

30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the
adoption of
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

**REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
NORTH MACEDONIA
on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform
for Action (1995) and the results of the Second Special Session of
the UN General Assembly (2000) - Beijing +30**

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Contents

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	5
Foreword.....	7
Section One: Summary	8
Section Two: Analysis of Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks 2020-2024	10
1. Achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women.....	10
2. Priorities for accelerating progress on the empowerment of women and girls 2020-2024.....	15
3. Measures taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls	21
4. Crises affecting the implementation the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the country.....	24
5. Priorities for accelerating the progress for women and girls through the implementation of laws, policies and programmes 2020-2024	25
Section Three: Measures taken to advance gender equality across the twelve critical areas of concern	31
Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work	31
6. Actions taken to advance gender equality in relation to women’s in paid work and employment	31
7. Actions taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and improve work-life balance	34
8. Measures and activities introduced to reduce gender gaps in the digital sphere	35
9. Introduction of austerity/fiscal consolidation measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector downsizing.....	36
Eradication of poverty, social protection and social services	36
10. Actions taken to reduce / eradicate poverty among women and girls	36
11. Actions taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls.....	38
12. The COVID-19 pandemic and social protection.....	39
13. Actions taken to improve health outcomes of women and girls.....	41
14. Actions taken to improve education outcomes and skills of women and girls.....	42

Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes	46
15. Dominant forms of violence against women and girls prioritized for action.....	46
16. Prioritized actions to address violence against women and girls	47
17. Strategies used to prevent violence against women and girls	48
18. Actions taken to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls facilitated by technology	49
19. Actions taken to address discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media	50
20. Actions taken to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.....	51
Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions.....	51
21. Actions and measures taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making.....	51
22. Actions taken to increase women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media	53
23. National gender equality machinery.....	53
24. Mechanisms for inclusion of gender equality in intersectoral (gender) audits.....	54
25. The national human rights institution of the Republic of North Macedonia.....	55
<i>Peaceful and inclusive societies</i>	55
27. Actions taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda	55
28. Actions taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peace building, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings	56
29. Actions taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response.....	57
30. Actions taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child and adolescent girls.....	59
Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation.....	60

31. Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and reducing land degradation.....	60
32. Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives in the policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and to build environmental and climate resilience	61
Section Four: National Institutions and Processes	62
33. National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality	62
34. Monitoring the share of the national budget that is invested in promoting gender equality and empowering women (gender responsive budgeting).....	64
35. Formal mechanisms for the participation of various stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.....	65
36. Contribution of stakeholders in the preparation of this National Report	66
37. Action plan and time frame following up on the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)	66
Section Five: Data and statistics	67
38. Areas of progress in terms of gender statistics at the national level.....	67
39. Priorities for strengthening national gender statistics	69
40. Gender indicators for monitoring the progress on SDGs	69
41. Routine disaggregation of data provided by major surveys in the country	69
Section Six: Conclusions	70
Bibliography	72

ACRONYS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AVMS	Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services
BDE	Bureau for Development of Education
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CSWs	Centres for Social Works
EU	European Union
ESA	Employment Service Agency
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IPARD	Instrument for pre-accession assistance for rural development
ISA	Institute for Social Activities
LAG	Local Action Groups
CRPD	Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MBSP	Minimum Basic Service Package
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoEPP	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoISA	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MP	Members of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations

NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
ORNM	Ombudsman of the R. N. Macedonia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SPGs	Sub-sectorial permanent groups
SSO	State Statistical Office
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WG	Multi-sectorial expert working group
ZELS	Association of Local Self-Government Units
WHO	World Health Organization

Foreword

This report represents continuity in the regular five-year reporting on the country's progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. All line ministries of the Government, as well as the relevant competent state institutions and authorities were involved in the preparation of the report. The process was coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, supported by the local office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women. In addition to input from stakeholders, the report is based on the existing available data and analysis at the national and local levels, including analyses by civil society organizations, relating to progress in gender equality and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for the reporting period.

The report's structure is based on six key sections. The first section presents an analysis of priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks, with a particular emphasis on the past four years, specifically the period between 2020 and 2024. Furthermore, this section provides an overview of several successful practices with transformative potential that may be relevant to other countries. The last report prepared by the Government of North Macedonia was submitted in 2019. The second section provides a comprehensive overview of implementation priorities, achievements, and challenges. This section provides further insight into the new priorities for the future and emerging priorities. The third section includes a detailed analysis of the measures taken to advance gender equality in twelve critical key areas, as well as the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Where applicable, for each of the areas, a specific example is included presenting the measures taken, challenges, and the results achieved. The fourth section covers the national machinery and mechanisms, including the mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fifth section highlights the progress achieved in relation to the availability of gender and sex-disaggregated data and the monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The sixth section provides an overview of the summary conclusions.

Section One: Summary

Gender equality is among the main priorities of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, which has been continuously present in the Government's Work Programmes for the period between 2020 and 2024, in accordance with the existing national legal framework for promotion and establishment of equal opportunities for women and men and advancement of the position of women in all spheres of social life, as well as in accordance with the undertaken obligations arising from international conventions, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030.

In the period since the last submitted report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the country has experienced several significant changes in terms of policies and processes for the promotion of gender equality, in the complex context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and subsequent economic disturbances. During this period, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted important legal solutions, strategic documents, programmes and measures for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of protection against discrimination, violence against women and gender-based violence, economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting, health care and access to sexual and reproductive health services, with a special focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups of women. These changes are in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, and in line with the areas identified in the previous report in which the country was expected to make progress. Key laws and public policy documents were adopted in strategic areas to promote gender equality in the country, such as the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027, which is the basic strategic document of the country in the field of gender equality, establishing the institutional roadmap of the goals and activities for promotion of gender equality and advancement of the status of women in the country in the foreseen implementation period. In addition, a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination was adopted, in which, intersectional discrimination was recognized as a more serious form of discrimination, and, gender identity and sexual orientation were added on the list of bases for discrimination. Furthermore, in 2022, the new National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 was adopted, and the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination was established, which plays an important role in protecting the rights of women and marginalized persons, combating discrimination and promoting equality, with its jurisdiction extending also to the private sector apart from the public sector. The country continued to work

on harmonization with the Istanbul Convention, advancing legislation in the area of gender-based violence, with the adoption of the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which is aimed at promoting and expanding the system for prevention and protection against violence against women, including all forms of gender-based and domestic violence. Also, amendments were made to the Criminal Code for the first time incriminating various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide, female genital mutilation, stalking, and sexual harassment, including through the use of digital technologies, economic and psychological violence, as well as explicit provision for rape defined by the act of sexual violence and absence of consent, not only through the lens of physical violence. In the reporting period, the country has also made significant progress in gender-responsive budgeting by improving institutional mechanisms, and establishing the Resource Centre on Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting that aims to assist the ongoing efforts of the Republic of North Macedonia for systematic and sustainable implementation of gender-responsive budgeting, by providing training to enhance the capacity of civil servants in the area of gender equality and GRB, mentoring and support for including a gender perspective in public finance management, as well as by supporting strategic planning and policy-making of the state institutions.

However, in the past period, the country has also faced challenges in achieving progress in the field of gender equality resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and subsequent economic disruptions. In addition to the difficult context in the past period, challenges were faced in the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of laws, policies, strategies, national action plans and measures aimed at improving the state of gender equality and empowerment of women, as well as from limited financial and human resources in the key institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation and inclusion of the gender perspective in national and local policies, strategies, plans and measures. These domains are in fact some of the key areas where the country will need to strengthen its capacity in the coming period, in order to improve and effectively implement the policies aimed at promotion of gender equality in line with the principle "leave no one behind", and in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Section Two: Analysis of Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks 2020-2024

1. Achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women

North Macedonia has made significant progress regarding the state of gender equality and the empowerment of women, with a stable national legal framework for the implementation of international obligations in this area. In the period since the last submitted report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the country has experienced several significant changes in terms of policies and processes for the promotion of gender equality, in the complex context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and subsequent economic disturbances. During this period, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted important legal solutions, strategic documents, programmes and measures for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of protection against discrimination, violence against women and gender-based violence, economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting, health care and access to sexual and reproductive health services, with a special focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups of women.

Gender equality is a priority of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, and as such, it has been incorporated into the most recent Government Programme (2022-2024). The Programme includes the following specific Government priorities from the aspect of gender equality:

- Promote gender equality at the central and local level, to improve the position of women in all areas of public and private life, as well as to combat gender stereotypes and build a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender and gender identity
- Invest in services for the protection of victims from all forms of gender-based violence in every municipality within the country's jurisdiction
- Prioritize the Programme for the reintegration of women survivors of violence including models for temporary housing, psychological counselling with mentoring, different types of financial assistance specifically intended for women survivors of violence, opportunities for education and training in various fields, as well as employment measures determined in the existing legislation

- Continue the process of harmonization of the legislation to meet the standards according to the Istanbul Convention
- Prioritize measures for reducing the gender gap in the domain of work by reducing the wage gap and inactivity rate, promoting policies for parental leave, protection at the workplace, measures for improving work-life balance (flexible working hours, part-time work), increasing the availability of child care services, particularly in rural areas and increasing the number of homes for the elderly in all planning regions
- Increase access to quality family planning services and the choice of modern contraceptive methods and means (on the positive list of medicines), lowering the age limit for reproductive health screening, introducing mobile gynaecological clinics in rural areas and smaller municipalities where there are no gynaecologists, a mandatory free health care package (MHP) for women over 35, which includes a gynaecological examination and mammography.

These priorities are in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Fifth Sustainable Development Goal. Below are the most significant achievements for the reporting period from 2020 to 2024.

Key legal and strategic developments

To harmonize the national legislation with the directives of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, in 2020 a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 258/2020) was adopted, in which, intersectional discrimination was recognized as a more serious form of discrimination, and, gender identity and sexual orientation were added on the list of bases for discrimination. Furthermore, in 2022, the new National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 (MLSP, 2022) was adopted, and an Action Plan for 2022-2024 including a cost estimate for the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026.

In July 2022, the new Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2022-2027 was adopted (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 170/2022), and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2024, which are the basic strategic documents of the country in the field of gender equality, establishing the institutional roadmap of the goals and activities for promotion of gender equality and advancement of the status of women in the country in the foreseen implementation period. The Strategy builds on the Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2013-2020 and focuses on three goals: 1. Establish an effective and efficient system for

promoting gender equality at central and local level (specific objectives focus on the institutional mechanisms at central and local level); 2. Improve the position of women in all areas of public and private life (specific objectives refer to the areas of labour market, agriculture, political participation, health care, education, peace, culture and sports); and 3. Combat gender stereotypes and build a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender and gender identity (specific objectives refer to combating gender-based violence and gender stereotypes and sexism).

In accordance with the ratified Istanbul Convention that entered into force in 2018, as well as the current National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018-2023), in 2021 the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 24/21) was adopted, which is in line with the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and is aimed at promoting and expanding the system for prevention and protection against violence against women, including all forms of gender-based and domestic violence.

In 2023, amendments were made to the Criminal Code (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 36/2023), defining the terms "victim of gender-based violence", "violence against women" and "gender-based violence against women" and criminalizing various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide, female genital mutilation, stalking, and sexual harassment, including through the use of digital technologies, economic and psychological violence, as well as explicit provision for rape defined by the act of sexual violence and absence of consent, not only through the lens of physical violence.

During this period, the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021-2025 was adopted, as well as the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy. In addition, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration was established as an interdepartmental coordinating body tasked with the implementation, coordination, and monitoring of the National Action Plan.

The Government of North Macedonia acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in January 2020. This positive development will support stateless women and girls, including from Roma communities, to acquire, change and retain their nationality in all proceedings covered by the legislation on citizenship so that existing mechanisms for accessing healthcare, housing, employment and social protection programmes will be available to stateless Roma persons, in particular women and girls.

In 2021 the National Action Plan for Protection, Promotion and Fulfilment of Human Rights of Roma Women and Girls 2022-2024 was adopted, aiming to promote intersectional justice, i.e. equal and fair access to rights, opportunities, resources and power in society, for Roma women and girls (MLSP, 2021).

In 2022, the Parliament adopted the new Organic Budget Law that for the first time includes gender equality as one of the key budget principles, while the provisions for gender-responsive budgeting are incorporated in the articles related to the financial plans of budget users. The Law envisages the introduction of Programme-based budgeting and a new Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), which will enable better planning, monitoring and tracking of gender budget allocations.

The National Employment Strategy for the period 2021-2027 and its Action Plan for the period 2021-2023 include specific measures for employment of women and their improved access to labour market services.

The Revised Employment and Social Policy Reform Programme 2022 provides a strategic framework for reducing the gender gap in the economy and improving the position of women in the labour market.

The National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2021-2027 adopted in 2021, highlights the importance of eliminating gender inequality to enhance agricultural productivity and community development. In order to empower women and promote gender equality, the Strategy outlines support for women's economic activities through direct payments and benefits, as part of the ranking system in the new Programme. However, while the Strategy aims at supporting women in rural areas in employment, entrepreneurship and other income-generating activities, gender equality is not well-defined in the document as an objective or even a concept.

In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted the Concept Note on Primary Education as guidance for wider reform of primary education in North Macedonia. The Concept Note relies on the principles of inclusivity, gender sensitivity/equality and interculturality, emphasizing the importance of education in creating opportunities for transformation of harmful gender norms and behaviours. The short-term and long-term effects envisaged by the Concept Note include: reduction in the number of students dropping out of primary education, increased sense of equality among students from vulnerable groups, reduction in gender and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices among students and teaching staff,

reduction in gender-based violence in schools and mitigating the negative consequences on the health and wellbeing of students who experience violence, and creating conditions under which sex/gender do not play a role in students' choice of secondary education and their future vocation. In line with the recommendations from the Concept Note on Primary Education, amendments to the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education were adopted to further regulate and refine the procedures for publishing school textbooks and eliminating discriminatory content or content that reinforces stereotypes, especially those that relate to gender and sex.

Furthermore, in 2020 the Ministry of Education and Science adopted the Concept Note on Inclusive Education as a guidance for the inclusion of children from vulnerable groups, such as, among others, children with disabilities, children from unfavourable socio-economic backgrounds, children with learning and behavioural difficulties, and children asylum seekers.

In 2024, at the proposal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Government adopted the National Youth Mental Health Strategy 2024-2026, which foresees, among other things, measures to raise awareness of mental health and improve access to mental health services for young people. The Strategy is guided by the 2030 Agenda and the general principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2024, the draft National Development Strategy 2024-2044 was adopted, as a leading document that defines the main development goals, strategic areas, and priorities for accelerated, inclusive, balanced, gender-equal, and sustainable development of the Republic of North Macedonia. This strategic document is fully aligned with the commitment to sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda.

During the reporting period, in addition to the laws and strategies that were adopted, efforts were undertaken to draft three significant legal acts that have not yet entered the governmental procedure. Namely, in the past period, expert debates, evaluations, and analyses were carried out focusing on the effectiveness and functionality of the institutional mechanisms for gender equality (gender machinery) and the results achieved with the existing Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 6/ 2012 and No. 150/2015). The results of the analyses led to recommendations for the necessary reform of the gender machinery and the need for further harmonization with international and European legal standards and directives. For this purpose, in 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy initiated a process for drafting a new Law on Gender Equality, and established a working group

that worked on the preparation of the Draft Law on Gender Equality for a period longer than two years. Furthermore, in the past period, activities were carried out for drafting a new Law on Labour Relations, in line with Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers (Official Journal of the EU, 188/79), expected to lead to reforms of the current system of maternity leave and the introduction of parental leave, including a special right to paternity leave, which, according to the existing legislation can be used only through waiving/termination of the mother's right to maternity leave (MLSP, 2022). The adoption of this Law is also delayed. In addition to these laws, after the ratification of the ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention (published in the Official Gazette No. 129/2023), the drafting of a new Law on Protection from Harassment in the Workplace was initiated, to regulate the prevention and protection against psychological and sexual harassment in the workplace.

2. Priorities for accelerating progress on the empowerment of women and girls 2020-2024

During the reporting period, the following priorities, aligned with the goals and objectives of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027 and the Sustainable Development Goals, were established to accelerate progress on the empowerment of women and girls.

Eliminating violence against women and girls

In accordance with the ratified Istanbul Convention that entered into force in 2018, as well as the current National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018-2023), in 2021 the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 24/21) was adopted, which is in line with the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and is aimed at promoting and expanding the system for prevention and protection against violence against women, including all forms of gender-based and domestic violence. The Law establishes a coordinated system for prevention, protection and response to domestic violence, including preventive measures to be taken by all stakeholders at the national and local levels, in order to establish effective protection of victims from all forms of gender-based violence against women as well as victims of domestic violence, punishment of perpetrators, and data collection on violence against women and domestic violence.

Since July 2021, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has acted as a coordinator of the National Coordinating Body for the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, established in

accordance with the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Its task is to coordinate the activities of institutions in the area of prevention and protection from gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, as well as to develop national policies in this area and monitor their implementation. In addition to representatives from the Ministry, the National Coordinating Body includes representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Health and Education and Science, as well as representatives from the civil society sector, the Organization of Employers of Macedonia, and the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia. This National Coordinating Body will play a significant role in strengthening the institutional response and ensuring more efficient interdepartmental coordination.

North Macedonia submitted its first baseline report to GREVIO in 2022, and GREVIO (Baseline) Evaluation Report for North Macedonia was adopted in May 2023.

The amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted in February 2023, define the terms “victim of gender-based violence,” “violence against women,” and “gender-based violence against women” in Article 122, and criminalize various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide (Art. 123 2-a), female genital mutilation (Art. 129-a), stalking (Art.144-a), and sexual harassment including with the use of digital technologies (Art. 190-a). In addition to forms of domestic violence that were already covered by criminal law, such as physical violence and sexual violence, the Criminal Code now includes economic and psychological violence as forms of domestic violence. Forms of psychological violence are included in criminal acts such as coercion (use of force), illegal deprivation of liberty and endangerment. The Law sanctions forms of sexual violence, such as rape, including rape of a current or previous spouse or intimate partner. Significantly, the Criminal Code definition of rape is based on the absence of the victim’s consent to the act by a current or former intimate partner (Art.186), which is a change from the previous force-based definition. The Criminal Code also prohibits non-consensual sexual intercourse with a person with disability (Art. 187), sexual assault against a child and forced prostitution, and for the first time introduced the crime of online sexual harassment. Currently, the Ministry of Justice is drafting amendments to the Law on Criminal Procedure to further its compliance with the Istanbul Convention.

Equality and non-discrimination in accordance to the law and access to justice

In 2020 a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 258/2020) was adopted, in which, intersectional discrimination was recognized

as a more serious form of discrimination, and, gender identity and sexual orientation were added on the list of bases for discrimination. Furthermore, in 2022, the new National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 (MLSP, 2022) was adopted and an Action Plan for 2022-2024 including a cost estimate for the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026. This Strategy expresses the country's readiness to promote equality and non-discrimination, emphasizing the commonality across differences and the principle of one society for all. The Strategy defines the goals, activities, measures and indicators, as well as the responsible institutions for its implementation. The adoption of this document establishes the broad strategic framework that unites all areas of action to achieve equality and non-discrimination. The outlined measures aim to prevent and combat stereotypes, eliminate prejudices, and establish equal opportunities and equal access for all persons in all spheres of public and private life. The Strategy takes into account all the bases of discrimination according to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and refers to discrimination in all areas, grouped into the following categories: work and labour relations, education, science, sport and culture, social security (protection, pension and disability insurance and health), justice and administration and access to goods and services.

In accordance with the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination was established, as a national human rights institution responsible for prevention and protection from discrimination and an autonomous and independent body established by the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Gender responsive budgeting

North Macedonia was the first country in the region to adopt a Government Strategy for Introducing Gender Responsive Budgeting (2012-2017), ever since it has made significant progress in the legislation, programmes and measures that promote gender-responsive budgeting in the country.

In 2022, the Government and the MLSP, supported by UN Women, established a Resource Centre on Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting. The Centre aims to assist the ongoing efforts of the Republic of North Macedonia for systematic and sustainable implementation of gender-responsive budgeting, by providing training to enhance the capacity of civil servants in the area of gender equality and GRB, mentoring and support for including

a gender perspective in public finance management, as well as by supporting strategic planning and policy-making of the state institutions.

Systematic tracking of budget allocations for gender equality is not yet possible, as implied by the SDG indicator 5.c.1 which seeks to measure government efforts to track budget allocations for gender equality. However, the Ministry of Finance and other line ministries publish Gender Budget Statements on their websites and, as of 2021, the Ministry of Finance has included information on the Annual Gender Budget Statements as part of the Citizens' Budget. Publishing and monitoring resource allocations for gender equality and making them publicly available is a prerequisite for assessing GRB efforts in the country.

Transparency and accountability in public policies and spending for gender equality are among the focus areas prioritized by the State Audit Office of North Macedonia. In 2021, the State Audit Office substantively increased its capacities for mainstreaming gender in audit practices and in conducting gender performance audits. The first Performance Audit on Gender Equality was undertaken by SAO in 2022, focusing on the effectiveness of Government measures for advancing gender equality and implementation of GRB by relevant institutions. Moreover, to ensure sustainable and effective mechanism for mainstreaming gender in all future audit reports undertaken by auditors, SAO developed a Methodological Guidance for mainstreaming gender in audit practices.

Political participation and advocacy

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men stipulates that the provision of equal opportunities should be accomplished through general measures (Art. 5 and 6) and special measures (Art. 7 and 8). Thus, the Law establishes the obligation of public institutions to give preference to equally qualified persons belonging to the less represented sex, until equal representation is reached in all bodies and at all levels in the legislative, executive and judiciary powers, local governments and other public institutions and services. The principle of affirmative action is transposed to the current Law on Labour Relations. Furthermore, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination incorporates the concept of affirmative measures horizontally throughout all sectors, as measures undertaken with the sole purpose of eliminating unequal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms until de facto equality of any person or group is achieved. Such measures are not considered discriminatory, if such differentiation is justified and fair, and the means used are proportionate, i.e., appropriate and necessary, and time bound (Art. 7).

The Electoral Code requires at least 40% of the candidates from the submitted list of candidates by the political parties to belong to women, as follows: at least one out of every three places to be reserved for women, with at least one additional place out of every ten places, alongside the mandatory replacement of elected women Members of Parliament (MPs) with other female candidates. The same applies to the candidate lists for members of municipal councils and the Council of the City of Skopje (Electoral Code, Art. 155-a). Furthermore, the Law on Political Parties stipulates an obligation for political parties to adhere to the principle of gender equality in party structures and positions (Art. 4).

With women representing 42.5 per cent of MPs at the beginning of 2023 (and 41.7 per cent after the 2020 elections), North Macedonia is among the 25 countries in the world with highest proportion of women parliamentarians, and occupies the highest position among the countries in the region. In the 2024 Presidential elections, for the first time in the history of the country, a woman was elected to the position of President of the Republic of North Macedonia. Women's representation in Parliament has been accomplished mainly through the introduction of a gender quota of 30 percent in 2002, which was raised to 40 percent with the amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015. The impact of the quotas is evident when considering the positive trend of an increase in women's representation in Parliament, however, in areas and political offices that are outside of the quota, gender inequalities persist. Gender inequalities in policy-making processes are more visible at the local level. There are numerous barriers for women who aspire to leadership positions in politics, stemming from prevailing patriarchal values and prejudice, as well as socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes that place women mainly in the domestic sphere and away from the public sphere. Women's overall representation in the judiciary represents a positive trend in terms of women in decision-making positions. Women comprised 60.6 percent of all sitting professional judges (299 women and 194 men) in 2022. Women make up more than half of professional judges in first and second instance courts (courts of appeal), and gender parity also exists in the Supreme Court. Furthermore, women represent 47.1 percent of court presidents combined (16 women and 18 men) and 62.7 percent of all non-judge staff working in courts in North Macedonia.

Access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

The Law on Health Protection regulates the right of every citizen to the highest possible standard of health care, that is, physical and mental integrity, safety, and non-discrimination. The Ministry of Health

publishes its Programme for active health protection of mothers and children on an annual basis, with the aim of reducing morbidity and mortality of mothers and newborns through an integrated approach in promoting the health of mothers and newborns that includes family planning measures, prenatal care and health care during childbirth and maternity, as well as access to appropriate health packages for socially vulnerable groups. In 2016, an evaluation of the National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health 2010-2020 was conducted aimed at ensuring its alignment with the SDGs and other global and regional initiatives for the provision of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and safe motherhood. The last adopted Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health covers the period 2018-2020.

Access to abortion has been impacted by significant legal and policy changes that include amendments to the Law on Termination of Pregnancy (Law on Abortion) in 2013. This Law, as well as a newly adopted Law on Termination of Pregnancy (2019) effectively abolished the provisions that limited women's access to safe abortion, such as a mandatory period for counselling and other administrative barriers. The Law guarantees that women will have timely access to health care providers and the right to an abortion upon request during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and in special circumstances between 12 and 22 weeks. Since 2021, medical abortions, meaning abortion without surgery, became available at the Clinic for Gynaecology and Obstetrics in Skopje. However, this procedure is not yet available to women in other regions of the country, especially rural women, unless they can travel to the capital.

The Ministry of Health publishes its Programme for early detection of malignant diseases on an annual basis, continually providing free preventive examinations for screening of breast and cervical cancer to all women. The National Programme for early detection of breast cancer was initiated in 2015, covering women aged 50 to 69 years, however, with the latest changes to expand the scope, women from 40 years of age are also included. There are no other preventive measures to increase the number of breast cancer examinations, which would enable early detection of the disease. Since 2019, the Ministry of Health is implementing activities envisaged by the Programme for early detection and prevention of cervical cancer. The National Strategy for the promotion of mental health in North Macedonia 2018-2025 and its Action Plan 2018-2025 include specific objectives on "improving mental health services for women in reproductive period" and "promotion of good mental health of women and mothers." However, there is no system in place for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy.

3. Measures taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls

Women and girls marginalized because of race, or ethnicity

In 2021 the National Action Plan for Protection, Promotion and Fulfilment of Human Rights of Roma Women and Girls 2022-2024 was adopted, aiming to promote intersectional justice, i.e. equal and fair access to rights, opportunities, resources and power in society, for Roma women and girls (MLSP, 2021). The main outcomes of the National Action Plan are: 1) Increased economic independence of Roma women; 2) Provide conditions for the acquisition and completion of formal education for Roma women and girls; 3) Improved effective protection of Roma women from any form of gender-based violence and domestic violence; 4) Strengthened access to justice for Roma women; 5) Strengthened access to health care services for Roma women; and 6) Increased participation in public and political life and cultivation of leadership among Roma women. The main horizontal outcomes are: 1) Combat stereotypes and prejudices and ensure effective protection against discrimination and promotion of equality of Roma girls and women; and 2) Increased collection, processing and publication of data on the economic, social, cultural and social life of Roma women. According to the budget estimate of the National Action Plan, the implementation of activities and measures is planned to be supported through donor funds. The monitoring and reporting of the implementation of the National Plan is carried out by the established Body for Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of the National Action Plan, which includes representatives from the MLSP, MJ, MES, ESA, and two representatives from the NHRI (one representative each from the ORNM and the CPPD) and three representatives from NGOs.

The Government of North Macedonia acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in January 2020. This positive development will support stateless women and girls, including from Roma communities, to acquire, change and retain their nationality in all proceedings covered by the legislation on citizenship so that existing mechanisms for accessing healthcare, housing, employment and social protection programmes will be available to stateless Roma persons, in particular women and girls.

In 2021, the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination recorded seven cases of discrimination based on Roma ethnicity. Roma women and girls continue to be particularly vulnerable to discriminatory treatment, often due to their lower level of education and unemployment.

Women residing in isolated and rural areas

One of the most critical problems women in rural areas are facing is the discrimination of registered individual women farmers in exercising their right to maternity leave and sick leave. To alleviate this problem, in 2022, the Government adopted the Programme for social security support to women engaged in agricultural activity 2023. The measures include financial support for all women engaged in agricultural activity to acquire the right to paid maternity leave. The funds for the implementation of the Programme were allocated from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2023 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 282/22), in the amount of MKD 81,000.00 for a nine-month maternity allowance for women who have the status of insured individual farmers, acquired in accordance with the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance. However, this is a short-term solution that is expected to be translated into appropriate legislation to ensure a permanent solution.

Due to the insufficient representation of women among the beneficiaries of subsidies in agriculture, the Programme for Financial Support of Agriculture for the period 2014-2020 introduced specific criteria to encourage increased participation of women in the application process and/or through increased allocation of funds.

Women and girls with disabilities

With the adopted National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030, the Government strives to promote awareness, equality and protection against discrimination of persons with disabilities, improve the access of persons with disabilities to justice and ensure their safety and security.

Measures and activities have been identified to improve awareness and advance the knowledge of both persons with disabilities and their organizations, and public institutions, about the obligations arising from the CRPD in relation to inclusion, equality, and the fight against discrimination based on disability. The measures envisage strengthening the capacities of organizations of persons with disabilities and parent organizations and contributing to their sustainability, as one of the key stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the CRPD.

The Strategy includes measures for providing information, gender- and age-sensitive assistance and support, as well as accessible and available services for persons with disabilities. In addition, measures are envisaged to strengthen the capacities of professionals who work on identification, reporting, and protection of survivors of gender-based/domestic violence.

The adopted Action Plan 2023-2026 for the implementation of the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030, covers nine priority areas, specifically: Accessibility; Equality, access to justice and active participation in public and political life; Access to health care; Child, social care and independent living; Right to education; Employment and right to work, Local inclusive communities; Public awareness, and Culture, sport and recreation. These areas are determined on the basis of the identified needs, and are aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 of the European Union, and each of them determines goals, measures and activities for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, independence, equal opportunities, quality of life, as well as building an inclusive society.

With the single European emergency number 112, the Crisis Management Centre (CMC) provides technical capacities and procedures so that people with speech and hearing impairments can communicate by sending text messages, and the operators offer assistance to establish connection with the appropriate institutions for assistance in emergency situations.

Migrant women and girls

The Transit Centres Vinojug - Gevgelija and Tabanovce - Kumanovo, under the auspices of the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, operate with regular working hours (eight hours) in one shift during the day. In addition, meetings for coordination among all participating entities in the Crisis Management System that are actively involved in the current operation of both centres are regularly organized. The Transit Centres are used to address the prolonged crisis situation and ensure protection against illegal migration and increased influx of migrants entering and transiting through the territory of the state.

Since 2018, various workshops, training events, and courses have been regularly organized in the Transit Centres Vinojug-Gevgelija and Tabanovce-Kumanovo by international and non-governmental organizations that provide education on women's rights, including for migrant women and the CMC staff present in the camps, with a particular emphasis on socialization.

The CMC collects statistical and analytical information on migrants, including number, gender, identity, as well as possible victims of violence, not only for women but for the overall situation in the camps (women, children, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied children, etc.)

4. Crises affecting the implementation the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the country

In the past period, a key influence in the implementation of the goals for the promotion of gender equality, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Agenda 2030, were related to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis it caused.

In order to effectively deal with the spread of the infection, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a series of measures in the fight against COVID-19 and was able to maintain a stable situation in the country and provide support for vulnerable categories of citizens. The crisis had a strong impact on the security, socio-economic and health status of women, particularly the most vulnerable, such as women with low socio-economic status, women with disabilities, elderly and widowed women, single mothers, women victims of violence, as well as other vulnerable groups of women.

The pandemic has affected the operation of almost all institutions in terms of all their regular activities, both in the country and abroad. In this regard, many of the planned campaigns, promotions, conferences, or research were not implemented. On 10 March 2020, the Government adopted a measure to suspend the educational process and teaching in all pre-school institutions and primary schools. At the same time, a decision was brought that one of the parents of children up to ten years of age who attend kindergarten or primary school should be released from work duties. The Government recommended to the employers in the country, based on the type of work and the available options, to modify the work activities so that they could be performed remotely. The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted four packages of measures aimed at addressing the adverse consequences on the economy. Under these packages, approximately 70 distinct measures have been implemented to cater to and assist the entities and individuals impacted by the pandemic. All sets of anti-crisis measures, aimed at supporting the economy, focus on the citizens, their jobs, social safety, solidarity, and creating an environment to easily overcome the economic consequences from the Coronavirus. The total amount of all four packages of anti-crisis measures is estimated at EUR 1.2 billion, i.e. the fourth set of economic measures amounts to EUR 470 million, while the total amount of the previous three sets of measures amounts to around EUR 555 million.

Because of the isolation measures and the establishment of a strict curfew to control COVID-19, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy warned of the risk of increased cases of domestic violence. As a result, during the curfew, women and other persons at risk of gender-based and domestic violence were allowed to seek assistance and report violence. During the entire

period, the contact information of the reporting and victim assistance services was continually shared.

5. Priorities for accelerating the progress for women and girls through the implementation of laws, policies and programmes 2020-2024

Institutional mechanisms for gender equality

The Republic of North Macedonia has established a broad framework of institutional mechanisms for equal opportunities for women and men at the central and local level.

The Committee for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Women's Parliamentary Club are mechanisms for implementing the gender perspective in the highest representative body for policy and decision-making.

The Intersectoral Consultative and Advisory Group for equal opportunities for women and men promotes the concept of including gender aspects in the general policies of all public institutions.

At the national level, the MLSP initiates and develops policies for gender equality and equal opportunities, and is also responsible for coordinating the activities and monitoring the state of gender equality in cooperation with other state administration bodies.

According to the LEOWM, a coordinator and a deputy coordinator for equal opportunities for women and men have been appointed in all ministries from the ranks of civil servants, with obligations and responsibilities stipulated by law. They are responsible for introducing the gender perspective in the state administration bodies.

Gender mechanisms at the local-level institutions are composed of the following structures: commissions for equal opportunities for women and men and coordinators for equal opportunities for women and men.

Furthermore, it is imperative to include the position of a coordinator for equal opportunities in the job classification, to improve the competencies and authority of this position in institutions, local self-government and other structures. With the job classification, the appointment of persons with adequate qualifications, interests, education and experience to these positions will be adequately regulated. In addition, frequent replacement of persons responsible for gender equality will be avoided, and gender equality will be considered a priority policy issue. In the

local self-government units, it is imperative to precisely define the responsibilities of the Commission and Coordinator(s) for equal opportunities in the main municipality documents. Another important factor for integrating the gender perspective is to ensure regular monitoring of the situation based on the latest data and the established relevant indicators. A data collection system should be established, and the progress should be measured using indicators. Data collection should be adapted to the indicators for monitoring the implementation of the NSGE and the NAP, which should be reflected in the reports submitted by the state administration bodies and local self-government units.

Economy and labour market

The main priority in the field of economy is the activation of the female population and increased participation in the labour market. This priority is also set high in other national-level strategies related to the advancement of the economy and the increase of employment. The increased activation and the improved participation in the labour market are related to the quality of work of women, in terms of formal employment and a full-time job, as well as to the established measures and support services for work-life balance of women, including flexible working hours, parental leave for men, the quality of work contracts, etc. It is also necessary to reduce the gender gap in salaries, which together with the low rate of employment and participation in the informal economy, contribute to the gender gap in pensions, which significantly affects the quality of life of women even after the end of their working life.

Agriculture

It is needed to empower women in rural areas, in terms of managing agricultural property and land, as well as building their self-confidence and decision-making capacities. The empowerment of rural women should also be aimed at building their capacities and knowledge for applying in programmes for financial support in agriculture, and also in other programmes, such as the programmes implemented by the Ministry of Economy aimed at the development of women's entrepreneurship and offering opportunities for starting own business and self-employment. At the same time, this will allow for diversification of activities in rural areas and contribute to their sustainability by starting small businesses that are not primarily related to agriculture, such as local hairdressers, production and sale of traditionally made products, development of rural tourism, etc. In addition, measures are needed for the transition of women from the informal economy to the formal economy, or, formalization of the work they perform without being paid and without social and health insurance. These processes will be supported

by the provision of child care and elderly care services in rural areas, the introduction of measures for valuing the care work etc.

Climate change

The main priority in the field of climate change is the inclusion of the gender perspective in the policies, measures, and strategies carried out at the national and local level. For this purpose, a greater participation of women in decision-making structures, and participation of experts on gender issues, who will elaborate on the impact of climate change on women, especially women from vulnerable categories, is needed to establish early intervention and risk reduction measures in line with their needs. It is particularly important to consider the different needs and demands of women and men in agriculture, energy, water management, telecommunications, transport, management of protected areas and tourism sectors. It is also important to strengthen the capacities of policy-makers for inclusion of a gender perspective in the design of climate change mitigation measures.

Policy and decision making

In line with the Commitment 50:50, it is imperative to increase women's participation in decision-making positions in the executive power, political parties, media, sports, and local self-government, i.e. in all areas where there are no established legal obligations or quotas and where the participation of women is at a very low level. Women's participation in decision-making positions can be increased through implementation of incentive, sensitization, and awareness raising measures, as well as through binding legal measures and protection against hate speech and violence in the public, media, and digital space. It is particularly important to encourage women to participate in decision-making structures in local self-government units, where decisions and measures that directly affect the quality of life in local communities are implemented.

Health

The focus of healthcare is on women from marginalized communities who still lack or have limited access to services within the healthcare system. To address this issue, it is necessary to increase the number of gynaecological outpatient clinics and gynaecologists outside Skopje, particularly in areas where marginalized communities reside. This expansion aims to reduce infant mortality and the mortality rate of children under five years of age. Better regulation and increased coverage of women under the Programme for Early Detection of Malignant Diseases (including screening for prevention and early detection of cervical cancer; colorectal cancer

and mammographic screening for early detection of breast cancer) is also needed. It is necessary to introduce measures to increase the availability of abortion and contraception as essential components of women's sexual and reproductive health, with a particular focus on women from vulnerable categories. This includes providing full support for women after the reproduction period, during menopause and for those who are not in heterosexual unions or any unions at all, enabling them to pursue motherhood through biomedically assisted fertilization (BAF). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health, especially for women who faced increased household burdens, caring for children and the elderly, while simultaneously feeling pressured to maintain their employment.

Education and science

Achieving full gender-sensitive and equal education involves retaining girls from vulnerable groups in the educational process and encouraging them to pursue education in fields traditionally considered "masculine," which often offer higher pay and more job opportunities, as they are professions of the future. Additionally, conditions should be enabled for women to advance in higher education and science through special measures for stimulation and support. Establishing the pilot programme for Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was a significant step in promoting gender equality and educating young people about sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationship building. Finally, the gender aspect in school infrastructure must be considered, particularly addressing the needs of girls for menstrual hygiene management. This will help reduce the stigma and shame associated with menstrual hygiene that many girls experience.

Women, peace and security

The concept of positive peace encompasses more than the mere absence of war; it involves overcoming cultural and structural violence and inequality to achieve full well-being and progress through equal opportunities and access to services, support measures, and sustainable investments in economic development and institutions. It also involves building a culture of equality and non-discrimination. For a society that fosters a culture of positive peace, the equal participation of women in defence, security, and international relations structures is essential. A key priority in this regard, especially in light of North Macedonia's NATO membership, is to increase the number of women in the army and peacekeeping missions, as well as in the police force, by fundamentally instilling a culture of gender equality in these institutions and

structures. Additionally, it is crucial to sensitize employees in defence and security sectors, particularly police officers, to gender issues and promote gender-sensitive behaviour.

Social protection

It is especially important for social protection to target vulnerable categories of women and to consider the intersection of their characteristics when creating and adopting assistance and support measures. Increasing the capacities of social workers concerning gender issues is necessary, as well as improving the coverage of social and health services, especially in rural areas. Concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, an intersectional approach should be included in the creation of measures to achieve effectiveness and broad coverage of women from vulnerable categories, thereby mitigating the crisis's consequences.

Access to justice

Ensuring full and effective access to justice is crucial for vulnerable population groups, including women victims of violence, Roma, LGBTI persons, asylum seekers, migrants, stateless persons, sex workers and drug users. It is essential to enhance the awareness and sensitivity of legal practitioners regarding issues of gender equality to prevent revictimization and discrimination against individuals from vulnerable categories with whom they interact directly. The justice sector must also address the needs of women prisoners by improving access to gynaecological and health services, as well as providing educational and vocational programmes to facilitate their reintegration into society.

Sports

The primary priority in the field of sports is increasing the representation of women in leadership positions across various sports structures, alongside promoting sports and creating enabling conditions for girls and women to participate and remain in the sports profession. To achieve this, it is essential to provide financial support to women's clubs, challenge the stereotype that sports is a "male" domain, increase the hiring of women coaches, and implement measures to combat violence and sexism in sports. Integrating the gender perspective is also crucial when constructing sports facilities, ensuring they are adapted, safe, well-lit, and equipped to facilitate girls' and women's use.

Culture

Prioritizing the promotion of gender equality in culture begins with recognizing the fundamental and inalienable human right to culture, where culture and art play pivotal roles in

shaping societal values. Improving the state of culture involves supporting and promoting projects, works, and events that advocate for gender equality, tolerance, and acceptance of diverse gender identities, ensuring equal access and support for women authors and project leaders, as well as enhancing the representation of women in influential and higher-paying positions within the cultural sector.

Media

The main priorities in the media sphere revolve around promoting gender equality in programmes and content by showcasing positive examples, increasing the participation of women as speakers in debates and other guest-oriented programmes, and amplifying content that addresses gender equality topics. This entails integrating the gender perspective into a wide range of media topics. To achieve these goals, it is imperative to ensure greater representation of women in decision-making roles, editorial positions, and directorial positions within media organizations. Additionally, education and awareness-raising about gender issues among all media professionals are essential components of this effort.

Sexism and gender-based violence

Sexism and gender-based violence are closely related, with the fact that the suppression of violence and the promotion of the position of women in other spheres are deeply rooted in combating sexism and challenging stereotypical gender roles. In this effort, key stakeholders include the media, education sector, sports organizations, and cultural events. It is essential to promote equality and tolerance in educational curricula and media content while effectively sanctioning sexist hate speech. This requires building the capacities of professionals in these fields and sensitizing the population to recognize and address these harmful phenomena. In addressing gender-based violence, it is imperative to ensure full compliance with Istanbul Convention standards, encompassing legal solutions, available services and support mechanisms, prevention measures, and enforcement actions against perpetrators, including those involved in sexual harassment and online stalking. Additionally, systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data is essential to inform policies and interventions effectively. Regarding trafficking in human beings, strengthening the capacities of law enforcement agencies, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders is crucial for more effective identification of victims and provision of protection and support services.

Section Three: Measures taken to advance gender equality across the twelve critical areas of concern

Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

The Government recognizes the need to advance the agenda for development, prosperity and workforce in order to advance gender equality. The following are examples of measures and programmes implemented during the reporting period.

6. Actions taken to advance gender equality in relation to women's in paid work and employment

Women in North Macedonia are generally in a disadvantaged position on the labour market. They represent the vast majority of the economically inactive population, with an activity rate of 42.8 percent in 2023 (versus 62 percent for men), which represents a slight decrease from 45.7 percent in 2020 (compared to 67.1 percent for men) (SSO, 2024). In the period from 2020 to 2023 (latest available data), the employment rate of women fluctuated slightly towards a downward trend, from 38.4 percent in 2020, to 37.9 percent in 2023. Among men, the employment rate in the same period shows a more pronounced decrease and ranges from 55.9 percent in 2020 to 53.2 percent in 2023. It is imperative to monitor these trends through the lens of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the subsequent economic shocks caused by global developments.

- **Strengthened / enforced workplace laws and policies and practices that prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors and equal pay legislation**

In 2020 a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 258/2020) was adopted, which has a comprehensive application in the field of labour and labour relations and which recognises intersectional discrimination as a more serious form of discrimination. Furthermore, in 2022, the new National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 (MLSP, 2022) was adopted. In addition, the National Employment Strategy for the period 2021-2027 and its Action Plan for the period 2021-2023 include specific measures for employment of women and their improved access to labour market services. The Revised Employment and Social Policy Reform Programme 2022 provides a strategic framework for reducing the gender gap in the economy and improving the position of women in the labour market. The National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2021-2027 highlights the importance of eliminating gender inequality and

empowering women to enhance agricultural productivity and community development. In order to empower women and promote gender equality, the Strategy outlines support for women’s economic activities through direct payments and benefits, as part of the ranking system.

In the recent period, positive practices have been noted also at institutional level (the General Secretariat of the Government), including giving preference to individuals of the less represented gender in employment, when candidates possess the same level of qualifications, and ensuring equal access to training and professional development.

- **Introduced /strengthened job creation and gender-responsive labour market policies (education and training, skill, subsidies)**

In the past four years, the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (ESANM) has implemented a series of measures to improve the equal participation of women and men in the labour market, in accordance with the annual Operational Plans for active employment programmes and measures and labour market services. Within the framework of the Operational Plans, several types of active employment measures have been implemented under the following programmes: Support for self-employment; Support for creating new jobs Trainings; Internship; Work engagement programme; Economy of care; Support for job creation through green investments; Payment of youth allowance.

In the period from 2020 to 2023, agreements were concluded for participation in active programmes and measures for employment of unemployed persons, and several types of services were provided for unemployed persons, through their inclusion in: Job search assistance; Motivational training; Professional orientation and career counselling; Activation of unemployed Roma and other groups at risk of social exclusion; Employment mediation and the SIM – counselling and motivation of users of Guaranteed Minimum Assistance. The percentage representation of women in these programmes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage representation of women (%)				
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Employment programmes and measures	45	44	45	46
Total number of employment services	50.52	50.36	49.65	48.24

Source: ESARNM, 2024

- **Improved financial inclusion and access to loans, including for self-employed women**

Access to finance for business women or women who intend to start a business is increasing. The Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship 2019-2023 promotes women's economic empowerment by creating a favourable business environment and supporting women's entrepreneurial potential. In addition, gender perspective is integrated in the National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises for 2018-2023, acknowledging the challenges that women and young people face and recommending measures for the active inclusion of women in consultations and social dialogue, improving training on entrepreneurship for women, and enhancing support through financial and non-financial measures.

Through its Programme for Competitiveness, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Economy has determined some targets for women entrepreneurs. In 2021, under the measure for financing SMEs and handicraft production, there were a total of 232 applicants (enterprises/craftsmen/craftswomen) for co-financing, of which 31.9 percent were owned and managed by women. Enterprises that are managed or owned by women also receive support under a separate measure for financial support of women's entrepreneurship. The Programme targets an average of 140 companies per year, including a provision that companies that are managed or established by a woman are eligible to apply for a 10 percent higher subsidy. In 2021, the Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship allocated 10,623,110 MKD (around 190,000 USD) for activities intended for women, such as training, development of business plans and counselling. In addition to the state-run financial assistance programmes for women entrepreneurs, there is a growing number of alternative sources of support for enterprises, including business accelerators, banks and saving institutions, and donors.

- **Improved access to modern technologies (including climate smart technologies), infrastructure and services (including agricultural extensions)**

With the Budget Circular 2023 and the proposed fifth gender budget initiative the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management envisages improved access of women farmers to advanced irrigation technologies. The measure includes a return of 80 percent on the investment for installing an electricity connection to supply the irrigation system with electricity to operate the borehole irrigation pumps. The goal is to achieve more effects through the use of advanced technologies and techniques in irrigation, such as increased production and

yields, generation of added value, risk management, and lower energy, time, and natural resources consumption. At the same time, these production and quality improvements will enable profit maximization given the limited time, labour, land and capital, particularly among women farmers.

- **Supported transition from informal to formal employment, including legal and policy measures that benefit women in informal employment**

The National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 and its Action Plan for the period 2021-2023 guide all government policies, in addition to those specifically related to labour, to aim and/or specifically address the reduction of informal employment and the promotion of women's participation in the labour market (Outcome 2.3).

7. Actions taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and improve work-life balance

- **Expanding childcare services or increasing the accessibility of the existing services**

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in investments in new kindergartens and reconstructions of existing ones (MLSP, 2024). The measures to support the costs of care and education for children of preschool age for single parents who are beneficiaries of the right to guaranteed minimum assistance continue to be implemented.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the Government package of anti-crisis measures also included a measure for extending paid maternity leave that ended at the start of the pandemic. In addition, after the closure of kindergartens and schools, the package of anti-crisis measures also included paid leave of absence from work for one of the parents to care for a child/children under the age of 10.

- **Introduced or strengthened maternity / paternity / parental leave or other family leave**

In 2022, a pilot programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management was adopted to provide increased coverage of women by paid maternity leave for 2023. This Programme provides paid maternity leave for women who are registered individual farmers. However, the Programme is perceived as a temporary solution and further amendments to the legislation are required to ensure a permanent solution for the right to paid maternity leave for women - registered individual farmers in the country (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 31/2023).

In the past period (2020-2024), activities were carried out for drafting a new Law on Labour Relations, in line with the Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers (Official Journal of the EU, 188/79), expected to lead to reforms of the current system of maternity leave and the introduction of parental leave, including a special right to paternity leave, which, according to the existing legislation can be used only through waiving/termination of the mother's right to maternity leave (MLSP, 2022).

8. Measures and activities introduced to reduce gender gaps in the digital sphere

The gender gap in the digital sphere has been reduced over the past period, however, it still persists. The percentage of female Internet users increased from 82.4 percent in 2019 to 86.9 percent in 2021, while this percentage among male internet users ranges from 84.4 percent in 2019 to 90.2 percent in 2021 (SSO, 2023).

- **Measures taken to support the development and expansion of safe, accessible, available, relevant and inclusive public and private digital tools and services**

Since July 2023, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration has been a member of the Digital Europe Programme, under which, a project was launched to establish and open a unique National Safer Internet Centre. The first pillar of the National Centre is the establishment of an Awareness Centre for mass education, training, campaigns, development of digital skills, awareness of dangers arising from the virtual world and of cyber attacks and their prevention. In addition to women, socially vulnerable categories such as parentless children, minor mothers, single mothers, girls and women from rural areas are also targeted.

In line with its Programme for the Development of Entrepreneurship and the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises 2023, the Ministry of Economy implements a measure for financial support of female entrepreneurship for digitalization of business processes, providing subsidies for women entrepreneurs who advance the digital approach in their business operations.

- **Measures taken to promote gender-responsive STEM education**

Over the past decade, a growing number of women have opted for STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), reducing the gender gap in STEM student enrolment, from 5.6 percent in 2013 to 3.8 percent in 2020 (Eurostat, 2022). In addition to the offer of attractive job positions in STEM fields, the positive measures that have been implemented by the Government in the past period have also made a certain contribution to reducing the gender

gap, among which: 1) information campaigns to raise awareness of the opportunities for career development offered by STEM fields, and 2) scholarships to encourage women and girls enrolled in STEM programmes (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 170/2022).

9. Introduction of austerity/fiscal consolidation measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector downsizing

In the last five years, the Government has implemented fiscal consolidation and austerity measures, taking into account the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and price shocks as a result of global developments related to the pandemic and armed conflicts. According to the reports of the Ministry of Finance, the Government has not implemented a gender assessment of the impact of austerity and financial consolidation measures implemented in the past period.

Eradication of poverty, social protection and social services

10. Actions taken to reduce / eradicate poverty among women and girls

- **Promote access to decent work for disadvantaged women through active labour market policies (e.g. job training, skills, employment subsidies, etc.) and targeted measures**

The recently adopted National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 and its Action Plan 2021-2023 include specific measures in this domain. Outcome 3.4 aims at the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, the long-term unemployed, and people with disabilities, through the implementation of a range of social services and active labour market programmes.

In order to increase the participation of women in the active employment programmes and measures, such as "Support for self-employment (Entrepreneurship)" Programme and "Support for job creation" Programme, the Employment Service Agency lists specific target groups under the measure "Wage subsidies" including unemployed women from the vulnerable categories, women survivors of gender-based violence and victims of domestic violence, as well as women belonging to the Roma ethnic community and other ethnic communities. The "Support for self-employment (Entrepreneurship)" Programme includes provision of advisory/mentoring support after the establishment of a company only for specific target groups of unemployed persons, including women from vulnerable categories (beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking, single mothers, socially excluded women due to redundancy and bankruptcy).

- **Supported women's entrepreneurship, access to markets and business development activities**

The Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship 2019-2023 promotes women's economic empowerment by creating a favourable business environment and supporting women's entrepreneurial potential, thus contributing to the development of existing and opening of new enterprises, creating new jobs, and strengthening the overall economy. The Ministry of Economy ensures equity in terms of participation in the labour market through incentive criteria under the measure for subsidizing micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that are over 50% owned by women and managed by women; measure for subsidizing women's entrepreneurship for digitalization of business processes and measure for financial support for women's entrepreneurship in tourism. Regarding the funds for the measure for financial support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, funds in the amount of 2,000,000 MKD were provided for enterprises owned or managed by women. For the measure for subsidizing women's entrepreneurship for digitalization of business processes, 2,000,000 MKD have been provided for enterprises owned and managed by women. Funds in the amount of 1,500,000 MKD have been provided for the measure for financial support for female entrepreneurship in tourism, intended for enterprises owned or managed by women.

The Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship, through the Programme for Support of Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness and Innovation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, envisages a range of measures and Programme activities that support entrepreneurship in the country, including women's entrepreneurship, particularly through special training for women's entrepreneurship. The main goal of the training is to provide women entrepreneurs with broad awareness of the instruments for financial support of women's entrepreneurship, in accordance with the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Macedonia 2019-2023. These training events are intended for women potential entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs, and aim to raise the level of competitiveness of existing enterprises managed by women entrepreneurs, as well as encourage new entrepreneurs.

To mitigate the effects of the global pandemic, several measures to support women entrepreneurs were included in the government's anti-crisis packages for COVID-19. For example, the Development Bank deployed interest-free loans with a 30 percent grant component, specifically targeting women, youth and companies that introduce digitalization, or are export oriented. Likewise, in 2020 the Innovation Fund introduced co-financed grants

for technological developments to overcome the impacts of COVID-19, incorporating a criterion to secure equal gender participation.

The Revised Operational Plan of the Employment Service Agency for 2020, under measure 1A. Support for self-employment (Entrepreneurship) and formalization of existing businesses in the conditions of "Covid-19" envisages that in the selection process, additional points should be awarded to applications for self-employment of women, with additional points for single mothers and women with young children.

- **Introduced/enhanced low-cost legal services for women living in poverty**

The current Law on Free Legal Aid guarantees first and second instance legal aid for citizens in an unfavourable financial condition. This Law covers victims of gender-based and domestic violence, including procedures for social protection, social insurance and protection of children's rights. In addition, citizens can receive free legal aid for property-legal disputes, debt-creditor relations, pension and disability insurance issues, social assistance, disputes with insurance companies, and other needs. Free legal aid is granted in all courts and administrative proceedings. In 2021, free legal aid was provided to 1481 men and 1580 women, and the most common requests submitted relate to property-legal relations, divorces, imposing measures to protect women victims of domestic violence, and child protection. In 2022, a total of 5972 people received primary legal aid, of which 3105 were men and 2741 were women. The executed annual budgets of the Ministry of Justice allocated for free legal aid increased during the analysed period, from 1,736,258.00 MKD in 2021 to 3,315,556.00 MKD in 2023.

11. Actions taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls

- **Introduced or strengthened cash transfers for families with children prioritizing women as recipients (e.g. child allowance, family allowances, conditional or unconditional cash transfers)**

The current Law on Social Protection introduced reform of the social protection system, including a greater focus on marginalized women and girls and provisions for financial assistance and support for victims of violence. In the period 2020-2024 the programmes for implementation of social protection include the following compensations, which are relevant considering the still primary role of women in the care for other family members:

- allowance for assistance and care from another person (for a person over 26 years of age with a disability, as well as a person with permanent changes in health condition, who needs assistance and care from another person),
- salary compensation for part-time work (due to the care of a child with a disability or the most severe forms of chronic illnesses, determined by the Law on Labour Relations, which right is exercised by the parent in the Social Protection Centre, regardless of the age of the child),
- housing allowance (for materially and housing insecure persons who until the age of 18 had the status of a child without parents and without parental care, i.e. after the termination of the guardianship, and up to 26 years of age),
- permanent allowance (for a foster carer who cares for a person in his family and a parent who cares for a child with a disability),
- one-time financial assistance (to a person or a family in a state of social risk, as well as to a person and family due to a natural disaster or epidemic and prolonged treatment in a health facility of a family member).
- guaranteed minimum assistance (a household that is materially insecure and does not possess any property and property rights from which it can be sustained).

The budget item for execution of social protection allowances increased in absolute value from the planned 6,263,470,000 MKD in 2021 to 8,921,560,000 MKD in 2024.

- **Introduced or strengthened social protection for older women (e.g. extension of social pensions, moratorium, correction of inflation, introduction of pension credits for carers)**

The Programmes for implementation of social protection in the period 2020-2024, also include an allowance - cash assistance for social security for elderly persons (over 65 years of age, persons who do not own any property, are not beneficiaries of a pension or other types of social support and payments).

12. The COVID-19 pandemic and social protection

The COVID-19 epidemic has further exacerbated existing inequalities between women and men in many social spheres. Rural women experienced a greater decline in income from agricultural activity compared to men (7 percent decline, compared to 4 percent decline), and young women experienced greater job loss as compared to young men (30.3 percent and 27.4 percent lost jobs, respectively).

The share of women who received unemployment benefits increased from 52 percent in February 2020 to 56 percent in October 2020, while the share of women who participated in active labour market programmes declined to 43.8 percent as compared to 52.5 percent in 2019. Moreover, the share of women who received support for self-employment (for start-up businesses, for instance) decreased in 2020 as compared to the previous year (from 33.3 percent to 30.9 percent) as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis.

The closure of kindergartens and schools led to a significant increase in time spent on childcare and household duties that were already performed mainly by women. Women, likewise, more frequently switched to working from home than men (35 percent of women as compared to 23 percent of men). Also, women were disproportionately burdened by the distance learning system for children imposed during the pandemic.

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a Decree on the application of the Law on Social Protection during a state of emergency, which facilitated access to the right to guaranteed minimum assistance for persons whose employment was terminated during the pandemic, considered from April to December 2020, so that during this period 5,500 households acquired this right. This act also allowed the cash allowance for covering part of the costs of energy consumption in the households to be provided continuously on a monthly basis in the course of 2020. Facilitated access to the right to guaranteed minimum assistance was also made possible for households that were left without their own means of subsistence during the state of emergency (established crisis situation, declared epidemic, i.e. pandemic, fires, floods, or other major natural disasters). In addition, the Government package of anti-crisis measures also included a measure for extension of the paid maternity leave that ended by the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, after the closure of kindergartens and schools, the package of anti-crisis measures also included paid leave of absence from work for one of the parents to care for a child/children under the age of 10. However, men rarely used this measure, and of the parents who were released from work, every fifth was a father (77 percent of women as opposed to 22 percent of men).

During the global pandemic, the Government provided a set of measures for social protection including a gender component. However, there were no targeted measures for women who are engaged in the informal economy, farmers, single mothers, survivors of violence and domestic violence, or employees in production facilities or the essential sectors exposed to the constant risk of the infection, but also the risk of losing jobs (production facilities, textile factories).

13. Actions taken to improve health outcomes of women and girls

The Ministry of Health publishes its Programme for Active Health Protection for Mothers and Children on an annual basis. The goal of this Programme is the continuous improvement of the health of children and women in the reproductive period to reduce mortality of newborns and mothers. In addition, the objectives of the Programme include: 1) continuous improvement of the system for monitoring the health status of mothers and children and efficiency of health care; 2) raising the awareness and education of the population on healthy lifestyles and adequate health behaviour in the preconception, antenatal, postnatal and nursing period, with a focus on vulnerable categories of women (Roma women, women from rural areas and persons without identification); 3) improving quality and equality in access to health services for mothers and children, with a special focus on vulnerable categories of women; 4) timely detection of diseases in newborns, infants and young children; 5) strengthening the intersectoral cooperation and mobilizing partnership in the community of all relevant partners in identifying and solving the health problems of mothers and children, especially in reducing barriers and increasing the availability of services; 6) provision of timely and early access of every pregnant woman to quality antenatal health care (removing all types of geographical, financial and cultural barriers, especially among vulnerable groups).

The main activities of the Programme include:

1. Activities for monitoring the health status of mothers and children and assessing the efficiency and availability of health services: free examinations and laboratory tests during pregnancy, related to pregnancy, and free delivery for pregnant women - persons without an identification document; free examinations for women survivors of sexual violence; medical abortion, procurement of modern contraceptives (oral contraception, intrauterine devices, condoms) for women from socially vulnerable categories and women from socially vulnerable categories with repeated abortions; monthly incentive in the course of 2 (two) years for a chosen gynaecologist in the municipality of Shuto Orizari (a municipality with a dominant Roma population).
2. Activities for health promotion and improvement of health behaviour through education of the population and promotional activities: promotion of the World Breastfeeding Week.
3. Strengthen the capacities of health workers who provide health care to children and women in the reproductive period: preparation of Information on the health status of mothers and children for 2022; engaging the members of the State Commission for Biomedical Assisted Fertilization in accordance with the Law on Biomedical Assisted Fertilization.

4. Activities for early detection of diseases in newborns, infants and young children: implementation of thyroid screening in all newborn children in the Republic of North Macedonia; neonatal metabolic screening for a target population of newborns suspected of metabolic diseases; national cystic fibrosis screening; conducting a pilot screening for phenylketonuria.
5. Activities for collection, processing and analysis of indicators for perinatal health of mothers and newborns.
6. Establish a system to review maternal mortality and complications to ensure safe pregnancy through implementation, evaluation and action in accordance with the recommendations of the WHO guidelines.
7. Strengthen intersectoral cooperation and cooperation with the local community: holding a workshop to develop the activities of the Programme including all stakeholders and potential partners at the local level.

The funds allocated to this Programme in 2020, as well as in 2023, amount to 17,000,000.00 MKD and are fully covered by the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The Ministry of Health publishes its Programme for early detection of malignant diseases on an annual basis, continually providing free preventive examinations for screening of breast and cervical cancer to all women. The National Programme for early detection of breast cancer was initiated in 2015, covering women aged 50 to 69 years, however, with the latest changes to expand the scope, women from 40 years of age are now also included.

The budget funds allocated for this purpose in 2020 amounted to 6,396,666.00 MKD. Since 2019, the Ministry of Health has also implemented activities foreseen by the Programme for Early Detection and Prevention of Cervical Cancer.

The National Strategy for the promotion of mental health in North Macedonia 2018-2025 and its Action Plan 2018-2025³⁴¹ includes specific objectives on “improving mental health services for women in reproductive period” and “promotion of good mental health of women and mothers.” However, there is no system for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy.

14. Actions taken to improve education outcomes and skills of women and girls

- **Strengthened curriculum to increase gender responsiveness and eliminate bias at all levels of education.**

The Bureau for Development of Education developed new curricula based on the principles of gender sensitivity/equality, inclusiveness, and interculturality for the subjects in the 6th and 7th grade, in accordance with the curriculum for primary education included in the Concept Note on Primary Education 2021, which promotes gender equality, inclusiveness and multiculturalism. A total of 38 new curricula were approved; teachers received training in the new curricula; textbooks, professional literature and children's magazines for pre-school, primary and secondary education were analysed also from the aspect of gender sensitivity, 12 expert opinions were provided; learning materials and manuals for 3rd, 5th and 6th grade were approved, while implementing measures aimed at raising awareness of gender sensitivity/equality, inclusiveness, interculturality, 20 learning materials and manuals; teachers trained in the accredited training Programme on "Gender equality and gender sensitivity in schools" for primary school teachers, trained 13 teachers; sensitized population of teachers and parents for CSO, 1052 sensitized teachers. In cooperation with HERA, three meetings were held with teachers and parents of students in primary schools in three municipalities: Kavadarci, Centar-Skopje, and Gostivar to present the Programme for the elective subject comprehensive sexuality education.

The number of teachers enrolled by Programme and the number of teachers who attended training with gender-sensitive elements, are as follows

No	NAME OF TEACHER/PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATE TRAINING PROGRAMME	Number of teachers who selected specific topic	Number of teachers who attended specific topic
1	For topic 2 (teachers): Education in a modern context: developing socio-emotional skills in students	166	92
2	For topic 4 (teachers): Multiculturalism in monolingual and multilingual schools	413	285
3	For topic 7 (teachers): Gender equality and gender sensitivity in schools	30	12

4	For topic 10 (teachers): Inclusion and approaches to teaching students with special educational needs/disabilities	708	580
5	For topic 20 (teachers): Professional development and career counselling for students (mentoring, tracking, approaches for detecting affinities and interests, motivation and development, etc.)	363	316
6	For topic 22 (teachers): Coping with peer violence and cyberbullying	724	650
7	For topic 23 (teachers): Resolving conflicts with students and between students.	954	821
8	For topic 24 (teachers): Strategies for classroom management - principles and examples of good practice for creating a positive working atmosphere in the classroom and in the online/virtual classroom	3533	2863
9	For topic 26 (teachers): Strategies, methods and techniques for work with gifted students.	1684	1325

- **Measures taken to increase girls' access, retention and completion of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes and skills development**

The Programme "Quality and inclusive secondary education (equal opportunities for boys and girls)" is related to the following strategic goals and priorities of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026: Goal 2. Improve the position of women in all areas of public and private life; Objective 2.6: Gender-sensitive education and science.

The Programme "Quality and inclusive secondary education" derives from the strategic priority of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Quality education available to all, in accordance with the demand on the labour market, development and promotion of culture and sports", i.e. the priority goals "Development of quality education available to all, to create personnel capable of logical and critical thinking, based on analysis and facts", education in the function of personalities who will respect and nurture civil rights, tolerance, diversity,

education in the spirit of multiculturalism and training for the needs on the labour market and affirming and promoting culture, development and promotion of education, in the languages of the members of the communities".

The aim of this Programme is to provide high-quality and inclusive secondary education and improvement of student standard; increase attractiveness, quality and relevance of vocational education, both for boys and girls, with continuous adaptation to societal and technological changes on the one hand and the needs and characteristics of students on the other; improve the resources and capacities of the system for secondary education and training, to enable equal access for all. In this regard, the selected programmes and activities that will be implemented to improve the gender balance in three vocations in which a strong disparity between boys and girls has been detected, will be additionally supported by a series of activities that are within the competence of the Ministry of Education and Science and the institutions active in the field of vocational education and training. Thus, based on an integrated approach, the effects of the proposed intervention are expected to increase. Activities that will additionally support the expected effects are:

- Introduction of a flexible and efficient system for development of Standards for occupations and Standards for qualifications, which are based on learning outcomes, development of a modular curriculum, which is also based on learning outcomes, in accordance with the standards that meet the needs of the labour market, as well as programmes for students with special educational needs and girls;
- Developed Standards of occupations and revised curricula in accordance with the needs of the labour market, as well as adequate teacher training;
- Introduced a system for tracking students, including a special column for entering the gender (Tracersystem) after they complete their formal education;
- A strengthened system for career guidance and counselling for boys and girls to enrol in deficit occupations, and also break stereotypes of "male" or "female" occupations.

Strengthening of the three regional centres for secondary vocational education (in the Southwest, Northeast and Polog regions), fully equipped to provide quality services, as well as their gender sensitization. In 2023, it was decided to establish two new regional centres for vocational education and training in the Vardar and Southeast regions, and at the moment the technical specification for their equipping are underway to ensure quality vocational gender-sensitive education (formal, nonformal and informal).

Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

15. Dominant forms of violence against women and girls prioritized for action

In accordance with the ratified Istanbul Convention that entered into force in 2018, as well as the current National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018-2023), in 2021 the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 24/21) was adopted, which is in line with the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and is aimed at promoting and expanding the system for prevention and protection against violence against women, including all forms of gender-based and domestic violence. The Law establishes a coordinated system for prevention, protection and response to domestic violence, including preventive measures to be taken by all stakeholders at the national and local levels, in order to establish effective protection of victims from all forms of gender-based violence against women as well as victims of domestic violence, punishment of perpetrators, and data collection on violence against women and domestic violence.

North Macedonia submitted its first baseline report to GREVIO in 2022, and GREVIO (Baseline) Evaluation Report for North Macedonia was adopted in May 2023.

The amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted in February 2023, define the terms “victim of gender-based violence,” “violence against women,” and “gender-based violence against women” in Article 122, and criminalize various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide (Art. 123 2-a), female genital mutilation (Art. 129-a), stalking (Art.144-a), and sexual harassment including with the use of digital technologies (Art. 190-a). In addition to forms of domestic violence that were already covered by criminal law, such as physical violence and sexual violence, the Criminal Code now includes economic and psychological violence as forms of domestic violence. Forms of psychological violence are included in criminal acts such as coercion (use of force), illegal deprivation of liberty and endangerment. The Law sanctions forms of sexual violence, such as rape, including rape of a current or previous spouse or intimate partner. Significantly, the Criminal Code definition of rape is based on the absence of the victim’s consent to the act by a current or former intimate partner (Art.186), which is a change from the previous force-based definition. The Criminal Code also prohibits non-consensual sexual intercourse with a person with disability (Art. 187), sexual assault against a child and forced prostitution, and for the first time introduced the crime

of online sexual harassment. Currently, the Ministry of Justice is drafting amendments to the Law on Criminal Procedure to further its compliance with the Istanbul Convention.

16. Prioritized actions to address violence against women and girls

- **Introduced or strengthened laws against violence against women and their enforcement and implementation**

In 2021 the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 24/21) was adopted, which is in line with the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and is aimed at promoting and expanding the system for prevention and protection against violence against women, including all forms of gender-based and domestic violence.

The amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted in February 2023, define the terms “victim of gender-based violence,” “violence against women,” and “gender-based violence against women” in Article 122, and criminalize various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide (Art. 123 2-a), female genital mutilation (Art. 129-a), stalking (Art.144-a), and sexual harassment including with the use of digital technologies (Art. 190-a).

During this period, the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021-2025 was adopted, as well as the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy. In addition, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration was established as an interdepartmental coordinating body tasked with the implementation, coordination, and monitoring of the National Action Plan.

- **Introduced or strengthened services for survivors of violence (for example, shelters, helplines, special health services, legal aid and legal services, counselling services, housing)**

Both governmental and non-governmental entities in North Macedonia offer specialist counselling and support for women. In the area of domestic violence, the primary providers of support services are the Centres for Social Work and women's rights organizations. The CSW operates with eight shelter centres, and in addition, the CSW of the City of Skopje operates integrative counselling services for marriage, family and domestic violence.

Women's rights NGOs provide a range of specialized support services, including shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support and helplines. There are, for example, nine specialized services managed by non-governmental organizations for psycho-social support for survivors of all forms of violence covered by the Convention. There are two specialist counselling centres in

Skopje, one of which is funded by the City of Skopje. The NGOs continue to provide advocacy services, issue reports, conduct research, and are actively involved in the elaboration of legal and policy measures. Despite the invaluable and important support that they provide to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, both on an individual and collective level, their access and capacity are hindered by insufficient and project funding, primarily depending on international and/or private donors. In addition, although there is a wide range of support available in the capital, this is not the case in other cities or regions of the country. Many areas lack psychosocial counselling services for women survivors of violence.

In the past period, activities have been undertaken to improve the availability of services for survivors of violence, both at the central and local level. In 2020, the Municipality of Strumica provided its own funds and opened a Shelter Centre for care and protection of survivors of domestic violence in the Municipality of Strumica. The Shelter is managed by the citizens' association "Sky Plus" based in Strumica, which, based on memorandums of cooperation with socially responsible companies, provided contribution in the amount of 50% of the total amount from the Municipality of Strumica, 1,000,000.00 MKD. The Shelter Centre offers a range of social services for survivors of domestic violence, women and children, who are accommodated for a period of 3 to 6 months and are provided individual support, meeting of everyday needs, and legal counselling or social-psychological assistance when emergency intervention is needed, including by mobile crisis intervention teams. In addition, a shelter centre for survivors of gender-based violence was opened in Gostivar by the non-governmental organization Etika, licensed in 2024 and financially supported by the municipality.

17. Strategies used to prevent violence against women and girls

- **Promotion of positive attitudes, beliefs, values and norms for gender equality, especially among girls and boys.**

In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted the Concept Note on Primary Education as guidance for a wider reform of primary education in North Macedonia. The Concept Note relies on the principles of inclusivity, gender sensitivity/equality and interculturality, emphasizing the importance of education in creating opportunities for transformation of harmful gender norms and behaviours. The short-and long-term effects envisaged by the Concept Note, include: reduction in gender and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices among students and teaching staff, reduction in gender-based violence in schools and mitigating the negative consequences to the health and wellbeing of students who experience violence, and the creation of conditions under which sex/gender do not play a role

in students' choice of secondary education and their future vocation. In line with the recommendations from the Concept Note on Primary Education, amendments to the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education were adopted to further regulate and refine the procedures for publishing school textbooks and to eliminate discriminatory content or content that reinforces stereotypes, especially those that relate to gender and sex.

- **Promotion of gender-egalitarian values in primary and secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education**

In the 2021/2022 school year, a pilot Programme for comprehensive sexuality education was implemented. The introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in primary schools means promoting gender equality, inclusiveness and tolerance, and also prevention of sexual harassment and violence. In addition, a proposal-concept of a textbook and a methodology for evaluation of a textbook were developed.

- **Raising public awareness to change attitudes and behaviours**

The MLSP is continuously involved in the implementation of campaigns for raising awareness for gender equality and gender-based violence, such as the "16 days of activism" campaign against violence against women and girls, which is regularly implemented by mobilizing and cooperation with municipalities, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

Since 2020, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Medium Services has been regularly organizing training in reporting on gender-based violence for media representatives.

18. Actions taken to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls facilitated by technology

- **Introduced or strengthened legislation and regulatory provisions**

The amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted in February 2023, define the terms “victim of gender-based violence,” “violence against women,” and “gender-based violence against women” in Article 122, and criminalize various forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence including femicide (Art. 123 2-a), female genital mutilation (Art. 129-a), stalking (Art.144-a), and sexual harassment including with the use of digital technologies (Art. 190-a). With these amendments, the criminal offense of online sexual harassment was introduced in the Criminal Code for the first time.

19. Actions taken to address discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media

Since 2020, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Medium Services (AAVMS) has been regularly organizing training in reporting on gender-based violence for media representatives.

Within the framework of the regular annual research on gender in the media, in 2023 the AAVMS for the first time conducted a research specifically focused on the reporting on gender-based violence on national televisions. The publication "Gender in the Media 2023: Research on gender-based violence reporting on national televisions" was promoted at the first public meeting of the AAVMS in 2024, which was held on 28 March. The research instrument was designed by the ISPPi team on the basis of the Agency's Monitoring Guidelines on regulation and monitoring of the application of reporting standards in gender-based violence cases in the media, prepared by Prof. Dr. Katharine Sarikakis (under the JUFREX 2 Project, funded by the Council of Europe and the EU). In the analysed period, the most common types of violence mentioned in the media reports were: economic violence, femicide, domestic violence and psychological violence. The term "gender-based violence" was most often not mentioned in the media reports, except in one case. In other reported cases, gender-based violence was described using the following terms: "domestic violence", "killing of a woman", "hate speech against women", "stereotypes against women", "women's labour rights are violated in the textile industry", "unjustly convicted textile workers' and "women are oppressed".

Among the noted good practices in reporting on gender-based violence are the presentation of a complete picture of what violence is, looking for the context and the reasons leading to GBV and giving voice to women.

The summary conclusions of the research indicate: increased frequency of items broadcast on the occasion of International Women's Day - 8 March; the items/broadcasts dedicated to GBV in the analysed period usually treated topics such as domestic violence, femicide, a form of economic violence against women in the public - social sphere, as well as the violation of women's labour rights in the textile industry, and also topics related to real conditions (statistical data) and information on GBV, results from research and analysis, as well as presentations of experts and competent institutions; Most often, topics related to GBV were broadcast in between items that were not thematically related to GBV; The term "gender-based violence" was precisely mentioned as such only in one case; Precise sources are used, often multiple sources; The voice of activists is presented; Women are presented in a real context; The media has detailed and comprehensively framed violence in the socio-political context.

The general recommendations include: Continuously nurture interest in the topic and ensure an adequate balance between reporting on specific cases and presenting the topic from a broader perspective; Familiarize media and journalists with the social construction of the term gender-based violence; Continue citing precise sources, multiple sources, sources of different types: official, alternative and independent; The voice of women to be constantly present; Careful use of emotionally charged phrases when reporting on GBV; Clear description of the social context in which violence occurs; Describe GBV as a social issue, a community issue, and not only an individual issue, which needs to be dealt with by the individual alone and unprotected.

20. Actions taken to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention 2018-2023 includes specific actions related to women who are at risk or subject to intersectional discrimination, such as women who belong to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, women who live in rural areas, migrant women, women living with HIV, homeless women and women affected by addiction. However, these groups of women still face barriers in accessing general and specialized services, as noted in the GREVIO report.

Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

21. Actions and measures taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men stipulates that the provision of equal opportunities should be accomplished through general measures (Art. 5 and 6) and special measures (Art. 7 and 8). Thus, the Law establishes the obligation of public institutions to give preference to equally qualified persons belonging to the less represented sex, until equal representation is reached in all bodies and at all levels in the legislative, executive and judiciary powers, local governments and other public institutions and services. The principle of affirmative action is transposed to the current Law on Labour Relations. Furthermore, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination incorporates the concept of affirmative measures horizontally throughout all sectors, as measures undertaken with the sole purpose of eliminating unequal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms until de facto equality of any person or group is achieved. Such measures are not considered discriminatory, if such

differentiation is justified and fair, and the means used are proportionate, i.e., appropriate and necessary, and time bound (Art. 7).

The Electoral Code requires at least 40% of the candidates from the submitted list of candidates by the political parties to belong to women, as follows: at least one out of every three places to be reserved for women, with at least one additional place out of every ten places, alongside the mandatory replacement of elected women Members of Parliament (MPs) with other female candidates. The same applies to the candidate lists for members of municipal councils and the Council of the City of Skopje (Electoral Code, Art. 155-a). Furthermore, the Law on Political Parties stipulates an obligation for political parties to adhere to the principle of gender equality in party structures and positions (Art. 4).

With women representing 42.5 per cent of MPs at the beginning of 2023 (and 41.7 per cent after the 2020 elections), North Macedonia is among the 25 countries in the world with highest proportion of women parliamentarians, and occupies the highest position among the countries in the region. In the 2024 Presidential elections, for the first time in the history of the country, a woman was elected to the position of President of the Republic of North Macedonia. Women's representation in Parliament has been accomplished mainly through the introduction of a gender quota of 30 percent in 2002, which was raised to 40 percent with the amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015. The impact of the quotas is evident when considering the positive trend of an increase in women's representation in Parliament, however, in areas and political offices that are outside of the quota, gender inequalities persist. Gender inequalities in policy-making processes are more visible at the local level. There are numerous barriers for women who aspire to leadership positions in politics, stemming from prevailing patriarchal values and prejudice, as well as socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes that place women mainly in the domestic sphere and away from the public sphere. Women's overall representation in the judiciary represents a positive trend in terms of women in decision-making positions. Women comprised 60.6 percent of all sitting professional judges (299 women and 194 men) in 2022. Women make up more than half of professional judges in first and second instance courts (courts of appeal), and gender parity also exists in the Supreme Court. Furthermore, women represent 47.1 percent of court presidents combined (16 women and 18 men) and 62.7 percent of all non-judge staff working in courts in North Macedonia.

22. Actions taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media

In addition to research including gender-disaggregated statistical data on the ownership structure and employees in the broadcasting industry, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services prepared and published the [Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap in the Broadcasting Industry in 2019](#), which was also the topic of the online debate "Gender, Pay, Broadcasting". organized by the Agency on 2 November 2020, at which, following the presentation of the results of the research on the gender pay gap in the broadcasting industry, a debate was initiated with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia and to the Platform for Investigative Journalism and Analysis - PINA.

23. National gender equality machinery

Gender equality mechanisms were established in accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Department for Equal Opportunities, which operates within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), is responsible for coordinating and implementing the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2012). While the list of tasks assigned by the Law to the MLSP is extensive, financial and human resources allocated to the Ministry to implement these tasks are limited. According to the Law on Equal Opportunities, all public administration bodies must appoint a Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator for Equal Opportunities, who are all required to report annually to the Department for Equal Opportunities of the MLSP with relevant information on the situation concerning the progress made in achieving gender equality and on the monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and other relevant policies and strategies. At the local level, Commissions for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men have been established in municipal councils. Members of the municipal-level Commissions for Equal Opportunities are elected councillors, and their composition changes every four years. Key institutional challenges faced by the public sector, including the gender machinery, are its limited capacity to effectively deal with the extensive work required for monitoring and implementation of measures for gender equality, and insufficient communication, coordination, technical and financial resources allocated for the functioning of the national gender machinery.

As a parliamentary republic, the 120-seat Parliament of North Macedonia is elected by proportional representation for four-year terms. In the Parliament of North Macedonia, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which is composed of representatives

of all political parties, has the role of ensuring gender-sensitive law-making and oversight of the implementation of international obligations and the national legislation. Established in 2003, the Women's Parliamentary Club is an informal consultative body in the Parliament for the promotion of women's rights. With the adoption of the Rulebook for the organization and scope of work of the Club in 2019, the Club received more formal treatment, however, in order to increase its influence over political processes, the Club would need to be fully formalized.

In addition to the Ombudsperson, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) is an important mechanism for the protection of women's rights, combating discrimination, and promoting equality. The CPPD's competences cover both the private and public sectors, in contrast to those of the Ombudsperson which are limited to the public sector.

24. Mechanisms for inclusion of gender equality in intersectoral (gender) audits

The Government has established its Intersectoral Consultative and Advisory group for equal opportunities for women and men, composed of officials/senior civil servants, representatives of civil society organizations, employers' associations, experts, representatives of local self-governments, trade unions and other entities. The Intersectoral Group is tasked, among other things, to participate in the development of the Strategy for Gender Equality by providing guidance, and monitor the periodic reports submitted by the institutions. The activities of the Interdepartmental Group are coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The activities related to the integration of a gender perspective into regular auditing activities were intensified. The transparency and accountability in public policies and spending for gender equality is one of the focus areas prioritized by the State Audit Office of North Macedonia. In 2021, the State Audit Office substantively increased its capacities to mainstream gender in audit practices and in conducting gender performance audits. The first Performance Audit on Gender Equality was undertaken by the SAO in 2022, focusing on the effectiveness of government measures for advancing gender equality and implementation of GRB by relevant institutions. Moreover, to ensure sustainable and effective mechanism for mainstreaming gender in all future audit reports undertaken by auditors, the SAO developed a Methodological Guidance for mainstreaming gender in audit practices.

25. The national human rights institution of the Republic of North Macedonia

The Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia is the national human rights institution. The Ombudsman is a control body in accordance with the Constitution of the RNM and the Law on the Ombudsman, which protects the constitutional and legal rights of the citizens and all other persons that are infringed by acts, actions and omissions by the state administrative bodies and by other bodies and organizations vested with public authorizations, and which undertakes actions and measures for protection of the principles of non-discrimination and equitable representation of community members in the bodies of the state authority, the bodies of the local self-government units and the public institutions and services. In accordance with the Law on the Ombudsman ("Official Gazette of the RM" No. 60/03, 114/09, 181/16, 189/16 and 35/18), as a control body that is established in accordance with the Constitution of the RNM and the aforementioned law, the Ombudsman has the right to act upon all forms and basis of discrimination, including sex and gender, however its actions are limited on the public sector entities.

In addition to the Ombudsperson, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) is an important mechanism for the protection of women's rights, combating discrimination, and promoting equality. The CPPD's competences cover both the private and public sectors, in contrast to those of the Ombudsperson which are limited to the public sector.

Peaceful and inclusive societies

27. Actions taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda

North Macedonia's commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is reflected in its robust framework for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, particularly through the second National Action Plan (NAP) for RSBON 1325 (2020-2025) by the Ministry of Defence. The strategic document defines the role and participation of women in peacebuilding processes and the security sector. The plan includes measures to increase women's participation in defence and security, gender sensitivity training, and support for victims of gender-based violence.

The implementation of the Second National Action Plan (NAP) of the Republic of North Macedonia for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security" (2020-2025) follows a strategic framework and is executed

through the delegation of further competencies to the Ministry of Defence through the Operational Plan for implementation. The Operational Plan for implementation is prepared in a unified format that includes clear results, activities, indicators, carriers and time and budget framework of the Ministry of Defence. It includes details on the appropriate allocation of the necessary resources for the planned activities.

The Operational Plan's objective is to initiate change in five areas over the next five years. These areas are legislation, policies, strategies, behaviour and culture/cultural awareness and acceptance. Each of these areas includes specific work processes, activities, medium and final effects and desired results. The Operational Plan for implementation of the Ministry of Defence is aimed at achieving the five strategic goals detected in the strategic framework, specifically: Leadership, Inclusion, Facilitation, Protection and Communication, Education and Training. The Implementation of the Operational Plan will be carried out by incorporating the activities into the Annual Operation Plans of the Ministry of Defence. The realization of this plan along with the plans from other institutions is coordinated, monitored and evaluated by the Ministry of Defence through the Body for Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation (BCME) of the NAP, in charge of reporting the progress through the preparation of sublimated reports and analyses. This body will be the primary national operational mechanism for ensuring the efficient and transparent implementation of the second NAP for Resolution 1325.

During the reporting period, annual operational plans of the relevant ministries were adopted, such as the Annual Operational Plan of the Ministry of Justice. This plan is part of the implementation efforts for the second National Action Plan (NAP) of the Republic of North Macedonia for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security" (2020-2025) prepared in 2023 (adopted on January 13, 2023).

28. Actions taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peace building, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings

The National Action Plan (NAP) of the Republic of North Macedonia for the implementation of United Nations Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security" (2020-2025) aims to achieve specific results in increasing the participation of women in leadership positions in the defence sector. This is pursued by raising awareness about the importance of gender diversity, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, and integrating gender principles into the career development system. The outlined goals are pursued through various activities, including

seminars, workshops, public campaigns, debates, preparation of informational materials, analysis of the career development system, and continuous monitoring of the situation, as well as primarily through directing the selection and appointments of women on leadership positions in the defence sector. Funds for these activities are provided through donor support from international organizations.

In addition to the activities outlined previously, Specific Strategic Objective 1.2 of the National Action Plan focuses on increasing the number of women leaders in peace missions, regional and international organizations, and defence diplomatic missions. The objective is to achieve specific targets, including: Increased Number of Female Leaders in Peace Missions (30% of the total number of referred members); Increased Number of Female Leaders in Regional and International Organizations (30% of the total number of referrals); and Increased Number of Female Leaders in Defence Diplomatic Missions (30% of the total number of referrals). Funds for these activities are allocated from the Budget of the Ministry of Defence.

29. Actions taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response

North Macedonia criminalized Trafficking in Human Beings in 2002 and added the "Trafficking in Children" (Criminal Code, Article 418-e) as an additional crime. In order to harmonize the national legal framework with EU legislation, the 2018 amendments to the Criminal Code introduced the principle of impunity of victims of trafficking in human beings and child victims. To deter individuals from exploiting trafficked persons, North Macedonia criminalized the use or exploitation of the services of a trafficked person, including for sex, if the perpetrator knew or should have known that the person was a victim of human trafficking (Criminal Code, article 418-a (3) and 418-d (3)). Correspondingly, according to the new Law on Foreigners, the recovery and reflection period, as well as the renewal of the residence permit, are now independent of the victim's cooperation with law enforcement authorities or involvement in criminal proceedings (Article 121).

The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration is an interdepartmental coordinating body in charge of implementing, coordinating and monitoring the NAP for the implementation of the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021-2025. The Anti-Trafficking Task Force as part of the National Unit for Suppression of Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human

Beings (National Unit) prosecutes human trafficking cases, but faces a lack of resources, with only ten prosecutors in the office which act on all cases under its authority.

Following the adoption of the Gender Budget Statement on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, the Ministry of the Interior has established mobile teams aligned with the priorities of the Trafficking in Human Beings Strategy. These teams conduct regular meetings, field visits, and outreach efforts, providing contacts, referrals, and assistance to vulnerable groups in order to enhance the timely and effective identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking in human beings. Five mobile teams have been established across the territory of North Macedonia: in Tetovo, Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, and Gevgelija. Concurrently, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings is consistently engaged in activities aimed at enhancing the identification of human trafficking victims and providing them with necessary assistance and protection. Additionally, the Commission has decided to set up three additional mobile identification teams focused on vulnerable groups, including victims of human trafficking, in the regions of Ohrid, Struga, and Shtip which are still in the process of appointing their members;

To facilitate implementation of this initiative, the brochure "Are you a victim of human trafficking? Recognize the signs." was created and disseminated in Macedonian, Romani, Albanian and English language. This brochure, accessible at <https://lastrada.org.mk>, aims to inform individuals about available services and rights that can be accessed within the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia (this falls within the scope of the MLSP; however, the Ministry of the Interior is also involved in this endeavour);

Simultaneously, on the occasion of the commemoration of the October 18th - the World Day for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, supporting the activities of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration and the Associations of Citizens, was included in the video materials for raising public awareness on the prevention of trafficking in human beings.

The National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, operating within the MLSP, serves as the coordinating body for the sole shelter in the country designated for victims of human trafficking. This shelter primarily caters to women and minor victims. However, due to limited capacity, it can only accommodate up to five individuals at a time. Free legal aid is accessible to individuals, as reported by the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021. Open Gate (CSO)

extended free legal assistance to four victims, while the Lawyers' Association of North Macedonia offered support to 573 migrants and 260 asylum seekers (gender specifications were not provided in the report). The Government intensified its efforts in prevention activities across the board, notably by establishing and adequately resourcing the independent office of the National Anti-Trafficking Rapporteur and organizing strong awareness raising campaigns.

30. Actions taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child and adolescent girls

In January 2020, the Government of North Macedonia acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Such changes in a positive direction help stateless women and girls, including those from the Roma community, to acquire citizenship, change or retain citizenship, in all procedures covered by the citizenship legislation. Consequently, stateless Roma individuals, particularly women and girls, gain access to existing mechanisms for healthcare, housing, employment, and social protection programmes.

The National Action Plan for Protection, Promotion and Fulfilment of Human Rights of Roma Women and Girls 2022-2024 (commencing from 2021) focuses on Roma girls. The focus is on the outcomes for ensuring the conditions for the acquisition and completion of formal education for Roma women and girls, as well as improved effective protection of Roma women from any form of gender-based and domestic violence. The outcomes for ensuring conditions for the acquisition and completion of formal education for Roma women and girls include activities to retain girls in the educational process through measures to provide financial support for the families of Roma girls, as well as free transportation. Furthermore, this outcome seeks to enhance educational opportunities for Roma girls by increasing scholarships available to them at all levels of formal education. This includes introducing minimum quotas for Roma girls in existing scholarship programmes. Additionally, an information campaign will be conducted to raise awareness among parents and girls, including Roma girls, about available scholarship opportunities. The goal also involves improving the system for monitoring and recording underage marriages to address any barriers to education caused by early marriage. To improve educational outcomes, efforts will be made to eliminate discriminatory content from textbooks. This will be achieved through the analysis and identification of discriminatory content toward Roma individuals, incorporating a gender perspective into the process.

As part of the outcome aimed at protecting Roma women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence, the action plan outlines several key activities such as:

Establishment of services and support in the Romani language within existing or new centres (shelters) for victims of domestic violence; Provision of support in the Romani language through the SOS violence reporting line; as well as Providing financial resources to support rent and bills for victims living in rented accommodation.

Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

31. Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and reducing land degradation

The Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027 includes a special specific objective aimed at strengthening mechanisms for environmental protection and developing gender-responsive policies to address climate change.

The Republic of North Macedonia has adopted the Long-term Strategy for Climate Action, which is expected as an outcome of the impact in the socio-economic sphere to contribute to the reduction of gender inequality. The vision outlined in the strategy aligns with North Macedonia's commitment to sustainable development and combating the causes and impacts of climate change. It emphasizes the creation of a fairer and more equal society, with a particular focus on promoting gender equality and strengthening the role of women. Following the principles outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement and the Lima Work Programme (the Preamble) on Gender (LWPG), this Strategy prioritizes the integration of the gender perspective as a crucial cross-cutting issue. Recognizing its significance, the strategy acknowledges that gender considerations are essential for ensuring transparency, effectiveness, and sustainability in climate policy and action.

Under the support and guidance of the Global Support Programme (GSP), an Action Plan addressing gender issues and climate change has been developed as part of climate change projects led by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and UNDP. This initiative marks the first introduction of the gender-climate change intersection in the region. The Global Support Programme has played a pivotal role in this effort by adopting a comprehensive approach that includes knowledge sharing, best practices dissemination, and the identification of most-effective models for developing plans and implementing the best solutions for their effective implementation across Western Balkan countries.

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, through the implementation of the Environmental Investment Programme for 2023, followed the initiative for the inclusion of the

gender perspective through activities that enable an equal participation application approach for women and men. Within the Environmental Investment Programme for 2023, several key provisions were made, including:

- support for projects that promote values for the promotion of gender equality within the environmental sector;
- conducting gender-disaggregated statistics within the framework of activities and supported projects from the Environmental Investment Programme;
- number of submitted applications and number of approved projects aimed at promoting gender equality within the environmental sector;
- percentage of funds that have been approved for the implementation of projects that promote gender equality as part of the total amount of approved funds in the Programme;
- included criteria for supporting gender equality in the environmental sector;
- number of activities encouraging civil associations to apply with projects that promote values in support of gender equality.

Out of a total number of applicants (97 beneficiaries) awarded funds for project realization in 2023, 42 applications were granted to men, amounting to MKD 12,700,000.00, while 55 applications were granted to women, amounting to MKD 9,300,000.00.

32. Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives in the policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and to build environmental and climate resilience

In North Macedonia, crisis management, protection, and rescue efforts are consolidated into a unified system aimed at monitoring, preventing, and addressing the repercussions of natural disasters and other emergencies, regulated by the Law on Protection and Rescue. The Law on Crisis Management provides the overarching framework for risk management in crisis situations, spanning from local to national levels. Previously, strategies and plans for crisis management and prevention were developed at the local level, often with the assistance of civil society organizations. The strategies adopted in five municipalities (Konche, Karbinci, Kavadarci, Veles and Mavrovo and Rostushe) use gender-sensitive language and contain specific measures and activities to deal with the vulnerability of women and are guided by the principle of equality and protection of human rights. Some of the activities with a special focus on women and other identified vulnerable categories include education and strengthening of knowledge and capacities for response in crisis situations and disaster risk, strengthening of

knowledge and capacities for health care and health crises, assessment of the needs of the population after a disaster, with a special focus on women, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Section Four: National Institutions and Processes

33. National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality

In July 2022, the new Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2022-2027 was adopted (Official Gazette of the RNM, No. 170/2022), which is the basic strategic document of the country in the field of gender equality, establishing the institutional roadmap of the goals and activities for promotion of gender equality and advancement of the status of women in the country in the foreseen implementation period. The strategy is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically with Goal No. 5 and the specific targets. Following the adoption of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2024 was also adopted. Financial resources for implementing both the Strategy and the National Action Plan are allocated from the Budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), as well as from line ministries and agencies responsible for the implementation of the activities, as well as from donations provided by international organizations and bodies.

The Strategy builds on the Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2013-2020 and focuses on three goals: 1. Establishment of an effective and efficient system for promoting gender equality at central and local level (specific objectives focus on the institutional mechanisms at central and local level); 2. Improvement of the position of women in all areas of public and private life (specific objectives refer to the areas of labour market, agriculture, political participation, health care, education, peace, culture and sports); and 3. Combating gender stereotypes and build a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender and gender identity (specific objectives refer to combating gender-based violence and gender stereotypes and sexism).

General Goal No. 1. Establishment of an effective and efficient system for promoting gender equality at central and local level, encompasses the following specific goals:

- Promotion of gender mechanisms at the central and local level, in accordance with the legal framework for the gender equality promotion;

- Establishment of a functional system for including the gender perspective in the creation of policies, programmes and budget processes at the central and local level;
- Establishment of an efficient system for monitoring the situation with gender equality, in accordance with international obligations and recommendations;
- Implementation of a gender perspective in the work and the creation of measures and programmes during emergency conditions and crisis at the central and local level.

General Goal No. 2. Improvement of the position of women in all areas of public and private life, encompasses the following specific goals:

- Reduction of the gender gap in the economic participation of women in the labour market, by using an intersectional approach;
- Promotion of the position of women in agriculture through special measures and policies aimed at affirmation and appropriate valuation of their work;
- Strengthened mechanisms for environmental protection and creation of gender-responsive policies for dealing with climate change;
- Equal participation of women in the decision-making processes at all levels in political and public life;
- Equal access to health care for all women;
- Gender-sensitive education and science;
- Promotion of gender equality to achieve and maintain positive peace (Women, Peace and Security);
- Improvement of the access to social services and promotion of the gender perspective for social security;
- Equal access to justice for all women and men;
- Promotion of gender equality in sport;
- Promotion of gender equality in culture.

General Goal 3. Combating gender stereotypes and build a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender and gender identity encompasses the following specific goals:

- Prevention, protection and support in case of gender-based violence;
- Suppression of gender stereotypes and promotion of equality.

34. Monitoring the share of the national budget that is invested in promoting gender equality and empowering women (gender responsive budgeting)

For the first time, in 2018, the Government of North Macedonia introduced a gender perspective in the guidelines for the preparation of three-year strategic plans for line ministries, in order to strengthen the institutionalization of the gender perspective at the national level. As a result, the MLSP and UN Women developed a Guide for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the strategic plans of the ministries and other state administration bodies, which aims to facilitate the process of preparation of gender-responsive policies, quality strategic plans and annual work plans of the ministries and other state administration bodies. Currently, the GRB Methodology is applied in the sectorial programmes of thirteen line ministries and three state agencies.

In 2022, the Government and the MLSP, with the support of UN Women, established a Resource Centre for Gender Responsive Policymaking and Budgeting. The centre aims to assist the current efforts of the Republic of North Macedonia for systematic and sustainable implementation of gender responsive budgeting, by providing trainings to enhance the capacities of civil servants in the area of gender equality and GRB, mentoring and support for including the gender perspective in the management of public finances, as well as by supporting the strategic planning and policy making of state institutions.

The Resource Centre operates within the Department for Gender Responsive Policies and Gender Responsive Budgeting at the Department for Equal Opportunities. The work of the Resource Centre takes place in special premises of the MLSP in the centre of Skopje.

During 2022 and 2023, in terms of gender-responsive budgeting and inclusion of the gender perspective, more than 20 trainings were held and attended by 212 administrative officials involved in the process of preparing strategic and budget plans, as well as administrative officials with relatively short work experience. Furthermore, with the training of trainers for gender responsive budgeting, 26 administrative officers acquired skills, competencies and knowledge for further training of other employees in the public sector.

It is not yet possible to systematically monitor the allocation of gender equality funds from the budget, as indicated by the SDG 5.c.1 indicator which measures the government efforts to track budget allocations for gender equality. However, the Ministry of Finance and other line ministries regularly publish Gender Budget Statements on their websites, and starting from 2021, the Ministry of Finance has included information on annual Gender Budget Statements within the Civil Budget. The publication of data and the monitoring of the allocation of gender

equality funds and their public availability are prerequisites for the evaluation of the activities on the GRB in the country.

According to the SDG Tracker database, although the Government of North Macedonia has not introduced a system for monitoring the distribution of budget funds for gender equality, it is estimated that the country is at a moderate distance from achieving the goal.

35. Formal mechanisms for the participation of various stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

There is no specially designated body that works only to implement and monitor the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Republic of North Macedonia. However, in accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, since 2017 the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia has been operating an Interdepartmental Consultative and Advisory Group for equal opportunities for women and men, which enables different forms of participation of stakeholders, and among other things, for the implementation and following up on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Interdepartmental Consultative and Advisory Group submits the reports to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Interdepartmental Consultative and Advisory Group consists of members of state institutions, representatives from local self-government, civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations, employers' associations (private sector) and labour unions, and independent experts from the academic community. The work of the Group is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The National Council for Sustainable Development is responsible for implementing and monitoring the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The National Council for Sustainable Development is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and consists of two MPs, all relevant ministries, representatives from the employers' union, members from the academic and civil sectors. Through the work of the Council, all members of the body can participate in the implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Minister of Labour and Social Policy is a member of the National Council for Sustainable Development. The National Council for Sustainable Development and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, who is in charge of economic issues and the coordination of economic departments, are responsible for

the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Mechanisms to ensure the participation of women and girls from marginalized groups

On the session held on October 4, 2022, by decision of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the National Coordination Body for monitoring non-discrimination situations and the implementation of laws, by-laws and strategic documents in this area ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia", No. 218/2022) was established.

The coordinator of this body is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and it is composed of 36 members, representatives of state institutions, local self-government units, associations, unions, employers' associations, and independent experts.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), through the Department for Equal Opportunities, ensures the transparent involvement of civil society representatives, including those representing marginalized groups of women and girls, in the policy-making process. This involvement encompasses the creation of policies related to gender equality, equal opportunities, and protection against discrimination in every stage of the process.

36. Contribution of stakeholders in the preparation of this National Report

In preparing this report, all line ministries under the Government, along with relevant state institutions and authorities, were involved. The process was coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with support from the local office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The report draws on input from various stakeholders and is based on existing data and analyses at both national and local levels, including those conducted by civil society organizations. It evaluates progress on gender equality and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action during the reporting period.

37. Action plan and time frame following up on the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

In 2017, the Republic of North Macedonia submitted the sixth periodic report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in 2018, the Committee published its conclusions and recommendations. The last national report for the Universal Periodic Review was submitted and adopted in 2024. The country does

not have separate action plans for following up the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Universal Periodic Review. Monitoring of the fulfilment of obligations and recommendations is carried out through the Inter-ministerial Body for Human Rights, which functions as a national mechanism for reporting and implementing the recommendations received from the bodies of the conventions and the Universal Periodic Review. The body was established in 2012 and is managed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The body includes an expert group responsible for consolidating all received recommendations, including those related to the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women. The implementation of the recommendations received during the Universal Periodic Review is conditioned by the type of recommendation itself, whether it is about areas in which it is necessary to take continuous measures for its promotion or recommendations for legislation, which includes a detailed analysis of the relevant domestic legal framework and the accession to or ratification of international agreements. Efforts are made to initiate the implementation of accepted recommendations as soon as possible after their reception and approval by the Government, continuing until the next UPR cycle.

Section Five: Data and statistics

38. Areas of progress in terms of gender statistics at the national level

The State Statistical Office (SSO) is the coordinator of the country's statistical system and responsible for the production and dissemination of gender statistics, in accordance with the Law on State Statistics, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Law on the Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and other relevant laws and strategies, as well as international commitments undertaken by North Macedonia. The SSO defines statistical methodologies and standards to be applied in North Macedonia and ensures the protection of data collected from individuals and from legal entities.

Published laws, regulations or statistical programmes/strategies that determine the development of gender statistics

The Strategic Plan of the State Statistical Office for 2022-2024¹¹⁷ provides a framework under which the SSO determines its basic priorities, goals and development programmes aimed at integration into the European Statistical System, strengthening the institutional environment and statistical infrastructure, developing strategic partnerships and quality management.

The SSO has incorporated the principle of equal opportunities in the production of gender statistics in its Programme of Statistical Surveys 2023-2027.

Conducting of new surveys to produce national baseline information on specialized topics (e.g., time use, gender-based violence, property ownership, poverty, disability)

In the period August - September 2022, the State Statistical Office conducted the first national survey on gender-based violence using the Eurostat methodology. The survey will be conducted every five years and is included in the current Programme of Statistical Surveys 2023 - 2027 of the State Statistical Office. The next national survey on gender-based violence is planned for 2027. These data will enable comparative tracking of national indicators for gender-based violence in the country. The European Institute for Gender Equality can use data from the survey on gender-based violence at the EU level to calculate the domain of Violence and estimate the prevalence of different forms of violence against women and girls in EU member states. The national comparative data for the country that will result from the survey on gender-based violence conducted by the SSO will also make it possible to measure the domain of Violence for North Macedonia by applying the EIGE methodology.

In addition, during the reporting period, the SSO conducted the Structure of Earnings Survey, based on which the indicator of the gender pay gap shall be produced.

In 2023, the SSO published the second report on the measurement of the Gender Equality Index 2022, applying the methodology of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The Index was developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Gender Equality Index is a composite indicator that consists of six core domains (Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power and Health) and two additional domains (Intersecting Inequalities and Violence). It is used as an instrument for monitoring gender (in)equalities within the European Union (EU) and allows a comparative overview of progress towards gender equality with EU member states.

The SSO flagship publication on gender indicators is “Women and Men in North Macedonia,” which has been produced regularly for more than two decades, since 2000, and provides data for several domains.

In addition to the publications from this edition in 2022 and 2023, a specialized [Gender Statistics Platform](#) was also published on the website of the State Statistical Office.

The SSO also regularly conducts population-based surveys on a variety of themes, such as the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), and others. Data from many of these surveys are disaggregated by sex, if not entirely, at least for several key indicators. The survey data is generally available in separate publications, but it is not consistently replicated in “Women and Men in North Macedonia”. Thus, the body of gender statistics produced by the SSO are spread across several publications and while gender-specific data can be accessed through an online database, they are not consolidated.

39. Priorities for strengthening national gender statistics

Among the priority challenges is the enhancement of coordination within the national statistical system. Improved coordination between the SSO and administrative data producers within ministries and other national institutions would also improve streamlining of relevant gender statistics, make data available for evidence-based policymaking, and enable statistics to be accessed by the wider population.

The availability of gender-disaggregated data for all forms of gender-based violence is among the expected results to be achieved under the specific objective 3.1. Prevention, protection and support for victims of gender-based violence of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027. However, the achievement of this result depends on the successfully established system for systematic data collection in the area, which will be in the focus in the coming period.

40. Gender indicators for monitoring the progress on SDGs

Based on an overview of the available data, of the 82 gender-related SDG indicators identified within the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals, of a total of 231 indicators, developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, North Macedonia has produced data for only around 40 percent. Gaps were identified in key areas, in particular: violence against women, poverty and social exclusion, women and food security, and women in local government.

41. Routine disaggregation of data provided by major surveys in the country

The major surveys in the country include routine disaggregation mainly according to: geographic location, sex, age, education, marital status, ethnicity, migration status and income/income group.

Section Six: Conclusions

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Republic of North Macedonia has made significant progress regarding the state of gender equality and the empowerment of women, with a stable national legal framework for the implementation of international obligations in this area. In the period since the last submitted report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the country has experienced several significant changes in terms of policies and processes for the promotion of gender equality, in the complex context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and subsequent economic disturbances. The progress and achievements made during the reporting period are related to the strengthening of the existing national legislative and political system, including the adoption of new laws and policies that include gender perspectives and are mainly in line with the SDG 5. In this period, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia has adopted significant legal decisions, strategic documents, programmes and measures for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of protection against discrimination, violence against women and gender-based violence, economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting, health care and access to sexual and reproductive health, with particular attention to the marginalized and vulnerable group of women.

Despite the efforts to improve the existing legal framework with the adoption of a new Law on Gender Equality, in line with international and European legal standards and regulations, this process has not been finalised yet. In addition, in the following period, the country will need to continue building the capacities of employees in the public administration for promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, as well as increase the financial support for further promotion of gender equality and SDGs. Furthermore, the country needs to

- strengthen the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of laws, policies, strategies, national action plans and measures aimed at improving the state of gender equality and empowering women.
- improve the inclusive/participative process of development of policies, in consultation with target groups/stakeholders (for example, women from rural areas, Roma women, women with disabilities and other marginalized groups).
- continue improving the production and dissemination of gender statistics by building the capacities of the SSO and other actors in the statistical system.

- improve cooperation and introduce clear protocols for cooperation with administrative data producers in the national statistical system to improve streamlining, analysis, use and dissemination of gender statistics.
- increase financial support and strengthen the partnership with civil society organizations that are active in the field of gender equality and empowerment of women to facilitate the implementation of activities at community level.
- intensify reforms in the educational process to implement gender-sensitive programmes that are aimed at eradication of gender stereotypes, prevention of violence and provision of sexuality education to improve reproductive health.
- implement regular education and awareness-raising campaigns to raise awareness of the need to combat gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

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