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**OVERVIEW OF RECENT TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS
IN SOCIAL PROTECTION IN MISSCEO COUNTRIES**

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OVERVIEW OF RECENT TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS
IN SOCIAL PROTECTION (2019)

Content

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. REGULATING EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT MEASURES.....	3
3. SOCIAL RISKS AND SOCIAL BENEFITS: AUTOMATISATION, DEINSTITUTIONALISATION AND INTRODUCTION OF IT IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES	5
4. LONG-TERM BENEFITS: PENSION AND DISABILITY SCHEMES.....	13
5. MODERNISING HEALTH CARE	19
6. NEED AND FAMILY BURDEN	20
7. SIGNING CO-ORDINATION TREATIES.....	24

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to identify recent trends and developments in social protection across those member states which make contributions to the Council of Europe publication 'Mutual Information System on Social Protection of the Council of Europe' (the MISSCEO member states for the purpose of this text). The paper is based on information provided by the national correspondents who have reported recent changes in legislation and social policies within their state over the year 2019. This edition relies upon country reports submitted on behalf of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. The views and opinions expressed within this paper are those of the author alone and not of the member states nor the Council of Europe. All efforts have been made to confirm the accuracy of the information contained within this report and the author is much obliged to the member states for the assistance they have provided. Due to the limited number of states that are within the network of MISSCEO and the variety of the undertaken measures, it has been decided to group the trends under the following common description headings:

- Regulating employment and active employment measures
- Social risks and social benefits (general)
- Long-term benefits: pensions and disability schemes
- Modernising health care
- Need and family burden
- Signing coordination treaties

2. REGULATING EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT MEASURES

2.1 Armenia

In the period under review the draft law on making amendments and additions to the Labour Code of the Republic of Armenia was prepared and submitted to the RA Government. Amendments and additions were made to the the decision of the RA Government #534-N dated 17.04.2014. In particular, it was proposed to amend the decision to include a procedure for the implementation of an assistance program for people on leave for the care of a child under the age of three to arrange the care while working in case they return to work before the child turns two years of age. The draft law also (a) specifies the criteria for determination of non-competitiveness in the labour market for the unemployed, (b) clarifies the scope of beneficiaries included in state employment programs and (c) implements the programs according to the specific target groups of beneficiaries.

In order to ensure a stable and efficient employment of the population the state program for employment and the list of activities for 2019 were developed. In 2018 eleven state programs to address employment were implemented covering 2660 people. The decision of the RA Government has set the minimum and maximum amount of reimbursement of additional

expenses incurred in the field and their payment procedure, the amount of per diem paid to the employee in case of visiting more than one country within one day during a duty trip (reimbursement of additional expenses), the amount of additional expenses incurred by the employees in the field and in case of relocation works outside the Republic of Armenia (with the exception of the Republic of Artsakh) deducted from the taxpayer's gross income.

2.2 Azerbaijan

As from March 1, 2019, the minimum wage in Azerbaijan, which currently stands at 130 AZN, increased by 50 AZN or 38.4% to reach 180 AZN. Thus, the minimum wage has reached the minimum subsistence level. The rise in the minimum wage directly benefited 600,000 people. Specifically, it resulted in a 30% increase in the wages of 450,000 employees in public sector, and a 25% increase in the wages of 150,000 employees in the private sector. To enable the increase of the minimum wage, 400 million AZN will be allocated from the state budget on annual basis additionally. For 2019, it will be 335 million AZN (covering 10 months).

Self-employment programme

In 2018, the scope of the self-employment programme was expanded by 6.5 times covering approximately 7,300 people. Another 7,000 to 8,000 people will be engaged in this programme in 2019.

Of all the entities created under this programme, 84% are agricultural (livestock production, poultry, crop production, beekeeping, horticulture, greenhouse building etc.), while the rest operates in the fields of services and manufacturing.

The Regional Development Public Union of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation successfully implemented a "Social gardens" project aiming to support the self-employment programme. The project was implemented within the framework of a Memorandum between the Ministry and the Public Union. Various farms and agricultural projects for people from vulnerable social groups were set up in 41 districts under the programme.

DOST Project

Under the 9 August 2018 Decree of President Ilham Aliyev, the Sustainable and Operational Social Security Agency ("DOST") and various DOST centres were established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population. Developed were (a) the concept of DOST agency, (b) passports for 126 services, (c) 116 job descriptions, (d) "Young DOST", (e) "DOST of Pensioner", (f) "DOST of People with Disabilities" and other similar projects and voluntary engagement programmes.

Established was also the "DOST of the unemployed" Programme, being the new mechanism for organising public works. The state has allocated \$80 million azn. for this programme. More 35,000 unemployed people are momentarily engaged in public works.

The DOST Agency and the first DOST Centre were launched on 9 May 2019. A total of four centres will be created in Baku throughout the year. From 2019 to 2025 a total of 31 more centres of this kind will be established in Baku and in other regions of the country.

2.3 Turkey

In 2018, various incentives have been put into practice for insured workers and employers. For example;

- Minimum wage support has been subsidised for private sector employers. This way, state subsidy has been provided for cost increase stemming from minimum wage increases for 2019.
- 150 TL per head for workplaces with maximum 500 employees and 101 TL per head for workplaces with minimum 500 employees have been provided for 2019.
- Under the name “ One From You, One From Me”, a contribution, tax and wage support has been provided for small sized enterprises which hire additional employment.
- In 2018, retrospective benefiting from incentives and opportunity for change kind of incentive have been enabled.
- A contribution incentive has been provided for young entrepreneurs in the age between 18-29.

In 2018 and 2019 different projects were also put into practice. For instance;

- The Registered Employment Transition Program (KİGEP), with a budget of approximately 14.2 million TL, which covers the access of Syrians under temporary protection to the workforce and the financial support of the employers. The project has been set up in cooperation with Social Security Institution and International Labour Organization (ILO).
- INSTACARE and EDUCARE Projects were set up for working mothers facing possible exclusion from the workforce. The projects’ budget is approximately 30 million Euro for both.

2.4 Ukraine

In order to strengthen the protection of labour rights of citizens and legalisation of employment measures aimed at diminishing relations in the field of employment of the population have been approved by the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated September 5, 2018 No. 649-p.

New approaches to the provision of employment services by the State Employment Service have been introduced, in accordance with the Procedure for Registration, Re-registration of the Unemployed and keeping records of persons seeking employment (approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 19.09.2018 No. 792).

3. SOCIAL RISKS AND SOCIAL BENEFITS: AUTOMATISATION, DEINSTITUTIONALISATION AND INTRODUCTION OF IT IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

3.1 Armenia

State allowances

In 2018 the payment of allowances provided through the assessment system of families in need (family or social allowance or urgent assistance) continued. In 2018 out of 115,621 families

registered in the assessment system of families in need, on average family or social allowance was received on a monthly basis by 95,516 families, making up around 82.6% of the total families registered, and quarterly urgent assistance was received by 5,152 families on average or 4.5% of the total registered families, average size of allowance amounting to 31,350 drams. One-off monetary assistance was provided to 3,891 families eligible for family allowance in connection with the birth of a child, 9,395 families received it in connection with the child going to first grade of school and 119 families received it in connection with the death of a family member.

Integrated Social Services

In the course of 2018 work was carried out to strengthen the institution of social work, the training needs of practicing social workers were assessed and training courses were conducted with around 200 professionals (social workers and medical workers) participating.

The process of selection of premises and their provision to the Integrated Social Services regional centres continued. Reference designs for renovation of Integrated Social Services regional centres and design and budgeting documentation for the construction or capital renovation of regional centers were prepared. In 2018 another four Integrated Social Services regional centres started operating on a one-stop basis (22 in total) located in renovated buildings equipped with the necessary information technologies.

3.2 Azerbaijan

Social benefits and presidential stipends increase

As from April 2019, social benefits and presidential stipends will rise by average 100%. New presidential stipends have been introduced for children with health limitations and persons within the 1st group of disability. This increase will cover up to 577,000 people from the most vulnerable groups of the population, including over 300, 000 persons with disabilities. An amount of 400 million AZN will be allocated from the state budget on annual basis additionally in order to finance this increase. For 2019, it will be 300 million AZN (covering 9 months). This will more than double the budget of social benefits and stipends.

Increase of a standard monthly allowance for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons of equivalent status

The amount of a standard monthly allowance for the IDPs and persons of equivalent status has been increased by 50% as of 1 April, 2019. Scholarships have been increased by an average of 20% covering approx. 600 PhD students and over 110 000 students.

State Social Protection Fund in 2018

In 2018 the SSPF revenues increased by 9,7% and amounted to 3,8 bln. AZN. The SSPF expenditures reached 3,8 bln. AZN, which was 8% more (in comparison with previous year). The number of insured persons registered on personal accounts was 3.8 mln, 4% more. The average monthly pension was 221,4 AZN, which is 6 % more. The average monthly amount of the pension for old age is 249,3 AZN, which is 7% more.

With respect to the social allowance, 5% of the population or 513,800 people received it monthly or one-time. The number of people receiving social allowances has increased by 30,900 and the number of pension recipients has increased by 2,500.

Families receiving Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) was 42,700, the number of family members was 173,200, and the average monthly assistance per family was 175 AZN; 104 million AZN were spent for TSA financing resulting in state budget saving of 102 mln. AZN; 626 apartments, 3 times more than planned, were provided to the Karabah war disabled and martyrs' families. 800 apartments in 2019; 265 locally produced cars were delivered to Karabah war veterans with disabilities.

Revenues of SSPF in Jan-March 2019 amounted to 1,3 bln. AZN (14% on CSSI), expenditures – 941,6 mln. AZN manat. As of March 1, 2019, the number of families receiving TSA increased by 7,000 and reached 50,000 and the number of family members reached 207,000.

In 2018 also a so-called “E-social” internet portal was introduced, ensuring access of citizens to all social data and services about themselves, has been built. An employment sub-system was created as an essential part of unified employment portal.

3.3 Georgia

In 2015, with the support of World Bank UNICEF, a revised methodology of assessment and assistance scheme was introduced. This methodology is oriented on family income (or property with revenues), consequently, a beneficiary can become a family member having no income or property with revenues. Assistance is provided based on the gradation system- families, having lower scores receive more financial support. Additionally, a new child cash benefit was introduced.

From November 2018, the rules of reference between social agents and social workers, of the LEPL Social Service Agency, was activated, particularly, the “Declaration of the child (children) living in the family (aged 0-18)” which has to be filled in by each family having children under 18. The aim of the document is to provide timely information to the social worker about needs of the child (children) living in the family, in order to find appropriate support for the child (children). The special document includes simple questions related to children’s physical development, health and access to medical services, child care and child education issues. The data recorded in the document via computer program, will pass technical processing and in result the score will be given, on the basis of which, if necessary, a child / case will be redirected to the social worker.

3.4 Republic of Moldova

In the context of combating undeclared work, the rate of social insurance contribution paid by the employer of the private sector was reduced with 5% from 23% to 18% of the labour remuneration

and other rewards fund (through a legislative initiative of the deputies). Employers in the public sector continue to pay 23% of the labour remuneration and other rewards fund.

In 2018 amendments to the legislation on social insurance indemnities were introduced, according to which, starting on January 1, 2019, the social insurance indemnities for military and police staff will be established by the National Social Insurance Office, with their coverage from the State Social Insurance budget. According to these changes, such categories of employees, granted the indemnities of temporary incapacity of work, the maternity and child-raising indemnities up to the age of 3 years from the state budget at the workplace. These amendments entered into force on 1 January 2019.

3.5 Montenegro

Introduction of IT in administrative processes

The E-Social Card i.e. Social Welfare Information System (SWIS), which is operational since 2015, shows that the implemented structural social welfare sector reform for poor and vulnerable groups, is better targeting and giving access to the social cash transfers and services. Capacities are significantly boosted, while social welfare centres' modus operandi is fully unified across the country and expert staff is relieved from the administrative work. On the other hand, the poor and vulnerable beneficiaries no longer experience difficulties and expenses related to collection of paperwork. For example a four-member family for the application for means-tested transfer needed to submit 36 papers from other institutions and to re-submit it every six months. This is no longer the case.

The SWIS generates various E-registers and BI (Business intelligence) modules – for reporting and evidence-based policy making but it also serves for monitoring and improving the quality of work and staff performance. According to the opinion of experts, the E-Social Card is a sample project in terms of functionalities integration. It is also the best practice model on how to implement a substantial structural sector reform and an excellent example of citizen-oriented service delivery, but also an excellent tool for public expenditures monitoring and savings. As stated in the last few EU Progress reports, the implementation of the second phase of the E-social Card – Social Welfare Information System continued successfully.

3.6 Turkey

As of 2018, both civil servants and workers who get income or pensions from the Social Security Institution (“SSI”) will receive a 1000 TL holiday bonus twice a year.

Two arrangements have been enacted for self-employed having contribution debts. One of them is giving them so-called “credit rights”. If the first installment of their contribution credit debt is paid during a defined duration limit, health services can be accessed. The other arrangement is that insured persons having contribution debts before May 31, 2018 can also benefit from these rights. In 2018, social security support contribution debts have been cancelled for once.

In the scope of the International Social Security Organization Good Practice Award, Europe 2019 competition, the Certificate of Merit with Special Mention has been given to SSI for its application "Registration by SMS of Employees Who Work Less Than Ten Days in Home Services". This project aimed to ensure insurance registration (which has been quite troublesome) and collect contributions by short message service (SMS). Through this, it was possible to inform the insured person, register the daily insurance premium, and reflect this on the operator's (employer) telephone bill. The transaction amount is reflected on the mobile bill of operator and transferred to the Social Security Institution of Turkey (Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu – SGK) by the mobile telecommunication companies, namely. This makes premium collection easier. Moreover, the SMS project expands coverage, prevents and tightens the informal or black market in this field, and makes access to services easier by no longer needing notifications of workplace declaration, recruitment registration statements, monthly premium and service certificates for premium accrual and payments, and declarations of separation from employment.

The "Medical Image Sharing Project" is another good practice of SSI. In order to avoid repetition of BT, MR services, an infrastructure for sharing results of these examinations and radiological images on demand was established in pilot centers and hospitals. There is also an application with the intent of avoiding repetition of medical analyses and results for patients. Medical analyses and results will be stored to MEDULA system which is operated with a view to authorising of defined medical costs. This application will be operated at the end of 2019.

3.7 Ukraine

In order to improve the functioning of the system of compulsory state social and pension insurance, on November 14, 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the draft Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Regarding the Fair Payment Mechanism for the Single Contribution to Mandatory State Social Insurance" aiming increasing (a) the quality of administration and payment of a single contribution; (b) revenues of the Pension Fund and social insurance funds, which as a result will contribute to the reduction of the budget deficit of the Pension Fund of Ukraine; and (c) the levels of material support and the quality of services provided under the compulsory state social insurance.

In order to ensure effective state social support of the population for payment of housing and communal services, the mechanism for providing housing subsidies to the population has been improved and simplified, in particular by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 27.04.2018 No. 329. Without a mandatory payment of a single contribution to the compulsory state social insurance fund, a housing subsidy may be obtained by: unemployed in rural areas, unemployed in the city (provided that they are registered at the employment center); citizens who work abroad and officially pay the single contribution. In December 2018, housing subsidies for the reimbursement of housing and communal services were received by over 3.9 million households.

Within the reform of the social services the number of the state standards were approved. Namely, of social services for social rehabilitation of persons with mental disorders (the Order of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine dated 17.12.2018 No. 1901), psychological rehabilitation of persons with dependence on drugs or psychotropic substances (the Order of the Ministry of Health and Social Policy dated September 3, 2018, No. 1275) of day-care (the Order of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine dated December 7, 2018, No. 1834).

3.8 North Macedonia

The new Law on Social Protection¹ adopted in 2019 reforms the system of social protection cash benefits and services. More specifically, social financial assistance has been reformed and upgraded to guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA), with the beneficiaries receiving an amount necessary to meet the minimum subsistence needs, which was not the case with the previous right to social financial assistance. At the same time, beneficiaries are provided with support to complete their education and gain job skills, and thus become competitive in the labour market. This means proper targeting of social benefits to persons and families who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, while at the same time active beneficiaries will be conditioned to enter into the labour market, by strengthening their work capacities, with the ultimate goal being their successful reintegration into society. Such planned measures are expected to have a direct impact on the poverty and social inclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens.

This GMA is provided to all households who have an income below 4000 denars per adult equivalent per month (which is one third of the minimum wage). The eligibility threshold, which is also the maximum level of support provided if the household does not have any income, has been selected based on the socio-economic context of the country and considering common levels of absolute poverty. The eligibility threshold will need to be updated every year based on the level of inflation as measured through the consumer price index published by the national statistical office.

Income is computed considering all income sources of household members, including salaries, pensions, income from self-employment, agricultural income, and parental allowances, but excluding child allowances, educational allowances, disability allowances and energy allowances as well as any one-off benefits and transfers (such as birth grants). Income from short-term participation in special work programmes will also be excluded or allow automatic re-entry at the end of the work programme.

If any household member has a registered use of a car, the household is excluded from the benefit (unless the car is for a person with disabilities). Moreover, the household is also ineligible if they own more than 7000m² of agricultural land or own savings for more than 25 times the value of the GAM (70000 denars).

Adult equivalents consider all members in the households with the following scales: 1 for one adult, 1.5 for two adults, 1.9 for three adults, 2.3 for four adults and 2.5 for five adults or more,

¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 104/19

and then adds 0.1 for every child up to a maximum of 3 children, an extra 0.5 for the first member over 65 or member with disability, an extra 0.2 respectively for the second and the third member over 65 and 0.5 extra for a single parent. Adults are all household members aged 18 or more. The equivalence scale and eligibility thresholds for some types of households are provided in the following table (the eligibility threshold are also the maximum amounts of benefit in case the household has no income).

Examples of GMI eligibility thresholds for different households

Households	Equivalence scale	Eligibility threshold (denars)
Single adult	1	4000
Single elderly	1.5	6000
Single parent with two children	1.7	6800
Two adults and one child	1.6	6400
Two adults and two children	1.7	6800
Three adults and one child	2.0	8000
Four adults	2.3	9200
Five adults	2.5	10000
Two elderly and two adults	3.0	120000

Entitlement is the difference between eligibility threshold and income per adult equivalent multiplied by the adult equivalents.

As noted, in households that benefit from the GMA, all working-able adults must register with the employment office and accept employment services and re-training. In case of two-in the raw refusals only the person who refuses the job/training offer would lose entitlement, but the rest of the household could still keep receiving support.

Households receiving GMA are automatically entitled to energy subsidy of 1,000 MKD during the 6 winter months, and children are entitled to a child allowance (CA).

Social services

In addition, in order to provide better access to social protection services, the reform of the social protection system also encompasses essential improvements in the area of social services, their type, scope, manner of provision, inclusion of other providers, etc. Re-designing of the social services system will be carried out by developing social contracting. Social contracting will mean determining the methodology for calculation of the cost of the social services. This method is supposed to increase the availability, quality and innovation of the social services. In this manner, the pluralisation of the activity will likewise be encouraged and the possibility of delegating the social services to external providers (citizens' organisations, private companies, natural persons, etc.) will be opened.

The new Law on Social Protection requires further enhancement and deepening of the cooperation between the Employment and Social Protection Services in order to support and

activate the working-age beneficiaries of social protection. The Centres for Social Work and the Employment Centres will cooperate in the preparation and implementation of an individual plan for activating a beneficiary of guaranteed minimum income, for his participation in active employment measures and overcoming the material insecurity of the household.

The introduction of case management is part of the overall reform of the social protection system, whereby the beneficiary and his or her family are at the center of attention and benefits and services as provided in the new Law on Social Protection are delivered according to the individual needs. For the purpose of proper implementation of the envisaged reforms, functional analyses of the work of the centres for social work and employment centres have been made, and new profiles that support the new manner of working were introduced such as case managers, triage social workers, supervisors, etc.. By-laws, forms, and documents that define the implementation of the new method of case management have also been adopted.

The improvement of the social protection system will be supported by the implementation of a new information system for integrated administration of cash benefits and social services. The new information system will also communicate with the information system of the Employment Agency, with real-time data exchange for the GMA beneficiaries who will participate in the employment programs, which will strengthen the cooperation between the social work centres and the employment centres.

Deinstitutionalisation

In September 2018, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 “Timjanik”. An Action plan for its implementation has also been prepared. The reform in the part of transition from institutional to non-institutional social protection should build a system for delivery of social services, based on human rights approach, which promotes the rights, inclusiveness and dignity of the beneficiaries. The starting point is the recognition of individual needs of the beneficiaries, as well as their life priorities and desires.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy started the transformation of residential institutions and the transfer of beneficiaries, primarily the children in the community. Resettlement from residential institutions, as one of the key indicators for the success of the de-institutionalisation process, has been progressing: At the end of 2017, there were a total of 482 users accommodated in residential institutions. Mid June 2019, there were 323 users accommodated in institutional care, i.e. one-third of the users have already been resettled to alternative, non-institutional forms of care, primarily in foster families or community-based group homes (with maximum seven users).

Children were in the focus of the resettlement efforts as no child below 18 years shall be left in any institution. As an illustration, by June 2019 two of the four children’s institutions have already completely transformed their care from institutional into community-based.

4. LONG-TERM BENEFITS: PENSION AND DISABILITY SCHEMES

4.1 Armenia

The activities carried out in the course of 2018 sought to broaden the scope of online services provided in the area of pension security in order to lower the risks present in the process of awarding and paying pensions and allowances and ensure accessibility of services, as well as simplify the administrative red tape associated with awarding and paying pensions and allowances. As a result of implemented legislative amendments and improvement of the E-Pension information system the following was made possible in 2018:

- online submission of applications for appointment of one-off allowance for the birth of the 3rd and subsequent child, childcare allowance and burial allowance;
- introduction of the system of exchange of information with the Civil Registry authorities on birth entries and termination of parental rights and through it initiation of an e-query to Civil Registry information system, receipt of necessary data, entry of these data in the *E-pension* Information system and decision making based on these (granting or declining a one-off allowance for the birth of the child and allowance for care of a child under 2 years of age as well as burial allowance);
- appointment of pension and reward pay (recalculation) to the military and their family members through e-Pension information system and their payout.

Amendments were made to the legislation with the aim to:

- increase the level of social protection of those families, preparing for the birth of the second child (the one-off allowance for the birth of a child has been set at 150,000 drams for the birth of the second child instead of former 50,000 drams);
- increase the level of social protection of families with 3 and more children (regardless of whether the child has reached the age of one year, the person authorised to administer the family capital was given the right to manage it in the monthly amount of 50,000 drams instead of former 25,000 drams, which could be used only after the child turned 1 year of age).

One of the key aims of the RA Government program approved by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia is the overcoming of extreme poverty. Accordingly, in the scope of the policy adopted by the RA Government the allowance sizes for old age, disability and loss of breadwinner will be increased from January 1, 2019 and set at 25500 drams, the amount projected for the value of the food (extreme) poverty line in 2019. As a result around 63000 beneficiaries will be paid an allowance of 25,500 drams starting from January 1, 2019.

Issues of the disabled and the elderly

The state policy on disability and targeted programs are aimed at the protection of rights and social inclusion of people with disabilities. In 2018 the work continued on bringing the legislation in the area of disability into compliance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In order to introduce a new model in the disability assessment system a draft decision package of the RA Government was developed and circulated. The legal draft

regulations included in it govern the clauses related to disability assessment which are based on the approaches and principles of the International Classification of Functioning of the World Health Organization (WHO ICF).

In the scope of state target programs implemented in 2018 the people with disabilities were given freemedical devices of various kind. In 2018 hearing aids and wheelchairs were provided to the beneficiaries based on state certificates. Under the adopted legal act the prosthetic-orthopedic and rehabilitation items, assistive devices will also be provided to people with disabilities and those assigned other social status based on certificates.

Over 2018 the implementation of programs aimed at the social protection of the elderly continued, as well as the policy to address the aging issues adopted by the state in the area of social protection to foster active and healthy old age and decent living conditions for the elderly. The measures planned for 2018 in the scope of the strategy of overcoming the consequences of aging and social protection of the elderly and its action plan for 2017-2021 approved by the protocol decision #20 of the RA Government dated 18.05.2017 were implemented.

Alternative programs to introduce a system of social services provided to the elderly in the Republic of Armenia based on new, modern approaches were developed taking into account the complete and comprehensive assessment of real needs of the elderly.

4.2 Azerbaijan

Pension reforms

As from March 1, 2019, the average minimum retirement pension in Azerbaijan, which currently amounts to 116 AZN (80 AZN for some categories), increased to reach 160 AZN. The increase in the minimum pension covers 233,000 pensioners (including 140,000 people who receive disability pensions). The average aggregate rise in the pension of 233,000 people amounts to 38.5%. Following the rise, Azerbaijan shares the first two spots among the CIS countries in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP).

As of the start of 2019, pension award services are automated and fully transparent ensuring no contact between officeholders and citizens. For the first time ever, pensions are awarded electronically on the day the right to a pension arises, without any prior submission of any application or document by the person whose right to a pension has arisen. The person is notified accordingly on the same day via a text message, e-mail or regular mail (also containing information about the amount of pension, the branch of a bank and date/time to pick the bank card for pension). As of March 5, 2019 a total of 5 000 individuals have been awarded pensions electronically.

Out of those who will retire this year, 36,000 or 70% will be awarded pensions in electronic way.

Another reform measure effective from early 2019 is as follows: if before 1 July 2018 any pension capital (regardless of the amount) has been recorded in the individual accounts of those who reach the retirement pension age in 2019-2020, these individuals automatically receive 25 years of social insurance history for the period preceding 1 January 2006. Once the 25-year history and the

pension capital recorded till 1 July 2018 are indexed in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, the pension is awarded based on the resulting total pension capital.

4.2 Georgia

The social protection system in Georgia includes different support and assistance programmes for various vulnerable groups of people, including elderly, persons with disabilities (including children), households under the poverty line, orphans and other vulnerable groups. Cash assistance is given in the form of State Pension (retired persons), State compensation (special groups), Social Package (persons with disabilities (including children) orphans, survivors, etc) and non-financial social assistance -the social services for elderly people, vulnerable children, including children lacking parental care, persons with disabilities / children, victims of domestic violence and abuse. The government further develops its policies and programmes to improve socio-economic conditions of vulnerable groups.

State pension in Georgia is universal and depends on reaching retirement age. According to the Law of Georgia on “the state pension”, the retirement age – 65 for men and 60 for women, is the basis for the state pension. Since 2019 the amount of the state pension has been raised up to 200 GEL. The social packages for persons with profound and significant disabilities and for children with disabilities have been raised by 20 GEL from January 2019 onwards. The permanent resident pensioners/ social package beneficiaries of high mountainous regions received increased amount of the state pension/ social package by 20 %, based on the increase of pension/social package.

In 2017 the sub-program of “Community Organizations” of the “social rehabilitation and child care state program” got a new component called "Provision of Family Type service for independent living for persons with disabilities " for the provision of independent life for persons with disabilities who are under the state care. Target groups are persons with disabilities 18 and older., In 2018 a new specialised home care service for children with severe disabilities under the state care has opened in Tbilisi (second home) to provide high quality specialised services for 7 children. The number of children in larger institutions (Tbilisi Infant house) has decreased. The children are transferred from infant's homes into alternative care services, taking into consideration the best interests of the children.

4.3 Republic of Moldova

On 1 April 2018, pensions and some state social benefits were indexed by 6.6%. The indexation coefficient represents annual growth of consumer price index for the previous year was determined and established by the Government.

In 2018, the final stages of valorization of the established old-age and disability pensions were realized in advance:

- On 1 April 2018, the old-age pensions and disability pensions established in the period 2012-2013 (54165 pensions, of which 46 965 pensioners for old age pensions and 7 200 beneficiaries of disability pensions) were valued;

- On 1 October 2018, the old-age and disability pensions established between 1 January 2014 and 31 March 2017; (a total of 9,448 pensions, of which 85,064 old-age beneficiaries and 9753 beneficiaries of disability pensions) were valued.

Valorisation/valuing the insured income - Valuation consists of the indexation of insured monthly average income realised since 1 January 1999, based on the economy average salary increase ratio during the contributory periods until the year preceding the pension setting year. The valorisation was introduced in the context of the pension system reform in 2017 and had to be realized in 4 stages.

In 2018 the procedure for recalculation of old-age pensions for persons who work or have worked after establish the right to an old age pension with the application of the law beginning with January 1, 2019 was approved.

The recalculation of the pensions will be made gradually depending on the year of establishing the pension right and the cumulative contribution period after the realisation of the old age pension right.

The Government Decision regarding the approval of the list of special employment places, under which an old-age pension is granted on advantageous terms, as well as the Instruction on how to apply the list and to confirm the special work period was approved. In this context, the way of granting the right to an old age pension for the persons who worked in special conditions and to confirm the special period of work in these conditions was confirmed.

4.4 Montenegro

Regular indexation of pensions was made on 1st January 2019 and the pensions were indexed by 2%. Also, the age for retirement in order to receive a pension will continue to be raised (by 3 months per year) until the age of 67 is reached.

4.5 Serbia

The amendments on the Pension and Disability Insurance Law adopted in September 2018 abolished reduction of the higher pension benefits, which applied since November 2014 (it affected roughly 40% of all beneficiaries). As a result, the pensions have been paid in total since October 2018.

The amendments also introduced new type of monthly payment directed to the beneficiaries receiving less than 34,003.9 RSD. The main purpose of the newly introduced payment is to provide additional support to the beneficiaries receiving lower pensions. Since November 2018 the Pension Insurance Fund takes care of the new payments limiting the total amount to 0,3% of the GDP. For those receiving up to 26,644.75 RSD (slightly above average pension amount) *the money amount* is equal to the 5% of their pension while it is lower for the other entitled beneficiaries depending on the level of their pensions. In addition, all pension beneficiaries received 3.000 RSD one-off payment (11% of the average monthly pension) in November 2018.

Finally, a new Rulebook on the determination of professional diseases was adopted in March 2019, bringing the list of the professional diseases in line with ILO Convention 121.

4.7 Ukraine

The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated March 14, 2018, No. 238 "On Amending Certain Decrees of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine" was adopted, which sets forth the new edition of the Procedure for providing technical and other means of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, children with disabilities and other specific categories of the population and payment of monetary compensation for the cost of self-acquired technical means of rehabilitation, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from April 5, 2012 № 321.

A Unified Register of Anti-Terrorist Participants was created and functioning, which includes data on almost 355 thousand ATO participants (as of the end of 2018).

4.8 North Macedonia

The Republic of North Macedonia reformed its pension system² to contain fiscal pressures and strengthen pension system's equity. However, the pension system financing worsened in the last decade as reflected in the growing deficit of the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, which increased by 150 percent between 2008 and 2017. High pension expenditures at above 10 percent of GDP emerged mostly from ad-hoc supplementary pension increases, reduced contribution rates, and introduced contribution payment waivers to promote employment.

Furthermore, analysis showed inequality in the pensions of the current and future retirees and unequal distribution of the insured persons in the two-pillar pension system. Voluntary and mandatory second pillar participants are awarded low PAYG accruals—well below their share of paid PAYG contributions. The over-proportionally reduced pension accruals for voluntary second-pillar participants resulted in first two-pillar pensions standing significantly below the old first pillar (PAYG) pensions. Pension benefits of first two-pillar pensioners were reduced by 20-60 percent depending on the length of service. Such a socially unacceptable reduction in pension benefits required immediate policy response.

All these factors, accompanied by the aging of the population in the country, implied the need for a structural reform in the pension system. With the Law Amending the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance and the Law Amending the Law on Mandatory Fully Funded Pension Insurance³ significant changes were made to address pension system fiscal sustainability, adequacy of multi-pillar pensions, and overpaid and underpaid contributions to the funded pillar.

² The pension system rests on three pillars: 1) a solidarity PAYG pillar (first pillar); 2) a second fully-funded mandatory pillar based on individual accounts (second pillar); and 3) voluntary private open and occupational pension funds (third pillar). A systemic pension reform was carried out in 2005-06 to improve the fiscal sustainability of the system and reflect the demographic changes: mandatory retirement age was increased to 64 for men and 62 for women, accrual rates were reduced, and the so-called Swiss pension indexation formula (50% wages and 50% consumer price inflation) introduced. In 2006, the second pension pillar was introduced as a mandatory defined contribution component for all first-time employed. Parametric changes in 2012 reduced the accrual rate for post-2013 service years of the PAYG-only system participants and tightened the criteria for disability pensions. All early retirement options were eliminated except those for hazardous and arduous occupations. As a result, the system dependency ratio improved from 1.31 in 2005 to 1.85 in 2017.

³ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no. 245/18

The first significant change is the introduction of a clear membership criterion in the second pillar – date of birth and the switchback of second pillar members older than 50 to the PAYG pillar. Namely, all those eligible for compulsory pension and disability insurance after 1 January 2019 and who are below the age of 40 have to join on a mandatory basis the fully funded scheme. The membership in the fully funded scheme shall be continued for existing members of the 2nd pillar born after 1 January 1967.

All employees in hazardous occupations are excluded from the membership in the second pension pillar in addition to individual farmers and those working on work positions with increased service credits like contracted soldiers, junior officers, officers and civilians in the Army service, employees in the Ministry of Interior, the Intelligence Agency and in Penitentiary-Corrective and Educative-Corrective institutions.

The second significant change refers to the harmonisation of accrual rates for the calculation of pension by raising all service year accruals for the second-pillar participants and by lowering the PAYG-only accruals for post-2018 service:

Previous accrual rates for members of the two-pillar pension system	New accrual rates for members of the two-pillar pension system
0.75% men, 0.86% women	1% men, 1.14% women

Accrual rates for members of the first PAYG pension system calculated for each additional year of pension service completed between 1 January 2013 and January 2019	Accrual rates for members of the first PAYG pension system calculated for the pension service completed after 1 January 2019
1,61%	2019 – 1,54%; 2020 – 1,47%

The third significant change refers to the pension indexation. Namely, from January 1, 2019, the pensions are harmonised twice a year on 1 January and 1 July each year according to the increase in the cost of living⁴, and if the gross domestic product in the previous year shows a real increase of more than 4%, an additional harmonisation can likewise be made.

A significant measure in the package of legal measures for the consolidation of the pension system is the increase in the contribution rates for mandatory social insurance. Through the amendments to the Law on Contributions from Compulsory Social Insurance⁵, which entered into force on 1 January 2019, the rates of contribution for pension and disability insurance and health insurance for 2019 were increased. The contribution rate for pension and disability insurance was increased from 18% to 18.4% or by 0.4 percentage points, and for health insurance from 7.3% to 7.4% or by 0.1 percentage points.

The following is achieved with the reform:

- stabilisation of the pension system without raising the age limit
- equality between the current and future retirees.

⁴ Previously, the pensions were harmonised twice a year in accordance with the increase of the wages and the cost of living

⁵ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” no. 247/18

To address elderly poverty and ensure dignified life for the citizens over the age of 65 who have no income, a Law on Social Security for the Elderly⁶ was enacted in 2019. The Law introduces a means-tested social security cash benefit for elderly above 65 who do not fulfil the requirements for acquiring the right to a pension, have no income or property. The benefit is set at the level of 24 percent of average net wage, i.e. 6000 denars and is subject to the CPI indexation. When needed, users of the social security benefit are entitled to health protection.

5. Modernising health care

5.1 Republic of Moldova

In September 2018, the obligation to keep the medical insurance policy on paper was abolished by law. Thus, insured persons are no longer required to present the health insurance policy in order to receive medical services or compensated medicines. The above-mentioned law entered into force on 1 January 2019. Health service providers have to check the status of the insured person in the medical information system based on the person's identification number.

5.2 Montenegro

The Law on Health Insurance and Law on Health Care was amended in 2018 in order to postpone the application of implementation of the supplementary health insurance provisions due to the lack of technical and human capacities in this sector. The amendment was introduced also to prescribe the deadline for issuing licenses to some of the health care professionals.

5.3 Serbia

The new Law on Health Care and the Law on Health Insurance was adopted in April 2019. The most important newly introduced measures include:

- The chosen doctor may now determine sickness leave for up to 60 days (30 previously). The financing principle remains unchanged – the employer pays the first 30 days of the leave while the Health Insurance Fund covers the rest.
- Parents of children suffering from serious diseases are entitled to sickness leave until the child reaches age 18. The benefit paid is equal to the 100% of the previous wage. The leave is to be renewed every six months.
- The period for the calculation of the sickness benefit has been extended. The basis for the benefit is average wage of the insured person in previous 12 months (previously - 3 months). If the insured person worked for less than 12 months before the temporary incapacity occurred the minimum wage is taken into calculation for each of the missing months.
- Insured persons who without justification do not respond to three preventive exams are now obliged to cover 35% of the full price of the medical treatment if they become ill from the disease related with the exams they missed.
- Health Insurance now covers palliative care costs in total.

⁶ "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 104/19

5.4 Turkey

In Turkey the following changes occurred in 2018:

- Pharmaceutists, persons regarded as health occupation members and persons working in protective, diagnostics, medical and rehabilitating services have been included to group of whom gets a supplement for actual service period.
- The duration of discharge of universal health insurance debts has been extended two more months.
- Restructuring rights have been given for universal health insurance contribution debts.
- Soldiers have been included to the universal health insurance coverage for 30 days after their date of discharge. On the other hand, contribution debts of these soldiers will be able to be rescheduled until the end of their obligatory service duration.
- An arrangement regarding additional payments from patients applying to healthcare service providers has been made in the event of emergency statements.

5.5 North Macedonia

With the aim of guaranteeing access to health protection for the most vulnerable groups of citizens, in 2018, the Government adopted a program that exempts from healthcare co-payment, children whose parents are social assistance beneficiaries. According to the program that the Government adopted in 2019, social assistance beneficiaries and the members of their households shall be exempted from co-payment for specialist consultation and hospital healthcare services.

6. NEED AND FAMILY BURDEN

6.1 Armenia

During 2018 the work continued towards protection of children's rights, in particular the improvement of quality of life of children in difficult life situations and provision of guarantees for social protection, development of network of alternative services provided to them, improvement of quality of services provided in institutions of care and protection of children. As a result of reforms carried out in the sector around 180 children were placed in families from the institutions providing 24-hour care, at that around 130 returned to their biological families and around 40 were adopted. With the assistance of the international partner organisations two small group homes were founded in the town of Vanadzor providing alternative childcare. In the first one 12 children left without parental care who transferred there from Vanadzor Orphanage, are being cared for in a setting which resembles a family environment as much as possible.

Measures were taken to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men, to prevent trafficking and to provide assistance to the victims. In particular, the draft decision of the RA Government on approving the implementation strategy and action plan for 2019-2023 of the policy to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men in the Republic of Armenia was submitted to the RA Government setting state policy priorities, issues for the sector along with appropriate measures to resolve them.

6.2 Azerbaijan

Social protection of families of martyrs and war-disabled people

In 2018 a total of 626 apartments (3 times more than anticipated) were awarded to families of martyrs and war-disabled people. The total number of apartments awarded up to now is 6,654. At least 800 apartments are planned to be awarded in 2019. A total of 6,144 automobiles (265 in 2018) have been awarded to war-disabled people up to now (October 2019).

Under Decree No.1 of 19 April 2018 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on “Additional actions for improvement of the social protection of families of military servants who were killed, died or were declared dead for having gone missing during military operations for the sake of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, a lump-sum payment of 11,000 AZN is planned to be made to heirs of afore-mentioned military servants with martyr status.

Under another presidential decree dated from 28 January 2019, the scope of lump-sum payment was expanded. Thus, the number of martyrs whose heirs will receive a lump-sum payment will increase to 12,268 from 9,543 (an increase of 2,725 people).

135 mln manats will be allocated for this purpose. The lump-sum payments will be made during 2019.

Under the 30 January 2019 Decree of the President, the monthly amount of Presidential allowance for martyrs’ families will increase by 58 AZN to reach 300 AZN as from 1 February 2019 (it has been raised 3 times up to now before reaching 300 AZN). Currently, over 12,000 families of martyrs receive this allowance. The monthly amount of allowance to the families of persons deceased while performing international duty in Afghanistan has been increased by 80 AZN to reach 300 AZN as of 1 March, 2019

6.3 Georgia

Since 2019, socially vulnerable families with a child/children under 16 years, whose rating score is equal to or less than 100 001, receive 50 GEL as the Child Benefit, instead of 10 GEL previously. The subsistence allowance, for the families, registered in the database as vulnerable, receiving subsidy under 100001 rating score, will not be suspended during next 12 months even of salary existence of the family member (which is more than 175 GEL per member for 4 months) child’s benefit (50 GEL per child) and rating score will remain during 24 months in order to enable families to use non-monetary benefits, attached to the rating score.

For families with multiple children (four or more children under 18) with respective parental status, with rating score below 300 000, will receive monthly allowance for electricity in amount of 20 GEL, and 10 GEL, for every following child.

6.4 Montenegro

Regular indexation was made on 1st January 2018 and the amount of social protection rights was increased by 0.55% and the second indexation in 2018 was made on 1st July 2018 and the amount of social protection rights was increased by 0.84%.

6.5 Ukraine

One of the main priorities in the field of social protection remains the creation of conditions for the implementation of the right of every child to education in the family, ensuring the priority of family forms of placement of the child. Particular attention is paid to vulnerable categories of children in need of state support, primarily orphaned children, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, children living in families that are in difficult living conditions. In general, 64,709 orphans and children deprived of parental care are covered by family forms of education, which is 91.7% of the total number of orphans and children deprived of parental care.

In 2018 normative acts aimed at strengthening social protection of children were adopted, in particular concerning:

- realisation of the right of internally displaced orphans and children deprived of parental care, who have reached the age of 16 years, as well as persons from among them, to the preferential housing loans at the place of their registration as internally displaced persons (Law of Ukraine from 08/02/2018 No. 2279-VIII);
- improvement of the procedure for granting the status of a child who has suffered as a result of hostilities and armed conflicts (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated April 11, 2018, No. 301);
- improvement of social protection of children in difficult living conditions (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated October 3, 2018, No. 800); and
- the procedure and conditions for granting subventions from the state budget to local budgets in 2018 for social housing (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated April 18, 2018, No. 300);

6.6 North Macedonia

The amendments to the Law on Child Protection⁷ complement the reform of the system of social protection benefits. Namely, access to the right to child allowance (CA) is for the first time provided to households/families recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance. So far, the requirement that the family must have an employed member was crucial in the exercising of the right to child allowance and this allowance was only given to employed parents for children from low-income families.

An education allowance (EA) is likewise introduced for the children of these households, which will help the parents in covering the school expenses and will prevent early school leaving. The right to a conditional cash benefit (this will be an education allowance in the future) was so far intended only for children attending secondary school – beneficiaries of social financial assistance and child allowance, and with the reforms it is expanded to children attending primary school, but also for all low-income households.

In fact, any child living in households with per adult equivalent income below 6000 denars per month will be entitled to receive child and educational allowances. As for the GMA also this

7

eligibility threshold will need to increase every year based on the level of inflation. Income is defined and computed in the same way as per the GMA. However, adult equivalence scales are defined a bit differently, and computed as follows: 1 for one person, 1.5 for two members, 1.9 for three members, 2.3 for four members, 2.5 for five members, 2.6 for six members, 2.7 for seven members and 2.8 for eight members or more. If there is a single parent in the household, an extra 0.5 is added to the adult equivalent size. The table below shows examples of equivalence scales and eligibility threshold for different households.

CA/EA eligibility thresholds

Households	Equivalence scale	Eligibility threshold (denars)
Single parent with one child	2	12000
Single parent with two children	2.4	14400
Single parent with three children	2.8	16800
Couple with one child	1.9	11400
Couple with two children	2.3	13800
Couple with three children	2.5	15000
Couple with four children	2.6	15600
Four adults and three children	2.7	16200
Four adults and four children	2.8	16800

Entitlement: The entitlement depends on the number and age of children in the household and whether they have different parents. In fact, while eligibility is assessed at the household level, the entitlement is computed and provided to the parents of the children within the household, preferably to the mother of the children. Entitlement is computed as follows.

If the parent(s) only has children less than six, then they will be entitled to 1200 denars per month for one child, and 1900 denars per month for two or more children less than six. If the parents have at least one child who is more than five (in school age), then the entitlement is of 1000 denars for one child and 1600 denars for two or more children.

When the household is entitled to child allowances, they are also automatically eligible to education allowances for the following amounts: 700 denars per month for every child attending regularly primary school and 1000 denars per month per child attending regularly secondary school. The annual amount of the education allowance for primary education will be 8,400 denars (137 EUR) in the school year per child, and for secondary education it will be 12,000 denars (195 EUR) in the school year per child.

Amounts of entitlement should increase every year with the level of inflation, measured with the consumer price index.

Birth grants

Birth grants will be one-off payments given to the first and the second child. The amount will progressively increase and be of 5000 denars for the first child and 20000 denars for the second child. Essentially, for the first child there won't be any changes, as there is already such benefit,

but the introduction of a benefit for the second child intends to somehow replace the withdrawal of parental allowances and maintaining a population growth objective.

7. SIGNING CO-ORDINATION TREATIES

7.1 Albania

Bilateral agreements on social security between Albania and the respective states have been ratified and entered into force with: the Turkish Republic, the Republic of Northern Macedonia, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Republic of Austria.

The following bilateral agreements are expected to enter into force:

- Romania, ratified by the Albanian Parliament by Law No. 42, dated 14.04.2016;
- Republic of Kosovo, "On the Certification of Insurance Periods for the Realisation of the Right to Pension", ratified by the Parliament with Law No. 20, dated 12.04.2018.
- Canada ratified by the Albanian Parliament with Law No. 58, dated 12.09.2019

By Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 533, dated 31.07.2019 "On the Approval in principle of the Agreement between the Republic of Albania and the Swiss Confederation on Social Security" the agreements with the Swiss Confederation were approved.

Albania and Bulgaria started the first round of negotiations in Sofia from 5 to 8 November 2019, on the drafting of a new agreement that would replace the old agreement with Bulgaria, entered into force by Decree No. 1578, dated 20.11.1952.

7.2 Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova continues the process of negotiation on the drafts of the Social Security Agreements. Thus in 2018, rounds of negotiations took place on the draft of Agreements in the field with the following states: the State of Israel, the Republic of Belarus and the Italian Republic.

7.3 Montenegro

In order to improve the institutional and administrative capacities of competent authorities in Montenegro to effectively coordinate social security schemes upon EU accession, a project named "Towards EU rules on coordination of social security schemes" was established. The project was limited to a duration of 18 months to implement the *acquis communautaire* in the area of free movement of workers and coordination of social security schemes. In this respect a number of trainings were held (for branches of social security covered by coordination instrument) for the Ministry of Health, the Health Insurance Fund, the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, the Employment Agency, and the Social Welfare centers for the implementation of the coordination rules on social security.

7.4 Serbia

The Social Security Agreement concluded between Serbia and Switzerland in 2010 came into force on 1 January 2019, while the Agreement between Serbia and Russian Federation came into force on 1 March 2019.

Furthermore, the Social Security Agreement between Serbia and China, signed in June 2018, was ratified in September 2018.

Finally, the first negotiation round on concluding a bilateral agreement between Serbia and Tunisia was held in March 2019.