



REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL POLICY

SECOND REPORT
ON THE NON-ACCEPTED PROVISIONS OF THE
REVISED EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

Submitted by

THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

regarding articles:

3.1	3.3	4.1	4.4	7.5	9	10.1	10.2	10.3	10.4	10.5	14.1	14.2
15.3	18.1	18.2	18.3	18.4	19.2	19.3	19.4	19.7	19.9	19.10	19.11	19.12
22	23	25	27.1	27.2	30	31.1	31.2	31.3				

Skopje, December 2022

The Republic of North Macedonia, on January 6, 2012, ratified the Revised European Social Charter, accepting 63 (out of 98) provisions of the Charter.

In accordance with the obligations arising from the Article C and Article 22 of Part IV of the Charter, the Republic of North Macedonia submits its Second Report¹ on the non-accepted provisions of the revised European Social Charter.

This Report builds on to the data and information already presented in our First Report on non-accepted provisions and it supplements and updates the developments, trends, situation and information that were previously presented.

It covers the **35 individual provisions** (articles and paragraphs) of the Charter that have not yet been accepted by the Republic of North Macedonia.

¹ The **First Report** on the non-accepted provisions of the revised European Social Charter (rESC) of N. Macedonia, has been submitted to the Council of Europe and to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) in December 2017.

Accepted/Non-accepted provisions
of the revised European Social Charter
by the Republic of North Macedonia

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	3.1
3.2	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	5	6.1	6.2	6.3
6.4	7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.7	7.8	7.9	7.10	8.1
8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	9	10.1	10.2	10.3	10.4	10.5	11.1	11.2
11.3	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.4	13.1	13.2	13.3	13.4	14.1	14.2	15.1
15.2	15.3	16	17.1	17.2	18.1	18.2	18.3	18.4	19.1	19.2	19.3
19.4	19.5	19.6	19.7	19.8	19.9	19.10	19.11	19.12	20	21	22
23	24	25	26.1	26.2	27.1	27.2	27.3	28	29	30	31.1
31.2	31.3										

	Accepted provisions
	Non - accepted provisions

Article 3 - The right to safe and healthy working conditions

Article 3§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to safe and healthy working conditions, the Parties undertake, in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations to formulate, implement and periodically review a coherent national policy on occupational safety, occupational health and the working environment. The primary aim of this policy shall be to improve occupational safety and health and to prevent accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work, particularly by minimising the causes of hazards inherent in the working environment;

Within the past several-year period, no significant new laws and/or by-laws have been prepared and adopted in the field of safety and health at work. During this period, within the process of revising and improving the content of some of the specific existing by-laws in the field of OSH, especially in the cases where certain deficiencies and/or "bottlenecks" in the application were detected in the practice, work was done on two rulebooks, in order to improve their content and practical application.

Nonetheless, it is important to mention that, in coordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a consultative process for the drafting of a **new Law on Safety and Health at Work** has been initiated and is now in an advanced stage.

Namely in 2019 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy initiated a broad participatory process of analysis and consultation with all relevant stakeholders to improve the legal framework for safety and health at work. This process will result in a new Law on Safety and Health at Work, the main objective of which will be to improve its practical implementation and to address and overcome the identified existing weaknesses, problems, shortcomings and bottlenecks that have negatively affected the implementation, and which were identified during the past fifteen years of practical experience in implementing this law (the existing OSH Law was adopted in 2007).

At the beginning, in order to support the implementation of this activity, which was also foreseen in the Strategy and Action Plan for Safety and Health at Work 2020, on the initiative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the National Council for OSH, expert assistance was requested and approved by the International labor organization (ILO), for the preparation of an analysis and evaluation of the compliance of the Macedonian legal framework for safety and health at work, i.e. the OSH Law, with the international standards (first of all with the relevant ILO Convention No. 187), as well as an expert assessment of the manner of the legal regulation of this area, the position and role of the institutions and other relevant stakeholders in the area. The activities in this part,

supported by domestic and international (ILO) experts in the field, resulted in the preparation of a report and analysis that were initially presented and discussed in early 2019.

The process continued with the organization of discussions, exchanges of opinions and analyzes of the experiences of various entities in the field of OSH, from the previous multi-year implementation of the Law on Safety and Health at Work (originally adopted in 2007.) With that purpose, several consultative work meetings were held during 2019, in order to ensure broad participation and transparency of the process. Towards the end of March 2019, three separate meetings with representatives of various relevant entities and stakeholders were held, in the organization of MoLSP. One with the representatives of employers and chambers of commerce, another one with representatives of workers, i.e. trade unions, and also, the last meeting - with professionals and experts (from the field of safety at work, occupational medicine, as well as the academics, i.e. representatives from all universities that carry out teaching activities in the field of safety at work and occupational medicine). At these working meetings, specific views, ideas and proposals were discussed on the need to improve and advance the new OSH Law, based, above all on the many years of experience in the application of the law and the identified problems and weaknesses that complicate its application and enforcement, together with the identified opportunities for improvement. After these debates, all parties additionally submitted their opinions and specific proposals in written form to the Ministry, as the coordinator of the entire process.

At another joint working meeting, in October, all the proposals and recommendations received so far from all sides were again presented and discussed in detail. In parallel with these meetings organized by MoLSP, a number of other relevant stakeholders (trade unions, employers' organizations, associations of professionals, and etc.) organized their own internal debates, consultations, workshops on issues related to the revision of the legal framework for OSH.

All these reports, analyzes and recommendations, as well as the results of the discussions and consultations, are the basis for the design of the legal amendments, which will aim at further improvement of the legal framework and improvement of the implementation. The process itself, unexpectedly, was largely slowed down and prolonged, primarily as a result of the emergence of the global health and economic crisis caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of shifting the focus and all available resources of all stakeholders to the efforts to more effectively tackle the hazards and consequences caused by the pandemic.

In this way, towards the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, an initial draft text of a new Law on Safety and Health at Work was prepared, which seeks to introduce certain changes and innovations in the ways and specifics of the legal regulation of safety and

occupational health. The initial version of the Law was discussed at a workshop in December 2021, which was attended by representatives of all the most relevant stakeholders in the field of safety and health at work. At this workshop, numerous observations and comments regarding the proposed solutions were presented and discussed, and it was concluded that the text of the law should be rewritten and later put back again for consideration and consultation.

During 2022, within the framework of this process, a number of individual working meetings were organized with various stakeholders (social partners, other institutions, experts, etc.), in order to find and formulate the most suitable and acceptable solutions, which will really be able to influence the qualitative improvement of the implementation of the legal framework in the area of OSH and the significant improvement of the situation in this important area.

This process will result in a new draft text which will then be the subject of further consultations and adjustments, in order to arrive at a legal solution that will be acceptable and significantly improved and advanced compared to the existing one.

We believe that in this way, through such an established, perhaps longer and more difficult, but more broadly inclusive and participatory process, it will be possible to reach a better legislative solutions that will contribute to the joint efforts to ensure healthier and safer workplaces in the country.

* * *

In respect to the national OSH policy, the preparation and implementation of strategic and operational documents that are particularly important for ensuring the continuous development and improvement of the policy and systems for safety and health at the workplaces in the country, we would like to inform about the following:

Prepared within a wide consultative process with the participation and contribution of many relevant stakeholders in the area, in August 2017, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia reviewed and adopted the **Strategy for Safety and Health at Work 2020**, together with the **Action Plan (AP) for its implementation, for the period 2017-2020**.

In the first half of 2020, at the initiative of the National Council for OSH, in coordination with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a comprehensive and detailed **Report (Information) on the implemented activities, according to the priorities of the Strategy and AP for OSH 2020** was prepared. In this Report, with a size of about 60 pages, information and a description of the specific activities and measures that have been

implemented in the past period (primarily during 2017, 2018 and 2019) are presented, in function of the implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan for OSH 2020 and the realization of the established goals and priorities in the area. The members of the Council for Safety and Health at Work and the institutions, organizations and associations they represent, contributed to the preparation of this Report by providing relevant data and information about the activities carried out and the results achieved. The report was reviewed and adopted by the Occupational Safety and Health Council in August 2020.

During 2021, in the same way as before, in coordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the National Council for Safety and Health at Work, and within a broad consultative process in which all significant and relevant stakeholders (who also participate in the work of the OSH Council and influence the creation, implementation, monitoring and supervision of the implementation of policies in the area of OSH), the work was done on the preparation of a new strategic and operational documents, which will determine and trace the priorities and directions for further development in the area of OSH for the next several-year period.

The process resulted in the new **Strategy for Safety and Health at Work 2021-2025** and the **Action Plan for OSH for the period 2021-2023**. Representatives from the OSH Council, several relevant institutions and state bodies, social partners, chambers of commerce, representatives of professional associations of safety at work, experts and occupational medicine doctors, representatives of universities that teach in the field of OSH, and others, participated in the preparation of these documents with their contributions, comments and suggestions. The prepared documents were reviewed and adopted by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in December 2021

The new Strategy builds on the previous strategic document and defines the strategic directions, values, instruments and principles of action, key challenges and national strategic priorities for the next five-year period, as well as the monitoring, reporting and financing of the planned activities. The strategy also provides a brief overview and analysis of the current situation in the country in the field of OSH, as well as, the implemented activities and the results achieved according to the previous Strategy and Action Plan.

The **OSH Strategy 2021-2025**, as key strategic priorities for the next period, establishes:

- Strengthening and improvement of the legal framework in OSH;
- Strengthening and improvement of organizational capacities and human resources in the area, and
- Strengthening and improving the ability of the OSH systems to respond to existing and emerging risks.

In the Action Plan, specific activities are set and described in details, including also the indicators for monitoring the implementation of activities and the planned financial

resources and sources of financing. In addition, the Action Plan also indicates the connection (links) of the activities with some of the specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), according to the Agenda 2030 (for sustainable development) of the United Nations.

Effective consultation with social partners and other stakeholders in the field of OSH

In the Republic of North Macedonia, effective communication and consultation between the relevant parties and stakeholders has been established and exists for a longer period of time, when it comes not only, to the preparation of new laws and by-laws, amendments etc., but also in the process of preparing the strategic documents, reports and other types of documents; in implementation of certain educational and/or promotional activities in the area of safety and health at work, as well. And these consultations and cooperation do not take place only between state institutions and social partners, but regularly and without exception, they include all other relevant subjects and stakeholders who can contribute to the creation and implementation of better and more efficient OSH policies. In these consultations, representatives of employers' organizations, workers' organizations (trade unions), but also chambers of commerce that have their own sections/groups that deal with OSH issues are always included, then there are also representatives of the civil society, i.e. the professional associations of occupational safety experts and the association of occupational medicine doctors, as well as representatives of the academic public (faculty professors) and other experts in the field.

The main forum, i.e. the mechanism through which this cooperation and joint action in the field of OSH is realized on a regular basis, is through the functioning of the **National Council for Safety and Health at Work**. At the sessions of the Council, which are held regularly, at least 3-4 times during the year, numerous relevant issues and topics in the field of OSH are discussed, decisions, solutions, recommendations, announcements are made, important documents in the field are reviewed and adopted, and in many cases, it is the OSH Council that is the main initiator and coordinator of certain activities and processes that are implemented with the joint participation of all its members, and with this, of the institutions, bodies, organizations, associations that they represent in the Council.

The work of the OSH Council is regulated by the **Rules of Procedure of the OSH Council**. As an advisory body of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Council has a proactive role in timely identifying weaknesses and challenges in OSH policies and systems, suggesting and proposing solutions to issues in the area.

In order to further promote the importance and benefits of the occupational safety and health, the Council organizes every year, together with the MoLSP, the **National Award for the company with the best implemented OSH system**, in the categories of small,

medium and large companies. This award has become a recognized value for companies that invest strongly in OSH systems by introducing advanced strategies to develop and improve the safety and health of their employees. The Council continuously monitors the implementation of activities in accordance with the Action Plan and Strategy for OSH and actively participates through all its representatives in the creation of policies and the legal framework in the field of OSH (amendment of regulations, new regulations, new Law on OSH, etc.).

It should be pointed out that, in the spirit of promoting greater transparency of the work in the field of OSH and of the Council, all conclusions from the sessions of the OSH Council, then, the relevant produced documents, recommendations, presentations and materials related to specific OSH campaigns, the materials from the European OSH Agency and other, are regularly uploaded on the website of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, in the section specifically dedicated to the OSH Council: (<https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/sovet-za-bzr.nspj>).

Article 3§3

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to safe and healthy working conditions, the Parties undertake, in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations to provide for the enforcement of such regulations by measures of supervision.

Within this section, we could indeed provide a brief overview of the really intense activities that took place in the recent period and were related to the spread of the corona virus, and were implemented in the first months of the emergence of the **COVID-19** pandemic and in the period after.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as in the largest number of other countries in Europe and beyond, the emergence of the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its spread in our country, from the very beginning - in the first quarter of 2020, led to the broad mobilization of all relevant factors in the country that acted jointly and coordinated throughout the year and implemented numerous policies, activities and measures to protect the population and more effectively overcome the risks and consequences caused by the spread of infection with the new coronavirus **SARS-CoV-2**. A large number of activities and measures were implemented and adopted during this period, both in the area of public health, prevention and protection of the health of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as in terms of mitigating or overcoming the economic and social consequences caused by or directly related to the pandemic, and of course the particular attention and efforts of a large number of significant entities, were aimed precisely at the prevention and protection of health and safety at workplaces and dealing with the new risks for all employees and in all sectors and activities, which were imposed by the spread of the virus and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the area related to **safety and health at work**, in the months following the outbreak of the pandemic, a number of different specific measures, recommendations and guidelines related to dealing with the risks of spreading and infections with the new coronavirus among workers have been prepared and published. Measures, instructions and recommendations have been developed in relation to the protection and safety of workplaces, some in general manner - intended for employers and workers in the state, but also a large number of specific ones - intended and aimed at certain specific sectors, at specific activities and specific circumstances. Most recommendations, restrictions and ordinances are discussed and formulated in consultation with social partners and other relevant non-governmental entities in the country.

Some of these recommendations were issued and published by government institutions (including the Commission on Infectious Diseases, the Ministry of Health, the Institute of

Public Health, the Institute of Occupational Medicine, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, etc.), and there is a large number of them that were actually adapted, prepared, published by non-governmental entities in the field of safety and health at work (OSH), i.e. social partners and associations of OSH professionals. A large number of these recommendations, guidelines, guidelines, informational materials, etc. were based on internationally available and published materials and information related to protection and safety in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (prepared and published by the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization, the European Union and the relevant European institutions, organizations, etc.).

Social and other media were intensively used throughout this period to promote all these measures, recommendations, guidelines, but also to encourage and promote the use of accurate, relevant and verified information and news regarding the situation.

With the beginning of the spread of the coronavirus and the declaration of a state of emergency throughout the country in mid-March 2020, a set of measures, recommendations and restrictions were proposed and adopted, in order to reduce the risks for workers from exposure to the virus, such as are the recommendations for working from home - where the work process allows it, the recommendations for rotating employees at the workplace, working in multiple shifts, how to reduce the number of workers present at the same time in the work premises, the recommendations for maintaining physical distance between workers, provision and distribution of personal protective equipment by employers, provision of disinfectants, regular disinfection of workplaces and premises, way of signing and handling work-related documents, restrictions and recommendations were introduced when organizing meetings, collegiums, employee training, and also there have been recommendations for the use of personal protective equipment by the security personnel, drivers, and etc....

A government website (portal) specifically dedicated to COVID-19 was launched, in Macedonian, Albanian and English language (<https://koronavirus.gov.mk>), which since the beginning of the pandemic provides all relevant information and data about COVID-19 measures.

At the beginning of May of the same year (2020), the **Rulebook on the List of Occupational Diseases** was amended, so that the list of occupational diseases now also included infectious diseases caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) during prevention, health care, home visits and other similar activities for which the risk of infection has been proven.

Particularly significant and important throughout this whole period was the role and engagement of employees in the **State Labor Inspectorate (SLI)**. This body, in coordination with all other relevant actors in society who were and are involved in the fight against the coronavirus and the spread of the infection with COVID-19, actively

participated in the implementation of the conclusions, recommendations, decrees, protocols and decisions of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, carrying out inspections on the entire territory of the state.

All the capacities of the SLI were made available and all inspectors available to the Inspectorate (for labor relations and for safety and health at work) carried out field activities and were available at any time, with the aim of identifying certain non-compliances with the recommendations and the conclusions, and to act immediately or in the shortest possible time.

During this period, the priority in the work of the Inspectorate was placed on supervision over the implementation of recommendations and decisions for protection against the coronavirus.

For additional prevention and protection of the inspectors in the performance of their duties, appropriate protocols were also developed and respected, according to which the state labor inspectors perform their inspections in the group of two (one from the labor relations, and one from OSH department) without the possibility of grouping and with strict use of protective masks, gloves and application of disinfectants, fully respecting the recommendations made by the Commission for Infectious Diseases from the Ministry of Health.

When conducting inspections, the State labor inspectors gave priority to conducting inspections in larger legal entities (companies) operating in the following activities/sectors:

- processing industry;
- wholesale and retail trade;
- transportation and storage;
- food service activities;
- service activities.

As a result of these activities, primarily aimed at protecting and dealing with the dangers of the coronavirus, in the period from March 2020, the SLI significantly increased the number of supervision inspections, compared to the same period of previous year - 2019.

The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI), in coordination with the other inspection services, and the Inspection Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, during the entire past period has been actively working and participating in activities to raise the awareness of employees and employers about the hazards and risks of the coronavirus, by organizing regular press conferences and publishing announcements, through meetings (respecting the protocols) or on-line communications with representatives of employers, unions and the non-governmental sector representatives, participation in debates, and other shows of an informative nature on national televisions. The SLI also publicly announced the telephone numbers of the labor inspectors throughout the country, so that they could be

available and reachable at any time for information and consultation, and an additional electronic e-mail address and telephone lines for reporting of irregularities, were also introduced.

In addition to all of this, in October 2020, the **Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases** (published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 257/2020) was passed, which gave to the state labor inspectors additional powers for performing supervision inspections over the application of measures to protect the population from infectious diseases, which refer to labor relations and safety and health at work, especially in production facilities and trade in non-food goods. The Law also defines sanctions for employees, legal entities and responsible persons in legal entities for non-compliance with measures to protect the population from infectious diseases applied by labor inspectors.

What we consider to be extremely important and should be particularly emphasized in relation to the joint efforts and activities for prevention, for informing and protecting the workers in the country, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, is of course, the huge engagement throughout this period, of the **representatives of the civil society**, i.e. associations of professionals in the field of safety at work and occupational medicine, and of course, from the social partners (union organizations and employers' organizations). The several active associations in the field of OSH, in some cases independently, and in many other cases jointly and in close cooperation with some of the relevant and representative organizations of employers and/or trade unions, or also with state institutions/organizations, from the very beginning of the crisis, worked intensively, above all, on spreading the information and knowledge, on informing, sharing the knowledge and raising awareness as much as possible, among the employees and employers about the corona virus crisis and the hazards related to the spreading the virus.

* * *

The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) conducts inspection supervision of the application of the regulations and bylaws in the area of occupational safety and health regarding injuries at work, collective injuries and fatal accidents at work, as well as inspection control upon complaints by the worker or the representative of the worker, but also at the request of the employers.

Injuries at work represent a very important indicator on the occupational safety and health situation. The responsibility of the State Labor Inspectorate is to conduct inspections, prepare reports and undertake all prescribed measures in case of a serious

injury at work which caused the worker to be absent from work for more than 3 days, as well as in cases of fatal work injuries.

The SLI also conducts supervision and inspection in cases of reported, but also in cases of unreported injuries at work upon report of the Ministry of Interior or a complaint. In practice, extraordinary inspections are carried out for more serious injuries at work and fatal injuries at work or collective injuries. Extraordinary inspections are conducted in compliance with the *Law on Inspection Supervision*² and the *Law on Labor Inspection*³. If the inspectors, after collecting all the documentation from the OSH area, the statements and other necessary technical documentation and after completing the supervision, determine the cause of the accident, that is, if certain deficiencies or non-implemented measures are determined, then appropriate legal inspection measures are applied, such as a decision with an order, a decision for prohibition, initiation of a settlement procedure by issuing a payment order, initiation of misdemeanor or criminal proceedings depending on the established offense and deficiency.

The data in the Annual reports on the inspections conducted in the area of occupational safety and health for the reporting period, that is, for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 show that on the basis of the on-site-inspections conducted in:

- 2017, a total of 1,709 injuries happened at work, of which 1,693 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 2 collective injuries and 14 fatal injuries;
- In 2018, a total 1,815 injuries happened at work, of which 1,790 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 2 collective injuries and 23 fatal injuries;
- In 2019, a total of 1,795 injuries happened at work, of which 1,772 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 4 collective injuries and 19 fatal injuries;
- In 2020, a total of 1,051 injuries happened at work, of which 1,020 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 12 collective injuries and 19 fatal injuries;
- In 2021, a total of 1,529 injuries happened at work, of which 1,508 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 2 collective injuries and 19 fatal injuries and
- In 2022, a total of 1,179 injuries happened at work, of which 1,158 injuries caused temporary incapacity for work longer than 3 working days, 12 collective injuries and 9 fatal injuries.

² “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia”, No. 102/9

³ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, No. 35/1997, 29/2002, 36/2011, 164/2013, 44/2014, 33/2015, 147/2015 and “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia”, No. 317/2020

Overview of the regular and control inspection supervisions in the area of OSH, on-site inspections of fatal, collective and grave injuries and bans for the period 2017–2022

Year	Regular inspections	Extraordinary inspections	Control inspections	On-site inspections conducted for			Adopted decisions	Complaints	Adopted bans	Education
				Fatal injuries	Collective injuries	More serious injuries				
2017	7406	1934	3552	14	2	1693	3870	225	181	120
2018	6953	2039	3453	23	2	1790	4223	224	20	57
2019	4433	2018	2404	19	4	1772	2474	223	24	59
2020	1497	10472	1141	19	12	1020	985	/	15	/
2021	929	9378	2341	19	2	1508	2739	305	97	/
2022*	1681	3149	1972	9	12	1158	1942		41	

* The data refers to January–September 2022

As regards what is shown above, the largest number of injuries is recorded in construction, the processing industry, mining, agriculture, wholesale trade and other activities.

According to this report, 14 deaths were recorded in 2017, 23 deaths in 2018, and 19 deaths each in 2019, 2020 and 2021 due to injury at work, mostly in construction, mining and quarrying, the processing industry and agriculture.

Overview of requests for initiation of misdemeanor and criminal proceedings for the period 2017–2021

Year	Request for initiation of misdemeanor proceedings						On the spot fines	Settlements (misdemeanor payment order)	Criminal charges
	Submitted category (1)	Submitted category (2)	Submitted category (3)	Article10 under LLI*	Total misdemeanor charges	Resolved			
2017		5	19	7	31	6	28	42	6
2018	2	5	24	3	31	/	23	17	7
2019	8	2	17	2	29	/	16	28	4
2020	/	/	/	/	4	/	/	70	11
2021	0	3	8	4	15	/	35	318	15

* Law on Labor Inspection

Note: In 2020, 9,421 extraordinary inspections were carried in the area of OSH in relation to COVID-19

In 2021, 7,849 extraordinary inspections were carried out in the area of OSH in relation to COVID-19

In 2020, of the total 22,866 inspections 9,421 were extraordinary inspections conducted by the occupational safety and health inspectors in relation to the implementation of decrees, measures, decisions and recommendations of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as inspections in relation to the application of the *Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases*, while in 2021 the OSH inspectors conducted 7,841 inspections on the same grounds. As of September 2022, 246 extraordinary inspections were carried out in relation to COVID-19. The injuries at work which caused the absence of workers for more than 3 days, the collective injuries and the fatal injuries per activities are presented in the table below for the period 2020–2022:

Injuries at work per activities for 2020–2022

Processing industry	574
Construction	289
Mining and quarrying	195
Health and social protection activities	275
Other service activities	154
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	191
Public administration and defense, compulsory social insurance	113
Water supply and wastewater disposal	103
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	51
Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply	121
Administrative and support service activities	38
Transport and storage	87
Education	55
Accommodation facilities and food service activities	19
Financial activity and insurance activity	22
Information and communication	23
Professional, scientific and technical activities	13
Real estate activities	6
Arts, entertainment and recreation	14
Total	2316

According to the presented condition the riskiest activities, in the period 2020–2022, where injuries at work occurred the most are the processing industry (574), construction (289), health and social protection activities (275) and mining and quarrying (195).

Collective injuries per activities for 2020–2022

Processing industry	4
Health and social protection activities	4
Construction	5
Agriculture	3
Transport and storage	1
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1

Textile	2
Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply	1
Water supply and wastewater disposal	1
Public administration and defense, compulsory social insurance	1
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1
Total	24

As regards the collective injuries at work, for the period 2020–2022, the most risky activities are construction (5), the processing industry (4) and the health and social protection activities (4).

Fatal injuries per activities for the period 2020–2022

Construction	25
Processing industry	3
Mining and quarrying	5
Agriculture	4
Transport and storage	3
Water supply and wastewater disposal	2
Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply	2
Metallurgy	1
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1
Total	47

The most at risk activities where fatal injuries occurred in the period 2020–2022 are construction (25), mining and quarrying (5) and agriculture (4).

According to on-site inspections and documentation related to occupational safety and health, the most common causes of injury are the irresponsible attitude of employers and management staff in the consistent application of the occupational safety and health regulations. This includes workers' lack of training on safe work, failure to carry out health checks on workers to determine their health condition, failure to provide a safe workplace, failure to use personal protective equipment, failure to carry out inspections of the work equipment, failure to follow instructions and procedures, and so on.

According to the organizational set-up, the SLI is comprised of six departments and one independent unit, and 213 workers help with the realization of its activities in 2022, of which 130 are inspectors (87 in the area of labor relations and 43 in the area of occupational safety and health). Of the total number of inspectors 24 do not own an inspector's license thereby the number of inspectors that conduct inspections is 105.

In order to further strengthen the capacities, given the planned retirement of 21 inspectors with the title of advisor and one senior inspector in 2022, the recruitment of 26 new inspectors (11 in the area of labor relations, 13 in the area of occupational safety and health and 2 integrated inspectors) is planned.

In the forthcoming period, SLI aims to strengthen and enhance the capacities, both in terms of the human resources and in terms of the continuous promotion of the expertise and adoption of new knowledge through the conducting of special trainings so that SLI inspectors can acquire adequate competencies as well as through the modernization of the **inspectors' methods for work, equipment, means for work and work premises**.

To the aim of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the conducting of inspection supervision as of January 2022 the software enabled by the Council of Inspection Authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia, that is, *E-inspector Platform* was put into operation as an efficient control mechanism for uniformity in the application of regulations and improved exchange of information through the establishment of open communication channels and a single central IT system.

Article 4 – The right to a fair remuneration

Article 4§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to a fair remuneration, the Parties undertake to recognise the right of workers to a remuneration such as will give them and their families a decent standard of living.

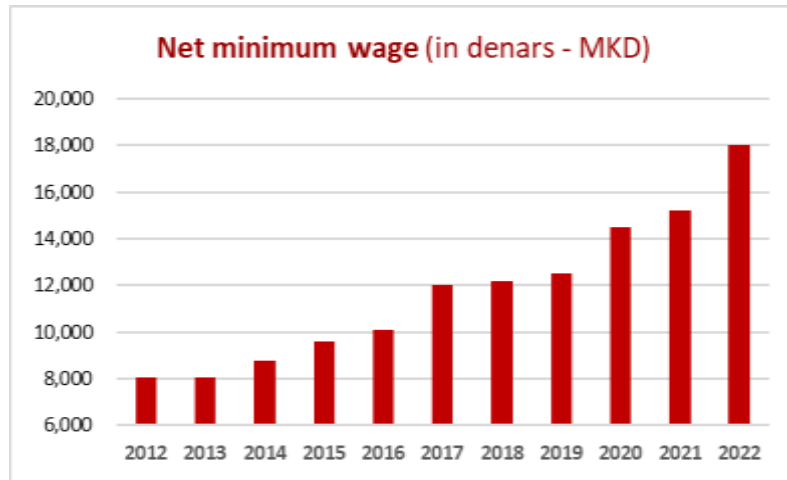
The **level of the minimum wage** in the Republic of North Macedonia continued to grow in this period, as well.

At the beginning of 2022, the representatives of workers and employers were actively engaged in the process of intensive negotiations to find an appropriate solution for determining the **minimum wage** for 2022. The successfully implemented social dialogue resulted in a jointly accepted position of the Economic and Social Council on amending the criteria for harmonizing the minimum wage and increasing the minimum wage, starting from March 2022. In addition, an agreement was also reached on subsidizing employers for payment of the contributions from mandatory social security for the difference of the increased net minimum salary.

As a result of these effective consultations and the achieved agreement with the social partners, the Law on Minimum Wage was amended (and adopted by the Parliament on February 23, 2022), allowing continuous increase of the minimum wage per employee in the country. With these latest amendments, **the net minimum wage is the level of 18,000 MKD, starting from the wages for March 2022**. The Law on Minimum Wage was amended in a transparent manner through social dialogue and negotiations conducted at the Economic and Social Council between the representatives of the workers (trade unions), the employers' organizations and the Government.

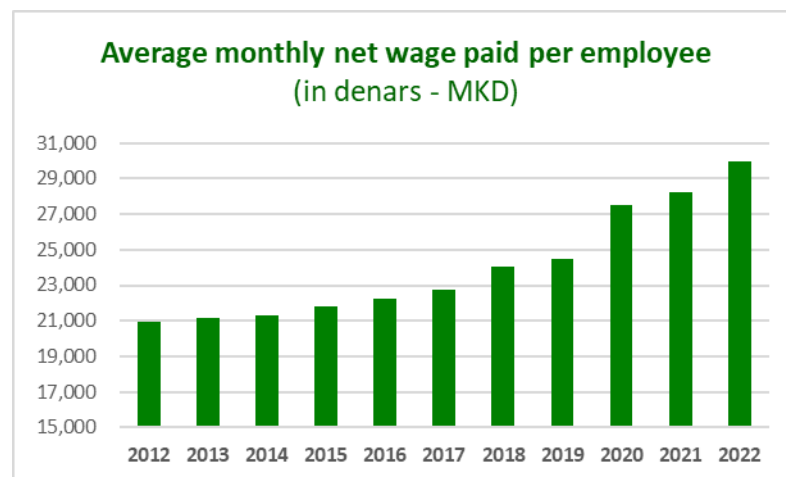
With the adopted amendments to the Law on Minimum Wage, a change has been made also to the previous criteria and methodology for setting up the minimum wage. Following these amendments, the minimum wage will be adjusted with 50% of the annual growth of the average salary and 50% of the cost of living growth. The third criterion is a novelty, and **it forbids the minimum wage to be lower than 57% of the average net wage paid for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office**. The new methodology thus defined, guarantees sustainability and continuous growth of the minimum wage in proportion to the increase of labor productivity

The following chart illustrates the growth of the net minimum wage over the past years in the Republic of North Macedonia:



In the past period, the wages in the country have continuously shown a positive growth trend. Thus, for 2021, the average paid net wage per employee is 28,718 MKD (in net amount) and is higher compared to 2020 by 5.7%. The increase of the average paid net wage in 2020, compared to 2019 is 7.8%, and for the year 2019 compared to 2018 - it is higher by 3.9%. We expect the trend of gradual increase of salaries in the Republic of North Macedonia to continue in the coming period.

The following chart illustrates the growth of the average monthly net wage paid per employee in past years:



Article 4§4

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to a fair remuneration, the Parties undertake to recognise the right of all workers to a reasonable period of notice for termination of employment.

In this section, the amendments to the *Law on Labor Relations*⁴ of 2018 are noteworthy.

These amendments, among other things, introduced changes to the additional criteria on the **termination of employment for business reasons** section.

In the “Founded reasons for dismissal” section a new paragraph was added, according to which the termination of employment for business reasons is done on grounds of the need for efficient functioning of the employer’s operation, the worker’s training and qualifications, his work experience, the success of the work, the type and significance of the workplace, the length of service and other criteria laid down in a collective agreement, as well as criteria for the protection of persons with disabilities, single parents and parents of children with special needs whose employment is terminated on the same basis.

Additionally, in case of dismissal by the employer due to personal reasons on the part of the worker, the delivery and deadline for delivery of a written notice before the termination of employment by the employer are specified:

“Article 73

Procedure prior to termination due to due to personal reasons of the employee

Prior to the termination of the employment contract due to personal reasons of the employee, under the conditions referred to in Article 80 of this Law, the employer must warn the employee in writing about the non-fulfillment of the obligations and the possibility of dismissal if the employee does not improve his work.”

“Article 80

Conditions for termination of the employment contract due to personal reasons of the employee

The employer may terminate the employment contract of the employee due to personal reasons of the employee if the employee is provided with the necessary working conditions and is given appropriate instructions, guidelines and written warning by the employer regarding the fact that the employer is not satisfied with the manner of performing the duties and if the employee still does not improve his work after the given warning within the period determined by the employer, which cannot be shorter than 15 days as of the day of receipt of the written warning, in the cases laid down in a collective agreement at branch, that is, department, that is, employer level”.

⁴“Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, No. 102/2018

ARTICLE 7 – The right of children and young persons to protection

Article 7§5

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of children and young persons to protection, the Parties undertake to recognise the right of young workers and apprentices to a fair wage or other appropriate allowances.

In 2018, amendments to the *Law on Labor Relations*⁵ were prepared and adopted, thereby introducing specific changes in the section on additional criteria for termination of the employment due to business reasons, also, in the section on the content of the employment contract, a deadline for the delivery of a written notice before termination of employment by the employer was defined, the deadline for submitting a written statement on the extension of the employment contract was specified, the time bar for termination of the employment contract was equalized, amendments that extend the prohibition of discrimination against fixed-time workers were made.

What is important to note here, and was achieved with these changes, is that in line with the recommendations of the **European Committee for Social Rights (ECSR)** of the Council of Europe, with the amendments to the *Law on Labor Relations*, additional protection was extended for a child under 15 years of age or a child who has not completed compulsory education. Namely, the period of work is limited to 2 hours per day in which the child can perform activities that are regulated by law, while the maximum limit of working hours is also determined to no longer than 12 hours per week. The period of work during school holidays may not exceed 6 hours per day or 30 hours per week, and the child must be provided with uninterrupted break of two working weeks.

* * *

At the beginning of 2020 the *Law on Youth Allowance*⁶ was adopted, which was prepared and enacted with the aim to encourage young people up to 23 years of age to get employed in the manufacturing activities, as well as to motivate young employed people in those activities to preserve their jobs. In compliance with this *Law* during the next three years, the state will pay young people employed in manufacturing activities a youth allowance in the amount of 3,000 MKD, in addition to the salary they are paid. This would have a positive impact on the process of reducing unemployment among the skilled workforce and meeting employers' needs for adequate skilled staff.

⁵ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, No. 102/2018

⁶ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia”, No. 18/2020

Article 9 – The right to vocational guidance

Article 9

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational guidance, the Parties undertake to provide or promote, as necessary, a service which will assist all persons, including the handicapped, to solve problems related to occupational choice and progress, with due regard to the individual's characteristics and their relation to occupational opportunity: this assistance should be available free of charge, both to young persons, including schoolchildren, and to adults.

The Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (ESARNM) implements active employment programs and measures and provides several types of services to different categories of unemployed persons, within its work domain.

One of the labor market services is the Professional Orientation and Career Counseling service which is part of the services for support of employment. The Professional Orientation and Career Counseling service covers various activities, such as provision of information, group and individual career counseling and so on. The unemployed persons can be included in multiple activities within the service according to their needs and interests, such as developing job searching skills and planning and managing their own career development, counseling, professional orientation and guidance, assistance in choosing an occupation, training or employment, as well as additional help and support in assessing their own potential for employment and matching that with the real needs of the labor market.

The service is realized in compliance with the *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment*⁷. The Professional Orientation and Career Counseling service is implemented as part of the services under the Operational Plans on Active Employment Programs and Measures and Labor Market Services, as a regular activity in the employment centers of the ESARNM.

In line with the changes, labor market demands and the needs of ESARNM's clients, this service is continuously evolving by improving the methods and techniques used in working with the unemployed persons.

Since the beginning of its implementation, the Professional Orientation was being realized as part of the regular activities of the Program for Work of the ESARNM. The implementation was mainly carried out by psychologists from the employment centres and from the Central Office (as coordinator of activities) who were trained and qualified to apply techniques for assessing abilities and other personality characteristics relevant to the professional development. The service provided professional information, professional orientation and counseling, as well as assistance in choosing an occupation and educational institutions for continuing the education after completing primary and

⁷ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 18/202037/1997, 25/2000, 101/2000, 50/2001, 25/2003, 37/2004, 4/2005, 50/2006, 29/2007, 102/2008, 161/2008, 50/10, 88/10, 51/11, 11/12, 80/12, 114/12, 39/14, 44/14, 113/14, 56/15, 129/15, 147/15, 154/15, 27/16, 119/16, 21/18 and 113/18 and "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia", No. 124/19, 103/2021

secondary education. The beneficiaries of these services were unemployed persons, pupils and students, persons with disabilities, as well as employers which expressed the need for selection of unemployed persons for training and employment.

With the new concept for development of this service the ESARNM is constantly working on an approach that ensures common standards and unified approach in the operation of all employment centers, that is, standards that can successfully be implemented with the human resources available and according to the needs of the unemployed persons. For the successful implementation of the service, ESARNM constantly invests in the development of human resources, through several types of trainings that were held in the past period, such as the trainings conducted in 2021 within the program *“Providing Training and Technical Support for Career Counseling for the Employment Service Agency (ESARNM)”* which included 55 employees from 30 employment centers. These trainings represent the continuation of the capacity strengthening of employment centers staff and the development of tools for career counselors to increase the employability skills of unemployed persons and their connection with employers.

According to the annual Operational Plans for Active Employment Programs and Measures and Labor Market Services, the aim of the Professional Orientation and Career Counseling service is for unemployed job seekers to acquire skills for exploring career opportunities, job searching skills and for planning their own career development.

The service is realised in all 30 employment centers of the ESARNM. All service activities are carried out by the employees at the employment centers which are trained as career counselors. The scope of activities and the number of unemployed persons that are covered by the service are partially conditioned by the size of the employment centers, the human resources available and the existing conditions and capacities of the center. All categories of unemployed persons are beneficiaries of this service. Pupils and students are also beneficiaries of this service due to the cooperation of the employment centers with the educational institutions, through various types of information and counseling activities related to the conditions of the labor market, in-demand occupations, employment opportunities through the ESARNM, etc. The service is free for all beneficiaries.

The service covers a wide range of different activities, such as:

- Provision of information (individual or in group workshops by using printed or electronic materials). The information relates to the presentation of occupations, the labor market situation, the available jobs, the opportunities for training, the possibilities for using the services and active employment programs and measures implemented by the ESARNM and so on;
- Using self-help tools that should help beneficiaries of the service be informed, make decisions and acquire skills for managing the career development;
- Group career counseling workshops;
- Group workshops on providing information about and application of the tools for assessment of the capacities of unemployed persons;
- Application of techniques for assessment and self-assessment of the personal characteristics related to the career development, that should help unemployed

persons in realizing their capacities for employment and needs for further development;

- Individual counseling;
- Preparation of a career action plan.

The activities of this service are planned and implemented according to the needs of the beneficiaries that are provided with help and assistance during the counseling process. The beneficiaries of the service, that is, the unemployed persons are informed about and included in the service through written notifications, information about the service on the **ESARNM website, calls made by the centers' staff via direct and telephone contacts, text messages;** and on the basis of the expressed interest for participation and the Individual employment plans. Part of the activities for unemployed persons that are significant to the career counseling and guidance are also realized within other services for support of employment carried out by the ESARNM, such as the services Job Search Assistance, Motivational Training etc.

Some of the activities of this service can also be implemented for the needs of and at the request of the employers, as assistance in the selection of candidates for trainings or provision of adequate workforce for employment.

The activities of the Professional Orientation and Career Counseling service enable easier access to all types of activities for active job searching. The end goal is for unemployed persons to become proactive, with enhanced skills for planning and increased motivation and success in the job search and employment. The implementation of the Professional Orientation and Career Counseling Service aimed primarily at unemployed persons, contributed to:

- Activation of unemployed persons, particularly young unemployed persons, through new service activities (self-assessment, training, improved interview, planning);
- Raising the awareness of participants about their personal characteristics, planning the job search process, and building their career step by step in a structured manner;
- Better provision of information to unemployed persons about labor market conditions, active measures and services implemented by the ESARNM, as part of the career counseling;
- Unemployed persons were active participants in the preparation of their individual career action plans, thereby improving their skills for planning and realizing the necessary activities for job searching;
- Some of the participants changed their status from unemployed to employed persons. Although, the participation in the service does not lead to direct employment, the activities of this service contributed to the active inclusion of people in the job search process (better knowledge, guidance, inclusion in other services and active employment programs and measures, enhanced capacities for representation in the labor market, motivation and so on);
- The beneficiaries of the services acquired new knowledge and skills which will be of use to them while actively seeking jobs in the future. The results of this type of services have long-term positive effects.

The following table shows the number of beneficiaries of the service.

Beneficiaries covered with the service, unemployed persons					
Year	Total	Women	%	Young persons up to 29 years of age	%
2017	1771	1023	57,76	1359	76,73
2018	4603	2555	55,51	3131	68,02
2019	4821	2576	53,43	2852	59,16
2020	532	282	53,01	271	50,94
2021	1054	580	55,03	468	44,40
2022*	672	368	54,76	384	57,14

* The data for 2022 refers to the period from January 1, 2022 to October 31, 2022 (the implementation of the service is ongoing)

- * As of 2020, the implementation of services, i.e. the work with unemployed persons, was taking place under difficult circumstances and was adapted to the conditions of the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Article 10 – The right to vocational training

Article 10§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational training, the Parties undertake to provide or promote, as necessary, the technical and vocational training of all persons, including the handicapped, in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations, and to grant facilities for access to higher technical and university education, based solely on individual aptitude.

Through several projects, in collaboration with USAID, the Chamber of Crafts, the United Nations Development Programme and the Economic Chamber, a deeper cooperation with employers was initiated through practical training with an employer, which prepares students for work processes during the education and through the development of curricula and programs. Over 800 mentors have been trained and certified to guide students through the learning process in the company.

As of September 27, 2017 the project for dual vocational education officially started which is implemented under the German model. It is a three-year project for dual vocational education that will be implemented in the Republic of North Macedonia with German expertise and support. This project has a significant meaning for the development of the economy in North Macedonia. The project will help companies that work in the industry to secure skilled staff considering that students will be going through preparations to work at a specific company even during their secondary education, which represents a typical example of public-private partnership.

Dual education is an education oriented towards the labor market needs and represents an investment in the future and the economy. The idea for dual vocational education is also supported by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. The companies will be able to award scholarships to high school students who will be obligated to work for them for a certain period immediately after graduating.

During 2018, several working meetings of representatives of the Delegation of the German Industry and Commerce in North Macedonia were organized with representatives of the companies Dräxlmaier, Kostal, ODW-Elektrik and LTH Learnica and secondary vocational schools. According to the needs of the companies and their preparedness to participate in the project, the pilot activities for introducing dual vocational education in secondary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia are implemented in two regions, namely Kavadarci and Ohrid as of the school year 2018–2019. In the region of Kavadarci the project partners are Dräxlmaier and the Secondary Vocational School “Kiro Spandjov-Brko”, and in the region of Ohrid the partners are Kostal, ODW-Elektrik and LTH Learnica and the Secondary Vocational School “St. Naum Ohridski” in Ohrid.

For the needs of the dual education initiated by the Delegation of the German Industry and Commerce in North Macedonia, changes were made to the structure of the curriculum. The number of general education classes decreased by 4 (1 class each of arts and music in the first year and 2 classes of history in the second year), while the number of vocational education subjects increased by 4. Work based learning was also introduced in the second year (with 5 classes or 1 to 1.5 days at a company) and the number of lessons in the third and

fourth years increased by 6 in the third year (10 classes or 1.5-2 days in a company) and by 5 in the fourth year (11 classes or 2-2.5 days in a company). Moreover, the curriculum provided for the opportunity lessons intended for practical classes and exercises to be realized within the work-based learning, of course through a flexible school schedule.

Dual education should equalize the great difference that exists between the available workforce and the real need of the economy. With the cooperation of the companies dual education already exists as an experimental project in the high schools of seven municipalities (Skopje, Kavadarci, Prilep, Veles, Bitola, Tetovo and Ohrid), but the idea is to make it a systemic and integral part of vocational education. The experiences regarding vocational education are taken from the developed countries, such as Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, but they will be adapted into a model suitable to our conditions and needs, defined in the new *Draft Law on Vocational Education and Training*.

The implementation of the *20/20/20 Project* began in the Secondary Vocational School “Mihajlo Pupin” in Skopje in the school year 2017/2018. The Project works under the principles of the so called dual secondary vocational education which enables direct involvement in the work process and employment of the 20 best students who after completing their formal education in 2020 were employed in EVN. The *20-20-20 Project of EVN* is also implemented in the secondary Municipal Technical School “Gostivar” in Gostivar, for the three-year educational profile electrical technician – electrical fitter of electric power networks.

The connection between secondary schools and companies is particularly significant because the purpose of secondary vocational education is to educate students who will be ready to enter the labor market upon their graduation.

Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training

To the aim of increasing the attractiveness and modernization of secondary vocational education in regard to the practical work aspect, a project is being implemented with the support of the European Union which will develop in detail the Concept on Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training, the full implementation of which is planned with the support of IPA funds. The idea of such centres is that all participants (students in regular formal secondary education, adults and persons with special educational needs) have an equal opportunity to acquire appropriate vocational skills at all levels (vocational training, three-year vocational education, technical education, post-secondary education, and trainings) in order to find adequate employment in the labor market or to continue on to higher education. Pilot activities on the validation of nonformal and informal education are also planned to be implemented in the centers.

On the basis of the analyses prepared on the three regions in the Republic of North Macedonia (Northeast region, Polog region and Southwest region) an amendment to the *Law on Vocational Education and Training* was adopted that introduced the idea of Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training for the first time.

In compliance with the legal provision the three secondary vocational schools: Secondary Vocational Municipal School “Kiro Burnaz” – Kumanovo, Secondary Vocational Municipal School “Mosha Pijade” – Tetovo and Secondary Municipal Catering and Tourism School

“Vancho Pitosheski” – Ohrid continue operating as regional centers for vocational education and training and have the status of state secondary schools.

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia assumed the founding rights and obligations towards the three vocational secondary municipal schools from the municipalities of Kumanovo, Tetovo and Ohrid as of January 1, 2021.

The three secondary municipal school were transformed by decision of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia into state secondary schools – Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training whose role in addition to providing formal and nonformal education in the forthcoming period is to offer validation, trainings for companies and unemployed persons, realization of the practical teaching for schools from the municipality and the region that cannot realize practical teaching in their school or company.

The introduction of the regional centers for vocational education and training is initially done through an upgrade, that is, transformation of the already existing secondary vocational schools into Regional centers for vocational education and training.

In the forthcoming period, on the basis of the analyses in the other 5 regions, the need for establishing new regional centers under the same principle as the previous three will be determined, as well as the opportunity for a private provider or business organization to develop a private regional center for vocational education and training.

The establishment of the regional centers for vocational education and training means equal opportunity for all participants in the educational process, namely, for students in the regular – formal secondary education, adults and people with special educational needs to receive the appropriate vocational education at all levels (vocational training, three-year vocational education, four-year technical education, post-secondary education and trainings within nonformal education) so that they can find a suitable job in the labor market, continue with higher education or move forward in the workplace.

Also, pilot activities for validation of nonformal and informal education are planned to be implemented to the aim of reducing the gap between the offer of vocational education and training and the demand on the labor market in the respective region; as well as trainings for the teaching and other secondary school staff in the region.

These centers should depict the needs of the labor maker, the needs for quality and appropriate skills and competencies of the emerging workforce that are in demand in the labor market according to the needs of the region.

The Project for Development of the Secondary Vocational Education in Macedonia (formal and nonformal education) started being implemented with the financial support of the Swiss Embassy. Project partners are the Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, the Macedonian Civic Education Center, the Youth Educational Forum, the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia and the University of Zurich. The main objective of the project is to increase the employability of young people, women and vulnerable groups in particular (Roma and young people with special needs). The timeframe of the project is 10 years; the implementation started in March 2018. Greater focus will be placed on the cooperation between the educational system (including non-formal education) and the business community (companies). The idea is to build a sustainable system, primarily for companies

to detect what skills are needed among workers and how to ensure the development of those skills (regardless of whether through the system of formal or nonformal education). The project will place emphasis on several clusters, that is, on health and social protection, personal services, agriculture, the food industry and catering.

The Ministry of Education and Science is currently implementing reforms in the secondary vocational education aimed at the mismatch between the skills acquired through the educational process and the skills in demand in the labor market. This gap leads to high unemployment among young people and disrupts the competitiveness of the economy.

In the past years, the Ministry of Education and Science through an intense dialogue with the companies, economic chambers and local self-government units saw the need for the introduction of new educational profiles and classes in schools, the need for redesigning **part of the curricula and the promotion of students' practical training.**

Through the campaign "Learn smart, work professionally" supported by the Swiss Embassy via the E4E Project in recent years, we have precisely identified the required profiles at local level and we are introducing new professional profiles that are sought after by companies in the market, and promoting the dual education model.

In the school year 2021/2022 after a great number of activities were implemented to promote the secondary vocational education and connect the business sector with the secondary vocational schools, 1,486 students were enrolled in the dual education model in 46 schools in cooperation with 220 companies, while the number of students increased in the school year 2022/2023 to 2,763 enrolled students in 61 schools, in cooperation with 450 companies. The students who get enrolled in the dual education model realize curricula and programs with an increased number of hours spent in a company.

A new Law on Vocational Education and Training is in the process of being adopted, which should provide for vocational education that matches the labor market; to provide for that the *Law* regulates the concept of the dual education model. Additionally, the provisions relating to practical education are being specified with the aim to increase the range of practical education, particularly the practical education acquired with an employer.

According to the Survey on the Need for Skills in the Labor Market in the Republic of North Macedonia for 2020 new scholarships were introduced for the first time for students in secondary vocational education in the school year 2020/2021 for the following professions: agriculture–veterinary profession, electrical engineering technician profession, mechanical engineering technician profession, civil engineering and geodesy profession and the textile and leather profession.

In vocational education and training curricula are realized for two-year vocational training, three-year vocational education and four-year technical education. Work-based learning with an employer is when people learn through doing real work. The work can be paid or unpaid, but it has to be done in real working conditions for the manufacturing of real goods and services (ETF 2014). However, work-based learning can also be realized with a real company which is a part of the school for technical education. Summer internships based on their function, organization and content represent a type of work-based learning.

In the two-year vocational training, the three-year vocational education and in the four-year technical education the summer internship is done in the duration of 5 to 20 days.

In the two-year vocational training and the three-year vocational education, the internship is not done only in the final years. In the three-year vocational education, the Practical Teaching Subject is also compulsory. Almost all qualifications include a compulsory component for learning through work, whereby at least 1/3 of the total fund of hours provided for the realization of practical teaching should be realized with an employer.

As regards technical education (with four-year duration) in 2021, a change was made to the curricula in relation to learning through work with an employer and to the summer internship, as a result of the demands of the companies and their claim that students will be able to realize these two forms of practical education with them. With the amended curricula the internship in I (first) year is realized for a minimum of 10 days, in II (second) year for a minimum of 15 days and in III (third) year for a minimum of 20 days.

In the reformed four-year curricula in the third and fourth years, work-based learning curricula are also implemented for each qualification. In the curricula for four-year vocational education based on a dual model for grades with increased number of classes of practical education, work-based learning is compulsory and is included in the curricula starting as early as the second year with 4 classes, third year with 8 classes and fourth year with 10 classes. Within the area of 'Contents programmed by the school', it is possible to increase the realization of learning through working with an employer by 2 classes at a grade level.

With the support of a project financed by the EU, activities aimed at supporting the research for the purposes of the tracer study on students from the final years of secondary vocational schools started being carried out at the end of 2022.

In the draft *Law on Secondary Education*, career counseling and a career counselor have been defined as a separate category for the first time.

For the purposes of monitoring individual inclinations of students and helping students and parents/guardians thereof in making decisions concerning their higher education, schools shall establish career counseling teams, coordinated by a career counselor and in cooperation with professional associates and their respective school teachers.

Career counseling teams shall carry out a career counseling program for students.

The Center for Vocational Education and Training continued to provide training to teachers of vocational school subjects who teach according to modularly designed curricula, with the support of the “Education for Employment (E4E)” project financed by the Swiss Embassy. Special focus has been set on vocational trainings for teachers from the three Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training.

In the period 2021–2022, with the support of the United Nations Development Program, more than 130 teachers, professional associates, and the directors of the three Regional Centers for Inclusive Education were provided with training, considering that the Regional

Centers for Vocational Education and Training need to offer education for all, thus becoming an example of an inclusive environment.

In the period from 2016 to 2020, vocational trainings were also delivered in penitentiary institutions. The trainings were conducted by secondary vocational schools, and enabled more than 400 people (of whom 68 women) from five penitentiary institutions to attain first-level vocational qualifications.

As part of the measures of the Government's *Operational Plan for Active Employment Measures and Programs and Labor Market Services*, long-term unemployed persons (young people, Roma) acquire certificates/documents for attained vocational skills through trainings each year, in compliance with the requirements of employers. The total number of people trained from 2018 to December 2022 is 628.

Furthermore, within the "Community work" program of the Government's *Operational Plan for Active Employment Measures and Programs and Labor Market Services*, the long-term unemployed (of whom over 85% are women) are provided with training for the purposes of obtaining vocational skills, thus improving their employability and access to the labor market. The total number of people who underwent training by December 2022 is 1,179.

Moreover, starting from 2021, as part of the measures of the "Care economy" program, for which three new occupation standards and three new training programs were previously prepared, 316 unemployed persons (of whom over 85% are women and over 20% are Roma women) underwent training and, for the first time, acquired skills that are in demand in the labor market.

The new draft *Law on Secondary Education* provides for the work engagement of educational mediators for Roma students who come from socially disadvantaged families and/or have been out of the education system for a long time. Educational mediators are to undertake activities to raise awareness of the possibilities and access to secondary schools, to conduct regular meetings with the aim of sensitizing the public and secondary school employees to the specifics and needs of vulnerable groups in the sphere of education, to regularly cooperate with the professional associates and teachers for the purposes of improving students' achievements, and to undertake activities aimed at reducing the school drop-out rate.

* * *

In the draft *Law on Secondary Education* the focus is set on inclusive education and provision of support to students with disabilities. It provides for the application of affirmative measures in secondary education with the aim of tackling discrimination and exclusion of children and adults. These affirmative measures include exemption from paying fees for recognition and equivalency of diplomas and degrees acquired abroad by socially disadvantaged categories, free transport for students with disabilities and the person accompanying them, provision of educational assistance to students with disabilities, provision of educational mediators, etc.

The infrastructure and the individualized support for realization of school syllabi and curricula in secondary education needs to be tailored to students' individual needs.

Furthermore, it provides for secondary school principals to establish inclusive teams in their respective schools, which are to manage the inclusive policies and practices at school level. School principals, on the proposal of the schools' teachers' councils, shall also establish an inclusive team for a student that works according to an individual educational plan. The inclusive team for a student shall be composed of: the student, student's teachers, student's parent or guardian, the school's social pedagogue / psychologist / social worker, and a special education teacher and rehabilitator. For a vocational school student, a representative from a company shall also join the inclusive team.

In compliance with the draft *Law on Secondary Education*, in order to support students with disabilities in their educational process, in addition to the inclusive team, the respective secondary school shall also provide educational assistance as a form of support to the teacher, on the recommendation of the professional assessment body. The educational assistants for municipal schools and schools of the City of Skopje shall be appointed by a commission established by the mayor of the municipality / City of Skopje; the educational assistants for state schools shall be appointed by the Minister.

In the past period, secondary school students with disabilities continued being supported through the provision of educational and personal assistants within the "Community work" program of the Government's *Operational Plan for Active Employment Measures and Programs and Labor Market Services*. The total number of educational and personal assistants trained from 2016 to December 2022 is 1,459.

Article 10§2

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational training, the Parties undertake to provide or promote a system of apprenticeship and other systematic arrangements for training young boys and girls in their various employments.

No updates were received regarding this particular paragraph.

Article 10§3

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational training, the Parties undertake to provide or promote, as necessary:

- a. adequate and readily available training facilities for adult workers;
- b. special facilities for the retraining of adult workers needed as a result of technological development or new trends in employment;

The Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia is a public institution which performs professional, organizational, administrative and other work related to

employment and insurance in case of unemployment and provides support, assistance and services to the participants in the labor market.

The competence to carry out training, retraining and additional qualification is provided by the *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment*, and the training/measures are elaborated in more detail within an annual Operational Plan for Active Employment Programs and Measures and Labor Market Services.

Pursuant to Article 3 of the *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment* the main activities of the labor exchange, among other things, is sending the unemployed persons to training, retraining and additional qualifications for employment, that is, pursuant to Article 12 one of the labor exchange services of employers provided by the Agency is helping the employer organize training, retraining or additional qualification for the unemployed persons according to their education and skills for the employer's needs.

Namely, pursuant to Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Law (Section 3 TRAINING, RETRAINING AND ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATION)

Article 14

“The Agency shall determine the manpower needs of the employer for employees and the needs of the unemployed persons that need to be trained, retrained or additionally qualified in order to be employed and shall inform the unemployed persons and employers about the needs, the conditions and the manner of organizing the training, retraining or additional qualification.

The Employment Service Agency shall render services for training, retraining or additional qualification before termination of the employment, short-term trainings for employment of unemployed persons, workplace training, and training of unemployed persons for participation in public activities, independently and via public and private training providers, chosen by means of a public announcement, under the conditions determined by an agreement between the Employment Service Agency and the training provider.”

Article 15

“The training, retraining or additional qualification shall enable acquisition and upgrading of the knowledge of the unemployed and the other persons for the purpose of their employment.

The training, retraining or additional qualification shall be organized and conducted in the Agency, i.e. at the employer, according to specific programs, under the conditions and in the manner determined by an act of the Agency.

The training, retraining or additional qualification can be also conducted in public and private institutions in the field of education, in accordance with the regulations in the field of education.”

Article 16

“The coordination of the training, retraining or additional qualification in public and private institutions in the field of education for persons during the training, retraining or additional qualification, shall be conducted by the Agency.”

One of the main responsibilities of the ESARNM is the implementation of the Operational plan for Active Employment Programs and Measures and Labor Market Services (OP), which is an annual document that contains the measures and services implemented by the Agency.

The following trainings are provided for within the OP:

- On-the-job training for a known employer;
- Occupations-in-demand training;
- Advanced IT skills training;
- Trainings for C, D and E category drivers licenses;
- Training for acquiring skills from old trades;
- Internship.

Given that the OP is an annual document, although most of these trainings are carried out each year as part of the OP, there is always the possibility, depending on the labor market needs, of providing new trainings, or adapting the existing ones to the aim of meeting the needs of both the employers and the unemployed persons as well as keeping up with new technological trends and so on.

The trainings foreseen with the OP refer to all categories of unemployed persons.

Description of the measures/trainings within the OP:

On-the-job training for a known employer

This measure supports trainings intended for occupations (jobs) that require primary or secondary education and for which certificates and licenses are not issued.

The training is conducted for a specific job in a period of 3 months.

The unemployed person receives a monthly allowance in the amount of 9,000 MKD, including insurance in case of a work accident and occupational disease.

The employer is obligated to submit a monthly attendance record list to the ESARNM. The employer is obligated to implement the training program in line with the previously determined plan for it.

The employer is paid a one-time lump sum for the mentorship and material costs in the amount of 15,000 MKD per trained person for the period of 3 months.

The employer is obligated to keep at least 50% of the trained persons at work and to not reduce the total number of persons employed full-time for an indefinite period of time for a period of 6 months.

From December 1, 2017 to October 31, 2022 a total of 441 persons were included in the on-the-job training for a known employer, of which 34% were young people up to 29 years of age and 49% were women.

Occupations-in-demand training

The training program is realized in a period up to three months by a verified training provider, of which one month of practical training is carried out at the premises of the employer. The training enables the acquisition of knowledge on the in-demand professions in the labor market, determined by several sources (data on the local labor market, analysis of the needs for skills in the labor market, survey conducted by the organization of employers, economic chambers and the local self-government units, at the request of the employer and on the basis of the expressed interest of the job seekers in such trainings).

The training is implemented by verified training providers at the Adult Education Center and the Ministry of Education and Science. The criteria for participation in training for each profession, including the previous educational level, are defined in the training programs in compliance with the *Law on Adult Education*. The training providers receive a maximum of 24,000 MKD per trained person. The persons involved in the training receive a monthly allowance in the net amount of 9,000 MKD (with included insurance for disabilities and bodily injuries caused by work-related injury and occupational disease and personal income tax for the duration of the training).

Upon completion of the training and verification of the acquired knowledge and skills the participants receive a certificate for the acquired knowledge which will be entered in the individual file of the registered unemployed person.

From December 1, 2017 to October 31, 2022 a total of 1,472 persons were included in the occupations in-demand training, of which 39% were young people up to 29 years of age and 70% were women.

Trainings for C and D category driver's licenses

Trainings are focused on traffic profession occupations demanded on the labor market, i.e. they are aimed at meeting the demand for drivers who have passed the driver's test for C and D category licenses with training providers that have applied for the open call. The trainings are conducted by selected licensed driving schools, for a duration of 1 month, and after the completion of the training (theoretical and practical part), the successful candidates take the C or E category driving test in test centers licensed to organize and conduct a driving test for this category. Unemployed persons registered in the ESARNM have the right to participate in this training.

After completing the training and passing the test, the unemployed person will obtain a certificate for issuance of a C or D category driver's license, which will be entered as information in the individual file of the registered unemployed person.

From December 1, 2017 to October 31, 2022 a total of 100 persons were included in the training for drivers, of which 43% are young people up to 29 years of age and 2% are women.

Digital skills development training, advanced IT skills training

The training programs for advanced IT skills aim to upgrade the skills of registered unemployed young people with a minimum of completed secondary education and under the age of 34 in the field of information technology.

The 2022 training program included the following modular program packages: Digital Marketing, Graphic design, Word press website developer, Microsoft Data Analyst, Java Developer, Cloud Administrator and Automation tester.

From December 1, 2017 to October 31, 2022 a total of 933 persons were included in the digital skills development training, of which 75% were young people up to 29 years of age and 38% were women.

Internship

The internship program has the purpose of providing unemployed with practical work knowledge and skills required to perform work tasks at certain jobs. The target group is unemployed persons up to 34 years of age with a minimum of secondary education completed. The internship program is intended for young people so that they can obtain their first work experience in line with their education, as well as specific knowledge and skills through participation in a three (3) month internship program at private enterprises or non-governmental organizations.

Persons who join the internship program shall receive a monthly compensation in the amount of 9,000 MKD per month (including insurance for disability, bodily harm caused by work injury, occupational disease, and personal income tax) for a period of up to 3 months.

From December 1, 2017 to October 31, 2022 a total of 7,053 persons were included in the internship program, of which 63% were women.

The changes to the current “**Labor Market Activation of Vulnerable Groups**” Project funded by the EU and implemented by the ESARNM introduced a new pilot measure, namely, Second Chance. The purpose of the measure is to enable unemployed persons without completed secondary vocational education and with low or irrelevant skills to complete their education and obtain a diploma. This program will increase the employability of job seekers and will provide opportunities for increasing professional skills and acquiring qualifications thus enabling a facilitated access to the labor market. The Second Chance Program is intended for people who have not completed secondary vocational education, and targets vulnerable groups (beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, young people up to 29 years old, women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, etc.) that are categorized by the ESARNM as hard-to-employ (according to the prepared individual employment plan or individual activation plan prepared for registered unemployed persons, who simultaneously use guaranteed minimum assistance). The selection of participants of the Second Chance Program will be done under the regular and established procedures, that is, processes of mediation and activation.

Article 10§4

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational training, the Parties undertake to provide or promote, as necessary, special measures for the retraining and reintegration of the long-term unemployed.

Data on registered unemployment – ESARNM (situation as of September 30, 2022)

112,464 unemployed persons registered in ESARNM (46,268 other job seekers)

Gender:

- 48.75% male;
- 51.2% female.

Age:

- 15-29 years of age: 19%;
- 30-49 years of age: 40.3%;
- 50+ years of age: 40.5%.

Education:

- without education and with only primary education: 58.2%;
- with uncompleted secondary education: 9.2%;
- with completed secondary education: 24.2%;
- with post-secondary or higher education: 8.3%.

Duration of being registered

- up to 12 months 24.9%
- between 1 – 3 years 49.6%
- more than 4 years 25.4%

Long – term unemployed: 84,446 persons, that is, **75%** of the total number of unemployed persons (of which 25.4% wait for employment 4+ years):

Gender:

- 49.2% male;
- 50.8% female.

Age:

- 15-29 years of age: 14.7%;
- 30-49 years of age: 40.7%;
- 50+ years of age: 44.5%.

Education:

- without education and with only primary education: 64.2%;
- with uncompleted secondary education: 9.3%;
- with completed secondary education: 20.5%;
- with post-secondary or higher education: 6%.

The ESARNM is implementing a project funded under IPA, instrument of the European Union, within which part of the measures are also intended for the long-term unemployed. The general objective of the project is to reduce long-term unemployment and dependency on the guaranteed minimum income by effectively including vulnerable groups in the labor market, through their inclusion in specialized programs and services for skills development. The project has two components:

Counseling and Motivation (CIM) Program designed to encourage and help the process for inclusion of guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries in trainings and other active employment measures thereby facilitating the inclusion of these people in the labor market.

This component/program is comprised of two types of support:

1. *Support through counseling* is provided before people are included in an active employment measure with the aim to help the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance in the process of their activation and integration in the labor market (planned coverage of 1,200 persons).
2. *Mentoring support* is provided during the period when the beneficiary is involved in training or other active employment measure, in order to enable the detection of personal and professional barriers and difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries during the training or employment process and the identification of factors and reasons that make it difficult for the beneficiary to integrate into the environment where the training or employment is carried out (planned coverage of 1,200 persons).

Employment Support through Training Program whose main goal is improving the skills and knowledge of the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance with the help of trainings, practical work and subsidized employment in order to facilitate their inclusion in the labor market.

This component/program is comprised of the following employment measures:

1. *Occupations in-demand in the labor market training*. The aim of the measure is to increase the employability of the unemployed persons by providing them with knowledge and skills related to the occupations in-demand in the labor market. Persons covered with this measure are provided with adequate compensation.
2. *On-the-job training* (training with a known employer). The aim of this measure is to provide unemployed persons, beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, with practical experience in performing work tasks according to the requirements of employers and improving their employability. The persons covered by this measure are provided with an adequate compensation. Adequate compensation is also provided for employers if they hire people from the target group.
3. *Subsidized employment* (subsidizing salaries). The aim of this measure is to provide financial support for the creation of jobs and the employment of unemployed persons who are beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance by paying the funds to the employer, as a subsidy to the employee's salary and covering the costs incurred in preparing the person for employment.

4. *Internship.* The program's aim is to provide practical knowledge and skills required to perform work tasks at certain jobs. The target group is unemployed persons up to 34 years of age with a minimum of secondary education completed, with priority given to long-term unemployed persons, beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance and persons with disabilities.
5. *Pilot measure – Second Chance.* Second Chance is intended for people who have not completed secondary vocational education, and targets vulnerable groups (beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, young people up to 29 years old, women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, etc.) that are categorized by the ESARNM as hard-to-employ (according to the prepared individual employment plan or individual activation plan prepared for registered unemployed persons, who simultaneously use guaranteed minimum assistance).

Article 10§5

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to vocational training, the Parties undertake to encourage the full utilisation of the facilities provided by appropriate measures such as:

- a. reducing or abolishing any fees or charges;
- b. granting financial assistance in appropriate cases;
- c. including in the normal working hours time spent on supplementary training taken by the worker, at the request of his employer, during employment;
- d. ensuring, through adequate supervision, in consultation with the employers' and workers' organisations, the efficiency of apprenticeship and other training arrangements for young workers, and the adequate protection of young workers generally.

A measure implemented by ESARNM is the Training for occupations in-demand in the labor market

The training program is implemented for a period of up to four months by a verified training provider, one month of which is carried out as practical training at the premises of the employer.

The training enables the **acquisition of knowledge on the in-demand professions in the labor market**, determined by several sources (data on the local labor market, analysis of the needs for skills in the labor market, survey conducted by the organization of employers, economic chambers, the local self-government units, at the request of the employer and on the basis of the expressed interest of the job seekers in such trainings).

The training is implemented by **verified training providers at the Center for Adult Education and the Ministry of Education and Science**. The criteria for participation in the training for each occupation, including the previous educational level, are defined in the training programs, in compliance with the *Law on Adult Education*. Training providers receive a **maximum compensation of 30,000 MKD per trained person**.

Those involved in the training receive a monthly net allowance of **5,043 MKD** (on this amount personal income tax and insurance in case of work-related accident and occupational disease are calculated and paid). Upon completion of the training and verification of the knowledge and skills acquired, participants receive a **certificate** of knowledge acquired, which will be entered in the individual file of the registered unemployed person.

ARTICLE 14 – The right to benefit from social welfare services

Article 14§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to benefit from social welfare services, the Parties undertake to promote or provide services which, by using methods of social work, would contribute to the welfare and development of both individuals and groups in the community, and to their adjustment to the social environment.

The social protection reform started being carried out in 2019 with the adoption of a set of laws and bylaws within the social sphere. The ultimate goal of this reform is the reduction of the poverty rate, especially among vulnerable categories of citizens, and the successful reintegration thereof into society.

To be specific, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the following new legislation: the *Law on Social Protection*⁸ and the *Law on Social Security for the Elderly*⁹, and the *Law Amending the Law on Protection of Children*¹⁰, which entered into force on May 23, 2019. All bylaws in relation to the implementation of the new legislation were published, allowing the first payment of cash benefits in compliance with the reformed system of social protection and protection of children to be made on June 10, 2019.

This reform has redesigned the entitlements to cash benefits in the social protection sphere, which can solely be seen as a family benefits package in accordance with the needs of households and citizens.

The following entitlements to cash benefits in the sphere of social protection were determined with the Law on Social Protection:

1. guaranteed minimum assistance;
2. disability allowance;
3. allowance for assistance and care from another person;
4. salary compensation for part-time employment;
5. housing allowance;
6. permanent allowance; and
7. one-off cash benefit.

In fact, with the new *Law on Social Protection* the social cash benefit was reformed and upgraded into guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA), which presents a cash entitlement for at-risk persons/households due to material deprivation.

Moreover, it envisages strengthened activation of guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries by requiring that household members with work ability become involved in the active employment programs for the purposes of their work training and employment, arising from the need to link social assistance and activation of GMA beneficiaries. The cooperation between employment and social protection services is being strengthened and deepened, with the aim of supporting and activating employable GMA beneficiaries. The

⁸ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 104/19

⁹ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 104/19

¹⁰ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 104/19

software of the Employment Service Agency and the Centers for Social Work has been adjusted, thus enabling the real-time exchange of data and the joint preparation of an individual plan for the most easily employable household member. The introduction of activation is supported by a project of the European Union; next steps include the continuation of the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of activities for activation of GMA beneficiaries in the labor market. Since the introduction of the reform, 3,300 GMA beneficiaries have been activated by means of individual plans drafted for activation of GMA beneficiaries; 1,075 beneficiaries have been included in the active employment measures.

For motivating GMA beneficiaries, the availability of special services to support employment is also important. To that aim, a new *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment* is planned to be adopted, which, *inter alia*, will create a suitable legal framework for provision of social services for supported employment via mentoring and counseling. The activities for enhancing the legal framework for employment and professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group are currently in progress.

The parallel reform in the field of child protection for the first time enabled the recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance to receive child allowance and education allowance for children regularly attending primary and secondary schools, so as to support parents in the settlement of school expenses, thus preventing early school dropout.

In the course of the six winter months, the amount paid to GMA beneficiaries and beneficiaries of social security for the elderly increases by 1000 MKD per month, so as to cover heating expenses.

As regards the application of the new *Law on Social Protection*, the Centers for Social Work *ex officio* transposed the persons who had been granted entitlements according to the previous social protection regulations, thus allowing beneficiaries who meet the criteria under the new law to continue to receive social protection entitlements.

The comparative data between the highest amount of cash benefit paid under the new law, that is, GMA, and the entitlements that are most closely sublimated with the GMA according to the previous law show a larger coverage of beneficiaries. Total amounts paid show an increase of 63%. The average cash benefit paid as GMA per household (6,291 MKD) under the new law is twice the amount of the social cash benefit (2,945 MKD) paid under the previous law, which presents an increase of 114%, whilst the average payments per household member show an increase of 122% (GMA in the amount of 2,231 MKD, in contrast to the social cash benefit in the amount of 1,006 MKD).

The introduction of case management and the new documentation are part of the overall reform of the social protection system, which puts the beneficiary and their family in the center of attention and the individual needs present the basis for provision of rights and services envisaged in the new *Law on Social Protection*. The first basic trainings for 650 professionals employed in the Centers for Social Work and the Employment Centers were completed in 2018; phase two trainings for all Centers for Social Work were delivered in 2019, specifically, in all stages of the case management method.

According to the data of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the number of households that are GMA recipients was 36,268 at the end of 2021, compared to the 25,095 households that received GMA in 2019 when the reformed system of social protection and protection of children was introduced. The number of households that received GMA increased by 8,235 in 2020, and, in 2021, 2,938 new households entered the system, resulting in a total increase of 45% in GMA beneficiaries over a two-year period.

From the gender perspective, the households in which the main recipient of the entitlement is a woman constitute 35.8% of all GMA receiving households, which corresponds to the traditional arrangement of families. As regards the size of beneficiary households, of the overall number of households receiving GMA, 28.2% are single-member households, 23.5% are two-member households, and 17.9% are four-member households. The share of households composed of five or more members, which are particularly vulnerable and at risk of poverty, is 10.7%.

In terms of the education attainment structure, persons with primary education attainment make up 60.2% of the main GMA recipients, followed by those with secondary education attainment (19%), and those without primary education (18.5%). The low education attainment level of members of households that are GMA beneficiaries presents a major barrier to the successful transition of these persons to employment.

A significant number of households, that is, 11,153 households (31.7% of the total number of households receiving GMA) also receive child allowance. Approximately every five household that receives GMA (21.2% or 7,681 households) also receive education allowance for children.

A significant part of the households that receive GMA also receive energy supplement. The number of beneficiary households has kept increasing over the years, reaching to 45,914. The number of households that receive energy supplement is by 26.6% higher than the number of households that receive GMA, and this is an important social protection entitlement aimed at tackling energy poverty.

Of the different types of social protection cash benefits, Roma households mostly receive GMA (19.9%) and energy poverty supplement (17%). Households of Albanian ethnic origin are mostly beneficiaries of energy poverty supplement (44.7%), GMA (41.8%), and child allowance (48.8%). Households of Macedonian ethnicity mostly receive electricity supplement (27.2%), GMA (26.5%), and child allowance (15.9%).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in April 2020 the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the *Decree with the Force of Law Amending the Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on Social Protection in a State of Emergency*, which enabled easier access to the entitlement to guaranteed minimum assistance for persons whose employment had ceased during the pandemic, from April 2020 to December 2020. Given that the Covid-19 pandemic continued, with the aim of providing easier access to the entitlement to guaranteed minimum assistance in extraordinary circumstances, the *Law Amending the Law on Social Protection* was adopted in 2020.

From the adoption of the *Decree with the Force of Law* to December 2020, the number of GMA beneficiaries increased by 15%.

The following social services were introduced with the new *Law on Social Protection*:

1. information and referral services;
2. professional help and support services;
3. counseling services;
4. in-home services (personal assistance and home-based assistance and care);
5. community-based services (daycare and temporary stay services, resocialization, **rehabilitation, reintegration of beneficiaries, respite care, and a “Half-way house”**, in order to provide prevention, care, and protection, with the aim of enabling beneficiaries to continue to live in their own home, that is, community, and preventing the need of non-family protection); and
6. non-family care services
 - supported living,
 - foster care, and
 - placement in an institution.

Under the conditions and in compliance with the procedure established in the *Law on Social Protection*, the social protection activity is performed by:

1. the Institute for Social Activities,
2. the support centers for foster families,
3. the social protection institutions (the Centers for Social Work, institutions for non-family social protection, centers for social services),
4. foster families,
5. associations, and
6. natural persons.

The social protection institutions and other social service providers are allowed to perform work in the field of social protection and provide social services if they possess a permit (license) to work, which is granted by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, except for the establishment of a center for social work, an institution for provision of care and education to children, and an institution for asylum seekers. The work permit for providing social services is renewed every five years, on grounds of the previously provided opinion of the Commission for Licensing Social Service Providers, appointed by the Minister.

The Ministry keeps a register of licensed social service providers according to the type of services they have been licensed to provide; the register is published on the website of the Ministry.

With the view to determining the strategic objectives, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has prepared the new draft *National Program for Development of Social Protection 2022–2032*, which envisages the medium- and long-term policies and measures for future development of the system of social protection, including social benefits and social services.

Article 14§2

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to benefit from social welfare services, the Parties undertake to encourage the participation of individuals and voluntary or other organisations in the establishment and maintenance of such services.

As regards the development of social services, a significant step forward was made with the adoption of the new *Law on Social Protection* in 2019; in fact, the development of local community based social services is in the spirit of this law.

The law provides an array of new in-home and community-based services. A system of licensing non-public social service providers and a system of public financing of non-public social service providers have been introduced. The Methodology for Calculating Costs of Services has also been adopted, on the basis of which a Decision on Determining Costs of Social Services is adopted each year. With the aim of developing and providing social services from licensed and authorized providers (associations and private providers), a Commission for licensing providers of social services and a Commission for providing funds for social services from the Municipalities and other providers were established. This way the pluralization of social services from private service providers and civil society organizations has been encouraged. Moreover, social service providers licensing guarantees delivery quality and achievement of norms and standards for different types of services.

Since the adoption of the *Law on Social Protection*, significant progress has been observed in the licensing of new social services providers, which is key to improving beneficiaries' access to new services.

Thus far, 69 social service providers (associations of citizens and private entities) have been registered in the network of social services providers, with the capacity to provide services to about 4,000 beneficiaries.

As noted above, a system for allocating funds to licensed social service providers by means of announced and conducted public competition for granting funds to associations of citizens and private social service providers was established in 2009.

In compliance with the established system for granting funds to licensed social service providers, upon conducting the procedure, funds for provision of social services, specifically, personal assistance, supported living, and home-based care and assistance, are granted each year.

In 2021, funds were granted for the purposes of provision of social services, specifically, personal assistance, supported living, and placement in an institution for treatment and rehabilitation of persons with addiction issues. The cost of the social services was established by the Decision on Determining Costs of Social Services Provided by Licensed Service Providers for 2021, in compliance with the Methodology for Calculating Costs of Services Depending on the Norms and Standards for Providing Social Services¹¹.

The number of social services for which a public competition for granting funds for provision of social services by private and licensed providers has been announced has increased to nine in 2022. The price of the social services from authorized services providers for 2022 has increased.

The implementation of the social protection reform is supported through the “Project for improvement of social services” that the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has been implementing with a loan from the World Bank.

Within this project, a total of 22 sub-projects in 27 municipalities were supported with the first public call for municipalities for expressing interest in applying for a grant for development of social services. Most of these sub-projects are intended for provision of assistance and care to the elderly, whereas the rest refer to active aging daycare services for the elderly, daycare for children with disabilities and rehabilitation, daycare for rehabilitation and reintegration of persons with disabilities, and counseling.

The projects were implemented in two stages:

- establishment of the service, in duration of six months and
- delivery of the service, in duration of 12 months, with project financing. The costs of the service are covered only for those beneficiaries who have received a Decision adopted by the Center for Social Work confirming that the beneficiary needs the specific service.

With the implementation of the sub-projects thus far, a total of 249 caregivers and professionals have been engaged to deliver these services. The services are provided with the referral of the beneficiary by the competent Centers for Social Work; by the end of July 2022, on the basis of a Decision adopted by the Centers for Social Work, a total of 692 beneficiaries have been provided with services, and this number could rise depending on the needs of beneficiaries and capacities of service providers.

Given that the development and sustainability of social services presents a strategic priority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a procedure was conducted to secure funds for these services to continue to be financed from the budget of this Ministry for 2022. This activity ensures the continuity of providing beneficiaries with the already established services.

Furthermore, in compliance with Article 144 and Article 145 of the *Law on Social Protection*, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy announced a Public Call to municipalities for the continuation of established services via the “Project for improving social services”. The Public Call, published on the website of the Ministry, is to remain

¹¹ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 264/19

open until the end of the year, thus creating an opportunity for municipalities to apply after the end of the project financing.

Owing to this call, nine administrative agreements have been signed thus far, and the procedure for allocating funds to municipalities will continue to take place successively for all established community-based social services.

With the signing of these administrative agreements, the already established system of providing services continues to function by obliging the Municipality and the service provider to provide services to the beneficiaries that have been referred by means of a Decision adopted by the competent Center for Social Work (in compliance with the capacity determined in the Decision on granting permission to a licensed service provider to perform work in the field of social protection).

The service provider submits a report on the service delivery to the Municipality and the Center for Social Work on a monthly basis. The Municipality and the Center for Social Work monitor the work of the service provider (the user of the funds) and the manner of implementing the program for the adequate service for beneficiaries who have a Decision on using a certain social service adopted by the competent Center for Social Work.

The Ministry supervises the service provider in the realization of the service for provision of home-based care and assistance.

The user of the funds informs the Ministry about the realization of the work in the field of social protection and the spending of the allocated funds by March 31 at the latest, concerning the funds utilized in previous year.

Within the framework of the second public call to municipalities, organization that are to provide various services, especially to the socially vulnerable categories of citizens residing in the territories of 17 Municipalities, were selected in December 2022. The social services that are to be provided to residents of these municipalities include home-based assistance and care, personal assistance, and daycare centers, and are expected to cover about 530 beneficiaries in need of assistance and support, such as, persons aged over 65 years, children and adults with physical or intellectual disabilities, and persons with reduced functional capacity. Moreover, the establishment of such new social services in these 17 municipalities has created opportunities for work engagement and employment of about 150 persons, mainly caregivers and other professionals, who would undergo appropriate training and receive licenses prior to starting work.

One of the challenges in the development of social services is the greater involvement of local self-governments and regional structures in the planning and delivery of social services. To that aim, intensive consultations started in late March 2022 with all eight statistical regions in the country about the needs and types of services for each region separately, based on the structure of the population and the needs thereof.

Furthermore, measures have been implemented with the aim of providing support and building the capacities of Municipalities to create and implement efficient local policies and provide quality and efficient social services; 20 Municipalities have prepared plans for social protection, and four more are being prepared. Guidelines for planning social

services at the regional level and for the functioning of the councils for social protection have also been prepared.

For the purposes of establishing councils for social protection at the regional level, a Manual for the establishment and work of the councils for social protection of the statistical regions has been prepared.

There is still the need to develop a quality service delivery monitoring system, as well as to adopt bylaws in relation to all services provided by the new *Law on Social Protection* and, also, a Rulebook on co-financing the costs of social services by beneficiaries, bearing in mind that at the moment all services are provided to beneficiaries free of charge, which puts pressure on the state budget.

Social enterprises have an important role in job creation and integration of the most vulnerable categories in the labor market, including persons with disabilities. In order to encourage the development of social entrepreneurship, the *National Strategy for Development of Social Enterprises in the Republic of North Macedonia (2021–2027)* has been adopted, and the matter is also to be regulated by drafting a special law. In 2021 and 2022, financial and technical support has been provided for establishing or managing social enterprises focusing on work integration of vulnerable persons. A special center for supporting social enterprises has been established. Since the establishment thereof, about 300 members of the non-governmental sector and of other entities that identify themselves as social enterprises have been provided with support (mentoring, internship, training, counseling, and so on). The draft *Law on Social Entrepreneurship* was prepared in 2022; this law is to regulate the establishment, operation, and support of social enterprises, as well as the monitoring the work of social enterprises. The law is expected to be adopted in 2023.

ARTICLE 15 – The right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community

Article 15§3

With a view to ensuring to persons with disabilities, irrespective of age and the nature and origin of their disabilities, the effective exercise of the right to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community, the Parties undertake, in particular to promote their full social integration and participation in the life of the community in particular through measures, including technical aids, aiming to overcome barriers to communication and mobility and enabling access to transport, housing, cultural activities and leisure.

Promoting inclusion and respecting the rights of persons with disabilities is high on the agenda of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. What is very important is that, with the new policies, the perception of disability is being changed, the old medical model of perceiving disability is being abandoned, that is, it is being replaced with a non-medical perception that encourages the strengths and abilities of children and people with disabilities and that provides the necessary support that they need to receive in order to be able to enjoy equal opportunities with all and develop their potential.

As regards the legal framework, the main legal act is the *Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia*, guaranteeing equality before the *Constitution* and the laws and social security in compliance with the principles of social justice. This is followed by the *Law on Ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Optional Protocol to the Convention of 2011*, via which the provisions of the *Convention* became part of the legislation of North Macedonia.

The new *Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination* was adopted in 2020¹² and is fully aligned with the *Convention* in terms of defining disability, the forms and types of discrimination, and the procedures for protection. Articles 4 and 5 of the new *Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination* are fully aligned with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

A number of laws guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities, including the laws in the fields of social protection and protection of children, the laws in the fields of education, labor relations, the pension system, health care, transport, construction, and the law regulating the work of the National Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. Furthermore, Article 11 of the *Law on Primary Education* supports the inclusion of all children in regular primary education, and the new *Law on Social Protection* of 2019 promotes the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination, participation, and the best interest of the beneficiary.

¹² “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 258/2020.

As regards the vision and strategic directions, the key document that has greatly impacted our society in terms of the issue concerning persons with disabilities is the ***National Deinstitutionalization Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2018–2027 “Timjanik”***, and the strong political commitment to transition from institutional to family and community care with the support of social services. The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the *National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018–2027* and the *Action Plan 2020–2021* were prepared in 2021. Based on the findings and recommendation of the mid-term evaluation, a new *Action Plan 2022–2024* for implementation of the *Strategy* has been prepared, and is currently in the process of consideration and adoption by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Other important strategic documents include the *National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination* emphasizing togetherness and the concept of one society for all, with the aim of providing equal right to education – the Concept Note on Inclusive Education of 2020.

As regards the institutional framework, the legislative body is the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia within which an informal inter-party parliamentary group for the rights of persons with disabilities is operating and providing support in the process of adoption of laws that are of importance to persons with disabilities. Furthermore, in 2018 the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, as the executive body, established the National Coordination Body for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As to policy making, all relevant ministries take part, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Transport and Communications, as well as the public institutions, such as the Centers for Social Work (30 in total in the country), the network of kindergartens, schools, health care centers, local self-government units, and so on.

In terms of monitoring and protecting the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, the Ombudsman also assumes an important role; it has established the Unit for Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities and the *Convention* monitoring team in which 17 stakeholders take part, including, *inter alia*, organizations of persons with disabilities. Moreover, another very important institutional element is the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, established in compliance with the *Law on Protection against Discrimination*.

The development of modern policies for persons with disabilities is evident with the introduction of the International Classification of Functioning in the assessment of children with disabilities. The application of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) in our country has started: extensive changes have been made to the legal framework (laws and bylaws); the process includes the establishment of professional bodies – services for functional assessment and capacity

building. To that aim, the *Law Amending the Law on Social Protection*¹³ has been adopted, which has enabled the application of the new model for needs assessment of persons with disabilities through functional assessment of children and youth aged up to 26 years, as well as determining measures for additional educational, health, and social support, and findings and opinion about the type and degree of disability provided by the professional bodies performing the functional assessment. With the *Law Amending the Law on Social Protection*, the previous categorization of children with disabilities in compliance with the outdated medical model has been replaced and the focus has been set on accessing their abilities and recognizing their potential, with the aim of achieving better inclusion and providing adequate support for further development of children and youth aged up to 26 years. The “categorization commissions” have been abolished and functional assessment is to be conducted by professional teams of the Functional Assessment Service within the Public Health Care Facility – Health Center Skopje. Based on the performed functional assessment, measures for additional support in the areas of education, health care, social protection, and protection of children for children and youth with affected health condition aged up to 26 years are to be determined.

A rulebook regulating the manner and procedure for conducting functional assessment and the need for additional educational, health care, and social protection of children for children and youth with affected health condition aged up to 26 years has also been prepared. Via this act, standard forms for the operating of all professional teams, as well as a central electronic register for their work, have been introduced.

As regards the assessment bodies, thus far, such professional bodies have been opened in Skopje (2), Bitola, Strumica, Gostivar, Kumanovo, and Shtip; the establishment of such assessment bodies in Veles, Ohrid, and Delchevo is in its final phase. This reform has been implemented jointly by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education and Science. In these new assessment bodies for children with disabilities, functional profiles of 1699 children with disabilities have been made thus far, of which 1152 (i.e. 67.8%) are of Macedonian ethnicity, 333 (i.e. 19.6%) are of Albanian ethnicity, and 214 (12.6%) are of other ethnicities. Additionally, 370 children more are awaiting assessment. In the future, additional funds are needed for the unobstructed functioning of these bodies, as well as for the employment of professionals to work on the assessments (special education teachers, social workers, and psychologists).

According to the made assessments, educational assistance within regular education has been recommended to 884 children with disabilities; for the school year 2022–2023, the Ministry of Education and Science has provided funds in the amount of 5.7 million EUR for the employment of 720 education assistants to provide support to the teaching staff in working with students with disabilities. All special schools have been transformed into elementary schools with resource centers, whereas the special classes (23 in total) have been transformed into support centers. In the previous three years, as part of the support to the inclusive education within a project supported by the EU, a total of 474 scholarships have been awarded to students with disabilities attending grade 1 and 2

¹³ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 294/21.

within the regular education system; furthermore, 18 sensory rooms and ten inclusive playgrounds have been equipped and furnished, and five sets of assistive technology and didactic materials have been provided, as well as tutoring support for students with disabilities especially in times of Covid-19 (33 tutors for a total of 117 students). The Ministry of Education and Science provides scholarships to all secondary education students with disabilities.

Furthermore, with the support of the EU, investments in the amount of 3 million EUR are being made with the aim of improving the accessibility of 20 educational institutions.

With the aim of providing support to children with disabilities for the purposes of increasing their mobility and supporting their enrollment in the regular education system, the Law Amending the Law on Social Protection has been adopted^{iv}, allowing for the personal assistance service to be used by children aged 6 and over.

As regards deinstitutionalization, serious steps have been taken, that is, to be precise, there are no longer children placed in institutions, whereas in terms of adults, 205 persons with disabilities have been resettled into 47 housing units, and 30 persons more are expected to be transferred to such units by the end of 2022. The resettlement of beneficiaries from residential homes was slowed down by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the establishment of supported living services and the resettlement of beneficiaries started taking place again in mid-2021. Additionally, in the next four years, all institutions for persons with disabilities are to be transformed by the end of 2027, which means that 150 persons more are to be provided with a different form of protection and to continue to live in community-based supported living.

The transformation of residential institutions also continued to take place: as of December 2022, two support centers for foster families have been established in Skopje and Bitola (within the former residential social institutions for children), as well as one center for provision of support through a private provider, namely, SOS Children's Village in Skopje. These centers provide specialized support to families caring for children and adults with disabilities. The three support centers for foster families provide this service to 327 foster families that are taking care of a total of 559 beneficiaries.

As regards strengthening the capacities and increasing the number of foster families, the implementation of the campaign "Lend a hand, change and life – become a foster carer" started on June 1, 2022, carried out by the support centers for foster families of the SOS Children's Village and the support centers for foster families in Skopje and Bitola. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the need to provide living conditions to children in a family-like environment, as well as to develop a network of foster families that will be available throughout the country.

With the support of the European Union, the conceptual project for thorough reconstruction of the Institute for Rehabilitation of Children and Youth in Skopje was completed in late February 2022; this project envisages that the institution would develop into a modern center for early identification and intervention, daycare centers, professional rehabilitation, and a respite care center. The beneficiaries currently accommodated in the institute (30) are to be resettled into residential units for supported

living. The reconstruction, financed by the European Union and co-financed from the national budget, is scheduled to take place in 2023.

As regards the development of social services, a significant step forward was made with the adoption of the new *Law on Social Protection* in 2019; in fact, the development of local community based social services is in the spirit of this law.

The law provides an array of new in-home and community-based services, including: personal assistance, home-based support and care, respite care, intended for persons with disabilities and the elderly. A system of licensing non-public providers of social services and a system of public financing of non-public providers of social services were introduced. The Methodology for Calculating Costs of Services has been adopted, on the basis of which a Decision on Determining Costs of Social Services is adopted each year. With the aim of developing and providing social services from licensed and authorized providers (associations and private providers), a Commission for licensing providers of social services and a Commission for providing funds for social services from the Municipalities and other providers were established. This way the pluralization of social services from private service providers and civil society organizations has been encouraged. Moreover, the social service providers licensing also guarantees delivery quality and achievement of norms and standards for different types of services. Thus far, 69 social service providers have been licensed; this number is expected to rise to 90 by the end of the year.

Social services – Basic statistics

Social services	Home-based support and care			Personal assistance			Daycare services			Supported living (24 hours)			Licensed providers		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
Beneficiaries	/	279	583	160	219	292	151	308	454	21	40	105	15	55	69
Municipalities	/	12	16	11	11	15	31	34	35	3	4	7			
Caregivers	/	126	254	121	151	187	133	140	148	17	37	92			
Hours	/	11983	31155	/	17746	23695	/	/	/	/	/	/			

As regards the access to the labor market, 13,442 persons with disabilities have been employed, of which 3,378 in sheltered employment, 8,847 in the open labor market, 830 in the public and state sector, and 387 as sole proprietors. Moreover, 33.2 million EUR from the special fund have been paid to 1,276 entities as support to employment. In the next period, with the purpose of increasing the potential for employment of persons with disabilities, activities will be undertaken with the aim of developing the vocational rehabilitation paid for by the state, the legal solution for employment of persons with disabilities will be modernized, and employment will be encouraged in both the public and the private sector.

The *National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of North Macedonia* started being prepared in 2022. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is the competent institution, with the technical support of the German Development Agency. “Nothing about us without us” is the slogan of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In line with this motto, public policies are created with active participation of persons with disabilities. The development of the new *National Strategy* is taking place in compliance with the obligations and principles arising from the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and complementary to the *European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, based on the data and conducted analyses of the current situation in terms of the respect and exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities.

In the new *National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the following nine areas have been highlighted as priority areas:

1. Accessibility;
2. Equality, access to justice, and active participation in public and political life;
3. Access to health care;
4. From child and social protection towards independent living;
5. Right to education;
6. Employment and right to work;
7. Local inclusive communities;
8. Public awareness; and
9. Culture, sport, and recreation.

ARTICLE 18 – The right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of other Parties

Article 18§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to apply existing regulations in a spirit of liberality.

Issues related to the terms and manner of employing foreigners are regulated by the *Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners*¹⁴.

The Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia is competent for issuing work permits to foreigners who have regulated their residence in the country on other grounds after an application for obtaining a work permit has been filed to the Agency, an opinion regarding the filling up of the quota and the current requirements of the labor market in the procedures for regulating the temporary residence of a foreigner for work purposes has been given, and a certificate for registration of the work performed by foreigners in the country for which no work permit is required has been issued. The proposal for the quota is submitted to the Government by the minister competent for issues in the field of labor, on the proposal of the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, in cooperation with the ministers responsible for the relevant fields, in accordance with the legal regulations.

In the period from January 1, 2017 to November 1, 2022, a total of 20,347 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 3,629 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 16,719 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

In 2017, a total of 3,589 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 626 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 2,963 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

In 2018, a total of 4,065 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 740 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 3,325 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

In 2019, a total of 4,132 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 788 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 3,344 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on

¹⁴ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 70/2007, 5/2009, 35/2010, 148/11, 84/2012, 148/13, 38/14, and 217/15

meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

In 2020, a total of 3,672 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 682 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 2,990 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

In 2021, a total of 4,890 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 792 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 4,097 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

By November 1, 2022, a total of 4,098 applications were filed to the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, of which 694 referred to issuance of work permits, whereas 3,404 were applications filed by the Ministry of the Interior for providing an opinion on meeting the requirements for issuance of a temporary residence permit to a foreigner for work purposes.

Член 18§2

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to simplify existing formalities and to reduce or abolish chancery dues and other charges payable by foreign workers or their employers.

The situation in this area has remained unchanged and the legal provisions stated in the first report are still in force.

Article 18§3

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to liberalise, individually or collectively, regulations governing the employment of foreign workers.

The new *Law on Foreigners*¹⁵ was adopted in the reporting period. This law, specifically, Article 126, regulates the provisions relating to the reasons for revocation of the right to temporary residence:

“The temporary residence of all foreigners who have been granted temporary residence, except those being granted temporary residence as victims of trafficking in human beings, shall be revoked if:

- a foreigner has been granted temporary residence for the purpose of employment, and failed to sign an employment contract with the legal entity or the employment contract was no longer valid prior to the expiry of the period of validity of the issued temporary residence permit for work purposes, or where the foreigner started performing work different from the one stated in the issued temporary residence permit for work purposes, for which the Employment Service Agency shall submit a notification to the Ministry of Interior.”

Article 18§4

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake and recognise the right of their nationals to leave the country to engage in a gainful occupation in the territories of the other Parties.

No updates were received regarding this provision.

¹⁵ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 97/18 and “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 108/19 and 294/2021

ARTICLE 19 – The right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance

Article 19§2

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to adopt appropriate measures within their own jurisdiction to facilitate the departure, journey and reception of such workers and their families, and to provide, within their own jurisdiction, appropriate services for health, medical attention and good hygienic conditions during the journey.

The Republic of North Macedonia remains committed to the management of all relevant aspects of external migrations, taking account of the changes in the characteristics of legal and illegal migration, the need to improve institutional capacities and align the legislation with the international standards, for the purposes of the advancement of the country's socio-economic development. This activity is regulated in the *Law on Foreigners* (Article 8)¹⁶ according to which “The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, upon proposal by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, shall enact a resolution on migration policy, specifying situations, problems, and measures to be undertaken in the field of migration”. Two migration policy resolutions have been adopted and implemented thus far: the *Resolution on Migration Policy of the Republic of Macedonia 2009–2014*¹⁷ and the *Resolution on Migration Policy of the Republic of Macedonia 2015–2020*¹⁸. The *Resolution on Migration Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2021–2025*¹⁹ has been prepared by the Inter-ministerial Body for Development and Implementation of the Migration Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia and adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.

¹⁶ *Law on Foreigners* (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 97/18) and the *Law Amending the Law on Foreigners* (“Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 108/19)

¹⁷ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 6/2009

¹⁸ “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 8/2015

¹⁹ “Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 290/2021

Article 19§3

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to promote co-operation, as appropriate, between social services, public and private, in emigration and immigration countries.

For this purpose, from the aspect of social rights of workers, the following bilateral agreements on social insurance that the Republic of North Macedonia has signed and ratified can be highlighted:

1. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Croatia on Social Insurance
2. Convention on Social Insurance between Macedonia and Austria
3. Agreement on Social Insurance between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Turkey
4. Convention on Social Insurance between the Republic of Macedonia and the Swiss Confederation
5. Agreement on Social Insurance between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Slovenia
6. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on Social Insurance
7. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria on Social Insurance
8. Agreement between the Macedonian Government and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on Social Insurance
9. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on Social Insurance
10. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Czech Republic on Social Insurance
11. Agreement between the Macedonian Government and the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on Social Insurance
12. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Poland on Social Insurance
13. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Romania on Social Insurance
14. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on Social Insurance
15. Agreement on Social Insurance between the Macedonian Government and the Belgian Government
16. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Austria on Social Insurance
17. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro on Social Insurance

18. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Canada on Social Insurance
19. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo on confirmation of the insurance periods for exercising the right to a pension
20. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Hungary on Social Insurance and Social Security
21. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Slovak Republic on Social Insurance
22. Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Albania on Social Insurance

There is reservation concerning the ratification of the provisions of Article 19, paragraph 2, given that the majority of the signatory countries do not express their willingness to sign bilateral agreements on social insurance, within which certain protocols would regulate the issue of data exchange on emigration and immigration between the signatory countries of that agreement.

Article 19§4

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to secure for such workers lawfully within their territories, insofar as such matters are regulated by law or regulations or are subject to the control of administrative authorities, treatment not less favourable than that of their own nationals in respect of the following matters:

- a. remuneration and other employment and working conditions;
- b. membership of trade unions and enjoyment of the benefits of collective bargaining;
- c. accommodation.

No updates were received regarding this provision.

Article 19§7

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to secure for such workers lawfully within their territories treatment not less favourable than that of their own nationals in respect of legal proceedings relating to matters referred to in this article.

No updates were received regarding this provision.

Article 19§9

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to permit, within legal limits, the transfer of such parts of the earnings and savings of such workers as they may desire.

No updates were received regarding this provision.

Article 19§10

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to extend the protection and assistance provided for in this article to self-employed migrants insofar as such measures apply.

No updates were received regarding this provision.

Article 19§11

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to promote and facilitate the teaching of the national language of the receiving state or, if there are several, one of these languages, to migrant workers and members of their families.

As part of certain project activities supported by international organizations, the electronic platform for learning the Macedonian language has been developed and placed on the website of the Faculty of Philology in Skopje, and is primarily intended for persons under international protection residing in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. The official state curriculum prepared by the Bureau for Development of Education has not been prepared yet.

Article 19§12

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance in the territory of any other Party, the Parties undertake to promote and facilitate as far as practicable, the teaching of the **migrant worker's mother tongue to the children of the migrant worker.**

No updates were received regarding this provision.

ARTICLE 22 – The right to take part in the determination and improvement of the working conditions and working environment

Article 22

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of workers to take part in the determination and improvement of the working conditions and working environment in the undertaking, the Parties undertake to adopt or encourage measures enabling workers or their representatives, in accordance with national legislation and practice, to contribute:

- a. to the determination and the improvement of the working conditions, work organisation and working environment;
- b. to the protection of health and safety within the undertaking;
- c. to the organisation of social and socio-cultural services and facilities within the undertaking;
- d. to the supervision of the observance of regulations on these matters.

The situation in this area has remained unchanged and the legal provisions stated in the first report are still in force (in the *Law on Safety and Health at Work, Law on Labor Relations*).

ARTICLE 23 – The right of elderly persons to social protection

Article 23

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of elderly persons to social protection, the Parties undertake to adopt or encourage, either directly or in co-operation with public or private organisations, appropriate measures designed in particular:

– to enable elderly persons to remain full members of society for as long as possible, by means of:

a. adequate resources enabling them to lead a decent life and play an active part in public, social and cultural life;

b. provision of information about services and facilities available for elderly persons and their opportunities to make use of them;

– to enable elderly persons to choose their lifestyle freely and to lead independent lives in their familiar surroundings for as long as they wish and are able, by means of:

a. provision of housing suited to their needs and their state of health or of adequate support for adapting their housing;

b. the health care and the services necessitated by their state;

– to guarantee elderly persons living in institutions appropriate support, while respecting their privacy, and participation in decisions concerning living conditions in the institution.

Eligible for the entitlement to financial assistance for social security for the elderly is a persons who holds citizenship of the Republic of North Macedonia and has had permanent residence in the Republic of North Macedonia in the last 15 years prior to submitting the application, provided the person and his/her spouse or the persons they live with in a *de facto* relationship do not own property and property rights from which he/she can support himself/herself, is not a beneficiary of a pension from the Republic of North Macedonia or other types of cash benefits received on grounds of old age, disability, or experience from another country and did not earn income on any grounds in the last three months prior to submitting the request.

According to the data of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, in September 2022 there were 10,874 registered beneficiaries of the cash benefit for social security of the elderly.

In recent years, intensive work has also been done on developing non-family care for the elderly. In the Republic of North Macedonia there are five public institutions homes for the elderly with a total accommodation capacity of 638 beds, as well as 39 private institutions for accommodating the elderly, of which 31 are located in Skopje, one in Negotino, two in Bitola, one in Gostivar, three in Strumica, and one in Radovish, with overall accommodation capacity of 1,588 beds.

Within the Project for enhancing social services financed with a loan from the World Bank, in the first public call of 2019 intended for municipalities to apply for a grant for development of social services, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has signed agreements with municipalities and service providers for projects for development of

social services for elderly persons; 16 of the agreements refer to the home-based assistance and care service and one to the active aging daycare service. With decisions from the competent Centers for Social Work, as of June 2022, services are received by a total of 582 beneficiaries, of which 565 are elderly persons and 17 are persons with disabilities and other persons with reduced functional capacity, with the possibility of increasing this number according to the needs of the beneficiaries and the capacities of service providers.

With decisions adopted by the competent Center for Social Work, 30 elderly persons are covered with the active aging daycare service.

ARTICLE 25 – The right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer

Article 25

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer, the Parties undertake to provide that workers' claims arising from contracts of employment or employment relationships be guaranteed by a guarantee institution or by any other effective form of protection.

As regards the transposing of the *Directive 2008/94/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2008 on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer*, assistance and support from experts with relevant experience in the field in the EU countries has been requested and approved, and is to be provided in the form of a twinning project funded within the IPA.

The Twinning Project “Enhancing the protection of employees in the case of insolvency of their employer” started being implemented in late September 2021; the project, with expected duration of 18 months, is implemented within the IPA program. With the expert support provided via this project, a mechanism for adequate protection of the rights arising from established labor relations in the event of the insolvency of employers is to be established in the Republic of North Macedonia, in line with the minimum requirements stated in *Directive 2008/94/EC* and the national socio-economic context in the country. The project consists of two components, namely, Component 1: “Setting up guarantee mechanism for protection of employees’ rights in cases of employers’ insolvency in line with relevant EU Directives”, via which the situation in the country will be analyzed, the most adequate model will be chosen, and a legal and institutional framework that guarantees the protection of the rights of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer will be established, and Component 2: “Capacity building of relevant institutions for protection of employees’ rights in cases of employers’ insolvency in line with relevant EU Directives”.

As part of this project, with the expert support provided, work is being done on designing the legal framework and the necessary legal amendments to be incorporated in the *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment*, via which a mechanism for the adequate protection of the rights deriving from established labor relations in the event of the insolvency of employers will be provided, in compliance with the *EU Directive 2008/94/EC*. These legal provisions will regulate the functioning of the chosen model of the guarantee mechanism for protection of the rights of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employers; the mechanism is expected to be managed by the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia.

ARTICLE 27 – The right of workers with family responsibilities to equal opportunities and equal treatment

Article 27§1

With a view to ensuring the exercise of the right to equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers with family responsibilities and between such workers and other workers, the Parties undertake to take appropriate measures:

- a. to enable workers with family responsibilities to enter and remain in employment, as well as to re-enter employment after an absence due to those responsibilities, including measures in the field of vocational guidance and training;
- b. to take account of their needs in terms of conditions of employment and social security;
- c. to develop or promote services, public or private, in particular child day care services and other childcare arrangements;

The situation in this area has remained unchanged and the legal provisions stated in the previous report are still in force.

The new *Law on Labor Relations* is currently being prepared; in this law, *inter alia*, certain rights from the national legislation will be aligned with *Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding*, *Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance of parents and carers*, as well as the *ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191)*. The new text of the Law envisages a series of new provisions that bring changes aimed at balancing the professional and private life of workers.

In order to improve the work-life balance and labor market participation, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy continues to invest in expanding the national capacities for preschool education and care. In 2021 the capacities increased by 754 places, and by further 696 places in newly opened facilities by the month of November 2022. Furthermore, the insufficient number of services for the elderly, especially in rural areas, is yet another obstacle to the active participation of women in the economy. For that reason, activities continued being undertaken with the aim of developing services for provision of care to the elderly and frail, such as home-based care and assistance, personal assistance, residential facilities for the elderly, and so on.

Article 27§2

With a view to ensuring the exercise of the right to equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers with family responsibilities and between such workers and other workers, the Parties undertake to provide a possibility for either parent to obtain, during a period after maternity leave, parental leave to take care of a child, the duration and conditions of which should be determined by national legislation, collective agreements or practice.

What should be mentioned in this regard is the process of preparation of the new *Law on Labor Relations* that has been taking place in the past few years, and which includes intensive consultations and dialogue with the social partners and all other relevant stakeholders. One matter to be further regulated and improved with the new law is precisely the issue of equal opportunities for workers with family responsibilities.

The establishing of work-life balance for workers, which is more difficult to apply to women due to their traditional role in the family, is regulated with *Directive 2019/1158*. It is believed that these policies will encourage greater participation of women in the labor market, promote a more equal division of family responsibilities, and reduce gender-based discrepancies in earnings and wages. To this aim, another novelty that contributes towards the equalization of men and women is the establishment of legal grounds for greater involvement of men in the carrying out of family responsibilities, especially in increasing the role of the father in the care and rearing of children. The new *Law on Labor Relations* will contain appropriate changes via which the latest European standards relating to leave due to childbirth and child-rearing will be applied. In addition to maternity leave, mandatory paternity and parental leave will be established, as well as flexible work arrangements for workers with family responsibilities, which will also be aimed at greater involvement of the father in the care and rearing of children from their earliest age, whilst at the same time enabling women to return to the labor market and their further career development sooner.

ARTICLE 30 – The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion

Article 30

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

- a. to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;
- b. to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary.

According to the latest data published by the State Statistical Office from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions in 2020, the poverty rate in North Macedonia was high at 21.8% (i.e. 451,900 people). The Gini coefficient (a measure of income inequality) increased compared to 2019 and was 31.4%. This met the expectations that the pandemic will worsen relative poverty and income inequality, but to a very small extent, among other things, due to government measures targeting lower-income segments.

Analyzed by household types, the poverty rate of households consisting of two adults with two dependent children in 2020 was 20.7%. The poverty rates according to the most frequent economic activity status show a decrease compared to the previous year. Therefore, the rate of poor employees, poor pensioners, poor unemployed and the rate of inactive persons was 7.9%, 7.0%, 45.1%, and 32.5%, respectively. In a longer time perspective, the increase in pensions and social assistance, but also in employment and the minimum wage led to improvements in the incomes of the poorest segment of the population. Such measures had a more significant impact primarily on the poverty among elderly, while children and youth have seen an increase in poverty. According to the data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, children and youth are the most affected population group when it comes to the impact of the pandemic on household income and poverty.

Laeken Indicators on Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2013–2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>At-risk-of-poverty rate, % of the population</i>	24.2	22.1	21.5	21.9	22.2	21.9	21.6	21.8
Men	24.6	22.3	21.5	22.1	22.4	21.8	21.1	21.7
Women	23.9	21.9	21.5	21.6	22.0	22.0	22.0	21.9
<i>By age</i>								
0–17	30.9	29.0	28.6	28.6	29.9	29.3	27.8	30.3
18–64	23.6	21.4	20.7	21.3	21.1	21.2	21.2	21.1
65 and over	16.5	14.5	14.5	14.5	16.1	14.6	14.8	13.4

<i>According to the most frequent economic activity status</i>								
Employed	11.1	9.8	8.9	9.0	9.0	8.8	8.5	7.9
Unemployed	43.7	40.5	39.7	41.1	38.7	41.9	41.7	45.1
Retired	10.9	8.4	7.3	7.1	7.7	7.9	7.7	7
Other inactive persons	29.2	26.1	26.7	29.4	32.1	31.1	32.9	32.5
<i>By dependent children in the household</i>								
Household with no dependent children	19.5	16.5	14.1	14.2	12.8	12.7	13.6	13.1
Household with dependent children	26.5	25.0	25.3	26.0	27.5	27.2	26.2	27.2
Number of persons below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, in thousands	500.4	457.2	445.2	453.2	460.3	455.1	448.1	451.9
At-risk-of-poverty threshold of single-person household - annual equivalent income in MKD	70,275	71,925	78,362	82,560	90,120	97,000	100,643	110,000
At-risk-of-poverty threshold of a four-person household (2 adults and 2 children aged less than 14) – annual equivalent income in MKD	147,578	151,043	164,560	173,376	189,525	203,700	211,351	231,210
At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers and before pensions, % of the population	41.0	41.7	40.5	41.6	40.7	40.8	41.1	42.1
At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers with included pensions, % of the population	26.8	24.8	24.8	25.7	25.9	25.7	25.7	25.7
Inequality of income distribution, S80/S20 income quintile share ratio	8.4	7.2	6.6	6.6	6.4	6.2	5.6	5.9
Inequality of income distribution, Gini coefficient, %	37.0	35.2	33.7	33.6	32.5	31.9	30.7	31.4

Source: State Statistical Office

Social protection is defined as “activity of public interest carried out through measures, activities, programs, and policies for protection against social risks, prevention, and overcoming social problems that have detrimental effects on the citizens’ wellbeing, with the purpose of: promotion and maintenance of the social security of citizens, prevention of social exclusion, improvement of the quality of life of the citizens, and strengthening the capacity of the citizens for independent, active, and productive living” (article 2 of the *Law on Social Protection*, adopted in May 2019).

The primary law governing the field of social protection is the *Law on Social Protection*. It is a new law which has been enacted in May 2019. It is based on the principles of the right to social security and social insurance of the citizens, social justice, humanity and solidarity, in accordance with article 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. The *Law on Social Protection* introduces several novelties:

- Social financial assistance is reformed and upgraded into Guaranteed Minimum Assistance (GMA). The base for calculation of the guaranteed minimum assistance was increased to 4,000 MKD, as compared to the previous social financial assistance benefit which amounted to 2,871 MKD. The former long-term beneficiaries of social financial assistance who used to receive 50% of the amount of the base now receive the full amount of the guaranteed minimum assistance
- The reformed social protection system provides for an increased activation of the recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance in such a way that all household members who are able to work would be included in the active employment programs for the purposes of their work training and employment. This entails continued compulsory attendance of trainings and accepting job offers. At the same time, the recipients of the benefit shall be provided support to complete their education and acquire skills that would improve their competitiveness in the labor market. Recently the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia started providing services for support to employment (psycho-social support) to **GMA (Guaranteed Minimum Assistance)** beneficiaries; these services are to facilitate the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market.
- The redesigned financial assistance benefits could be seen solely as a family benefits package in accordance with the needs of households and citizens. The Guaranteed Minimum Assistance is provided for persons/households at risk of material deprivation, as well as 1,000 MKD per month in the course of the six winter months to cover heating expenses. The parallel reform in the field of child protection enabled the recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance to use a child allowance and education allowance for children regularly attending classes in primary and secondary schools, so as to support the parents in the settlement of school expenses, thus preventing early school leaving.
- In view of improving the quality of life and providing for greater social inclusion of persons with disabilities, the financial benefits relating to persons with disabilities were extended. The disability allowance also became available to persons with severe or profound intellectual disability, in addition to persons with most severe physical disability, completely blind, and completely deaf persons. The amount of the salary

supplement for part-time work due to care for a child with disability was increased to 50% of the average net salary paid in the country, as opposed to the previous limit to 50% of the minimum wage. The reforms introduced the entitlement to permanent allowance for a parent or caregiver who provided care for a child with disability up to 26 years of age (and had not placed the child in a residential social institution) and who, after completing 62 years of age for women, i.e. 64 years of age for men, is not using a pension benefit. In this regard, persons with disabilities and their families were enabled to use the new social services such as home-based assistance and care, personal assistance, respite care, and other daycare and temporary residence services.

- In order to overcome the finding that the social services fail to match the individual needs of the beneficiaries, the law provides for the promotion and development of various and flexible social services that would be home and community-based services and non-family care services, as well as the possibility for development of innovative and intervention social services. Currently, in compliance with the *Law on Social Protection*, there are 69 licensed social service providers (compared to 20 such providers in 2020), providing services to about 4,000 beneficiaries. Most of the new services are in-home services, mainly for the elderly, as well as personal assistance for persons with disabilities. This number is expected to rise with the licensing of providers of all categories of services, which would result in an increase in the coverage of beneficiaries that would have access to the necessary services in their community.
- The law introduced a new manner of licensing professionals and a new method of professional work by case management, so that the professionals at the social work centers would work with the beneficiaries under a plan so as to overcome the social risk and reintegrate them in the society. The social worker, together with the responsible persons from the Employment Service Agency, will work with all workable members of the household to help them acquire and improve their work skills and knowledge in accordance with their abilities and the requirements of the labor market, which would enable their employment as the best path out of poverty.
- The same period has seen the initiative to amend the *Law on Protection of Children*, in accordance with the identified need to reform the rights to child protection. The reform of the rights to financial assistance for child protection aimed to increase the access to the right to child allowance, transformation of the parental allowance through a more balanced distribution of the financial resources within the one-off financial assistance for a new-born child, by progressively increasing the amounts of the allowances for the first, second, and third child, as well as by directing the participation in the costs for providing care and upbringing of children to the protection of single parents - recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance who use the services of public institutions for children - kindergartens, as well as by introducing a new right such as the education allowance for school-age children (in primary and secondary schools) coming from families with lower disposable income and for children of recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance.

- The Law on Social Security of the Elderly was adopted, providing for financial assistance for persons aged 65 and above who are materially deprived, in order to reduce the poverty among this category of citizens.

During the Covid-19 crisis the eligibility criteria of the GMA were relaxed to protect individuals from falling into poverty. The new criteria envisaged: (i) means-testing based on the prior month income (rather than the prior three months); and (ii) allowing beneficiaries to own the house/apartment of residence and one small vehicle. The estimates show that this measure had positive effects on the income of the poorest segment of the population. The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia also provided one-off financial support in July 2020 (targeting GMA beneficiaries, registered unemployed, low-paid workers and young people registered in public education institutions) and in December 2020 (registered unemployed and jobseekers, pensioners with low income, single parents and youth left out from the July support).

In 2022, additional measures targeted at the more vulnerable population groups were taken in order to mitigate the consequences of the economic-energy crisis and the high growth and high volatility of the prices of primary energy and non-energy products caused by the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Furthermore, we believe it should also be emphasized that the *National Employment Strategy 2021–2027* sets, *inter alia*, the goal to reduce the share of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion to 18% by 2027. To that aim, the *Strategy* envisages strengthening the inclusiveness of labor market policies. In the short term, the role of labor market services would be to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on jobs, as well as on poverty and social exclusion; in the medium term, their focus will shift to establishing an effective system of employment and social inclusion services, implementing the legislation on employment protection, and designing, monitoring, and evaluating policy initiatives aimed at inclusion of vulnerable groups. In that context, one of the outcomes of the employment policies is that the implementation of dedicated employment programs and services is contributing to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market (young people, women, the long-term unemployed, social welfare beneficiaries, persons with disabilities, and low-skilled persons).

ARTICLE 31 – The right to housing

Article 31§1

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed to promote access to housing of an adequate standard.

The draft text for the *Law on Housing* has been prepared, and the purpose thereof is to improve the housing situation of all marginalized groups.

Article 31§2

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination.

With the aim of providing protection and reintegration to homeless people from the Roma community, mapping and accommodating new homeless families in the existing social protection facilities took place again in 2018, whilst part of the previously accommodated families that had been included in the supported living program (15 homeless Roma families in total) have been accommodated in temporary dwellings in Vizbegovo as the final stage of the process towards achieving independence. The children accommodated in Vizbegovo attend primary school. Continuous efforts are being made for the purposes of enhancing the economic sustainability, socialization, and resocialization of the families, as well as their activation in the labor market with the aim of improving their situation before leaving the institution. Professional workers from the Center for Social Work, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, and two Roma non-governmental organizations work with these people.

As regards reducing homelessness, the benefits derived from the law amendments made in the systems of social protection and protection of children in 2019 are also emphasized, the goal of which, first and foremost, is the adequacy and efficiency of cash benefits for the most materially deprived families, as well as the opportunities of developing social services at the local level aimed at greater availability of the necessary services for the most vulnerable categories of citizens, including the homeless.

Furthermore, with the aim of preventing homelessness, the Project for construction and maintenance of social housing units is being carried out unobstructed, within which social housing units are being built and then awarded in a public announcement procedure in multiple municipalities; eligible to apply are categories of citizens at social risk, namely, children without parents aged 18 and over, guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries, persons affected by natural disasters, persons with disabilities or families with persons with disabilities, members of the Roma community, and single parents with minor children.

Bearing in mind the observed need to establish new forms of protection for homeless persons, in the next period the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy will face the challenge of establishing a Center for daycare, reintegration, and resocialization of the homeless, a new Center for temporary stay, and a “Half-way house”.

Article 31§3

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.

The situation in this area has remained unchanged and the stated legal provisions are still in force.