

COUNTRY GENDER EQUALITY PROFILE OF NORTH MACEDONIA



UN WOMEN, 2023

This publication is prepared within the framework of the UN Women project “Gender mainstreaming advisory services to North Macedonia’s administration at central level – Gender Equality Facility (GEF)”, implemented by UN Women in North Macedonia, in partnership with the Secretariat for European Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with financial support of Sweden.

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Produced by UN Women Programme Presence Office in North Macedonia

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Please cite this publication as follows: UN Women (2023), *Country Gender Equality Profile of North Macedonia*, Skopje, North Macedonia.

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UN WOMEN NORTH MACEDONIA

Skopje, 2023

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAVMS	Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CGEP	Country Gender Equality Profile
CHF	Swiss Franc
CLIP	Country-Level Implementation Plan
CoE	Council of Europe
CPPD	Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organization(s)
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DIPs	Development and Integration Partners
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DV	Domestic violence
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECE	Early childhood education
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ESA	Employment Service Agency
EU	European Union
EUD	EU Delegation
EVAW	Ending violence against women
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross domestic product
GE	Gender equality
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
HDI	Human Development Index

HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPH	Institute for Public Health
Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
LPPD	Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
LSGU(s)	Local Self-Government Unit(s)
MISA	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MKD	Macedonian denar
MoEPP	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organisation(s)
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Assistance Committee
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPD(s)	Organization(s) of Persons with Disabilities

OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SAO	State Audit Office
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEC	State Electoral Commission
SEK	Swedish Krona
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME(s)	Small and Medium Enterprise(s)
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSO	State Statistical Office
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
THB	Trafficking in human beings
TUS	Time-Use Survey
UKIM	University Sts. Cyril and Methodius - Skopje
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USD	US Dollar
VAW	Violence Against Women
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WBL	Women, Business, and the Law
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was produced by UN Women in North Macedonia with the aim of strengthening national understanding and data on the advancement of international, regional, and national commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and to serve as a source for evidence-driven advocacy and programming for national stakeholders, international development partners, and the UN System to advance the gains and overcome bottlenecks at the national, regional, and global level. The document was drawn up with the active engagement of governmental and non-governmental counterparts and should serve as a valuable tool in the national processes for monitoring the country's progress in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

UN Women acknowledges with appreciation the dedication of the participants in consultation and validation sessions, and their contributions to this publication, namely: Svetlana Cvetkovska, Elena Grozdanova, Mabera Kamberi, Darko Docinski, Mladen Frckovski, Maja Papatolevska, Mirjana Aleksevskva and Gordana Trenkoska (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), Elizabeta Buova and Valentina Janevska (Secretariat for European Affairs), Biljana Stevkova and Antoanela Stankovska Budimir (Ministry of Defence), Biljana Shuperliska (Ministry of Interior), Arlinda Beqiri (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Nermina Fakovic and Dzemile Aljilji (Ministry of Health), Jasmina Markovska and Elena Ginovska (State Statistical Office), Emilija Petreska-Kamenjaro and Sasho Bogdanovski (Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services), Selvisha Ramadani and Veljka Juran (Employment Service Agency), Jana Velkovska (General Secretariat of the Government) Irena Nikolov (Organization of the Units of Local Self-Government), Zhaneta Poposka (OSCE Mission to Skopje), Irena Ivanova (EU Delegation to North Macedonia), Emilija Dimovska, Voskre Naumoska Ilieva and Dijana Stojanovikj Gjorgjevikj (Kvinna till Kvinna), Ljupka Trajanovska (Center for Research and Policy Making), Daniela Dimitrievska (Macedonian Women's Lobby), Savka Todorovska (National Council

for Gender Equality), Tanja Ivanova and Vaska Leshoska (Reaktor), Dragana Karovska Chemerska (HERA), Marija Savovska (Akcija Združenska), Elena Kochoska (Polio Plus), Teodora Stolevska (Youth Educational Forum), Natasha Dimova (Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation), Liljana Jonoski (Rural Coalition), Blagica Kirov (ECHO Shtip), Andrea Nakova and Natasha Dokovska (Journalists for Human Rights), Pranvera Kasami and Klaudija Manovska (Institute for Leadership and Public Policy), Vesna Gligorova and Nada Dimitrievska (Centre for Change Management), Valentina Disoska and Elena Blazhevskva (Association of Business Women), Marija Todorovska (Open Gate), Gordana Nestorovska (Radar), and Bojana Jovanovska (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights).

The following representatives of the United Nations entities were also involved in the consultation and validation processes and provided significant feedback for this publication: Tatijana Temelkoska (UNRCO/OHCHR), Jasmina Belcovska-Tasevska and Lilian Kandikjan (UNRCO), Sanja Bojanic and Snezana M. Damjanovska (UNDP), Afrodita Shalja-Plavjanska and Zhaklina Geshtakovska Aleksovskva (UNFPA), Artur Ayvazov (UNICEF), Tihomir Nikolovski, Elena Djartovska Caranovikj and Tatjana Bundaleska (UNHCR), Katerina M. Spasovska (IOM), Maria Jose Chamorro and Emil Krstanovski (ILO), and Vesna Ivanovikj Castarede (UN Women).

Finally, UN Women acknowledges with appreciation the dedication of the team who participated in the drafting of the document, namely: Natasha Amdiju, Memet Memeti, Marjan Petreski (national consultants), Valeria Vilardo, Elisabeth Duban (international consultants), and especially Natasha Dimitrovskva (UN Women) who had the primary responsibility of reviewing, amending, consolidating, and finalizing the publication. Additionally, we acknowledge the support by the colleagues from the UN Women Programme Presence Office North Macedonia and the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, who peer-reviewed the document and provided their valuable comments and inputs.

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Executive summary

The Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) represents an important guide for UN Women and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), as well as for the Government of North Macedonia, civil society, and other development partners, to assess the existing situation regarding gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). This is an analytical and operational document that provides assessment of the key challenges for gender equality in the context of sustainable development in North Macedonia and explores the existing opportunities to address the gaps identified in all the thematic areas analysed in this report. In producing the CGEP, it is UN Women's goal to develop a concise and comparative situation analysis. The CGEP describes and analyses the present situation mainly based on the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), at the same time considering the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) frameworks. In line with UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025,¹ the following critical areas for GEWE have been analysed: governance and participation in public life; women's economic participation; violence against women and girls; women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. Additionally, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action,² the following areas have been analysed, as relevant when considering the situation with GEWE in the country: education and training of women and girls; and women's health and wellbeing. In this CGEP, existing data on gender equality is considered along with the country's existing legislation and policies addressing each of these areas. Each chapter opens with available quantitative data related mainly to the SDG indicators, followed by analysis of relevant policy framework, ending with analysis of the current situation, pointing to the main gaps in achieving gender equality in North Macedonia. Specific focus of the analysis is placed on the COVID-19 impact, where data was available at the moment of drafting of the document.

While significant progress in GEWE can be noted, especially regarding the adoption of relevant strategies and policies, the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, there are still significant gaps that the analysis of the different areas has revealed.

Governance and participation in public life

In North Macedonia, the presence of women in governance, decision-making, and public life is still an area with a wide gender gap. While the critical quota of women's participation in the legislative and judiciary power has been reached, women still face low representation in decision-making positions in the executive power at national and local level. Based on last elections of July 2020, women held 41.7 per cent of parliamentary seats,³ which is a 10 per cent increase compared to 2016, when women held 30.1 per cent of seats.⁴ However, in decision-making at executive power, out of 21 members of the Government composition elected in January 2022, only four are women (one deputy minister and three ministers). Women's representation in governmental positions (prime-minister, deputy prime-minister and minister) is rated at 19 per cent,⁵ which is significantly lower than the percentage in the European Union (34 per cent).⁶ The situation is even more worrying at local level, with only two women elected mayors out the total number of 81 (2.5 per cent) in the last elections.

The low representation of women in executive power at national and local level stems from the systematic discrimination of women in political parties, where it is very rare for women to occupy positions of party leadership. Additionally, political parties lack fundamental protections for their female members, activists, and political representatives, with little or no protection from or regulations against discrimination, harassment, or gender-based violence.

¹ Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025>

² Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

³ Out of the 47 women delegates, 21 representing the SDSM Coalition (out of 46), 17 from the VMRO Coalition (out of 44), five from DUI (out of 15) and four from Coalition Alliance/ Alternativa (out of 12). Source: <https://www.sobranie.mk/segashen-sostav-2020-2024.nspix>

⁴ Women in Parliament (IPU). 2016, <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wip2016-e.pdf>

⁵ Data compiled by the author using official statistics by the Government of North Macedonia.

⁶ Gender Equality Index, available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/power>

Women's overall representation in the judiciary represents a positive trend in terms of women in decision-making positions, with 60.6 per cent of all sitting professional judges (299 women and 194 men) in 2022.⁷ Furthermore, women make up more than half of professional judges in first and second instance courts (courts of appeal), and gender parity exists in the Supreme Court,⁸ and 55.1 per cent of all prosecutors (103 women and 84 men in 2022), but with a smaller share in higher instance courts.⁹

Gendered division of sectors is visible in public administration. As public administration employees, women are best represented in labour and social policy (82.9 per cent), health (72.7 per cent) and education (66.7 per cent), while men make up a larger share of public sector employees in environment (89.3 per cent), transport (85.5 per cent), and agriculture (82.2 per cent).¹⁰ It is also notable that women public servants have higher levels of education on average,¹¹ however, they hold only around 36 per cent of managerial positions.¹²

Analysis of media representation of women in politics has revealed that discriminatory treatment of women is a common practice in Macedonian media. For example, analysis of news coverage of the 2020 elections found that women candidates were present as speakers only 14.5 per cent of the time and were invited to speak during interviews only 17.4 per cent of the time.¹³

Women's economic participation

Observing the labour market in North Macedonia, women are generally disadvantaged, which is primarily visible in the activity and inactivity rates. Namely, in 2021, the activity rate for women was only 44.9 per cent, compared to 67.2 per cent for men, while the employment rate was 38.3 per cent for women and 56.2 per cent for men.¹⁴ Women also represent 62.7 per

cent of the inactive population.¹⁵ Furthermore, gender differences are very visible in the economic status of the employed persons. In 2021, only 19.2 per cent of the employers were women (decrease from 21.2 per cent in 2020), only 22.6 per cent of the own account employees were women (decrease from 24.4 per cent in 2020), while 66.4 per cent of the unpaid family workers were women (increase from 63.9 per cent in 2020).¹⁶ In 2021, only 21 per cent were women in senior management positions in listed companies, and as board members.¹⁷

The gendered division of sectors of employment remains prevalent in North Macedonia. Besides the obvious sectors, such as construction, transport, or mining, where the vast majority of employees are men, the starkest differences are notable in education, where 60.6 per cent of employees are women, health and social protection, where 77.7 per cent of employed persons are women, and ICT, where 65 per cent of employees are men.¹⁸ Overall, women are employed in significantly larger numbers in the sectors that are characterized as "care sectors" and which are mainly paid less.¹⁹

Main barriers for women's employment and participation at the labour market in North Macedonia are the gendered divisions of the household duties and the burden of providing care for children and the elderly, mainly due to the lack of early childhood education services, especially in the rural areas. In 2020, 59.3 per cent of inactive women in the age group 20-64 were inactive due to household duties and responsibilities, while only 2.3 per cent of men were inactive for the same reason.²⁰ Data from the latest available Time Use Survey (2015) reveals that the time women spend on domestic activities is threefold that of men (3.38 hours daily compared to 1.11 hours for men).²¹

Due to the intersecting identity characteristics, some women, such as women in rural areas, Roma women, and women with disabilities, are in an even more disadvantaged position on the labour market. While the employment rate for women in urban areas in 2021 was 51.5 per cent, for women in rural areas it was 38.1%.²² Employment rates are significantly lower

⁷ Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), North Macedonia Evaluation Exercise, 2022 Edition.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ MISA, Annual report of the Register of employees in the public sector, 2022.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Voluntary National Review, North Macedonia, 2020.

¹³ AAVMS. 2020. Gender in the 2020 Election Campaign: Analysis of Gender Issues and the Manner of Representing and Portraying Women and Men in the National Television Stations' Coverage of the Elections.

¹⁴ SSO, Results from the Labor Force Survey 2021, news release: https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.05_mk.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ SSO, MakStat database, Employed by economic status and sex

¹⁷ SSO, MakStat database, Participation of women in senior management positions, in listed companies, board members, number of positions

¹⁸ SSO, MakStat database, Employed persons by sectors of activity of business entity and sex

¹⁹ Bashevskva, M. 2019. Gender Equality Index in North Macedonia, UNDP-UN Women.

²⁰ SSO, MakStat database, Inactive population due to household duties, % of inactive population aged 20-64

²¹ SSO, Time Use Survey 2014/2015.

²² SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia

for Roma women, at only 8 per cent in 2021.²³ There is no available data on employment of women with disabilities, however data on employed persons with disabilities in “sheltered” companies²⁴ shows that men with disabilities are employed in significantly higher numbers (1,269 men and 727 women with disabilities employed in 2021).²⁵

The prevailing patriarchal social norms and the disadvantaged position of women on the labour market, contribute to their discrimination and subordinate position in other areas, such as ownership of property. In North Macedonia, only about 4 per cent of women are owners of the house/property.²⁶ The numbers are overwhelming also looking at ownership of land, where only around 12 per cent of women are owners of land, and half of them are not active in the decision-making related to the land.²⁷ Only 27.8 per cent of properties in North Macedonia are registered to women.²⁸ The situation in rural areas is worse, with only 5 per cent of women holding property rights, usually after widowhood.²⁹

Education and training of women and girls

In education, the number of pupils, both girls and boys, in primary education has been on a decline over the last two decades. There are no significant gender differences in the enrolment rates in primary and secondary education. The most significant difference in enrolment is visible in higher education, with consistently higher numbers for women. For example, in 2021, 59 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education were women.³⁰

The gendered division of fields of study is visible starting from secondary education and continuing into higher education. Among the traditionally “feminine” fields of study are health, personal services, and gymnasium, while electro-technical, agriculture, forestry, and construction, are mainly “masculine” fields of study.³¹

Data show no substantial difference in girls’ and boys’ out-of-school rates in both primary and secondary education. However, the rates for the poorest quintile and among Roma secondary-education students are higher. Primary school attendance for Roma girls is 84 per cent, while for Roma boys is 86.7 per cent, showing a slight lower attendance rate in primary education for both sexes when compared to their non-Roma peers: 98.1 per cent and 97.9 per cent, respectively.³²

There are consistently more women obtaining master’s and doctoral degrees. In 2021, 60 per cent of persons graduated with a master’s degree were women, with the only fields where men were dominant information-communication technologies (ICT), agriculture, and services, with 64 per cent, 59 per cent, and 70 per cent, respectively.³³ 61 per cent of those who obtained a PhD degree in 2021 were women, with men dominant only in engineering, production, and construction with 58 per cent and in agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary science, with 67 per cent.³⁴

When it comes to the teaching profession, in primary and secondary education, the overwhelming majority of teachers are women, while in tertiary education, the higher positions of permanent professors are occupied by more men than women. In 2021, 69.9 per cent of teachers in primary schools in North Macedonia were women, 62.3 per cent in secondary education, while 51.4 per cent of professors and associates in tertiary education were men.³⁵

Women’s health and wellbeing

Despite general health care coverage, women’s access to quality health care services and sexual and reproductive health, especially among Roma and other marginalized groups, remains an issue.³⁶ The country’s performance in life expectancy and reducing infant mortality is improving; however, systemic changes are needed to sustain a declining mortality trend. The neonatal mortality rate in 2021 was 2.9 per 1,000 live births, a decrease from 4.2 in 2020,³⁷ while the infant

²³ MLSP, Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022-2030.

²⁴ According to the Law on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (Off. Gazette no.87/2005, 113/2005, 29/2007, 88/2008, 161/2008, 99/2009, 136/2011, 129/15, 147/15, and 27/16), sheltered company is defined as a company with at least ten employees, of which minimum 40 per cent persons with disabilities.

²⁵ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia

²⁶ GIZ. 2020. Inserter: The right to property guaranteed by the Constitution, only 4% of rural women own property.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ SSO, MakStat database, Enrolled students, citizens of Republic of North Macedonia, in higher education

³¹ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia

³² SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³³ https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.07_mk.pdf

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ SSO, MakStat database, Gender indicators

³⁶ UN North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis Update 2021 North Macedonia, p.10.

³⁷ SSO, MakStat database, Neonatal mortality rate, by region

mortality rate in 2021 was 4.6 per 1,000 live births.³⁸ There is an increase in maternal mortality, with 10.7 per 100,000 live births, an increase from 5.2 in 2020.³⁹ The fertility rate in North Macedonia in 2021 was 1.6 live births per woman.⁴⁰ The adolescent birth rate in 2021 was 15.7 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years.⁴¹ It is estimated that 0.2 per cent of women gave birth under the age of 15, and around 4.5 per cent of women between the ages of 20-24 gave birth before age 18. Among Roma women these percentages are quite different - 0.5 per cent and 28.2 per cent respectively.⁴² Overall, 58.8 per cent of women in North Macedonia make their own decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, while only 39.3 per cent of Roma women, who are married or in a union, make their own decisions about their health.⁴³ Care for sexual and reproductive health is still a problematic aspect in certain municipalities and regions in North Macedonia where the majority of the population would be considered to be in a vulnerable category, such as Roma and older women. Despite the sufficient number of gynaecologists that exceeds the European average, they are not evenly distributed, so there are municipalities where there are not enough or no gynaecologist at all, which along with financial access, represents a barrier to women's care for sexual and reproductive health.⁴⁴

Among women, malignant neoplasm of the breast was the most common cause of neoplasm-related deaths from 2010-2021. The mortality rate ranged from 30.0 in 2010 to 26.4 in 2018, and 32.6 per 100,000 women in 2021.⁴⁵ A more systematic approach to prevention of malignant diseases is generally lacking within the system of health protection.

When it comes to availability of services, there is a significant lack of services and support for older women and during the period of menopause, as well as specialized mental health services for women, addressing post-partum depression and other disorders related to women.

Violence against women and girls

North Macedonia has a robust legal framework to protect women against gender-based violence and domestic violence, with the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the adoption of the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in 2021, which covers all forms of such violence and includes specific definitions of "violence against women" and "gender-based violence," in line with the international standards and the Istanbul Convention. Most of the forms of manifestation of domestic violence are incriminated into the amendments of the Criminal Code, adopted in 2023. Moreover, a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination was adopted in 2020, guaranteeing protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

According to data from the Ministry of Interior (Moi), in 2022, a total of 1,117 crimes related to domestic violence were committed, an increase from 1,056 in 2021 and 992 in 2020, with the vast majority of perpetrators men, at around 92 per cent.⁴⁶ The majority of registered criminal acts are related to domestic violence are bodily harm, while in 2022, there were 7 homicides in the course of committing domestic violence, an increase from 5 in 2021 and 4 in 2020.⁴⁷ The vast majority of victims of domestic violence are women, 79 per cent in 2022, mainly wives of the perpetrators.⁴⁸ In 2022, the largest number of complaints submitted to the Moi refer to psychological abuse in the course of committing domestic violence, with around 84 per cent of complaints.⁴⁹

When it comes to support of women survivors of violence, there is a significant lack of specialised services, as well as lack of human resources engaged as service providers. Also notable is the lack of support to women survivors of violence in the subsequent period, in terms of economic empowerment and housing.

³⁸ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia

³⁹ Institute of Public Health, Report on the health of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021.

⁴⁰ SSO, MakStat database, Total fertility rate

⁴¹ WHO (2021): <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/349683/WHO-SRH-21.148-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴² SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mladenovikj, B. Lucheska, I. 2019. Situational analysis and proposed modalities: Reproductive healthcare in the Republic of Macedonia, HERA – Health Education and Research Association.

⁴⁵ Institute for Public Health, Report on the health of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021.

⁴⁶ <https://data.gov.mk/organization/mbp>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Human trafficking

Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in North Macedonia, and traffickers exploit victims from North Macedonia abroad.⁵⁰ Foreign victims exploited for sex trafficking in North Macedonia typically originate from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, while children, primarily Roma, are exploited by forced begging and sex trafficking through forced marriages.⁵¹ Migrants and refugees traveling or being smuggled through North Macedonia are vulnerable to trafficking, particularly women and unaccompanied minors. In 2021, the number of identified victims of trafficking has increased significantly, with 48 identified victims, compared to 7 in 2020.⁵² Of the 48 identified victims, 40 were foreign citizens, mostly trafficked for forced labour, 36 were men, six were women, five were girls, and one was a boy.⁵³

Child/Early Marriage

Early marriages predominantly occur among Roma community with low economic and social standing of the family and are linked to poverty, school dropout and early pregnancy, which can be detrimental for girls' reproductive health.⁵⁴ In Roma settlements, 45.1 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years old were married before the age of 18, compared to 7.5 per cent in the general population.⁵⁵ The most frequent justifications for child marriage in North Macedonia are pregnancy, the need to preserve the family's "honor," and "a better life in Western countries."⁵⁶

Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction

Women are mainly under-represented in defence and security institutions, which are considered male-dominated sectors. In 2021, in the Ministry of Interior, 80.1 per cent of the employees were men and 19.9 per cent were women.⁵⁷ Over the 80 police stations in North Macedonia, in 2021 only 5 had women as police commanders.⁵⁸ When referring to different positions in the army, 83 per cent of officers were men and only 6 per cent of professional soldiers were women in 2021.⁵⁹ Participation of women among civil personnel in the army is not much better, with 34 per cent.⁶⁰ In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, men outnumber women out of the total number of employees, with 40.3 per cent of women diplomats, and 59.7 per cent of men.⁶¹ Women generally occupy the lower ranks in the top decision-making positions, encompassing only 22 per cent of the directorial, only 34 per cent of ambassadorial, and 12.5 per cent of general consular positions.⁶²

In terms of gender parity in crisis management institutions, more men are represented in the Centre for Crisis Management (around 27 per cent are women) and Directorate for Protection and Rescue (around 29 per cent are women), demonstrating that gender stereotypes of crisis management as a male-dominated occupation still exist.⁶³ At the Directorate for Rescue and Protection, of the total of 23 managerial positions, around 8 per cent are occupied by women.⁶⁴

⁵⁰ US Department of State. 2022. Trafficking in Persons Report: North Macedonia.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Annual Report of National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ UNFPA, Child Marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Overview).

⁵⁵ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018–2019.

⁵⁶ UNFPA, Child Marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Overview).

⁵⁷ Ministry of Interior, Annual report of the public administration bodies on the advancement of the situation with equal opportunities for women and men 2021.

⁵⁸ Jovanoski, Z. 2021. The best army platoon is commanded by a woman - is gender equality improving in the security-intelligence community?, 26.20.2021 (online article) 360 Stepeni, available at: <https://360stepeni.mk/so-najdobriot-armiski-vod-komanduva-zhena-se-podobruva-li-rodovata-ednakvost-vo-bezbednosno-razuznavachkata-zaednitsa/>

⁵⁹ Ministry of Defense, Annual report of public administration bodies on the advancement of the situation with equal opportunities for women and men 2021.

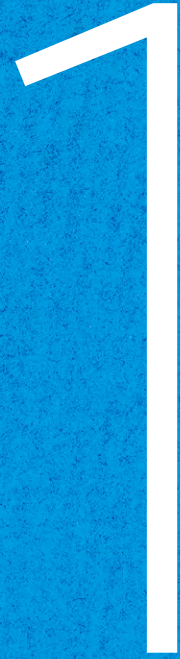
⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gender budgetary statement 2021.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Interview, Coordinator for Equal Opportunities, Directorate for Rescue and Protection (conducted on 02.02.2022)

⁶⁴ Ibid.



INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

A. Background and justification

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires renewed efforts by UN Member States to measure economic, social and environmental progress under the global agenda from a gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) perspective. As part of the UN System-wide investments in this area, and leveraging UN Women's three-pronged mandate - supporting strengthened global norms and standards; promoting effective coordination, coherence and commitment across the UN System towards gender equality; and supporting Member States to translate global norms and standards into national policies and action - UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 commits to increasing national-level knowledge and strengthening national systems to monitor international, regional, and national commitments to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.⁶⁵ In support of the above, since 2019, UN Women regional offices and country offices are developing Country Gender Equality Profiles (CGEPs). The CGEP for North Macedonia is developed as part of the Gender Equality Facility (GEF) North Macedonia project, implemented by UN Women in North Macedonia from December 2020 to September 2023, in partnership with the Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), with the financial support of Sweden. The project is aimed at supporting the Government of North Macedonia in transposing the EU Gender Equality *acquis* by increasing the long-term capacities of key personnel to mainstream gender equality into the planning and implementation processes. This CGEP is the result of all-encompassing sectoral gender analysis and consultations with relevant stakeholders. It provides reliable gender-sensitive information to support UN coordination including around the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025 in North Macedonia.⁶⁶ Additionally, where relevant, the CGEP reflects the findings of the Rapid Gender Assessment conducted in 2020,⁶⁷ and the Socio-Economic Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19

in North Macedonia under the UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19,⁶⁸ as well as the Common Country Analysis Update 2021.⁶⁹

B. Goal and objectives

The purpose of the CGEP is to serve as a baseline for regular monitoring of progress towards GEWE and the SDGs, as well as for joint planning and implementation of GEWE-related work by the UN and its national partners. The CGEP provides a detailed assessment of the key challenges for gender equality in the context of sustainable development in North Macedonia, identifying gender inequalities in the enjoyment of social and economic rights, cultural and political rights, and analysing the underlining root causes of the identified challenges. The CGEP also identifies gaps in data and evidence concerning gender equality, emphasizing the need for filling gender data gaps and exploring available data sources for producing further disaggregated data to be used for gender analysis. The CGEP also assesses the effects of identified challenges on women and men, particularly vulnerable groups, such as girls and young women, women with disabilities, Roma women, women living in rural and remote areas, single mothers, migrant and refugee women, elderly women, and women survivors of violence, among others.

C. Methodology and structure

The CGEP is based on an in-depth data analysis and desk review of information collected from the national statistical agency and other central and local institutions; existing reports, studies, and comprehensive gender analyses conducted in North Macedonia in various policy areas; legislative, policy, institutional and operational frameworks for gender equality; as well as other relevant documents and reports, including those submitted to international bodies.

⁶⁵ Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025>

⁶⁶ Available at: <https://northmacedonia.un.org/en/100160-republic-north-macedonia-and-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework>

⁶⁷ Bashevska, M. 2020. Rapid Gender Assessment on the Impact of COVID 19 on Women and Men in North Macedonia, UN Women.

⁶⁸ UNDP. 2020. Socioeconomic Assessment of COVID-19's Impact in North Macedonia [Version 1, June 12th 2020].

⁶⁹ UN North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis, Update 2021.

Consultative meetings were organized in order to discuss key topics, and to identify priorities in the area of gender equality for the country as a whole and as the focus for the forthcoming period. Consultations were conducted with 24 partners from the national UN agencies, the government, including gender institutional mechanisms, and international partners. Specifically, key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Defence, State Statistical Office, the Organization of the Units of Local Self-Government, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Skopje, and the European Union Delegation in North Macedonia. Further, interviews were conducted with representatives from eight UN agencies, namely the UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). Additionally, online focus group consultations were conducted with representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs)⁷⁰ to identify challenges and progress in achieving GEWE in the country at the grass-roots level, as well as to discuss viable strategies to achieve gender equality in North Macedonia. The consultations took place in February 2022.

The CGEP was validated at three validation sessions held on 18, 19 and 20 April 2023, with relevant partners from public administration, CSOs, and the international community. The comments and notes provided at the validation sessions were accordingly integrated in the final version of this CGEP.

The CGEP presents a summary of the context in which it is developed, analysing the current state of human rights, the situation regarding gender equality, the achievements under the 2030 Agenda, and the importance of developing partner support. This report analyses the policy and legal framework that applies to North Macedonia, focusing on the international commitments to gender equality, domestic legislation, and the strategies that national institutions have adopted, as well as the existing gender institutional mechanisms. The CGEP goes beyond a quantitative analysis and includes a qualitative analysis about the root causes of bottlenecks to the advancement of GEWE and the inter-related nature of the data.

The CGEP is structured in accordance with the thematic focus areas of UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and the Beijing Platform for Action, analysing key findings in the following areas:

- governance and participation in public life;
- women's economic participation;
- education and training of women and girls;
- violence against women and girls;
- women's health and wellbeing;
- women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction.

Where relevant, the analysis includes findings on the impact of COVID-19, while emphasis is also given to the gender differential needs of women and girls from ethnic minority communities and women and girls with disabilities, in accordance with the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach.

Finally, the report identifies specific challenges in the relevant areas and provides specific recommendations for the advancement of GEWE in North Macedonia in the context of the sustainable development agenda, targeting national policy reform, implementation, and behavioural change.

Detailed methodological note is available in Annex 1.

⁷⁰ Full list of participants provided in Annex 1.

2



**NORTH
MACEDONIA
IN BRIEF**

2. NORTH MACEDONIA IN BRIEF

The Republic of North Macedonia is a land-locked country situated in the Balkan Peninsula, sharing borders with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo,⁷¹ and Serbia. Formerly one of the constituent republics of ex-Yugoslavia, North Macedonia declared its independence in 1991, managing to avoid direct involvement in the wars in the region. In early 2001, an ethnic civil war was largely averted mainly due to the diplomatic intervention of the European Union, the United States, the OSCE and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), culminating with the signing of a far-reaching political settlement, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) in August 2001.⁷² North Macedonia is a member of the United Nations, NATO, OSCE, the Council of Europe, and was declared an EU candidate country in December 2005. In 2020, the EU's General Affairs Council decided to open accession negotiations, and in July 2022, the Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations was held with North Macedonia, and the Commission started the screening process.

North Macedonia is ranked 78 of 191 countries included in the **Human Development Index (HDI)**,⁷³ with an HDI score of 0.770. This score places the country with those of high human development (the second-best cohort), however North Macedonia is in the lowest position of all the countries in the region (the countries of former Yugoslavia, as well as Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania). Between 2010-2020, the **Human Capital Index (HCI)** for North Macedonia⁷⁴ ranged between 0.54 and 0.56, meaning that children born in 2023, will be 56 per cent as productive in adulthood as they could have been had they enjoyed complete education and full health.⁷⁵ This is lower than the average for the Europe and Central Asia region and for upper middle-income countries.

In the **Gender Development Index (GDI)**, North Macedonia scores 0.945 (a score of 1.00 represents gender parity), placing it in Group 3 (which corresponds to countries considered to have medium equality in HDI achievements between women and men).⁷⁶ Of the three dimensions of the GDI for North Macedonia, gender gaps are most significant in life expectancy (which is longer for women on average) and income per capita (which is considerably less for women than men). North Macedonia is ranked 37 of 170 countries in the **Gender Inequality Index (GII)**, with a score of 0.134 (here, a score of 1.00 represents the highest level of inequality in all measured dimensions).⁷⁷ Under the GII, women in North Macedonia fare especially poorly in the dimensions of political and labour force participation.

In the **Gender Equality Index**, which measures progress of gender equality in the EU, North Macedonia's score of 62 in 2019 was below the EU average of 67.4.⁷⁸ The 2022 Gender Equality Index marks an increase of 2.5 points, placing North Macedonia only 3.5 points behind the EU average (2021).⁷⁹ Improvement is noted mainly in the domains of "power," "knowledge," and "money," while there is no progress in the domain of "time" and only a slight change in the domain of "health." The most significant difference with the EU average is in the domains of "money" and "time", which are 18.1 and 9.1 points behind the EU average, respectively.⁸⁰

North Macedonia ranks 69th (out of 146 countries) with a score of 0.716 in the World Economic Forum's **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)** 2022,⁸¹ with the lowest ranking in economic participation and opportunity and the highest in political empowerment (score of 1.00 corresponds to gender

⁷¹ All references to Kosovo within this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

⁷² Available at: <https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622>

⁷³ UNDP, Human Development Report 2021/22: https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf.

⁷⁴ https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/hci/HCI_2pager_MKD.pdf

⁷⁵ UN North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis, Update 2021.

⁷⁶ 2021/22 HDR Technical Note: https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22_HDR/hdr2021-22_technical_notes.pdf

⁷⁷ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index-/indicies/GII>

⁷⁸ Bashevska, M. 2019. Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia, UN Women

⁷⁹ Bashevska, M. 2019. Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia, UN Women

⁸⁰ [https://eige.europa.eu/about/eu-candidate-countries-and-potential-candidates/north-macedonia?language_content_entity=en-:-:text=North Macedonia published two Gender, and Money \(+2.2](https://eige.europa.eu/about/eu-candidate-countries-and-potential-candidates/north-macedonia?language_content_entity=en-:-:text=North%20Macedonia%20published%20two%20Gender,%20and%20Money%20(+2.2)

⁸¹ https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf

parity). The 2021/2022 **Women, Peace & Security (WPS) Index** ranks North Macedonia 44th among 170 countries, a deterioration compared to 2019/2020 (when the country ranked 37th),⁸² with sluggish or no improvement in categories such as discriminatory norms, son bias,⁸³ and intimate partner violence.⁸⁴ The country scores far above the global average on women's parliamentary representation and on the absence of legal discrimination and there have been no reported deaths from organized violence.⁸⁵ With a score of 1.704, North Macedonia ranked 36th (out of 163 countries) in the **Global Peace Index (GPI)** 2022,⁸⁶ holding the first place amongst the countries of the Western Balkan region. The intensity of internal conflict indicator had the greatest improvement and is now at its lowest level since 2016, while the lowest score is in the indicators for security officers and police (the number per population), political instability, and access to weapons.

When it comes to political and civil rights and freedoms, North Macedonia is still seen as a partly free country, with a score of 67 out of 100 in the **Freedom in the World** ranking by Freedom House 2022.⁸⁷ As per the **World Rule of Law Index**,⁸⁸ the overall score for North Macedonia has dropped from 0.55 in 2015 to 0.53 since 2020, compared to the global average of 0.55 and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia regional average of 0.50 in 2022, placing the country 63rd among 140 countries and 3rd in the region (among 14 countries). North Macedonia is ranked 85th of 180 countries in the 2022 Transparency International **Corruption Perception Index**,⁸⁹ with a score of 40 out of 100, showing slight improvement from 2021 and 2020.

According to the most recent population census (2021), 1.84 million people live in North Macedonia, which is a decline of around 10 per cent compared to the previous census of 2002. The declining population is due to multiple factors, the most significant of which are the high outmigration rate since 2009 and the decline in the fertility rate. For the first time, there are more women than men in North Macedonia, accounting for 50.4 per cent of the population.⁹⁰

Macedonian households on average have 3.1 members.⁹¹ The average age of the population in 2021 was 41.7 for women and 39.9 for men, and women live longer than men by about four years. While the share of girls (0-14) in the population declined from 24.1 per cent in 1994 to 16.3 per cent in 2021, that of elderly women (65+) increased from 9.3 per cent in 1994 to 18.6 per cent in 2020.⁹² In 2018, a total of 12.1 per cent of the older population were living alone, compared to 32.5 per cent in the EU (26), with the share of older women living alone higher (17.7 per cent) than that of men (7 per cent), and a greater proportion of older women living in other types of households, with other family members, friends or other people (36 per cent), compared to men (15.2 per cent).⁹³

Ethnic Macedonians comprise 58.4 per cent of the population, and ethnic Albanians make up 24.3 per cent, while the rest of the population consists of Turks, Roma, Serbs and other minorities.⁹⁴ Roma are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the country, especially Roma women. For example, the employment rate for Roma women is considerably lower than for non-Roma women, while Roma women also have the highest incidence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in North Macedonia - factors that contribute to their lower completion rate of formal education and under-representation in the labour market. More detailed information and data pertaining to Roma women and girls is provided throughout this CGEP, where relevant.

Since the 1990s, North Macedonia has made considerable progress in terms of economic development and integration into global markets. Being an upper-middle income economy, it still faces a large gap when compared to the living standards in the EU: the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was 42 per cent of the EU-27 average in 2021, an increase from 38 per cent in 2020.⁹⁵ Overall, 21.8 per cent of the population was at-risk-of-poverty in 2020, with no significant difference between women and men (21.9 per cent and 21.7 per cent, respectively).⁹⁶ Single parents with children (41.6 per cent at risk) and households of two adults with three or more children (45.6 per

⁸² <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>

⁸³ "Son bias" reflects a preference for boys, which indicates serious discrimination against girls and women.

⁸⁴ North Macedonia ranks better than Bosnia and Herzegovina (56th), Albania (58th), Kosovo (77th), similar to Montenegro (42th) and worse than Serbia (34th).

⁸⁵ <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>

⁸⁶ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

⁸⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2022>

⁸⁸ <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2022/North%20Macedonia/>

⁸⁹ <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/north-macedonia>

⁹⁰ SSO, Census 2021

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ WHO (2021) Older people and access to health care in North Macedonia, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, p.22.

⁹⁴ SSO, Census 2021. 7.2 per cent of the population was not surveyed and information was collected from administrative sources.

⁹⁵ Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/461f3dd9-d3de-42e4-b12b-74ec5858dccc?lang=en>

⁹⁶ SSO, Laeken poverty indicators, 2020, news release: https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/4.1.22.40_mk.pdf

cent) have the highest at-risk-of-poverty rates by household.⁹⁷ The **Gini Coefficient Index** for inequality of income distribution in 2020 was 31.4 per cent.⁹⁸

North Macedonia has made significant advancements related to GEWE, with a robust national legal framework to implement international commitments in this area. The 1991 Constitution (Article 9) provides for equality of all citizens regardless of sex, race, skin colour, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status. However, unlike the constitutions of some EU Member States, it does not have a separate provision on equality between women and men. The country has ratified the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁹⁹ and the Optional Protocol in 1994. As a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995),¹⁰⁰ North Macedonia made commitments to its implementation at the Fourth World Conference of Women in September 1995. In 2019, the country submitted its Report on the application of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the results of the 2nd special session of the UN General Assembly (2000) – Beijing +25.¹⁰¹ In 2017, the country ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women (the Istanbul Convention),¹⁰² and in 2022, North Macedonia submitted its first report to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO).¹⁰³

The country has a national legal framework to protect women's rights and gender equality, with three key laws at its centre: the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 2006 and amended in 2012,¹⁰⁴ the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination adopted in 2020,¹⁰⁵ and the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence adopted in 2021.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, several national strategic and policy documents are in place to advance GEWE in the country, mainly the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2022-2027,¹⁰⁷ the National Action Plan for the

implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018-2023),¹⁰⁸ and the second National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2020-2025).¹⁰⁹

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality

In terms of institutional mechanisms, 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.¹¹⁰ 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 in the MLSP with relevant information on the situation concerning progress in gender equality and monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy on 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.¹¹¹

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

¹⁰⁰ Available at: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA_E.pdf

¹⁰¹ Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/North_Macedonia.pdf

¹⁰² Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>

¹⁰³ <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-inf-2022-5-state-report-north-macedonia/1680a618d5>

¹⁰⁴ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 6/12, 166/14.

¹⁰⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 258/2020.

¹⁰⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 24/2021.

¹⁰⁷ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3m91h1W>

¹⁰⁸ Available at: https://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-nacionalniot-plan-za-sproveduvanje-na-konvencijata-za-sprecvanje-i-borba-protiv-nasilstvoto-vrz-zen.nspix

¹⁰⁹ Available at: <https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/2020-2025.pdf>

¹¹⁰ OSCE. 2020. Gender Matters! Manual for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, p.20.

¹¹¹ Report of the Government of the Republic of Northern 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 +25, 30 April 2019.

As a parliamentary republic, the 120-seat Parliament of North Macedonia is elected by proportional representation for four-year terms. The President is elected to as many as two five-year terms through a direct popular vote. The unicameral Assembly elects the Prime Minister, who is head of the government and holds most executive power. 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.¹¹²

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.

Gender statistics and data

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,¹¹³ the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men,¹¹⁴ the Law on the Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence,¹¹⁵ 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.¹¹⁶

According to the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Art. 18), all private and state legal entities are required to collect, record and process statistical data, to produce sex-disaggregated data and to submit it regularly to the SSO. 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 programs aimed at integration into the European Statistical System, strengthening the institutional environment and statistical infrastructure, developing strategic partnerships and quality management.¹¹⁸

The SSO flagship publication on gender indicators is "Women and Men in North Macedonia,"¹¹⁹ which has been produced regularly for more than two decades, since 2000, and provides data for several domains. 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.¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹

An overview of existing gender statistics for North Macedonia reveals that some of the data are sourced from the SSO's own censuses and regular surveys, while some are from administrative sources. Examples for the latter include wage statistics from the Public Revenue Office, educational data from the Ministry of Education and Science, data on violence against women from the Ministry of Interior and Centres for Social Work, among others. One weakness of the administrative data is that the producers of official data do not necessarily follow a systematic or coordinated approach, making it challenging to compare data from various sources.

Based on an overview of the available data, of the 82 gender-related SDG indicators identified within the global indicator framework for the Sustainable

¹¹² Jovanova, E. 2019. Number and supra-party cooperation of the MPs as a factor for strengthening their influence, Parliamentary Institute, Assembly of RSM.

¹¹³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 54/1997, 21/2007, 51/2011, 104/2013, 42/2014, 192/2015, 27/16, 83/18, 220/18, 31/20.

¹¹⁴ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 6/12, 166/14.

¹¹⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 24/2021.

¹¹⁶ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

¹¹⁷ Available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/StrateskiPlan/StrategiskiPlan_2022-2024_mk.pdf

¹¹⁸ UN Women (2022) Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PublikaciiPoOblast.aspx?id=23&rbrObl=37>

¹²⁰ UN Women (2022) Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Development Goals, of a total of 231 indicators,¹²² developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, North Macedonia has produced data for only around 40 per cent.¹²³ Gaps were identified in key areas, in particular: violence against women, poverty and social exclusion, women and food security, and women in local government.

In summary, North Macedonia is well on the path to strengthening its system for collection, use, analysis, and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data.

However, some crucial challenges remain. 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.

Table 1

Summary of data availability for gender-related SDG indicators

SDG	Total number of indicators	Gender-related SDG indicators	Data available for gender-related SDG indicators
1	13	7	4
2	14	4	2
3	28	16	16
4	12	9	8
5	14	14	8
6	11	2	0
7	6	2	0
8	16	7	7
9	12	1	1
10	14	1	1
11	14	3	2
12	13	0	0
13	8	2	0
14	10	0	0
15	14	0	0
16	24	11	9
17	14	2	1
TOTAL	231 ¹²⁴	82	59

Source: Mapping Matrix for the Gender-Related SDG Indicators, prepared in the framework of the UN Women “Gender Equality Facility” project in collaboration with the State Statistical Office (unpublished)

¹²² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

¹²³ Source: Mapping Matrix for the gender-related SDG Indicators, prepared in the framework of the UN Women GEF project in collaboration with the State Statistical Office (unpublished)

¹²⁴ The total number excludes indicators that are repeated under two or three different targets, see: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

3

**PARTNERSHIPS
FOR GENDER
EQUALITY**

3. PARTNERSHIPS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

UN Women, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the EU Delegation in North Macedonia, the OSCE Mission to Skopje, as well as other UN Agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, and UNFPA, are the main international actors working on GEWE in North Macedonia. The efficient programming of the international community and coordination, ensures further support for gender equality initiatives.

There are 18 UN Agencies in North Macedonia.¹²⁵ Their work has been guided by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, with twenty agreed outputs in four strategic focus areas that respond to the country's needs and make use of the UN's comparative advantages: inclusive prosperity; quality services for all; healthy environment; and good governance.¹²⁶ The UNSDCF recognizes gender equality, inclusion of marginalized and excluded groups and the centrality of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle, as cross-cutting in all thematic areas and serving as a key unifying criterion for the identification and implementation of programmatic interventions by the UN system in the country. Therefore, the UNSDCF focuses on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups: youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET); women and girls from ethnic communities; women and girls with disabilities; older women; the Roma community; children from ethnic communities and those at risk; people with disabilities; refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people; people in rural areas / small farmers; and older persons.¹²⁷

Strategic partnerships with different government structures have been crucial for the work of the UN in advancing GEWE in North Macedonia, led by UN Women. Over the course of the UNSDCF implementation, the UN has played an important role in providing support to the authorities at different levels in North Macedonia to identify strategic issues, to ensure commitment to and achievement

of normative standards (through programming and implementation), and to design and promulgate laws, strategies, and policies that foster gender equality.

In North Macedonia, **UN Women** supports government and civil society efforts to fulfil national and international gender equality commitments, particularly in enacting laws and strategies to meet its obligations under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Istanbul Convention, and those stemming from the EU *acquis* and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Priority has been given to such highly relevant areas as normative standards, gender mainstreaming, gender responsive budgeting (GRB), eliminating violence against women (EVAW), and women in leadership and governance. The extensive work of UN Women in North Macedonia encompasses gender mainstreaming support to the country's EU (pre-)accession path, targeting central and local governments for systematic and sustainable integration of a gender perspective at all stages of policy and budgetary processes. Additionally, UN Women works with public officials to provide improved integrated domestic violence protection and prevention services. Furthermore, at the systemic level, UN Women has contributed to numerous processes related to gender responsive budgeting (GRB), strengthening the capacities of public administration employees and other structures on central and local levels to understand and apply GRB in planning, budgeting, and implementation processes. Finally, UN Women supports the implementation of national commitments to advance women in security sector reform and in the implementation of National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325.

UNDP, in collaboration with UN partners and the global community, has prioritized gender equality as a core aspect of their work across diverse groups. This approach entails two key components: integrating gender considerations throughout all programs and interventions (gender mainstreaming) and implementing targeted initiatives to empower women and girls. Significant efforts are dedicated to advancing gen-

¹²⁵ FAO, ILO, IOM, OHCHR, RCO, UN Women, UN-Habitat, UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNOPS, and WHO.

¹²⁶ <https://northmacedonia.un.org/en/100160-republic-north-macedonia-and-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework>

¹²⁷ UNSDCF 2021-2025, p.12

der-responsive public policies and services that deliver for all citizens, promoting measures that offer more opportunities for women to be more competitive on the labour market, including increased participation of women in STEM studies and careers, promoting community-based models that ensure that both women and men shape and benefit from solutions to crises, as well as improving the response to gender-based violence.

One of **UNICEF**'s important contributions to the prevention and elimination of stereotypes and prejudice against women and girls is the revision of school curricula from a gender perspective, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, both in terms of content and visual presentation. UNICEF has also raised concern over the lack of reliable (sex-disaggregated) data to identify problems and measure poverty, particularly for women-headed households. In 2020, UNICEF prepared an Analysis of the Situation of Women and Children in the Republic of North Macedonia in order to identify and address barriers to, and opportunities for, full achievement of the rights of all children living in North Macedonia, especially in relation to equity and gender. The challenge for all key actors will be to institutionalise identified best practices.

UNFPA supports the implementation of the Law on the Prevention and Protection against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, adopted in January 2021. The support is operationalized through a robust legal and policy framework that is multi-sectoral, including addressing perpetrator engagement and leveraging the media. It supports improvements to access and quality of survivor-centered services, in a multi-sectoral fashion, as well as of the system for data collection and utilization in line with the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) minimum standards. Regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH), UNFPA supported national efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and ensure continuity in the provision of quality SRH services, including through mobile gynaecological clinics that provide accessible, affordable, acceptable and quality SRH services to rural and remote populations. In line with the WHO Global Strategy for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer, UNFPA focuses on this preventable disease that is a leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. UNFPA is also strengthening the capacities for effective perinatal care that directly contributes to improving maternal and newborn health outcomes.

UNHCR cooperates with the Department for Asylum of the Ministry of Interior (Mol) and has a Partnership Agreement with MLSP. The field of work covers social services, legislative changes, access to services for victims of GBV, asylum seekers, and persons without citizenship, among others. UNHCR supports and cooperates with CSOs providing free legal aid to asylum seekers.

EUROPEAN UNION: The EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to North Macedonia, helping the economy in implementing reforms that bring it closer to the *acquis*, particularly concerning strengthening the rule of law and improving the work of the public administration. The EU's financial support to the economy and the region has been provided through both temporary support, such as COVID-19 assistance packages, and long-term investment programmes and funds through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), European Investment Bank loans, Western Balkans Investment Framework grants and others. In addition to a total of 1.2 billion EUR provided to North Macedonia by the EU between 2007 and 2020 under the IPA I and II, the EU is providing an additional 14.2 billion EUR to the region under IPA III for the period 2021-2027 to improve rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy; increase good governance, *acquis* alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication; speed up the green agenda transition and sustainable connectivity; increase competitiveness and inclusive growth; and support territorial and cross-border co-operation.¹²⁸ In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Macedonia received 220 million EUR in grants and financing from the European Commission's 3 billion EUR Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) package for enlargement and neighbourhood partners that aims to help the country limit the economic fallout of the pandemic.¹²⁹ The EU Delegation (EUD) in North Macedonia considers gender equality to be a cross-cutting issue which is taken into account in all financial instruments, both in development and during the implementation phase. The efforts of the EUD are in line with the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,¹³⁰ and the third EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III),¹³¹ which introduces stringent rules for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming throughout all new actions in external relations. GAP III is further adapted to the national context through the Country-Level Implementation Plan for North Mace-

¹²⁸ OECD, North Macedonia: Economy Profile 2022.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ European Commission, 5.3.2020, A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, COM(2020) 152 final.

¹³¹ European Commission. 2020. Together towards a Gender Equal World – EU Gender Action Plan III, an ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action.

donia (CLIP), adopted in 2022.¹³² The CLIP creates both political and programmatic commitments on gender equality, with the overall purpose to ensure support for the effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks on gender equality and women's rights, mainstreaming gender equality into EU integration and pre-accession assistance and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality in line with EU standards. Furthermore, the first Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia,¹³³ developed under the IPA and funded by the EU, is an important composite indicator, that contributes to the refinement of gender statistics and alignment with the Eurostat methodology.

Through its programmes, the EUD supports improvement of policies, legislation, and its implementation, encouraging gender transformative actions against gender stereotypes and prejudice, including on violence against women and girls. The country's progress towards the EU is monitored annually through the EU Progress Report. From a gender perspective, the European Commission's North Macedonia Progress Reports vary in the levels of gender mainstreaming and attention to gender equality. While there was an overall noticeable improvement in gender mainstreaming in the 2020 Report,¹³⁴ the 2021 shows reduced attention to gender equality issues.¹³⁵ The situation in terms of attention to gender issues was substantially the same in the 2022 Report as in 2021.¹³⁶

SWEDEN: Globally, just under half of the total support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) goes through multilateral organizations and one third of the budget is channelled through UN agencies.¹³⁷ With this partnership and support, Sida contributes to a positive development for people living in poverty, within the priority thematic areas: democracy, human rights, environment and climate, as well as gender equality and the role of women in development. Sida's cooperation with the UN has significantly increased over the past decade, regularly partnering with: UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNOCHA, FAO, and UNOPS.¹³⁸ In 2020, multilateral organisations

received approximately 46 per cent of Sida's total disbursements and 73 per cent of the multi-bilateral support was channelled through UN organisations, amounting to nearly 9 billion SEK (around 850 million USD), of which UN Women received over 500 million SEK (or just over 49 million USD).¹³⁹

The strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2027¹⁴⁰ provides a total of 5.6 billion SEK (around 547 million USD), of which Sida's activities in the Western Balkans comprise approximately 4.9 billion SEK (around 478 million USD). In the Western Balkans, Sweden's development assistance focuses on contributing to building closer ties between the countries and the EU and complementing EU activities related to fundamental reforms. Among others, activities focus on building and strengthening transparent, responsible, independent, and more efficient public administration at national and local level; supporting civil society in creating inclusive dialogue, promoting respect for democracy and contributing to increased trust in society; developing opportunities for employment with decent working conditions; and prioritizing marginalised groups. In the area of gender equality, Sida activities focus on reducing gender discrimination, strengthening women's economic empowerment and rights, and supporting women human rights defenders, increasing women's influence and participation in political processes, and increasing access to and respect for their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence and changing social norms.

In North Macedonia, Sweden is focusing its cooperation and development program on democracy, human rights, rule of law, climate and environment, and peace, as well as supporting the EU accession process of the country.¹⁴¹ The total development assistance for North Macedonia in 2021 amounted to 8.49 million USD, with 1.08 million USD support to UNDP, 1.05 million USD to UN Women, just over 790,000 USD to UNICEF, and just under 750,000 USD to UNOPS.¹⁴² The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment has been a major theme within Sweden's cooperation framework, with a substantial focus on

¹³² Available at: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU%20GAP%20III%20CLIP%20for%20North%20Macedonia%202021-2025.pdf>

¹³³ <https://eige.europa.eu/news/north-macedonia-publishes-its-own-gender-equality-index>

¹³⁴ Kvinna till Kvinna. 2020. Is the glass half full or half empty? - Gender analysis of 2020 EC Country Reports for the Western Balkans.

¹³⁵ Kvinna till Kvinna, 2021. A stitch in time saves nine – Gender analysis of 2021 EC Country Reports for the Western Balkans.

¹³⁶ Kvinna till Kvinna, 2021. A stitch in time saves nine – Gender analysis of 2021 EC Country Reports for the Western Balkans.

¹³⁷ Sida. 2021. Sida's support to United Nations Organisations, Portfolio Overview 2021.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2027.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/countries-and-regions/north-macedonia>

¹⁴² Retrieved from Openaid website: <https://openaid.se/en/activities?filter=2022,MK,SE-6,,,false,all>

gender equality, women's empowerment, and countering violence against women. Support to local organisations working on promoting women's rights, combating GBV, fostering women's political participation, and protecting women's sexual and reproductive rights, is extended through the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. Through the organisation We Effect, Sida supports local organisations working in rural areas to promote entrepreneurship, competitiveness and productivity, and works to ensure that more people in rural areas, especially women and youth, find employment. Moreover, Sweden supports the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), which works to reform and increase democratic control of the security and intelligence services in the country.

SWITZERLAND: Globally, through more than 500 programmes and projects, the South and Global Cooperation of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) focuses on 10 thematic areas, adapting its priorities according to the needs of the 21 cooperation partner countries and regions, with gender equality as a cross-cutting theme.¹⁴³ The financial means awarded to international cooperation grew steadily until 2015, to reach the Swiss Parliament's target of 0.5 per cent of official development assistance, stalling from 2015 until 2020, when there was an increase to the funds related to additional credit to support international efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴⁴ Since joining the UN in September 2002, Switzerland has been an active member, participating in the broad policy decision-making processes for the various UN agencies and for international development cooperation as a whole.¹⁴⁵

Swiss cooperation supports the Western Balkans in their transition to a social market economy and democracy, helping to restore stability and improving opportunities for the people.¹⁴⁶ Switzerland has been supporting North Macedonia's political, social, and economic transition since 1992. Switzerland was one of the largest and most engaged among the limited number of bilateral donors with 21 million CHF (around 24 million USD) in 2019 among the official development assistance from the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) donors to North Macedonia (around 67 million USD in 2018).¹⁴⁷ In 2020, total Swiss expenditures in North Macedonia were 17.6 million CHF (around 20.2 million USD), of which 12.5 million CHF (around 14.4 million USD) was allocated through the SDC and 5.1 million CHF (around 5.9 million USD) was allocated through the Economic Cooperation and Development Division of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).¹⁴⁸

Swiss cooperation in North Macedonia is aligned with the country's EU-driven reforms and localised efforts to achieve the SDGs, pursuing change in the areas of economic development, the environment and climate change, human development, and peace-building and governance.¹⁴⁹ The overall goal of Swiss cooperation in North Macedonia is to support the country to build a socially inclusive democracy and market economy, while ensuring sound natural resources governance and resilience to climate change.¹⁵⁰ Gender equality is considered a transversal topic within the Swiss Cooperation Programme 2021-2024, to be systematically integrated in analyses and in the design, implementation and monitoring of all Swiss projects/programmes in North Macedonia. Special attention is dedicated to measures to empower women to strengthen their roles and increase their presence in governance, politics and the economy, acknowledging the key role of gender-disaggregated indicators, targets and data in measuring and closing gender gaps.¹⁵¹ Outcome 1.1 of the Democratic governance portfolio of the Programme is specifically focused on transparent and efficient decision-making and inclusive, gender-responsive public finance management.¹⁵² Furthermore, in addition to programmes dedicated to leaving no one behind (LNOB), all projects/programmes are to be designed according to the do-no-harm approach. In the context of Swiss cooperation in North Macedonia, the groups considered to be at risk of being "left behind" include people living in rural areas, and especially small-scale farmers; women, and especially women from ethnic minorities and from rural areas; youth and especially youth in the NEET category; the Roma community; and people living with disabilities.¹⁵³

¹⁴³ Swiss International Cooperation – Annual Report 2020.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/partnerships-mandates/partnerships-multilateral-organisations/un-agencies.html>

¹⁴⁶ Swiss International Cooperation – Annual Report 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Swiss Cooperation Programme in North Macedonia 2021-2024.

¹⁴⁸ Swiss International Cooperation – Annual Report 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Swiss Cooperation Programme in North Macedonia 2021-2024.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

OSCE: The OSCE Mission to Skopje supports North Macedonia in the processes of development of legislation and policies related to gender equality, starting from the development of the very first Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2006), the amendments in 2012, as well as the current drafting of a new Law on Gender Equality and its by-laws. Gender mainstreaming is enhanced through support for developing anti-discrimination legislation and policies, including the drafting and enactment of the new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, establishment and strengthening of the CPPD as a mechanism and national coordinative body for policymaking, and capacity-building of key stakeholders. The OSCE provides continued support to the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors, the State Electoral Commission, and other public administration bodies. Furthermore, the OSCE has been supporting the Assembly of North Macedonia since 2017, with priorities to create a more independent and representative assembly that mainstreams a gender perspective into its work and is responsive to citizen's needs.¹⁵⁴ One of the most significant contributions of the OSCE in relation to the prevention of violence

against women was the comprehensive regional prevalence survey conducted in 2018 that improved understanding of the issue of violence against women in the region.¹⁵⁵

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: Over several decades, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been the main catalyst for promoting gender equality and advancing women's rights in all areas. Starting from women's political empowerment to the empowerment of rural women, CSOs have seen significant results and generated best practices. Women's organizations have been at the forefront in advocating for amendments to the Electoral Code, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, as well as other important advancements in gender equality policies and measures. Of the identified 69 civil society networks in North Macedonia, gender equality is the main area of work for around 73 per cent, whereas another 33 per cent of networks, including networks focusing on democracy and rule of law, protection of marginalized persons, social protection, and antidiscrimination, include gender equality in their work.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ OSCE. 2020. Gender Matters! Manual for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.osce.org/VAWsurvey/publications?page=1>

¹⁵⁶ Chaushoska, J. 2018. Report on survey for identification of networks in the Republic of Macedonia, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation.

4

KEY FINDINGS

4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1. Governance and Participation in Public Life

Table 2

SDG indicators on women’s political participation in decision-making

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
5.5.1: Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments	<p>Women members of the Parliament of North Macedonia: 32% (2016), 33% (2014), 31% (2006, 2008 and 2011), 18% (2002), 8.4% (1998).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 women mayors out of 81 (local elections 2017) • 4 women mayors out of 81 (local elections 2013) • 0 women mayors out of 85 (local elections 2009) • 3 women mayors out of 85 (local elections 2000) • 0 women mayors out of 124 (local elections 1996) 	<p>41.7% women members of the Parliament of North Macedonia (elections 2020);</p> <p>42.5% (beginning of 2023)</p> <p>19% women in Government (Prime-minister, deputy prime-ministers and ministers)</p> <p>36.5% women councillors in local municipal councils (elections 2021)</p> <p>2 women mayors (2.5%) out of 81 (local elections 2021)</p>
16.7.1: Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups	<p>Employees in public institutions (2016): Women: 53.6% Men: 46.4%</p> <p>Source: MISA</p>	<p>Employees in public institutions (2022): Women: 56.3% Men: 43.7%</p> <p>Age: 18-25 – 1.9%; 26-35 – 16.4%; 36-45 – 29.1%; 46-55 – 28.9%; 56-64 – 23.3%; over 64 – 0.3%</p> <p>Source: MISA</p> <p>Women professional judges for all instances: 60.6% (2022)</p> <p>Women prosecutors for all instances: 55.1% (2022)</p> <p>Source: European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ)</p>

National legal, institutional and policy framework

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men¹⁵⁷ 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 Law on Labour Relations.¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination,¹⁵⁹ as *lex specialis*, 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 Code¹⁶⁰ requires that at least 40 per cent of candidates on party lists are women, allocating every third seat on the lists to a woman, with an additional seat reserved for women every 10 seats, as well as 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 Parties¹⁶¹ stipulates an obligation for political parties to adhere to the principle of gender equality in party structures and positions (Art. 4).

Overview of current trends in governance and participation in public life

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.¹⁶² Women's representation in parliament has been accomplished mainly through the introduction of a gender quota of 30 per cent in 2002, which was raised to 40 per cent with the amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015. The impact of the quotas is clear when considering the positive trend of an increase in women's representation in parliament, from 8.4 per cent after the elections in 1998, 18 per cent in 2002, 31 per cent in 2006, 2008 and 2011 elections, 33 per cent in 2014, and 32 per cent in 2016.¹⁶³ However, in areas and political offices that are outside of the quota, gender inequalities persist. Women are still under-represented in the current 21 parliamentary committees, of which only six are chaired by women (28.6 per cent). Only one committee has a gender-balanced structure.¹⁶⁴

The two bodies within the parliament that deal with gender issues are the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Women Parliamentarian's Club, which is an informal consultative body for the advancement of women. In 2023, the Women Parliamentarian's Club marks 20 years since its establishment. From the independence of North Macedonia in 1991 to the present day, twelve Presidents of the Parliament were appointed, all of them men.¹⁶⁵

All larger political parties in North Macedonia have women's forums, separate structures for women, aimed at strengthening women's political participation and spaces for women to voice their concerns, interests, and priorities. However, it is very rare for women to occupy positions of party leadership. Currently, there are three parties with a woman president (DOM, PEP21, and Voice for Macedonia) out

¹⁵⁷ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 6/2012, 166/2014.

¹⁵⁸ According to Art. 6, women and men must be provided equal opportunities and equal treatment regarding: access to employment, including promotion and work-related vocational and professional training; working conditions; equal payment for equal work; occupational social security schemes; absence from work; working hours, and termination of employment contract, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/MONOGRAPH/71332/109716/F-1464727386/MKD71332%20Eng.pdf>

¹⁵⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 258/2020.

¹⁶⁰ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 40/2006; 136/2008; 148/2008; 155/2008; 163/2008; 44/2011; 51/2011; 142/2012; 31/2013; 34/2013; 14/2014; 30/2014; 196/2015; 35/2016; 97/2016; 99/2016; 136/2016; 142/2016; 67/2017; 125/2017; 35/2018; 99/2018; 140/2018; and 208/2018, and Constitutional Court Decisions U.no. 87/2006, U.no. 93/2014 and U.no. 25/2017

¹⁶¹ Official Gazette no. 76/2004, 5/2007, 8/2007, 5/2008, 23/2013

¹⁶² <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=2&year=2023>

¹⁶³ IDSCS. 2020. Substantive or sterile: Parliamentary representation of women in the Republic of North Macedonia (1990-2020).

¹⁶⁴ National Assembly of North Macedonia, Gender Sensitive Assembly: <https://bit.ly/3nKmkIS>

¹⁶⁵ National Assembly of North Macedonia: <https://www.sobranie.mk/former-presidents-of-the-assembly.nspix>

of around 55 parties.¹⁶⁶ 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.¹⁶⁷ Political parties lack fundamental protections for their women members, activists, and political representatives, and so there is little or no protection from or regulations against discrimination, harassment, or gender-based violence, in any form.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, women experience systematic discrimination within political parties, as seen by the fact that men are able to progress more easily in their position in a political party, while women must “prove themselves” to be able to progress and usually need to have higher levels of education than their male counterparts.¹⁶⁹

In 2022, North Macedonia scored of 0.715 (20 of 146 countries) in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), based on the number of women in parliament, but scored only 0.267 for women in ministerial positions (corresponding to a ranking of 75),¹⁷⁰ indicating the significant difference in women’s representation in the branches of executive power. Out of the 21 members of the Government (prime minister, deputy prime ministers and ministers), in January 2023, only four were women (one deputy prime minister and three ministers), bringing women’s representation to 19 per cent,¹⁷¹ which is significantly lower than the EU average of 33.4 per cent in 2022.¹⁷² Out of 16 appointed deputy ministers in the Government of North Macedonia, only two are women (as of January 2023).

The Government also encompasses four independent bodies and three administrative organizations, with no women in leading positions in any of these bodies.¹⁷³

However, despite the low representation of women in executive positions, public perceptions are mainly favourable toward women as leaders. A survey conducted in 2020 indicated that 84 per cent of respondents believe there should be more women in political positions; 79 per cent say the country should

have a woman prime minister, and 77 per cent respond that they would vote for a woman president.¹⁷⁴

Gender inequalities in policy-making processes are more visible at the local level. In terms of women’s participation in governance and local public life, data reveal persistent absence of women as candidates and elected mayors in the 81 local self-government units (LSGUs) of North Macedonia (80 municipalities and the City of Skopje). From 2005 to 2020, the number of women elected as mayors ranged from none in the 2009 elections to six in the 2017 elections. In 2020, the situation deteriorated, with only two women elected as mayors out of 25 women candidates, across all 81 municipalities. In comparison, in the 2017 local elections, only 15 women stood for mayor out of 260 candidates, and six women were elected.¹⁷⁵ In terms of elected councillors in the 2021 local elections, of a total of 1,347 members of councils, 491 (36.5 per cent) were women.¹⁷⁶ These figures are a clear indicator that there have been no significant efforts by the political elites for inclusion of women in decision-making processes at the local level.¹⁷⁷

In contrast, women’s overall representation in the judiciary represents a positive trend in terms of women in decision-making positions. Women comprised 60.6 per cent of all sitting professional judges (299 women and 194 men) in 2022.¹⁷⁸ Women make up more than half of professional judges in first and second instance courts (courts of appeal), and gender parity exists in the Supreme Court.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, women represent 47.1 per cent of court presidents combined (16 women and 18 men) and 62.7 per cent of all non-judge staff working in courts in North Macedonia.¹⁸⁰

Women are also well-represented among the public prosecution service, making up 55.1 per cent of all prosecutors (103 women and 84 men in 2022), but with a smaller share in higher instance courts.¹⁸¹ Women are just under half of the heads of all prosecution units (10 women and 13 men), but their representation decreases as the level of court increases. Within the public prosecution service, women are 72.2 per cent of all non-prosecutorial staff.¹⁸²

¹⁶⁶ National Democratic Institute. 2020. Violence against Women in Political Parties in North Macedonia, Assessment Report, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Korunovska et al. 2015. Women in Politics: Paths to public office and impact at the local level in Macedonia, Reaktor – Research in Action.

¹⁷⁰ World Economic Forum (2022) The Global Gender Gap Report.

¹⁷¹ Data compiled by the author using official statistics by the Government of North Macedonia.

¹⁷² Gender Equality Index, available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/domain/power>

¹⁷³ Independent bodies: Agency for Youth and Sport, Migration Agency, Food and Veterinary Agency, Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups; Administrative organizations: Geological Institute, State Archive, State Statistical Office

¹⁷⁴ Topuzovska Latkovikj et al. 2020. Women’s Study of the Republic of North Macedonia 2020/2021. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Skopje, p. 64.

¹⁷⁵ Voluntary National Review (VNR), Sustainable Development Goals, North Macedonia 2020.

¹⁷⁶ SEC. 2021. Revised Report on Local Elections 2021, p. 107.

¹⁷⁷ Trajanovski, M. and Gestakovska Aleksovska, Z. 2022. Gender parity in political life – beyond the electoral quota, UNDP, 8.03.2022.

¹⁷⁸ Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), North Macedonia Evaluation Exercise, 2022 Edition.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Table 3

Number of professional judges, by sex and instance in 2022

	Women	Men
Total number of professional judges	299	194
Number of first instance professional judges	232	144
Number of second instance (court of appeal) professional judges	56	39
Number of Supreme Court professional judges	11	11

Source: Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), North Macedonia Evaluation Exercise, 2022 Edition

Table 4

Number of public prosecutors, by sex and instance in 2022

	Women	Men
Total number of public prosecutors	103	84
Number of prosecutors at first instance level	86	61
Number of prosecutors at second instance (court of appeal) level	16	14
Number of prosecutors at Supreme Court level	1	9

Source: Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), North Macedonia Evaluation Exercise, 2022 Edition

Of all public administration employees¹⁸³ in North Macedonia in 2022 (110,465 in total), 56.3 per cent were women and 43.7 per cent were men.¹⁸⁴ Women are best represented as judicial staff (in courts and the public prosecution services, as noted above), but have the lowest representation in public enterprises (where men make up 82.4 per cent of employees).¹⁸⁵ The clear division of male and female dominated sectors is a consequence of predetermined sociocultural models and ideas that define gender roles and gender professions in the society. As public administration employees, women are best represented in labour and social policy (82.9 per cent), health (72.7 per cent) and education (66.7 per cent), while men make up a larger share of public sector employees in environment (89.3

per cent), transport (85.5 per cent), and agriculture (82.2 per cent).¹⁸⁶ Further analysis of public sector employees also highlights the fact that women public servants have higher levels of education on average, having achieved university education, master's and PhD degrees.¹⁸⁷ However, despite the greater number of women employees in the public sector and their higher levels of education, they hold only around 36 per cent of managerial positions.¹⁸⁸ There is no available sex-disaggregated data on public administration employees in managerial and senior level positions, which is crucial for further assessing the existence of a "glass-ceiling"¹⁸⁹ that prevents women from advancing in decision-making positions in the public sector.

¹⁸³ Excluding employees in the Army, the Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Ministry of Interior with its organ, the Bureau of Public Security, as well as in the body within the Ministry of Finance, the Directorate for Financial Intelligence, with status of authorized officials for which only the number and not the structure is in the Register.

¹⁸⁴ MISA, Annual report of the Register of employees in the public sector, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Voluntary National Review (VNR), Sustainable Development Goals, North Macedonia 2020.

¹⁸⁹ "Glass ceiling" is defined as "artificial impediments and invisible barriers that militate against women's access to top decision-making and managerial positions in an organization, whether public or private and in whatever domain." See EIGE: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1099?language_content_entity=en

Table 5

Share of women and men public sector employees, 2022

Type of Institution	Women (%)	Men (%)
Government of the Republic of North Macedonia	61.8	38.2
Public institutions	68.8	31.2
Public enterprises	17.6	82.4
Ministries	46.8	53.2
Municipalities	42.1	57.9
Regulatory bodies	53.3	46.7
Independent state administration bodies	47.1	52.9
National Bank of the Republic of North Macedonia	55.4	44.6
Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia	63.9	36.1
Council of Public Prosecutors	75.0	25.0
Courts	62.7	37.3
Judicial Council	66.7	33.3

Source: MISA, Register of employees in the public sector 2022

In terms of intersectionality between gender and ethnicity, gender disparities are evident in the employment of ethnic minority women in public administration. The Ohrid Framework Agreement¹⁹⁰ called for adequate and equitable representation of ethnic minority groups which, in principle, should imply adequate and equitable representation of women and men from ethnic minority groups. However, this principle has failed to address the issue of gender disparity among the pool of candidates based on their ethnicity, and the result is the exclusion of minority women from public service. For example, Macedonian

women are better represented in the public sector as compared to Macedonian men, as are women from the Bosnian and Vlach communities. Contrary to this trend, Albanian (45.6 per cent), Roma (30.4 per cent), and Turkish (44.1 per cent) women are less represented compared to men from the same ethnic groups (54.4 per cent, 69.7 per cent, and 55.9 per cent, respectively).¹⁹¹ Overall, Roma women are the least represented segment of the population in public administration when data are triangulated per gender and ethnicity. In judicial offices, in particular, there are no women of Albanian, Turkish, or Roma ethnicity in the Judicial Council.

Table 6

Share of public sector employees by ethnicity and gender, 2022

Ethnicity	Women (%)	Men (%)
Macedonian	60.5	39.5
Albanian	45.6	54.4
Bosniak	58.4	41.6
Vlach	58.8	41.2
Roma	30.4	69.6
Serbian	57.2	42.8
Turkish	44.1	55.9

Source: MISA, Register of employees in the public sector 2022

¹⁹⁰ The agreement represents a framework for securing the future of democracy of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and permitting the development of closer and more integrated relations between the country and the Euro-Atlantic community.

¹⁹¹ MISA, Annual report of the Register of employees in the public sector, 2022.

There are no available data on the participation of women with disabilities in governance or in public life generally. According to a focus group discussion with civil society organizations held in February 2022 as part of the CGEP process, there is an urgent need to adopt regulations on the participation of women with disabilities in public and political life through inclusive legislation that is required for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,¹⁹² ratified by North Macedonia in 2011. The intersections of gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities should be addressed across national legislation in order to eradicate both institutional and social barriers for the involvement of women with disabilities in governance and in public life.

Media representation of women in politics

The Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Services prohibits discrimination in the media based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or belonging to a marginalized group.¹⁹³ Despite a special section on raising awareness about the treatment of gender issues in the media in the Regulatory Strategy for Development of Audio and Audio-Visual Activity 2019-2023,¹⁹⁴ discriminatory treatment by mass media targeting women in politics is a common practice.¹⁹⁵

Although women constituted 43 per cent of the candidates in the parliamentary elections in 2020, they received only between 4 and 14 per cent of media coverage.¹⁹⁶ An analysis of news coverage of the 2020 elections found that women candidates were present as speakers only 14.5 per cent of the time and were invited to speak during interviews only 17.4 per cent of the time.¹⁹⁷ Overall, women were presented in the shadow of men and had less access to different means of promoting their platforms and their profiles. In contrast, men were disproportionately represented among experts and analysts in the media, supporting the stereotypical notion that “politics is a male profession”.¹⁹⁸ Political parties’ own narratives did not address gender equality, and even in

instances in which it was mentioned, the discussions were generalized without mentioning concrete measures and interventions for achieving gender equality. The analysis shows that political campaign advertising reinforced gender stereotypes in terms of the expected societal roles of men and women, especially about women’s domestic responsibilities, in opposition to the heroism and professionalism that were depicted as male characteristics. The report pointed out journalists’ lack of gender-sensitivity and their reluctance to cover gender equality issues.¹⁹⁹

Gender-responsive budgeting

North Macedonia has introduced gender responsive budgeting (GRB) as a precondition for public finance management that addresses gender specific needs and ultimately contributes to closing gender gaps in all spheres of economic, social, and political life, thus contributing to development results that can benefit both men and women equally.

The country was first in the region to adopt a Government Strategy for Introducing Gender Responsive Budgeting (2012-2017) which was reinforced through an amendment in the budget circular by the Ministry of Finance, obliging the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to develop gender analyses for selected sectoral programmes and to submit Gender Budget Statements to the MoF along with their annual budgets.²⁰⁰ In order to fulfil these obligations and to unify the methods and procedures to mainstream a gender perspective in sectoral programmes and budgets, the MLSP, with the support of UN Women, prepared a Manual²⁰¹ and Methodology for gender-responsive budgeting for state administration bodies at the central level.²⁰² The Methodology represents an instrument to operationalize specific obligations stemming from the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Budget Circular, which continues to stipulate gender-specific obligations since 2013. Since 2014, the Government Methodology

¹⁹² Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>

¹⁹³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia/North Macedonia no. 184/13 and 13/14, 44/14, 101/14, 132/14, 142/16, 132/17, 168/18, 248/18, 27/19 and 42/20

¹⁹⁴ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Ulkswc>

¹⁹⁵ National Democratic Institute. 2020. Violence against Women in Political Parties in North Macedonia, Assessment Report.

¹⁹⁶ OSCE ODIHR. 2020. Special Election Assessment Mission, Final Report, Early Parliamentary Elections, 15 July 2020.

¹⁹⁷ AAVMS. 2020. Gender in the 2020 Election Campaign: Analysis of Gender Issues and the Manner of Representing and Portraying Women and Men in the National Television Stations’ Coverage of the Elections.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ MLSP, Strategy for introducing Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Republic of Macedonia (2012-2017), available at: http://mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/strategija_eng_rob.doc

²⁰¹ MLSP. 2013. Manual for gender responsible budgeting for the administration of the Republic of Macedonia.

²⁰² MLSP. 2014. Methodology for gender responsive budgeting for state administration bodies at central level.

on GRB serves as the key instrument and a guide for mainstreaming gender in sectoral programmes and budgets at the national level. Currently, the GRB Methodology is applied in sectoral programmes of 13 line ministries and 3 state agencies.

For the first time in 2018, the Government of North Macedonia introduced a gender perspective in the instructions for developing three-year strategic plans for line ministries, in order to strengthen the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming at the national level.²⁰³As a result, the MLSP and UN Women developed a Guide for Gender Mainstreaming in the Strategic Plans for Line Ministries and Other State Administration Bodies²⁰⁴ which aims to assist the process of developing gender-responsive policies, quality strategic plans, and annual works plans of the line ministries and other state administration bodies.

In 2022, the Government and MLSP, in partnership with UN Women, within the project “Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia,” with financial support from Switzerland and Sweden, established a Resource Centre on Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting.²⁰⁵ 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 trainings 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, and 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. Both the CEDAW Committee’s Concluding Remarks²⁰⁶ and the 2020 EU progress reports for North Macedonia²⁰⁷ recommended further work to improve budget transparency and public financial management reforms. Putting in place systems for monitoring and making information about allocations to promote gender equality publicly available would increase transparency of public spending and improve accountability towards gender equality commitments. According to the SDG Tracker data base,²⁰⁸ although the Government of North Macedonia did not introduce a system to track budgetary allocations for gender equality, the country has been assessed with moderate distance to reach the target.

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 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.²⁰⁹

In 2022, the Parliament adopted the new Organic Budget Law²¹⁰ which for the first time includes GE as one of the key budgetary principles, while GRB provisions are incorporated in articles related to the financial plans of the budget users. The Law foresees 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.

²⁰³ See: <https://vlada.mk/podzakonski-akti>

²⁰⁴ Mincheva Kocavska, B. 2022. Guide for Gender Mainstreaming in the Strategic Plans for Line Ministries and Other Administration Bodies, UN Women.

²⁰⁵ See: <https://mtspresursencentar.mk/about-us>

²⁰⁶ UN, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2018. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6.

²⁰⁷ European Commission. 2020. North Macedonia 2020 Report

²⁰⁸ See: <https://ourworldindata.org/sdgs/gender-equality>

²⁰⁹ State Audit Office. 2022. Guidance for mainstreaming gender in audit practices, UN Women.

²¹⁰ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 203/22

Main challenges in women's participation in governance and public life

- Women in North Macedonia have reached the critical quota of participation in the Parliament, but not in local level offices. There are low numbers of women in decision-making positions in local government, with very few women candidates and mayors across the 81 municipalities of North Macedonia, with only two mayors in the current composition. Such low figures point to persisting gender stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination within political parties, where women face many obstacles to advancement.
- In executive offices, in ministerial positions, women's participation is disproportionately lower than men's. The same can be said for senior positions in public administration.
- Data indicate the correlation between gender, ethnicity and participation in public life, showing that disparities are greater within the Roma and Albanian ethnic communities. Women from minority communities are less represented in judiciary on the whole.
- There are no data available related to women with disabilities in governance and public life, pointing to their low participation.
- In terms of media representation of women in politics, overall women in politics receive discriminatory treatment, and traditional societal roles of women and men are reinforced through media coverage. This phenomenon is especially visible during political campaigns.

4.2. Women's Economic Participation

Table 7

SDG indicators on women's economic participation

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
1.2.1: Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	2017: Women – 22.0% Men – 22.4% 2015: Women – 21.5% Men – 21.5%	Women – 22.0% Men – 21.1% Source: SSO (2019)
1.2.2: Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	2015: Women – 41.3% Men – 41.8% 2010: Women – 47.0% Men – 47.5%	Women – 41.1% Men – 41.2% Source: World Development Indicators (2018)
1.3.1: Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable		Proportion of children/households receiving child/family cash benefit: Women – 24.3% Men – 75.7% Proportion of population with severe disabilities receiving disability cash benefit, by sex: Women – 100% Men – 100% Source: SSO (2019), WC (2020)
5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location		Time spent on domestic activities: Women - 3.38 hrs daily, Men - 1.11 hrs daily Time spent on food preparation, dishwashing, cleaning and childcare: Women – 2.1 hrs daily, Men – 0.22 hrs daily Source: SSO, TUS (2014/15)
5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions	Proportion of women in managerial position in listed companies (board members): 21.3% (2020); 16.7% (2019); 19.7% (2018); 23% (2017); 21.7% (2016); 21.1% (2015); 23.6% (2014); 16.9% (2013); 15.8% (2012); 19.2% (2011). Proportion of women in senior management positions (board of directors, executive managers): 25% (2020); 28.2% (2019); 26.2% (2018); 27.9% (2017); 30.4% (2016); 29.5% (2015); 28.8% (2014); 35.4% (2013); 32.4% (2012). Source: SSO	Proportion of women in managerial position in listed companies (board members): 21% Proportion of women in senior management positions (board of directors, executive managers): 25% Source: SSO (2021)

8.3.1: Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex		Informal employment in total employment: Women – 10.5 per cent Men – 15.6 per cent Source: SSO (2020)
8.5.1: Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities	2014: Women – 166 MKD Men – 181 MKD 2010: Women – 176 MKD Men – 188 MKD	Average hourly earnings: Women – 179 MKD Men – 197 MKD Source: SSO, LFS (2018)
8.5.2: Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities		Unemployment rate: Women – 16.2% Men – 16.8% Source: SSO (2020)
8.6.1: Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training	2020: Women – 29.0% Men – 23.6% 2018: Women – 33.9% Men – 25.9% 2016: Women – 34.0% Men – 28.7% 2014: Women – 36.2% Men – 27.8%	Women – 16.8% Men – 18.8% Source: SSO (2020)

National legal, institutional and policy framework

North Macedonia has a strong legal framework that recognizes gender considerations within employment and labour market policies. The Labour Relations Law²¹¹ prohibits discrimination on a variety of grounds, including gender, age, health status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and other personal characteristics. It prescribes that “women and men must be provided equal opportunities and treatment relating to: 1) access to employment, including promotion and vocational and professional training; 2) working conditions; 3) equal pay for equal work; 4) professional social insurance schemes; 5) leave from work; 6) hours of work, and 7) termination of the employment contract” (Art 6(2)). The Law addresses the following forms of discrimination: direct, indirect, harassment, sexual harassment, psychological harassment, and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, birth, and parenthood. However, the Law only regulates

maternity leave and does not recognize the concept of parental leave. A father can use paternity leave only if it is not used by the mother. At the time of conducting the CGEP, a new Labour Relations Law is being drafted that will include specific provisions on maternity, paternity, and parental leave. Furthermore, the Law on Protection from Harassment in the Workplace,²¹² in line with the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, regulates psychological and sexual harassment in the workplace and sets forth measures and procedures for protection. With the adoption of the Law on Minimum Wage in 2017, the gender pay gap has been reduced by equalizing the minimum wage with the national average for workers in the textile, leather and shoe industries, where a majority of employees are women.²¹³

The National Employment Strategy for 2021-2027 and its Action Plan for 2021-2023²¹⁴ includes specific measures for women’s employment and access to labour-market services. Specifically, outcome 2.3 states that all government policies, beyond those concer-

²¹¹ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia/North Macedonia no. 62/05, 106/08, 161/08, 114/09, 130/09, 149/09, 50/10, 52/10, 124/10, 47/11, 11/12, 39/12, 13/13, 25/13, 170/13, 187/13, 113/14, 20/15, 33/15, 72/15, 129/15, 27/16, 134/16, 120/18, 110/19, 267/20.

²¹² Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 79/2013, 147/2015.

²¹³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 11/2012, 30/2014, 180/2014, 81/2015, 129/2015 and 132/2017.

²¹⁴ Available at: https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2021/trud/strategija_vrabetuvanje_2021_eng.pdf

ning labour, must aim to and/or specifically account for the reduction of informality in employment and increase the engagement of women in the labour market. Outcome 3.4 aims at the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, among which women, youth, the long-term unemployed, and people with disabilities, through offering a range of social services and active labour market programs. The Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship for 2019-2023²¹⁵ promotes women's economic empowerment by creating a favourable business environment and supporting women's entrepreneurial potential. The Revised Employment and Social Policy Reform Programme 2022²¹⁶ provides a strategic framework for reducing the gender gap in the economy and improving the position of women in the labour market. In addition, gender perspective is integrated in the National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises for 2018-2023,²¹⁷ 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.

The National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2021-2027²¹⁸ 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. For example, the Strategy only marginally mentions women in outlining objectives to improve agricultural producers' access to the global value chain or to increase employment in agriculture. The National Programme for Agricultural Development and Rural Development 2018-2022²¹⁹ included women from rural areas within strategic goals for establishing a new instrument to support unemployed women, to empower women in rural areas economically, and to create conditions that would retain the female population in rural areas. The Programme for Finan-

cial Support of Rural Development prescribes dedicated financial "support to women active members of agriculture households," in accordance with the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development (Art. 92), to be allocated to "female members of agricultural holdings registered in the Register of Agricultural Holdings." Of the relevant international conventions, North Macedonia ratified the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156). The country has not yet ratified the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) or the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118). In addition, North Macedonia is a party to CEDAW,²²⁰ which includes special provisions on women in employment (Art. 11), more specifically to ensure such rights as the right to equal employment opportunities, the right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to equal remuneration, the right to social security, and to protection against discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy.

Overview of current trends in women's participation in the labour market

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 44.9 per cent in 2021 (versus 67.2 per cent for men), a slight decrease from 45.7 per cent in 2020.²²¹ The employment rate in 2021 was 38.3 per cent for women and 56.2 per cent for men.²²² The unemployment rate was 14.6 per cent for women and 16.4 per cent for men (double the rates in the EU-27, which are 7.4 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively), confirming that inactivity is more characteristic for women who are registered in lower number as job seekers. There is a notable difference between the activity rates for women in urban and in rural areas, with 59.4 per cent of women (compared to 76.4 per cent of men) active in urban areas, but only 45.9 per cent of women (and 78 per cent of men) active in rural areas in 2021.²²³

²¹⁵ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3KmvahOh>

²¹⁶ Available at: [https://www.mts.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2020/ESRP\(r\)%202022%20\(MKD\)%20full.pdf](https://www.mts.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2020/ESRP(r)%202022%20(MKD)%20full.pdf)

²¹⁷ Available at: <https://economy.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/Strategija%20za%20MSP%20-%20finalna%20verzija%2003%2004%202018%20.pdf>

²¹⁸ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3UmhWu>

²¹⁹ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3KGF9J>

²²⁰ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

²²¹ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

Gender differences in activity and employment are even more noticeable among the young population (aged 15-24). The number of employed young men is almost double that of employed young women, with 23 per cent of young men employed in 2021 compared to only 12.4 per cent of young women.²²⁴ Similarly, the employment rate for women aged 15-29 in 2021 was 27.6 per cent, compared to 38.9 per cent for young men of the same age group. The unemployment rate was 29 per cent for young women, compared to 26.7 per cent for young men.²²⁵ Among NEET,²²⁶ again there is a slightly higher proportion of young women, with 26.1 per cent, as compared to 22.6 per cent of young men.²²⁷

Women are also disadvantaged in terms of their economic status within employment. In 2021, only 19.2 per cent of all employers were women (a decrease from 21.2 per cent in 2020), and only 22.6 per cent of women were own account employees (a decrease from 24.4 per cent in 2020).²²⁸ At the same time, women constituted 66.4 per cent of all unpaid family workers (an increase from 63.9 per cent in 2020).²²⁹ The differences are even starker when considering employment in rural areas, where women were 68.2 per cent of unpaid family workers in 2021, and only 10.5 per cent of employers.²³⁰

The labour market in North Macedonia demonstrates gender-based occupational segregation. On one hand, in sectors that are traditionally considered “male,” such as construction, transport, or mining, the vast majority of employees are men. On the other hand, the starkest differences are notable in the education sector (in which 60.6 per cent of employees are women) and in health and social protection (77.7 per cent of employees are women).²³¹ There is a significant gender disparity among employees of the ICT sector, in which women are around 27 per cent of the workforce, but hold a mere 12 per cent of management-level positions.²³² Overall, women are employed in significantly larger numbers in sectors that are characterized as “care sectors” and which have on average lower salaries.²³³ Such occupational

segregation undoubtedly stems from gender-segregation in educational fields.

Vertical occupational segregation also exists in North Macedonia, evidenced by the smaller share of women in managerial positions. Women very often encounter the “glass ceiling” effect, in which they face difficulties advancing to upper managerial positions. In listed companies, in 2021, women held only 21 per cent of positions in senior management and on corporate boards.²³⁴ These figures represent an increase from 16.7 per cent in 2019, but a decrease from 23 per cent in 2017.²³⁵ In comparison, women held only 10.3 per cent of senior management positions of listed companies in 2008.²³⁶ Concerning executive management positions specifically, women hold 25 per cent of such positions in North Macedonia, which is a decrease from 28.2 per cent in 2019 and 30.4 per cent in 2016.²³⁷

One of the consequences of labour market segregation is women’s lower wages on average, which results in a gender pay gap. The gender pay gap is not officially calculated by the SSO; however, according to ILO, which measures the gender wage gap as the percentage difference between the average gross hourly wages of women and men, the gender pay gap in North Macedonia is around 8.8 per cent.²³⁸ Comprehensive research suggests that calculation of the gender pay gap should take into consideration additional indicators related to the factors that hinder women’s participation in the labour market. The most significant change in the gender pay gap occurred in 2012, when the minimum wage was increased for specific sectors where the majority of employees are women, such as textile and leather manufacturing. As a result of these and other legislative changes, such as amendments to the Law on Minimal Wage, women’s remuneration has been steadily improving over time. In the decade from 2009 to 2019, the number of women receiving a monthly wage of up to 12,000 MKD dramatically declined, while the number of women receiving a wage between 12,000-16,000 MKD, as well as those receiving 20,000-25,000 MKD increased.²³⁹ However, according to the Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) Index,

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Young population age 15-29 not in employment, education or training.

²²⁷ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ SSO, MakStat database, Employed by economic status and sex

²³⁰ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²³¹ SSO, MakStat database, Employed persons by sectors of activity of business entity and sex

²³² United Nations North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis, Update 2021

²³³ Bashevska, M. 2019. Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia, UN Women.

²³⁴ SSO, MakStat database, SGD 5: Gender Equality

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, p. 40.

²³⁷ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²³⁸ Petreski M. and Mojsoska Blazevski N. 2015. The gender and motherhood wage gap in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: An econometric analysis, ILO.

²³⁹ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, p. 41.

North Macedonia receives one of the lowest scores for the indicator that measures laws on women's pay, with recommendations to mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, and allow women to work in industrial jobs in the same capacity as men.²⁴⁰

Of the population as a whole, Roma women are in the most disadvantaged position in the labour market in North Macedonia. The NEET rate for Roma women (aged 15-24 years) in 2017 was 73.6 per cent compared to 32.8 per cent of non-Roma women. The employment rate of Roma women (aged 15-64) was 13 per cent (versus 26 per cent for non-Roma women), with only slight improvements as compared to the overall improvements in the country's labour-market.²⁴¹ The unemployment rate of Roma women has been 58 per cent against the national average of women in the labour market of 19 per cent in 2017.²⁴² Considering the multiple forms of discrimination that Roma women encounter in the North Macedonian labour market, compounded by their lower levels of education, the socio-economic status of their household, and their persistent exclusion from public life, Roma women are not able to exercise their rights. As a result, they are at high risk for poverty and often become trapped in this vicious cycle.

Albanian women are another disadvantaged group that faces traditional patriarchal norms and structural barriers that impede their access to the labour market. According to one study,²⁴³ while ethnic Macedonian women believe to a large extent in gender equality, ethnic Albanian women largely believe that a man's main responsibility is to provide financially for his children, that women should make most decisions about how their children are raised, that women should work only if necessary, and that for many high-level jobs, it is better to choose a man instead of a woman. These findings indicate that gender roles are more rigid among the Albanian population, and that these divisions are also more widely accepted among Albanian women than among Macedonian women.

Official labour market statistics are not disaggregated by disability status (in addition to sex-disaggregation). The Employment Service Agency produces administrative data on the number of persons with disabilities who seek employment or who are em-

ployed. Of the total of 1339 unemployed persons with disabilities seeking employment in 2022, 453 (33.8 per cent) were women with disabilities.²⁴⁴ The inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market is mainly done through so-called "protection" or "shelter" companies, with a requirement of hiring at least 40 per cent of employees (of a minimum of 10 employees) who are persons with disabilities.²⁴⁵ Data show that almost twice as many men as women are employed in such companies, which might be due to the fact that "protection" companies are mainly manufacturing facilities that do not hire women with disabilities due to discrimination and gender stereotypes about the work they can perform.²⁴⁶ However, when this data is compared with the data on persons with disabilities registered with the Employment Agency, the lower activity of women with disabilities on the labour market is obvious.

Women's access to entrepreneurship and financing

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's Report for 2019/2020²⁴⁷ shows that in North Macedonia there are more than two early-stage male entrepreneurs for each early-stage female entrepreneur (9 per cent for men and 3.3 per cent for women), highlighting that women's potential for economic growth remains untapped. North Macedonia scores rather low in women's entrepreneurship in the Small Business Act assessment, with 2.39 points in 2022 (compared to the Western Balkans' average of 3.49).²⁴⁸ While progress has been made in some areas, it has been limited in the area of entrepreneurial learning, and this has resulted in a slightly lower score than in the previous assessment (2.48 in 2019). The OECD recommends urgent action to monitor and evaluate the progress, efficacy and impact of measures taken to support women's entrepreneurship, to underpin the implementation of the recent women's entrepreneurship strategy, including a transparent monitoring and evaluation process, supported by the production of sex-disaggregated data via national statistics and government-funded programmes.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁰ World Bank, WBL, North Macedonia 2023.

²⁴¹ Blazevski, N. M., Marnie, S. and Keskine, I. 2018. The Position of Roma Women and Men in the Labour Markets of the Western Balkans: Micronarratives Report, UNDP.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Topuzovska Latkovikj et al. 2021. Women's Study for the Republic of North Macedonia, FES.

²⁴⁴ See: <https://av.gov.mk/lica-so-posebni-potrebi.nspx>

²⁴⁵ Law on Employment of Disabled Persons, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 44/2000, 16/2004, 62/2005, 113/2005, 29/2007, 88/2008, 161/2008, 99/2009, 136/2011, 129/15 and 147/15.

²⁴⁶ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

²⁴⁷ Bosma, N. et al. 2020. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2019/2020 Global Report (GEM Report).

²⁴⁸ OECD, North Macedonia: Economy Profile 2022.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Civil society organizations are an important factor in the promotion and advancement of women's entrepreneurship, and they lead collaboration with governmental structures from the grassroots level. In 2021, the National Platform of Women's Entrepreneurship was established as a forum in which the government and all constituents from the private sector can cooperate to create an environment conducive to women's entrepreneurship. However, infrastructure, activities and measurable outcomes of the platform are yet to be developed.²⁵⁰

North Macedonia has one of the lowest levels of women-led companies in the region, ranging between 23 per cent and 29 per cent.²⁵¹ According to most recent available data from 2017, 29.4 per cent of the total number of active companies are owned by at least one woman with a founding investment of over 50 per cent.²⁵² The largest share of companies led by women are small, with between 1-4 employees (86.7 per cent), followed by companies with 5-9 employees (8.5 per cent). Significantly few large companies are operated by women (only 4.2 per cent of companies with between 10-49 employees and 0.4 per cent of companies with over 50 employees).²⁵³ On average, women-run enterprises employ two persons, and most of the companies are established in the wholesale and retail trade sector; processing industry; and professional, scientific, and technical activities.²⁵⁴

A 2016 survey conducted by the Association of Business Women targeting 1,024 women entrepreneurs in North Macedonia, concluded that the typical woman entrepreneur in North Macedonia is educated (has higher education), middle aged (around 40 years old), runs a micro business and is married with children.²⁵⁵ The main motivations for women to start their own business are gaining independence, financial motives, and the inability to find work in the public sector, while the main

obstacles to starting a business were: access to finance and other relevant information, insufficient business skills, and difficulties achieving work-life balance.²⁵⁶

Access to finance for businesswomen or women intending to establish a business has been expanding. For example, the Ministry of Economy manages measures and activities for the support and development of entrepreneurship, innovation and competitiveness in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Through its Program for Competitiveness, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the ministry has 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 74 (31.9 per cent) were owned and managed by women. Under a separate measure for financial support of women's entrepreneurship, 27 enterprises managed or owned by women were awarded support.²⁵⁷ The program targets an average of 140 companies per year, and there is a provision that companies that are managed or established by a woman are eligible to apply for a 10 per cent larger subsidy. In 2021, the Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship allocated 10,623,110 MKD (around 190,000 USD) for activities aimed at women, such as trainings, creation of business plans and counselling. In addition to state-run programs for financial support to women entrepreneurs, the number of other sources of enterprise support, such as business accelerators,²⁵⁸ banks and saving institutions,²⁵⁹ and donors²⁶⁰ has been expanding.²⁶¹

Even though ICT is one of the fastest growing private sectors in North Macedonia, the absorption of technology by SMEs from other sectors remains low. North Macedonia has one of the lowest shares in the region of e-commerce sales by SMEs, with only 7.5 per cent of SMEs selling online in 2022, well below the EU

²⁵⁰ <https://vlada.mk/node/25335>

²⁵¹ Regional Cooperation Council, factsheet: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/152/women-entrepreneurship-in-the-western-balkans--economy-factsheets>

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ National Council for Women's Entrepreneurship. 2018. Report on survey for women entrepreneurs: What do women entrepreneurs need for sustainability and development of their business?

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ MLSP, Sector for Equal Opportunities, Annual Report on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men 2021.

²⁵⁸ See e.g., Business Accelerator UKIM (<https://accelerator.ukim.mk/>), Seavus Accelerator (<https://seavusaccelerator.com/>), however they do not focus on female entrepreneurship exclusively or dominantly.

²⁵⁹ For e.g., there have been a couple of initiatives of EBRD to channel funds through domestic banks for supporting women-led SMEs, (see: Women in Business program: <https://www.ebrd.com/women-in-business/finance-and-advice-for-women-in-business.html>) combining financing, technical assistance and business advisory services. There has been no fully market-driven bank initiative to support women's entrepreneurship per se, but for e.g., Sparkasse Bank runs a credit line for young entrepreneurs who would like to develop their business idea, as well as for social enterprises, which may have significant interference with women entrepreneurship (see: <https://bit.ly/3yeN3Jr>)

²⁶⁰ An example is the donor support channeled through the CEED Hub for women entrepreneurs (see: <https://bit.ly/3BVpww4>) or the European Gateway for Women's Entrepreneurship WEGate, an e-platform launched by the EC (see: <https://wegate.eu/>)

²⁶¹ See: Dimitrova, M. 2020. Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in North Macedonia: Market Assessment. Skopje: ILO.

average of 20.8 per cent.²⁶² Knowing that women-led businesses are mainly SMEs, this is an area that requires particular attention as it influences the overall advancement of women's entrepreneurship.

To mitigate the effects of the global pandemic, several measures to support women entrepreneurs were included in the government's anti-COVID-19 packages. For example, the Development Bank deployed no-interest loans with a 30 per cent grant component, specifically targeting women, youth and companies introducing digitalization, or which are export oriented. Likewise, the Innovation Fund in 2020 introduced co-financed grants for technological developments to overcome the impacts of COVID-19, incorporating a criterion to secure equal gender participation. However, to date, the effects of the financing landscape in support of women's entrepreneurship, both the establishment of and growth in their businesses, have not been assessed in a comprehensive manner.

Women in rural areas and employment in agriculture

In North Macedonia, the agricultural sector contributes about 10 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about 14 per cent of the workforce, of which one third are women. Women living in rural areas have the lowest employment rates, compared both to rural men and to the urban population in general. In 2021, the employment rate for women (age 15-64) in rural areas was 38.1 per cent, as compared to 64.6 per cent for men in rural areas and 51.5 per cent for women in urban areas.²⁶³ According to the Single Agricultural Holdings Register, out of the 175,088 registered agricultural holdings in 2020, 22 per cent were held by women, which is a 4.5 per cent increase from 2019.²⁶⁴ Of the women working in rural areas, 15.5 per cent were contributing family workers (the figure for men was 4.1 per cent), while 6.9 per cent were self-employed (17.8 per cent of men).²⁶⁵ In fact, the country's largest group of unpaid family workers are women working on family farms.

For this group of women, they work an average of more than 11 hours per day, and 42 per cent of that time is unpaid. In contrast, men in agriculture work an average of 9.7 hours, most of which are paid.²⁶⁶ 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 agriculture 2023.²⁶⁷ The measures include financial support for all women working in agriculture to receive maternity leave, which had not been regulated previously.

The precarious situation of women in rural areas also leads to higher female internal emigration observed in the last decade.²⁶⁸ Even if a woman is a registered (formal) agricultural worker, discussions for this CGEP revealed that she typically would not enjoy the full labour rights, particularly related to obtaining cash benefits during maternity and sickness, which then particularly deters young women from registering as agricultural workers or deters them from pursuing any kind of work in agriculture. Due to the unfavourable position of women in the labour force, young women in rural areas are not interested in spending their future in farming and are willing to remain in the rural areas only if they are able to find work in non-agricultural sectors.²⁶⁹

Women are also underrepresented in the utilization of agricultural subsidies through the Programme for financial support of agriculture. For example, for the period 2013-2017, women participated in agricultural subsidies with only 16.9 per cent in the number of applications and by 12.4 per cent in their total value.²⁷⁰ For the period 2014-2020, the Programme explicitly included criteria which promote greater participation of women in the application process and/or through topping up of the disbursed funds.²⁷¹ Women participate with around 30 per cent in the Programme for rural development 2013-2017 – 35.6 per cent of applications were submitted by women, while 33 per cent were approved investments.²⁷²

²⁶² Eurostat, E-commerce sales of enterprises by size class of enterprise.

²⁶³ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²⁶⁴ United Nations North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis, Update 2021.

²⁶⁵ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²⁶⁶ Dimitrievski et al. 2019. Measuring women's empowerment in agriculture with survey-based and experimental economics method, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, p.31.

²⁶⁷ Available at: <https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2023/programa%20majcinstvo.pdf>

²⁶⁸ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development 2021-2027.

²⁶⁹ Tuna, E. and Petrovska-Mitrevska, B. 2017. Multidimensional poverty analysis, Republic of Macedonia, We Effect – Swedish Cooperation Centre.

²⁷⁰ Dimitrievski et al. 2019. Measuring women's empowerment in agriculture with survey-based and experimental economics method, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, p. 60.

²⁷¹ See: https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Brosura_-_Zeni-zemjodelki.pdf

²⁷² Dimitrievski et al. 2019. Measuring women's empowerment in agriculture with survey-based and experimental economics method, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, p. 60.

When it comes to access to financial support, women in agriculture lack the awareness, empowerment, and the self-confidence in applying for such support.²⁷³ Around 58.6 per cent of women consider themselves not eligible to receive a loan from savings banks, 47.6 per cent of women consider themselves ineligible to receive a bank loan, 67.9 per cent of women consider themselves ineligible to receive a loan from Development Bank of North Macedonia, while 61.9 per cent of women consider themselves ineligible for the IPARD-Program for Rural Development.²⁷⁴

Rural women are especially disadvantaged in the labour market due to such factors as the gendered division of labour in the households and the lack of social services that would allow them to (re)enter the labour market, notably childcare services. In rural areas, significantly fewer children aged 36-59 months attended early education services - 19.9 per cent, compared to 46.6 per cent in urban areas.²⁷⁵ Women spend three times more time daily on household chores than men, while in rural areas about 20 per cent more than those in urban areas, which suggests that the household-related pressure is significantly higher for rural than for urban women.²⁷⁶ This is most visible in mountainous villages where social centres, cultural institutions, health-care facilities and high schools are almost entirely absent.²⁷⁷ Despite government's investment in modernizing and expansion of the road infrastructure, the situation is far from satisfactory. Rural municipalities are usually smaller and financially feeble, which results in slower progress in the elevation of the access to and quality of basic services.

Property rights/ownership and secure rights over agricultural land

Women's ability to exercise their property rights, including over agricultural land, is an important factor in their economic independence. In 2021, women owned 28.5 per cent of all property in North Macedonia; men therefore held the majority.²⁷⁸ In rural areas, specifically, a very small percentage of women are property owners - only 4.1 per cent. Only 12 per cent of women are registered as land owners.²⁷⁹ In 2019, 27.7 per cent of the records for property

ownership had women as owners or co-owners, the highest in Skopje with 34 per cent, and the lowest in Polog with 13.9 per cent.²⁸⁰

Ownership and rights over land and property is an area in which traditional patriarchal views and practices are predominant. It is still common in North Macedonia for property and land to be inherited by the son in the family, or property to be registered solely in the name of the husband, male partner or brother. It is rare that women, mostly widows, have some property in their name, while married daughters are usually expected to renounce their share in inheritance from their parents to the benefit of their male relatives. This situation reflects the traditional view that a woman's inheritance will be taken by another family when she marries.

Registering agricultural land exclusively in the name of men has excluded women farmers from entitlements, such as accessing agricultural extension and financial support services, as well as from issuing formal contracts with traders, thereby limiting their productivity, and pushing women further into informality and precarious economic circumstances. Such traditions lead to the lack of recognition of women as farmers and limit rural women's active participation in their communities and in the creation of agricultural policies.

Moreover, only around 10 per cent of women make decisions about the activities related to the agricultural land.²⁸¹ Even if women own property, they are often not the ones making decisions about the use of the property or land. Half of women landowners are not active in the decision-making process on activities related to their land. While 90.3 per cent of men landowners make decisions on such activities, the same is true for only 9.7 per cent of women land and property owners.²⁸²

Unpaid care work

The most significant factor contributing to women's disadvantaged position in the North Macedonian labour market is the burden of unpaid domestic and care work. Women's unpaid domestic and care work, which consists mainly of cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and household maintenance, and caring for children, adults and people with disabilities, amounts

²⁷³ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, p. 42.

²⁷⁴ National Platform for Women's Entrepreneurship. 2021. Public Policy Document, Women in Rural Areas and Entrepreneurship, p. 11.

²⁷⁵ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019

²⁷⁶ SSO, Time Use Survey 2014/2015, available at: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija.aspx?id=58>

²⁷⁷ Dimitrievski, D. et al. 2019. Measuring Women's Empowerment In Agriculture With Survey-Based And Experimental Economics Method, Skopje: UN Women.

²⁷⁸ MLSP, Sector for Equal Opportunities, Annual Report on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men 2021.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ FAO and GIZ. 2020. Achieving SDG indicator 5.a.2 in the Western Balkans and beyond, Rome, Italy.

²⁸¹ GIZ. 2020. Inserter: The right to property guaranteed by the Constitution, only 4% of rural women own property.

²⁸² Sproule, K. et al. 2019. USAID/North Macedonia Gender Analysis Report, Banyan Global.

to 72.5 per cent of unpaid work performed at home.²⁸³ According to a study conducted in 2017, almost a third (34.5 per cent) of women who were economically inactive cited household duties and providing care for children and the elderly as the reason.²⁸⁴ In 2020, 59.3 per cent of the female inactive population aged 20-64 years was inactive due to care responsibilities (the share was 61.6 per cent in 2019). In sharp contrast, only 2.3 per cent of the male population cited care responsibilities as the reason for their economic inactivity (5.2 per cent in 2019).²⁸⁵ In 2021, 44.1 per cent of the inactive female population were categorized as “housekeepers” (which only exists as an option for women in the official categories of SSO).²⁸⁶

Data from the most recently available Time Use Survey (TUS) (2014/2015),²⁸⁷ confirms the stereotypically gendered division of paid and unpaid work, with men expected to fulfil the role of household financial provider for the family, while women are expected to carry out household chores and care for children and dependents, including the elderly, even if both partners engage in paid employment outside the household. On average, men spend three hours per day on income-generating activities, as opposed to 1.6 by women. On the other hand, women devote 3.4 hours daily to domestic activities daily, as opposed to 1.1 by men. As a result, women have around 20 per cent less free time than men.²⁸⁸

The time that women spend on unpaid work reflects Macedonian patriarchal gender norms and prejudices. For example, Female Inactivity Survey in 2017²⁸⁹ found that 65.2 per cent of women thought that it was much better for a pre-school child if the mother doesn’t work, 43.4 per cent agreed that to be a housewife is as fulfilling as having a paid job, while 42.8 per cent disagreed that taking care of others by women doesn’t leave enough time to work outside of the house. Such gender norms around unpaid household work as being “naturally” assigned to women significantly affect their ability and time to

perform paid work, pursue career development or greater participation in public life, volunteer or take part in other activities of interest. If the unpaid work that women in North Macedonia perform was valued at a minimum wage, it would have a monetary value of about 17 per cent of the GDP.²⁹⁰

In the context of limited social services of all kinds, women in rural areas spend 20 per cent more time than those in urban areas on daily household chores, which suggests that the household-related pressure is significantly higher for rural than for urban women.²⁹¹ The new Law on Social Protection²⁹² defines schemes through which the holders of the informal care economy could professionalise their services and receive cash transfers for care if they register as authorized service providers.²⁹³ However, the impacts and potential for implementation of these reforms have not yet been assessed.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak exposed major vulnerabilities in the economy and aggravated existing inequalities, impacting women and men differently. The industries that experienced closures are those in which the majority of employees are women and in which the pay is generally low, such as manufacturing, trade tourism, catering and other personal services, as well as essential and indispensable activities (such as health care and nursing, production and sale of food, pharmacy and financial services) that were most affected by the pandemic.²⁹⁴ Rural women experienced a greater decline in income from agricultural activity as compared to men (7 per cent decline, compared to 4 per cent decline), while 42 per cent of rural women, compared to 37 per cent of rural men, stated that it would be difficult to keep up with basic expenses for food and hygiene products if the COVID-19 pandemic

²⁸³ Charmes, J. 2019. The Unpaid Care Work and the Labor Market: An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys, ILO, Geneva.

²⁸⁴ Mojsoska-Blazeski, N. et al. 2017. National Research on Low Female Labor-Market Participation in Macedonia: Quantitative-based Estimates from a New Survey. Skopje: UN Women.

²⁸⁵ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

²⁸⁶ MakStat database, Inactive population by categories and age, annual

²⁸⁷ Available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija_en.aspx?id=58

²⁸⁸ Of household-related activities, women spend about two thirds of the time on four sub-activities: food preparation (1.2 hours daily), dishwashing (0.35), cleaning (0.35) and childcare (0.22), i.e., a total of 2.1 hours daily. In contrast, men spend only 0.22 hours daily on all four. Men spend most of their time on other maintenance of the household (0.16) and gardening (0.09), which suggests that not only men spend significantly less time on household chores and care, but their domestic activities differ from those of women.

²⁸⁹ Mojsoska-Blazeski, N. et al. 2017. National Research on Low Female Labor-Market Participation in Macedonia: Quantitative-based Estimates from a New Survey. Skopje: UN Women.

²⁹⁰ Reaktor. 2020. Men in Care (MiC): Caring Masculinities in North Macedonia. Country Report, p. 17.

²⁹¹ SSO, Time Use Survey 2014/2015.

²⁹² Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 104/19, 146/19 and 275/19

²⁹³ Reaktor. 2020. Men in Care (MiC): Caring Masculinities in North Macedonia. Country Report, p. 17.

²⁹⁴ Bashevska, M. 2020. Rapid Gender Assessment: The impact of COVID-19 on women and men in North Macedonia, UN Women.

continued.²⁹⁵ Reductions in working hours – which was a more common response to the crisis rather than job termination – were rather evenly distributed between women and men.²⁹⁶

The downturn in employment was more pronounced for men as compared to women (26 per cent and 23 per cent loss from 2019 to the first half of 2020, respectively).²⁹⁷ However young women experienced greater job loss as compared to young men (30.3 per cent and 27.4 per cent lost work, respectively).²⁹⁸ The share of women receiving unemployment benefits increased from 52 per cent in February 2020 to 56 per cent in October 2020, while the share of women who participated in active labour market programs declined to 43.8 per cent as compared to 52.5 per cent in 2019.²⁹⁹ Moreover, the share of women that received support for self-employment (for start-up businesses, for instance) decreased in 2020 as compared to the previous year (from 33.3 per cent to 30.9 per cent) as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis and insufficient gender-responsive measures implemented by the Employment Service Agency.³⁰⁰

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. The COVID-19 measure that allowed one working parent to stay at home to care for a child or children up to the age of ten, after the closure of the kindergartens and schools, was rarely used by men. Of the parents who were released from work, every fifth was a father, thus forcing mothers to take over three-quarters of the total burden of care (77 per cent of women as opposed to 22 per cent of men).³⁰¹ Women, likewise, more frequently switched to working from home than men (35 per cent of women as compared to 23 per cent of men).³⁰²

Women were disproportionately burdened by the distance learning system for children imposed during the pandemic. This measure increased the need for domestic activities (such as cooking, cleaning, disinfection, and help with schoolwork), as well as the care and support of children and other family members. The time women spent on activities in the household increased overall, specifically they spent 44 per cent more time on cleaning, 40 per cent more time on cooking, and 40 per cent more time on household

management. In comparison, men reported that the time they spend on the same activities increased by 30 per cent, 19 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively.³⁰³ The time that women spent on caring for children also increased; they spent 21 per cent more time playing with children, 21 per cent more time caring for them, and 20 per cent more time on educational support. Men also experienced an increase in their time dedicated to childcare, but to a lesser degree. For the same activities, they experienced increases in their time by 17 per cent, 16 per cent, and 16 per cent, respectively.³⁰⁴ The unequal distribution of additional domestic tasks and childcare brought about by COVID-19 aggravated pre-existing intra-household inequalities in the division of responsibilities and the burden of unpaid household work.

Main challenges in women's economic participation

- Women are generally disadvantaged on the labour market in North Macedonia, primarily due to the high level of inactivity of the female population. The main reasons behind the inactivity of women are household duties and providing care for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- Young people experience high rates of unemployment and inactivity, with particularly young women further less active on the labour market compared to any segment of the population.
- The potentials for the advancement of women's entrepreneurship are still at an initial level, with many possibilities remaining unaddressed, such as the use of ICT.
- The gendered division of professions remains, with women more frequently working in sectors like manufacturing, trade, agriculture, all of which face the low productivity and low pay trap.
- Overall, women more frequently face structural barriers preventing them from moving forward in their careers above a certain point, limiting their potential for professional growth.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ United Nations North Macedonia, Common Country Analysis, Update 2021.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Risteska, M. 2021. Gender and Diversity: Analysis of the Covid-SARS-19 Impact, OSCE Mission to Skopje, p. 54.

³⁰² Bashevskva, M. 2020. Rapid Gender Assessment: The Impact of Covid-19 on Women and Men in North Macedonia, UN Women.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

- Data shows that the share of women who are self-employed is significantly lower than that of men, while women still face the “glass ceiling effect” in progressing in their profession.
- Rural women are especially disadvantaged in the labour market due to such factors as the gendered division of labour in the households and the lack of social services that would allow them to (re)enter the labour market, notably childcare services.
- Women in agriculture lack the awareness, empowerment, and the self-confidence in applying for financial support.
- Traditional patriarchal views prevail when it comes to land/property ownership. Registering agricultural land exclusively in the name of men has excluded women farmers from entitlements, such as accessing agricultural extension and financial support services, thereby limiting their productivity, and pushing women further into informality and precarious economic circumstances.
- The overall unemployment rate of Roma women has been persistently high over the years, deriving from the multiple discriminations they face to access the labour market, compounded with their lower education level, dire socio-economic status of their household, and persistent exclusion from public life.

4.3. Education and Training of Women and Girls

Table 8

SDG indicators on education and training of women and girls

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
4.1.1: Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex		Percentage of children aged 7-14 who demonstrate foundational skills: Reading: girls- 70.2%, boys- 58.3% Numeracy: girls- 35.3%, boys- 46.6% Source: MICS 2018-2019
4.2.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex	2011: Girls – 92.8% Boys – 92.6% Source: MICS 2011	Proportion of children aged 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development, and learning: Girls – 89.3% Boys – 75.9% Source: MICS 2018-2019
4.2.2: Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex	Percentage of children attending first grade who attended preschool in the previous year: Girls – 48.8% Boys – 32.9% Source: MICS 2011	Girls – 54.2% Boys – 45.9% Source: MICS 2018-2019

National legal, institutional and policy framework

The Law on Primary Education,³⁰⁵ adopted in 2019, prohibits any direct and indirect discrimination in primary education and childcare, based on, *inter alia*, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and prescribes affirmative measures for overcoming existing discrimination and promoting equality (Art. 6). In accordance with the Law (Art. 66), the Ministry of Education and Science has adopted Guidelines on the procedure for reporting on and protecting student victims of any forms of violence, abuse and neglect.³⁰⁶ The priorities of the national Education Strategy and Action Plan for 2018-2025³⁰⁷ include student-centered

teaching, measuring learning progress in relation to outcomes (rather than focusing only on acquiring knowledge) and introducing a national assessment. However, gender mainstreaming in the Strategy is very limited, and the document lacks a clear commitment to addressing gender-related challenges in education, such as prevailing gender stereotypes in the choices of educational fields, measures to combat gender-based violence and harassment in schools and ensuring that girls from vulnerable groups stay in education. Moreover, the Strategy does not explicitly address the gendered digital divide or provide for specific programming aimed at girls.

³⁰⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 161/19 and 229/20.

³⁰⁶ Available at: <https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=3288>

³⁰⁷ Available at: <http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-ENG-WEB-1.pdf>

In 2020, the MoES adopted the Concept Note on Primary Education³⁰⁸ as guidance for wider reform of primary education in North Macedonia. The Concept Note identifies substandard textbooks, insufficient teaching resources in schools, lack of opportunities for teachers' career development and their inconsistent professional development, insufficient readiness of teachers to apply new digital approaches as several challenges that the primary education system has been dealing with for years.³⁰⁹ 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.³¹⁰ The short- and long-term effects envisaged by the Concept Note, include: reduction in the number of students dropping out of primary education, an 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 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.³¹¹ In line with the recommendations from the Concept Note on Primary Education, amendments to the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education³¹² 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.

Finally, the MoES adopted the Concept Note on Inclusive Education in 2020,³¹³ as a guidance for the inclusion of children from vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, children from unfavourable socio-economic backgrounds, children with learning and behavioural difficulties, and children asylum seekers, among others.

Overview of current trends in education

In terms of attendance of early childhood education (ECE) (age 36-59 months), girls generally face lower participation rates than boys (31.5 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively).³¹⁴ The lowest ECE attendance rate can be observed among the poorest quintile, with 7.4 per cent, and among Roma children (10.3 per cent attendance rate for Roma boys and 13.5 per cent for Roma girls).³¹⁵ Moreover, analysis has shown that ECE does not provide optimal conditions or opportunities for inclusive enrolment and development, i.e., the integration of girls and boys with disabilities.³¹⁶

The overall number of pupils enrolled in primary and secondary schools has been declining over the past two decades, from around 250,000 (primary school) and 93,000 (secondary school) in the 2000/2001 academic year to around 190,000 (primary) and 70,000 (secondary) in the 2020/2021 academic year. This trend is a direct consequence of outmigration, as discussed above, the declining birth rate, and other societal developments in the country.³¹⁷

The primary school completion rates are high, over 90 per cent for both sexes, as is the transition to secondary school, 98 per cent for both sexes; this is due to the compulsory nature of secondary education.³¹⁸ There are no gender differences in enrolment rates in secondary education. The completion rate - the proportion of students who enter a high school program and who complete it successfully - is slightly lower for girls - 85.1 per cent as compared to 89.3 per cent for boys.³¹⁹ The situation with attendance and completion of compulsory education is worrying for the Roma population. Only 75 per cent of Roma children aged 6-18 were enrolled in compulsory education in 2019.³²⁰ The reasons cited for the low attendance rates of Roma girls and boys are the lack of finances and the distance of schools from their settlements.³²¹

While boys mainly outnumber girls in primary and upper secondary education, the situation in tertiary education is the opposite. In the 2021/2022 academic

³⁰⁸ Available at: <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/koncepcija%20osnovno%20obrazovanie%20en.pdf>

³⁰⁹ Ministry of Education and Science, Concept Note on Primary Education, p.5.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p.11.

³¹¹ Ibid., p.13.

³¹² Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 98/2008, 99/2009, 83/2010, 36/2011, 135/2011, 46/2012, 24/2013, 120/2013, 29/2014, 146/2015, 217/2015, 30/2016 and 21/2018.

³¹³ Available at: <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Koncepcija%20za%20inkluzivno.pdf>

³¹⁴ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ombudsman of North Macedonia. 2018. Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Preschool education. Skopje: UNICEF.

³¹⁷ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

³¹⁸ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

³¹⁹ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³²⁰ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. 2019. Revised Employment and Social Reform Programme 2022, p. 57.

³²¹ Ibid.

year, 36 per cent of women, compared to 24 per cent of men enrolled in tertiary education, after completing secondary education. In other words, women represented 59 per cent of enrolled students.³²² In 2007, the government launched a state program to open and/or expand branches of universities, faculties, and programs throughout the country in order to increase access to tertiary education. At the same time, the government introduced a program to encourage people in their 30s and 40s to enrol in universities, aimed at increasing the level of education of the population. Because access to tertiary education improved for people living outside of major urban areas, the number of graduates almost doubled after 2007 as compared to the early 2000s. In 2021, 41.1 per cent of women aged 25-34 had completed tertiary education, compared to 30.3 per cent of men, and compared to 28.5 per cent of women and 21.8 per cent of men in 2011.³²³ The situation is similar in postgraduate education, with women representing 60 per cent of all graduates with master's degrees, and 61 per cent of all PhD graduates in 2021.³²⁴

Out-of-school rates are low in primary education (1.7 per cent) and moderate in secondary education (8.4 per cent). Data show no substantial differences between out-of-school rates for girls and boys in either primary or secondary education. However, the drop-out rate for the poorest quintile and among Roma students have been quite high. In the 2018/2019 academic year, 19 per cent of Roma girls and 18.4 per cent of Roma boys were out of primary school.³²⁵ At the secondary school level, the likelihood that Roma children will be out of school increases. In the 2018/2019 academic year, 51.6 per cent of Roma boys and 54.1 per cent of Roma girls aged 15-18 were out of secondary school.³²⁶

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), which measures literacy in reading and numeracy foundational skills, found that in North Macedonia girls outperform boys in reading, but not in numeracy (for the age bracket of 7-14 years old). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures skills in reading, mathematics and science when pupils enter (upper) secondary education (at age 15). In 2015, half of the country's 15-year-olds did not demonstrate basic proficiency in the three assessed subjects, with an average score of 384, compared to a score of 493 among OECD countries. The PISA scores indicate that Macedonian students were almost four years behind their peers in OECD countries.³²⁷ However, girls outperform boys in all three dimensions - in mathematics by 7 points and in science by 19 points.³²⁸ Gender stereotypes still prevail, however, in students' choices of the field of education. This long-standing trend is concerning because gender differences in choice of educational field directly contribute to gender segregation of occupations in the labour market. Health, personal services, gymnasium, and law remain female dominated fields of study, whereas agriculture, architecture, and electrical engineering are male-dominated fields. In the 2020/2021 academic year, 65 per cent of students enrolled in gymnasium were girls, 73 per cent of pupils studying health were girls, while 68 per cent of students studying agriculture and veterinary medicine, 95 per cent studying mechanical engineering, and 85 per cent studying electrical engineering, were boys.³²⁹ In the last decade, there has been a slight improvement in the proportion of young women entering traditionally "male" fields, and so the sex ratio has become closer to equal. However, the road to gender-balance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects) remains a long one.

Table 9
Girls' and boys' foundational skills

	MICS (Percentage of children aged 7-14 who demonstrate foundational skills)		PISA (Average scores for 15-year old children)		
	Reading	Numeracy	Reading	Mathematics	Science
Girls	70.2	35.3	420	398	423
Boys	58.3	46.6	368	391	404

³²² SSO. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ OECD and UNICEF. 2019. OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education in North Macedonia.

³²⁸ OECD. 2018. Results from PISA 2018.

³²⁹ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

According to several cross-country surveys, girls may already have lower confidence in their digital skills than boys by age 15.³³⁰ In fact, when girls are good at both STEM and humanities (i.e. non-STEM subjects), they tend to choose humanities because they believe it will be easier for them to achieve higher grades.³³¹ A self-evaluation conducted among secondary school students in North Macedonia showed that while girls and boys believed that they were equally competent in mathematics and science, boys evaluated themselves much higher than girls in information technology (IT).³³² It is notable, and concerning, that girls' perceptions of their abilities in STEM are in direct contrast to their levels of proficiency, as described above.

Divisions in education based on gender stereotypes also persist in tertiary education. Education is the most feminised academic field, and around 90 per cent of graduates in higher education in this area are women. Health and social protection and the arts and humanities are all “women-led” fields, with almost three times more women graduating from these subjects than men (76 per cent of graduates in the former are women, and 74 per cent are women in the latter). Women also outnumber men among graduates in business, administration and law (58 per cent of graduates are women). On the other hand, even though the situation is slowly changing, ICT remains a “male-dominated” field, with 67 per cent of graduates men. The situation is similar for agriculture, forestry, fishing and veterinary medicine, where men are 58 per cent of graduates.³³³

The teaching profession, at the primary and secondary school levels, is not only dominated by women, but it has become increasingly feminised in recent years. In the 2020/2021 academic year, there were 2.3 female teachers in primary schools for each male teacher, and the sex ratio has increased in favour of women from the 2000/2001 academic year (when it was 1.3 female teachers for each male teacher).³³⁴ The situation is similar in secondary education; in the 2021/2022 academic year, 62 per cent of the teaching staff were women. On the contrary, among the faculty of tertiary education institutions, in the 2021/2022 academic year, fewer women held full professor positions (44 per cent) or associate professor positions (48 per cent), but women were more often employed as docents (56 per cent) or assistants (53 per cent).³³⁵ Considering the fact that teaching positions in elementary and secondary schools are much less paid than at university level, these divisions are well within the already established position of women and “feminization” of professions that are paid less.

Main challenges in girls' and women's participation in education and learning

- Girls have lower enrolment rates than boys in early childhood education, while girls and boys generally have similar enrolment rates in primary and secondary education.
- The stereotypical division of education fields remains prevalent, contributing to the division of professional fields on the labour market. Health, personal services, gymnasium, and textiles remain female dominated fields. In the fields of architecture, transport, and tourism, boys dominate over girls as they do in educational courses on physical education, electrical and mechanical engineering.
- There are no substantial differences in the out-of-school rates for girls and boys in either primary or secondary education. However, the rate for the poorest quintile and among Roma secondary-education students is considerably higher, with the higher rates for Roma girls.
- Girls generally outperform boys in foundational skills in all three dimensions. However, girls have lower confidence in their digital skills than boys, preventing them to pursue education in STEM and ICT fields.
- Women outnumber men among enrolled students in tertiary education. Concerning the area of specialization, medical sciences and the humanities are areas in which the large majority of graduates are women. Natural and social sciences are likewise female-dominated subjects. In contrast, technical and biotechnical sciences are male-dominated fields of study.
- Primary and secondary education in North Macedonia is a female-dominated occupation, while women are less represented in higher positions in tertiary education.

³³⁰ International Telecommunication Union. 2021. Digitally empowered Generation Equality: Women, girls and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in selected Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Hadzi-Vasileva, K. 2019. Mapping of gender in ICT sphere in Macedonia, Association for Progressive Communications.

³³³ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

³³⁴ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia – A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, p. 42.

³³⁵ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

4.4. Women's Health and Wellbeing

Table 10

SDG indicators on health

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
3.1.1: Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	2020: 5.2	10.7 Source: IPH/SSO (2021)
3.1.2: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (per cent)	98 Source: MICS 2011	100 Source: MICS (2018-2019)
3.2.1: Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	2020: 6.0 2019: 6.3 2018: 6.0 2017: 9.9 2016: 12.9 2015: 9.6 Source: SSO	4.9 Source: SSO (2021)
3.2.2: Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	2020: 4.2 2019: 3.8 2018: 4.1 2017: 7.4 2016: 10.2 2015: 6.8 Source: SSO	2.9 Source: SSO (2021)
3.4.1: Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease (probability)	2019: Women: 17.5 Men: 27.9 2015: Women: 18.9 Men: 30 Source: Women Count	Women: 22.9 Men: 27 Source: SSO 2020
3.4.2: Suicide mortality rate (deaths per 100,000 population)		Women: 3.5 Men: 8 Source: SSO (2021)
3.7.1: Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (per cent of women aged 15-49 years)	Urban: 42.9 Rural: 38.0 Source: MICS 2011	29.6 Source: MICS (2018-2019)
3.7.2: Adolescent birth rate (per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years)	2018: 15.1	15.7 Source: WHO (2021)

National legal, institutional and policy framework

The Law on Health Protection³³⁶ 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, evaluation of the National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health 2010-2020³³⁷ was conducted, with the purpose of its alignment with the SDGs and other global and regional initiatives for provision of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and safe motherhood. The last Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health was adopted for the period 2018-2020.³³⁸

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)³³⁹ 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 Gynaecology and Obstetrics Clinic in Skopje. However, this procedure is not yet available to women in other regions of the country, especially rural women, unless they are able to 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. National Programme for early detection of breast cancer was initiated in 2015, and includes women aged 50-69 years. There are no other preventive measures to increase the number of breast cancer examinations, however, 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.³⁴⁰

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.

Overview of current trends in women's health and wellbeing

In 2021, the fertility rate in North Macedonia was 1.6 (referring to the number of live births per woman), an increase from 1.31 in 2020.³⁴² The majority of live births (34 per cent) are to mothers aged 25-29 years, with the average mother's age for all births of 29.2 years, and 27.5 at the time of the first birth.³⁴³ In 2021, there were 20 live births to mothers below age 15.³⁴⁴ The neonatal mortality rate in 2021 was 2.9 per 1,000 live births, a decrease from 4.2 in 2020, 5.7 in 2018, and 11.9 in 2016.³⁴⁵ The infant mortality rate in 2021 was 4.6 per 1,000 live births, while the under-5 mortality rate was 5.3 per 1,000 live births.³⁴⁶ Maternal mortality rate in 2021 was 10.7 per 100,000 live births, an increase from 5.2 in 2020.³⁴⁷ The abortion rate in North Macedonia in 2021 was 17.1 per 100 live births, a slight decrease from 17.4 in 2020.³⁴⁸

³³⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 43/2012, 145/2012, 65/2013, 87/2013, 164/2013, 39/2014, 43/2014, 101/2014, 132/2014, 188/2014, 10/2015, 61/2015, 154/2015, 192/2015, 17/2016, 37/2016.

³³⁷ Available at: <https://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/strategija-seksualno-i-reproduktivno-zdravje.pdf>

³³⁸ Available at: <https://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Nov-tekst-na-AP-usoglasen-so-Sekretarijat-za-zakonodavstvo-11.09.2018.pdf>

³³⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 87/13, 164/13, 27/14, 144/14, and 149/15.

³⁴⁰ Institute for Public Health. 2019. Analysis - Assessment of the capacities of the existing staff and equipment (PAP and HPV testing), organization of visits, work of a working group for realization of activities related to cervical cancer screening.

³⁴¹ Available at: <https://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/strategija-za-MZ-2018-2025-170718-pf-1.pdf>

³⁴² SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ SSO, MakStat database, Neonatal mortality rate, by region.

³⁴⁶ Institute for Public Health, Report on the health of the population of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021, p.68.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

Almost all births in North Macedonia are attended by skilled health personnel³⁴⁹ who have the required skills to provide life-saving obstetric care, including the necessary supervision, care and advice to women during pregnancy, labour and the post-partum period, to conduct deliveries and to care for newborns. Around 83 per cent of women have access to post-partum care, including visits by a qualified nurse.³⁵⁰ However, there are still women who face challenges accessing health care during pregnancy and post-partum. According to a survey conducted among Roma women, 63 per cent of the respondents had experienced negative attitudes in access to health services, based on their ethnicity,³⁵¹ which demonstrates the need to increase the awareness of and train skilled health personnel in delivering non-discriminatory and inclusive treatment.³⁵²

Early pregnancies among adolescents have major health consequences for young mothers and their babies. Social consequences for unmarried pregnant adolescents can include stigma, rejection or violence by partners, parents and peers. Girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 years are more likely to experience violence within a marriage or partnership. In 2021, the adolescent birth rate in North Macedonia was 15.7 per 1,000 women aged 15-19.³⁵³ In comparison, the adolescent birth rate for Eastern Europe countries is 15 per 1,000 women, but is considerably lower in Central Europe (7 per 1,000 women) but much higher in Central Asia (29 per 1,000 women).³⁵⁴ It is estimated that 0.2 per cent of women gave birth under the age of 15 in North Macedonia, and around 4.5 per cent of women between the ages of 20-24 gave birth before age 18. Among Roma women these percentages are quite different - 0.5 per cent and 28.2 per cent respectively.³⁵⁵ With the support of civil society sector, pilot-programme for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was implemented in 2021 in several primary schools in the country. The programme showed success in advancing knowledge and awareness in students on the topics covered with CSE, however a broader approach is needed in the

implementation of the programme, to include trained specialised educators and to expand the contents to scientific and medical facts on sexuality.³⁵⁶

The number of new HIV infections in 2021, for all ages, was 44, which is an incidence of 2.1 per 100,000 population.³⁵⁷ In total, for the period 1987-2021 there are a total of 548 cases of HIV registered by the Institute for Public Health, of which 89.4 per cent are men and 10.6 per cent are women.³⁵⁸ The average age of newly-identified persons with HIV is 34 years, and most (77 per cent) are between the ages of 20 and 39. The majority (60.6 per cent) of infections are among men having sex with men, while 33 per cent of individuals reported heterosexual transmission.³⁵⁹

Neoplasms are the second leading cause of death in the Republic of North Macedonia (accounting for 15.2 per cent of deaths of women and men),³⁶⁰ just after diseases of the circulatory system. Among women, malignant neoplasm of the breast was the most common cause of neoplasm-related deaths from 2010-2021. The mortality rate ranged from 30.0 in 2010 to 26.4 in 2018 and 32.6 per 100,000 women in 2021.³⁶¹ In 2021, according to data from the Institute for Public Health, 26,217 smear tests were performed within organized screening for early detection of cervical cancer (of women aged 36-45 years, who have not had a smear test in the last three years), detecting cytological abnormalities in 2,070 women.³⁶² There is no available information on the HPV vaccine coverage as a preventive measure.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of depression and anxiety is higher among women than men, and from 10-15 percent of mental disorders among women occur in the perinatal period (during pregnancy and in the first year after delivery).³⁶³ Mental disorders are directly related with suicide. In North Macedonia, in 2021, of the total number of cases of violent deaths (677), suicides accounted for 105, or 17.4 per cent of the violent deaths among men and 12.4 per cent of violent deaths among women.³⁶⁴

³⁴⁹ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018–2019.

³⁵⁰ MLSP, Sector for Equal Opportunities, Annual Report on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men 2021

³⁵¹ European Public Health Alliance. 2017. From Rhetoric to Action: Bringing the Voice of Romanian Roma Communities to Europe.

³⁵² SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³⁵³ WHO (2021): <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/349683/WHO-SRH-21.148-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³⁵⁴ See: <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2021-report/progress-indicators/maternal-mortality/>

³⁵⁵ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019, p. 63-66.

³⁵⁶ Institute for Public Health, Report on the health of the population of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021, p.36.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ SSO. 2020. Mortality in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, by municipalities, in 2020, available at: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooptenie.aspx?rbtxt=7>

³⁶¹ Institute for Public Health, Report on the health of the population of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2021.

³⁶² See: <https://www.iph.mk/nedela-za-prevencija-na-rak-na-grlo-na-matka/>

³⁶³ Ministry of Health, National Strategy for Promotion of Mental Health in the Republic of Macedonia September 2018 – 2025, available at: <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/strategija-za-MZ-2018-2025-170718-pf-1.pdf>

³⁶⁴ SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

Urgent and comprehensive measures by the state are still needed to increase prevention and other measures to protect women's health and raise public awareness on gender-specific health risks. To address these issues, the Ministry of Health created a special section on "Women's Health" that will be added to a patient's "My appointment" electronic file, where the examining doctor can see in one place reports from gynaecological examinations, as well as from breast examinations, the results of echocardiography and mammography; there is also a section for monitoring the HPV and general vaccination status of each woman.³⁶⁵

Analysis has shown that women are faced with numerous obstacles when it comes to participation in sports and physical activity. In general, sport in North Macedonia is perceived as predominantly male activity, while women who practice sport very often experienced discrimination, harassment and violence.³⁶⁶ There is a lack of data on overall participation of the population in sport and physical activity, however, according to research, men are almost double more active than women.³⁶⁷ The Agency for Youth and Sport in 2020/2021 has granted a total of 500 scholarships, of which 197 (39.4 per cent) to girls, which is the highest number until now.³⁶⁸ As a significant factor when it comes to health and wellbeing, there is an urgent need to implement measures to promote and increase girls' and women's participation in sport and physical activity.

Access to health services

Access to sexual and reproductive health care is still problematic in certain municipalities and regions in North Macedonia where the majority of the population would be considered to be in a vulnerable category, such as Roma and older women. Despite the number of gynaecologists in the country that exceeds the European average, such specialists are not evenly distributed, and so there are municipalities

where there are too few or no gynaecologists at all.³⁶⁹ Underdeveloped health services in rural areas is particularly dire for mountainous villages, in which healthcare facilities are almost entirely absent.³⁷⁰ Women in rural areas are often unable to access medical services because of the distance to the facility itself, as well as how they are allocated in rural areas, combined with the lack of public transportation options that women rely on. Research shows that 60 per cent of rural women have been only "partially satisfied" with their access to healthcare.³⁷¹ For example, the Polog region has the lowest number of primary health care gynaecologists per 1000 women (0.09), followed by Pelagonia (0.13), and these are the regions where the lowest number of gynaecological visits among older women have been recorded.³⁷²

Nevertheless, it is notable that most Roma people have access to health insurance.³⁷³ According to the 2018 Regional Roma Survey, 93 per cent of Roma women from North Macedonia have health insurance- while coverage is high, this is still below the national average (99.1 per cent).³⁷⁴

Women in North Macedonia have a high level of knowledge about contraception methods. In 2019, 99 per cent of the female population aged 15-49 had heard of some contraceptive method, either modern or traditional. Knowledge is also very high among Roma women of the same age group (96.4 per cent were aware). The most well-known modern contraceptive method among all women aged 15-49 is the male condom - familiar to 96.5 per cent of women in the general population and 90.6 per cent of Roma women.³⁷⁵ The second most well-known modern contraceptive method is the pill (oral hormonal contraception) – for 92.4 per cent of the total women population; for Roma women, the second most familiar form of contraception is the intrauterine device (IUD) - known by 81.1 per cent.³⁷⁶ Familiarity with emergency contraception (the "morning-after" pill) is significantly lower for women aged 15-49 in general (67.7 per cent) and in particular for Roma women of this age group (26.7 per cent).³⁷⁷

³⁶⁵ Nestoroska, B. 2023. In "Moj Termin" a section is introduced "Zensko zdravje", all tests for women will be in one place, Sakam da kazam: <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/vo-moj-termin-se-voveduva-seksija-zhensko-zdravje-na-edno-mesto-ke-bidat-site-ispituvana-na-zhenata/>

³⁶⁶ UN Women. 2022. Gender Equality in Sport in North Macedonia.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ MLSP, Sector for Equal Opportunities, Annual Report on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men 2021.

³⁶⁹ Mladenovikj, B. Lucheska, I. 2019. Situational analysis and proposed modalities: Reproductive healthcare in the Republic of Macedonia, HERA – Health Education and Research Association, p. 71.

³⁷⁰ Dimitrievski, D. et al. 2019. Measuring Women's Empowerment In Agriculture With Survey-Based And Experimental Economics Method, Skopje: UN Women.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² WHO. 2021. Older people and access to health care in North Macedonia, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, p.12.

³⁷³ UNDP. 2017. Regional Roma Survey 2017: Country fact sheets.

³⁷⁴ UNDP. 2018. Roma at a Glance: The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Factsheet.

³⁷⁵ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

Access to contraception is more problematic for groups with limited financial means, since modern contraceptives require out-of-pocket payment. People from rural areas, young people aged 15-24, Roma women, unemployed women, and women who are receiving some form of social protection are those most likely not to be able to afford the regular use of modern contraceptives and to require access to free or subsidized contraception.³⁷⁸ Women from rural areas also have limited access to family planning counselling, since it is provided through gynaecological facilities that are mainly located in urban areas. Adolescents and young adults make even less use of family planning services. The total demand for family planning among women who are married or in a union, between the ages of 15-49, is 70 per cent.³⁷⁹ For only 19.9 per cent the demand for family planning is satisfied with modern contraception methods. For Roma women of this group, the picture differs - the total demand for family planning is higher at 75.6 per cent, but the demand is satisfied for only 11.4 per cent of Roma women.³⁸⁰ The need for family planning is significantly lower for women who are neither married nor in a union, aged 15-49, and who use contraception - for women in general (24.6 per cent) and for Roma women, specifically (10.3 per cent).³⁸¹ The total demand for family planning among unmarried Roma women is 11.6 per cent while for all women 24.6 per cent.³⁸²

According to the Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019,³⁸³ 32.1 per cent of adolescents below age 19 are sexually active. Almost half of young people (48 per cent) sometimes use protection when having sexual intercourse, and around one quarter (21 per cent) always use protection. One quarter never use protection (25 per cent), however, and 6 per cent do not know what this term means or they are not informed. The absence of an organized framework that could disseminate information about SRH to adolescents results in their poor and, to some extent, inaccurate knowledge about sexual and reproductive health. In 2018, a multi-sectoral expert working group was created to propose a model for implementing

comprehensive sexual education as part of the formal primary education curriculum. The program was piloted in the 2021/2022 academic year in four schools in both urban and rural areas.

In North Macedonia, there are no established support services for women during menopause, i.e., after the end of the reproductive period. There is also a lack of data and analysis in this area, however according to some estimates, 70-80 per cent of menopausal women have noticeable symptoms that can be medically alleviated, but only about 25 per cent of them seek help.³⁸⁴ Data shows that women above 65 years of age visit gynaecologist 1.82 times per patient per year, which is substantially lower than women below 65 years of age (3.1) and the national average (2.98).³⁸⁵

The current mental health system is characterized by an outdated model of hospitalization with psychiatric hospitals that are in unsatisfactory conditions, lack of adequate finances and outpatient community services. There are few alternatives to hospital treatment, lack of preventative and rehabilitative programs, lack of family involvement and social support, and lack of support and opportunities for people with mental disorders to live in and participate in their communities.

Equal health for all is one of the SDGs, so in order to improve mental health, it is necessary to also break the stigma that exists around mental disorders. Despite the fact that women are recognized as a risk group based on several social determinants, in North Macedonia no services have been established that focus on women's mental health needs. No activities have been established for perinatal care services for mothers, and the care for the mental health of children and youth has been somewhat neglected.³⁸⁶ In the coming period, national policies should focus on raising awareness on the importance of mental health care in order to increase knowledge about mental disorders and reduce stigma, as well as introducing services for the prevention and treatment of mental disorders.

³⁷⁸ Mladenovikj, B. and Lucheska, I. 2019. Situational analysis and proposed modalities: Reproductive healthcare in the Republic of Macedonia, HERA – Health Education and Research Association, p. 19.

³⁷⁹ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

³⁸⁰ UN Women. 2022. Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Topuzovska Latkovikj et al. 2021. Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019, FES.

³⁸⁴ See: <https://zmc.mk/blog/samo-chetvrtina-od-zhenite-baraat-lekarska-pomosh-vo-period-na-menopauza/>

³⁸⁵ WHO. 2021. Older people and access to health care in North Macedonia, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

³⁸⁶ National Strategy for Promotion of Mental Health in the Republic of Macedonia September 2018 – 2025, available at: <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/strategija-za-MZ-2018-2025-170718-pf-1.pdf>

Impact of COVID-19

While women and men had similar rates of COVID-19 infection (a total of 156,452 as of early August 2021), men accounted for 62.8 per cent of COVID-19 deaths.³⁸⁷ On the other hand, women occupy 74 per cent of jobs in the health care sector and were therefore more likely to be front-line health workers and at greater risk of COVID-19 infection.³⁸⁸

As health facilities focused on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to essential health services for women became significantly constrained, especially for those in the most vulnerable groups.³⁸⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic also had a great mental health impact, with stress and anxiety being reported in highest rates among women aged 35 to 54.³⁹⁰

- Mental health has not been addressed in a gender-sensitive manner.
- There are no available established services for women in menopause and women above 65 years of age visit a gynaecologist much less often than women below 65 years of age.

Main challenges in women's health and wellbeing

- Adolescent births are still a problem in the country, mostly registered among Roma girls. Hence, it is important to take into consideration the specific sexual and reproductive health concerns of Roma women who experience higher level of adolescent pregnancy, early marriage, and shorter life expectancy compared to other female segments of population.
- Care for sexual and reproductive health is still a problematic aspect in certain municipalities and regions where the population of vulnerable categories, such as Roma, predominantly lives. It is crucial that skilled health personnel are trained to treat Roma girls and women in non-discriminatory way, including providing translation services when necessary.
- North Macedonia has a low rate of contraceptive use, especially among the younger population and the population in marginalized communities, such as Roma women and girls, since modern contraceptives are subject to out-of-pocket payment.
- Women are faced with numerous obstacles when it comes to participation in sports and physical activity. In general, sport is perceived as predominantly male activity, while women who practice sport very often experience discrimination, harassment and violence.

³⁸⁷ WHO. 2021. Health Systems in Action: North Macedonia.

³⁸⁸ WHO. 2021. Fact sheet: Health inequity and COVID-19 in North Macedonia.

³⁸⁹ Bashevska, M. 2020. Rapid Gender Assessment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men in North Macedonia, UN Women.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

4.5. Violence against Women and Girls

Table 11

SDG indicators on violence against women and girls

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
5.2.1: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age		In 2020, a total of 1,025 cases related to domestic violence were reported to the MoI, out of which 594 victims with physical injuries, 31 with major injuries, 337 reports for endangering safety, and four killings of women. In the same year, the MLSP recorded 1,531 new cases of domestic violence with 1,161 women victims and 121 children victims. Source: GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report
5.2.2: Proportion of women and girls aged 15 and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence		Number of women treated in rape victim centres in 2021: 8 Source: GREVIO Report
5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18		Women aged 20-24 who first married or entered a marital union before age 15: 0.3% Women aged 20-24 who first married or entered a marital union before age 18: 7.5% Source: MICS 2018-2019
16.1.1: Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause	2020: Women: 0.2% Men: 1% 2018: Women: 0.4% Men: 0.8% Source: SSO	Homicide death rate (per 100,000 population): Women: 0.1% Men: 1% Source: SSO

National legal, institutional and policy framework

North Macedonia was among the first countries to sign the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), ratifying it in 2017. North Macedonia submitted its first baseline report to GREVIO in 2022, and GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report for North Macedonia was adopted in May 2023.³⁹¹ The four pillars of the Istanbul Convention, prevention, protection, prosecution, and co-ordinated policies, create a wide-range of state obligations,

including challenging gender stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based violence. The country has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2011), which sets forth state's obligation to protect persons with disabilities "from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse", taking into account gender and age (Art. 16, par. 1). States are also required to provide programs to promote the recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons who have been subjected to abuse and violence (Article 16, par. 4).

Following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the country adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) for

³⁹¹ Available at: [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/ednakvi%20moznosti/GREVIO-Inf\(2023\)5%20Final%20report%20on%20North%20Macedonia_eng.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/ednakvi%20moznosti/GREVIO-Inf(2023)5%20Final%20report%20on%20North%20Macedonia_eng.pdf)

the Implementation of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2018–2023), aimed at harmonizing the legal framework with the provisions of the Convention, establishing general and specialized services to improve the protection of victims of GBV and DV, and conducting activities for preventing GBV and DV.³⁹² Unfortunately, information about the effectiveness of the NAP has been difficult to obtain, and it does not appear that the results of any monitoring have been made public. According to civil society organizations that analysed the implementation of the NAP between 2018 and 2022, there is absence of accurate information available to civil society on the “already allocated funds or spent budgets on carried out activities from the beginning of the adoption of the Istanbul Convention until now.”³⁹³

Protection against all forms of GBV is part of the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as a priority objective within the Ministry’s Programme for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination. GBV is also included in the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 as a key priority for the country, under specific goal 3.1: Prevention of and combatting gender-based violence.³⁹⁴

Substantial changes have been made to national legislation on victim protection in cases of domestic violence starting in 2004 with the amendment of the Criminal Code and the Family Law to include articles that explicitly cover domestic violence. In 2014, to improve the overall system for prevention and protection of victims of domestic violence, the first systemic Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence was adopted. A new Law for Protection and Prevention from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted in 2021,³⁹⁵ covering all forms of violence and including specific definitions of “violence against women” and “gender-based violence”, in line with international standards and the Istanbul Convention. 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, establishing effective protection of victims from all forms of GBV against women as well as victims of domestic violence, punishing perpetrators, and data collection on violence against women and domestic violence.³⁹⁶ Article 8 states that “measures, activities and services for victims of gender-based violence against women and domestic violence should be tailored to the specific needs of women with disabilities”. The Law also notes the central importance of data-collection for creating general and special measures for prevention and protection of violence (Articles 28 - 32).

The amendments to the Criminal Code,³⁹⁷ 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 VAW and GBV 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,³⁹⁸ 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.³⁹⁹ 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

³⁹² Action plan for implementation of the Convention for Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2018-2023, available at: https://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-nacionalniot-plan-za-sproveduvanje-na-konvencija-ta-za-spreccuvanje-i-borba-protiv-nasilstvoto-vrz-zen.nspix

³⁹³ Gender Equality Platform. 2022. Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in North Macedonia, p. 22.

³⁹⁴ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3GwnTKu>

³⁹⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 24/2021.

³⁹⁶ The new law aims to expand the system of prevention and protection from all forms of gender-based and domestic violence, in accordance with the recommendations of the European Council, that is, “prevention and suppression of gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, effective protection of victims of any form of gender-based violence against women and victims of domestic violence by respecting the fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and international agreements.”

³⁹⁷ Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 36/2023.

³⁹⁸ Criminal offenses in the Criminal Code sanctioned especially when committed as a result of domestic violence are: murder (Art. 123), voluntary manslaughter (Art. 125), bodily injury (Art. 130), serious bodily injury (Art. 131), forcing (Art. 139), illegal deprivation of freedom (Art. 140), endangering the safety (Art. 144), intermediation in prostitution (Art. 191), and sexual assault against a minor who has not reached 14 years of age (Art. 188).

³⁹⁹ As stated by GREVIO, the amendments to the elements of the offences set out in Article 186 of the Criminal Code are fully in line with the requirement under Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention to criminalise all non-consensual sexual acts.

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.

Through legislative amendments, significant advancements have been made in the protection from and prevention of GBV and domestic violence. These changes not only largely bring national legislation in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention, but they also address the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for North Macedonia,⁴⁰⁰ such as the need for harmonization of national legislation, particularly strengthening the legislative framework against gender-based violence, adoption of a definition of gender-based violence, providing adequate support to victims of domestic violence, and criminalization of all forms of gender-based violence against women with the latest amendments to the Criminal Code.⁴⁰¹

Since 2009, policies and measures for the protection of women victims of violence have been enacted through the Law on Social Protection that regulates the right of victims of domestic violence to financial support and temporary accommodation in a shelter. The 2019 Law on Social Protection⁴⁰² enables various legal entities, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to provide social services, including services to victims of GBV.

The Law on Free Legal Aid⁴⁰³ extends the right to receive free primary legal aid to victims of GBV and domestic violence, in addition to allowing victims to access various forms of legal assistance, for example in registering births, acquiring identity documents and citizenship, applying for social protection and protection of children and applying for pension, disability and health insurance.

Even though not specifically aimed at tackling online gender-based violence, some efforts have been made to address this issue. The Ministry of Interior operates phone numbers for citizens to report any computer crime directly to the Department of Cybercrime and Digital Forensics Unit or to any police station.

The ministry has established the Red Button service,⁴⁰⁴ through which citizens can report online content related to child sexual abuse and hate speech, and can also report incitement to violence. Additionally, citizens can report online child abuse to the ministry via email. The Government of North Macedonia is supporting a website⁴⁰⁵ aimed at educating and promoting protection software for safe and responsible use of the Internet.⁴⁰⁶

Overview of current trends in violence against women

In North Macedonia, violence is the most common human rights violation that women experience. Violence against women has negative impacts on women's health, causing physical injuries, psychological trauma and even death.⁴⁰⁷ According to the OSCE-led survey on violence against women in North Macedonia,⁴⁰⁸ almost half (45 per cent) of women respondents have experienced some form of violence (physical, sexual and/or psychological) by an intimate partner by the age of 15, while almost one in three women (30 per cent) have experienced sexual harassment.

Societal attitudes towards GBV are quite lenient, as seen in the fact that 10 per cent of women in North Macedonia agreed that a man could be justified in beating his wife. This viewpoint is less common among urban women (5.7 per cent agreed with the statement) than women in rural areas (where 17.4 per cent were in agreement). Women aged 45-49 also hold this opinion more often than younger women aged 15-17 (15.1 per cent for the former and 12.1 per cent for the latter).⁴⁰⁹ Almost a fifth (18.8 per cent) of Roma women would justify a man beating his wife, with this view most prevalent among Roma girls aged 18-19 (21.4 per cent).⁴¹⁰ Additionally, the survey showed the lack of awareness on violence and harassment among women, revealing that every third woman is suspicious about other women who have reported harassment or violence.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁰ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/mk-index>

⁴⁰¹ Universal Periodic Review - Republic of North Macedonia 24 January 2019.

⁴⁰² Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 104/2019

⁴⁰³ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 101/2019

⁴⁰⁴ <http://redbutton.mvr.gov.mk/prijavi.aspx>

⁴⁰⁵ <https://surfajbezbedno.mk/>

⁴⁰⁶ International Communication Union. 2020. Status of national child online protection ecosystems in South Eastern Europe, p.15-17.

⁴⁰⁷ Tozija F. 2009. Violence and injury prevention and safety promotion in Macedonia: evidence-based policy intervention. Arch Public Health. 1:39-46.

⁴⁰⁸ OSCE. 2019. Well-being and safety of women, OSCE-led survey on violence against women, North Macedonia, Results Report.

⁴⁰⁹ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ OSCE. 2019. Well-being and safety of women, OSCE-led survey on violence against women, North Macedonia, Results Report.

Understanding the prevalence and forms of violence against women in North Macedonia is complicated by the fact that data are not widely available. While the Ministry of Interior (Mol) collects and disseminates data on cases of domestic violence that enter the legal system, the MLSP does not publicly share information on cases of domestic violence collected from the Centres for Social Work. In 2022, the Mol registered a total of 1,117 criminal acts related to domestic violence (an increase from 1,056 in 2021 and 992 in 2020); men were the perpetrators in 91.9 per cent of the cases and women were the victims in 79.1 per cent of the cases.⁴¹² The perpetrators are most often the husband of the victims (in 474 cases), or son of the victim (in 171 cases), and the majority of cases concern bodily injury (675) or endangering the safety of the victim (389).⁴¹³ According to Mol's records, seven cases of homicide in the course of domestic violence were registered in 2022, an increase from five in 2021 and four in 2020.⁴¹⁴ In 2022, the Mol registered a total of 366 misdemeanour offenses of domestic violence, with the largest number of them physical assault (128 offenses), while a total of 4,421 complaints related to domestic violence were made in 2022 (an increase from 3,761 in 2021 and 3,759 in 2020), of which the majority complaints of psychological abuse; physical abuse was reported in 394 cases.⁴¹⁵

There is a significant lack of data on cases of femicide.⁴¹⁶ The available data collected and published by CSOs is gathered through analysis of police reports, media reports, and courts documentation on killings where the victim is a woman. According to the latest analysis,⁴¹⁷ there have been 22 intentional killings of women (femicides) in the period 2017-2020, 6 of those witnessed by children.

Women and girls with disabilities face a greater risk of violence, due to intersectional discrimination, societal stigmatization, and their general isolation from support services. According to a report by the European Parliament, women with disabilities in the EU are four times more likely to be sexually abused

than women without disabilities.⁴¹⁸ OSCE research on violence against women in the region⁴¹⁹ indicates that almost two-thirds of women with disabilities (63 per cent) who ever had a partner said they had experienced psychological violence from the partner since the age of 15, compared with 23 per cent of women overall. Also, women with disabilities are more likely to experience more serious forms of physical violence (ten per cent of women with disabilities said that they were beaten by an intimate partner, compared to six per cent of women in general).⁴²⁰ Almost half of the women and girls who participated in research on violence against women and girls with disabilities in North Macedonia⁴²¹ had experienced some form of violence directly, and one in three had witnessed violence and/or abuse. Within institutions, women experience various forms of violence, including physical violence from the staff, excessive use of tranquilizers and similar medicines, sexual abuse (inappropriate touching, undressing them in front of others, etc.), and neglect.⁴²² Women with disabilities who have experienced violence have long-term psychological and emotional consequences in the form of trauma, fear, and seclusion; they largely distrust institutions and have feelings of hopelessness.⁴²³ Unlike the general population of women, the majority of whom say that they would report violence to the police, only a small number of interviewed women with disabilities said that they were familiar with the work of organizations providing support to women victims of violence. From 2018 to the first quarter of 2021, out of 3,352 cases reported to the Centres for Social Work, only 13 cases involved violence against men and women with disabilities, or an average of two to four cases per year.⁴²⁴ Taking into consideration the large number of women and girls with disabilities who have self-reported that they have been victims of violence, these figures are especially concerning. One can conclude that violence against women and girls with disabilities remains largely underreported.

⁴¹² SSO. 2023. Women and Men in North Macedonia.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Defined as intentional killing with a gender-related motivation: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf

⁴¹⁷ UNDP. 2021. Analysis of Cases of Femicides: Murders of Women in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2017-2020.

⁴¹⁸ European Parliament. 2004. Report on the situation of women from minority groups in the European Union (2003/2109(INI)), p. 13.

⁴¹⁹ OSCE. 2019. Well-being and safety of women, OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Experiences of disadvantaged women: Thematic Report.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. p.32

⁴²¹ Dimitrovska, N. and Kochoska E. 2022. Preventing Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities, OSCE.

⁴²² Ibid., p. 41.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

Existing services for survivors of VAW

When it comes to specialised services for women survivors of violence and domestic violence (and their children), there are specialised services in seven regions on the territory of North Macedonia, as follows: 13 centres for women survivors of domestic violence (and their children), of which eight are organizational units of local Centres for Social Work, two are funded by the MLSP and managed by associations, and one is funded by local self-government and managed by an association. In addition, there are ten specialised counselling centres for women victims of violence and victims of domestic violence and eight specialised counselling centres for the psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence.⁴²⁵ Specialised service centres for women survivors of domestic violence are available on a 24/7 basis, while counselling centres operate with scheduled appointments.⁴²⁶ However, the majority of support services are focused in the capital, while other cities and regions in the country are faced with a significant lack of support services. Many areas do not have psychosocial counselling available for women survivors of violence, and women living in rural areas face particular difficulties in accessing specialist support for domestic violence or other forms of violence.⁴²⁷

There are several women's CSOs in North Macedonia working in the field of protection, prevention and response to GBV and DV. The services they offer are wide-ranging including SOS helplines, counselling and psychological support, shelter services, free legal aid (which in some cases includes representation of victims in court), financial and social welfare support (this includes employment and housing advice for victims that have left violent relationships and are facing homelessness), as well as advocacy and policy work.⁴²⁸ In total, CSOs operate 20 women-only centres that provide specialist support for survivors of VAW. UN Women supports two such organizations, which have cooperated with and received funding from the municipalities of Shtip and Strumica to support services for

survivors of VAW. Additionally, the city of Skopje supports the First Family Centre, which has provided counselling since October 2013. However, the functioning of services provided by CSOs remains largely contingent on grants from international multilateral and bilateral donors, such as the EU, UN agencies, in particular UN Women, and foundations, such as Kvinna till Kvinna. Analysis from 2020 showed that less than nine per cent of total funds secured by women's organizations in North Macedonia were from national institutions (MLSP or the government), while large majority of their funding is from foreign donors.⁴²⁹ This means that CSOs lack steady and sustainable funding, or more importantly, they have no comprehensive or systematic funding from the state.⁴³⁰

There are still no shelters for women victims of violence in Polog and North-Eastern Regions. Crisis centres for victims of VAW and domestic violence have been established only in three regions, namely in the Eastern, Pelagonija and Skopje Regions (offering accommodation up to 72 hours, in Prilep and Shtip). There is only one shelter for victims of sexual violence, in Skopje, which functions within the Shelter for victims of human trafficking managed by a civil society organization. Referral centres for victims of sexual violence and rape have been opened in health institutions in three cities (Skopje, Kumanovo and Tetovo). In terms of available counselling centres for psychosocial support of victims of GBV and domestic violence, there are 11 in total, of which only one (run by a CSO) offers integrated counselling services for victims, perpetrators and children.⁴³¹ Most of the centres were opened in July 2018, prior to the adoption of the NAP for Implementation of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2018-2023.⁴³² According to the GREVIO (Baseline) Evaluation Report, as of mid-2022 there were 103 beds in 11 shelters available in the country, implying that it falls short of the target of one family place per 10,000 head of population.⁴³³

⁴²⁵ Report submitted by North Macedonia pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 1 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Baseline Report), GREVIO/Inf(2022)5.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report, North Macedonia, 26 May 2023.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Kvinna till Kvinna. 2020. Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ HERA. 2022. Monitoring Report of the Action Plan for Implementation of the Convention for Prevention and Fight against Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence.

⁴³² Available at: https://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-nacionalniot-plan-za-sproveduvanje-na-konvencijata-za-sprecuvanje-iborba-protiv-nasilstvoto-vrz-zen.nspix

⁴³³ GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report, North Macedonia, 26 May 2023, p. 47.

The MLSP has developed standards for specialized services for victims of VAW and operational procedures through participative consultation with civil society organizations.⁴³⁴ The standards and procedures cover: the operation of social work centres for women victims of VAW and domestic violence (October 2021); licensed providers of specialised counselling service - specialised services for women victims of gender-based violence and victims of domestic violence (October 2021); providers of temporary residence services (Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence, Centre for Victims of Gender-Based Violence and Centre for Women Victims of Sexual Violence and Rape (October 2021); providers of counselling services for the social treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence (October 2021); licensed providers of specialised services through the SOS help-line for assistance to victims of VAW and DV (October 2021).⁴³⁵

One of the activities of the NAP to prevent and combat VAW and domestic violence is the inclusion of victims of VAW in the Ministry of Health program for the protection of mothers and children, which provides free access to healthcare to women and children who are not registered beneficiaries of the health care system.⁴³⁶ Thus, it is possible for victims of domestic violence to receive one-time financial assistance for medical treatment, but their eligibility depends on their financial and property status (for example, they lack property in their name). A program was adopted in 2019, but it applies only to women victims of sexual violence, and does not grant free access to medical services to women victims of other forms of VAW.⁴³⁷ Therefore, North Macedonia does not have measures for free health care and medical assistance for all survivors of VAW.

In terms of economic empowerment, a desk analysis of programming of the MLSP for 2015-2020 concluded that women survivors of VAW are not recognized as a group that is in need of employment and other forms of economic support tailored to their specific needs.⁴³⁸

The MLSP has commented that women survivors of violence are recognized within newly-planned employment measures. However, a 2021 call by the Government for social housing,⁴³⁹ does not explicitly include victims of VAW as eligible candidates, but categories such as parentless children, people using minimal social protection funds, people affected by natural disasters, people with disabilities, Roma people, and single parents are eligible.⁴⁴⁰ UN Women supports one civil society organization to pilot the provision of economic reintegration opportunities to 15 women survivors of violence, through a social mentoring programme. However, economic assistance is not available to all women survivors from violence in North Macedonia.

Impact of COVID-19

The isolation measures and the establishment of a strict curfew to control the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in an increase in domestic violence cases, as well as cases of femicides, during the months in which the restrictions on movement were most severe. According to an official statement by the MoI, during the health crisis, protection for victims of domestic violence deteriorated significantly. From April-May 2020, reports of domestic violence increased by 44.6 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year, with 373 complaints of domestic violence and 85 charges for domestic violence-related crimes.⁴⁴¹ In 2020, at the same time that the government introduced the strictest measures limiting movement, four women were killed by their intimate partners.⁴⁴² Comparing the number of registered crimes related to domestic violence from January-March 2019 (207 cases) to those for the same period in 2021 (241 cases), the increase is clear.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, February 2022.

⁴³⁵ Report submitted by North Macedonia pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 1 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Baseline Report), GREVIO/Inf(2022)5.

⁴³⁶ Gender Equality Platform. 2022. Shadow Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in North Macedonia.

⁴³⁷ Balshikjeska M. and Nushkova A. 2020. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in North Macedonia - October 2018 - October 2020, National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ See: Government of North Macedonia, "Call for social housing applications in Strumica": <https://vlada.mk/node/25007>. Please note that although this call is specifically for Strumica, there is information that it pertains to several municipalities in North Macedonia.

⁴⁴⁰ Gender Equality Platform. 2022. Shadow Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in North Macedonia.

⁴⁴¹ Statement available at: <https://www.pravdiko.mk/chulev-prijavite-za-semejno-nasilstvo-za-april-maj-zgolemeni-44-6-otsto-za-razlika-od-lani/>

⁴⁴² UNDP. 2021. Analysis of Cases of Femicides: Killings of Women in the Republic of North Macedonia 2017-2020.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Interior acted in a coordinated manner in cases of domestic violence during curfews, and also with other competent institutions dealing with cases of domestic violence. Professionals from the centres for social work had a permit for unimpeded movement during curfew, for the victims to receive the necessary protection and support.⁴⁴³

The restrictive measures adopted to control the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to an increase in cases of VAW, while the increased isolation of some groups of women and girls, such as those with disabilities and those living in poverty, only exacerbated their pre-existing vulnerabilities to violence and harassment. Measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, as well as those to protect the population, did not consider women's vulnerabilities to violence, and no measures were taken that were directly aimed at protecting and supporting vulnerable women and girls. The difficulties that for women and girls with disabilities faced during the pandemic is evident in the fact that 75.1 per cent of respondents stated that their situation had worsened or had significantly worsened.⁴⁴⁴

Trafficking in human beings

North Macedonia criminalized human trafficking in 2002 and has an additional criminal offence on trafficking in children (Criminal Code, Art. 418-g). To align the national legal framework with the EU legislation, the principle of non-punishment of victims of human trafficking and child victims was introduced through amendments to the Criminal Code in 2018. To deter individuals from exploiting trafficked persons, North Macedonia criminalizes the use or exploitation of the services of a trafficked person, including for sex, if the perpetrator knew or should have known the person was a trafficking victim (Criminal Code, Art. 418-a (3) and 418-d (3)). In addition, the new Law on Foreigners⁴⁴⁵ states that national authorities are obliged to ensure that the recovery and reflection period and renewable residence permit are not conditional on the victim's co-operation with the authorities in charge of the investigation or criminal proceedings (Article 121).

The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration is the inter-ministerial co-ordination body tasked with the implementation, co-ordination, and monitoring of 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 within the Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling Unit of the Ministry of Interior prosecutes trafficking cases, but reported a lack of resources with only ten prosecutors in the office to handle all cases under its jurisdiction.⁴⁴⁶

The national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in human beings is under the MLSP, the institution responsible for coordinating the country's only shelter dedicated to trafficking victims. The existing shelter accommodates women and minor victims with the capacity to house only five people. Free legal aid is available, and according to the National Commission's report for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021, Open Gate (a CSO) provided free legal aid to four victims while the Macedonian Lawyers' Association provided free legal aid to 573 migrants and 260 asylum seekers (gender was not specified in the report).⁴⁴⁷

According to the US Department of State,⁴⁴⁸ North Macedonia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so; thus the country remained in Tier 2 in 2022.⁴⁴⁹ The government increased its prevention efforts overall, including by establishing and resourcing the independent office of the national anti-trafficking rapporteur and organizing robust awareness campaigns. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas: (i) the police are not adequately funded or equipped to conduct proactive investigations; (ii) the Organized Crime and Corruption Prosecution Office lacks sufficient resources, including staff, to handle all cases under their jurisdiction; (iii) the government deported, detained, or restricted freedom of movement of some potential trafficking victims due to inadequate identification practices and does not have the capacity to accommodate victims at times when the country's only victims' shelter is full.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴³ Report submitted by North Macedonia pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 1 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Baseline Report), GREVIO/Inf(2022)5, p.14.

⁴⁴⁴ Risteska, M. 2020. Analysis of the impacts of COVID-SARS-19 on gender and diversity, OSCE Mission to Skopje.

⁴⁴⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 71/20, 125/20 and 169/20.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Representative of the Ministry of Interior, February 2020.

⁴⁴⁷ Annual Report of National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021.

⁴⁴⁸ Trafficking in Persons Report: North Macedonia 2022: US Department of State.

⁴⁴⁹ Tier 2 definition: Countries and territories whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

⁴⁵⁰ Trafficking in Persons Report: North Macedonia 2022: US Department of State.

Human traffickers exploit both domestic and foreign victims in North Macedonia.⁴⁵¹ Women and girls in North Macedonia are primarily exploited through sex trafficking and forced labour in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Foreign victims exploited for sex trafficking in North Macedonia typically originate from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine.⁴⁵² Citizens of North Macedonia and foreign victims who transit through the country are most often exploited for sex trafficking and forced labour in the construction and agricultural sectors in southern, central, and western Europe, while children, primarily Roma, are exploited through forced begging and sex trafficking within forced marriages.⁴⁵³ Migrants and refugees traveling or smuggled through North Macedonia, particularly women and unaccompanied minors, are vulnerable to trafficking,

According to the Annual Report of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021, there were 48 victims of trafficking identified in North Macedonia, of which six were children (five girls and one boy). The types of trafficking in human being varies; out of the six children, four were victims of forced marriage, one of begging, and one of labour exploitation. Related to the adult female victims, 39 were subjected to labour exploitation, two to labour and sexual exploitation, one to sexual exploitation.⁴⁵⁴

Mobile teams play an important role in identifying most of the potential victims of trafficking, and experts consider such teams to be an effective means for proactive identification and collaboration between civil society and government. However, the viability of mobile teams remains uncertain given that their funding from an international organization ended in 2020, and the government reallocated earmarked funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government placed all identified child victims in day care centres and warned or fined their parents. In cases in which the courts found the parents to be incapable of caring for their children, the state placed the children in orphanages or foster care. The government and civil society have expressed concern over the low number of identified victims, and experts point out that most government institutions are not proactive in making identifications.⁴⁵⁵

Child/early marriage

Child marriage refers to any formal or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. It is mainly girls who are victims of child or early marriage. Girls who marry are vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal. If they become pregnant at a young age, they often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home.

North Macedonia is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁴⁵⁶ and its two Optional Protocols, as well as CEDAW that explicitly prohibits child marriage (Art. 16). Likewise, the Istanbul Convention requires states to criminalize forced marriage of children and adults (Art. 27).

The Law on the Protection of Children defines a child as a person under 18 years of age, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁵⁷ The law regulates the protection of children from abuse. Under all legislation of North Macedonia, persons under 18 years of age do not enjoy full legal capacity, subject to certain exceptions. The Law on the Protection of Children stipulates that a person under 18 years of age cannot enter a marriage. However, in certain circumstances, according to the Family Law,⁴⁵⁸ the court may, in an out-of-court procedure, allow a person who has reached age 16 to enter into a marriage contract. By entering into a marriage, a child older than 16 gains full legal capacity. The Criminal Code stipulates that the act of an adult living in common-law marriage with a juvenile aged 14-16 years is a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term of between three months and three years. The same punishment is applicable to parents or guardians who allow or induce a juvenile who has reached age 14, but is under 16 years of age, to live in a common-law marriage with another person. However, forced marriage, as the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter a marriage, is not criminalized in North Macedonia. The Criminal Code does criminalize forced marriage within articles on trafficking in persons and trafficking in children (Arts. 418-a and 418-g). Cohabitation with a child younger than 16 years of age is also a criminal act (Art. 197).

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Annual Report of National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021.

⁴⁵⁵ US Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report: North Macedonia, 2022.

⁴⁵⁶ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁴⁵⁷ Law on Protection of Children, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 104/2019; 146/19

⁴⁵⁸ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 153/14

None of these criminal acts address forced marriage *per se*, as established in the Istanbul Convention.⁴⁵⁹

In November 2019, at the Nairobi Summit on the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25), the Government of North Macedonia formally committed to eliminating child marriage by 2030. This commitment builds on amendments to the Criminal Code according to which an extramarital union to someone under the age of 18 is a crime (Art. 197). The amendments which were passed with direct support from the Women Parliamentarians' Club were followed by further changes to the Law on Primary Education in 2019. These reforms paved the way for a broader debate on child/forced marriages.

The proportion of women aged 20-24 in North Macedonia who were married or in a union before the age of 18 is 7.5 per cent, while 0.3 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before the age of 15. Of the women who married before the age of 18, less than one per cent have higher education, compared to 29 per cent of women with or without primary education.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, 25 per cent of women in the poorest settlements were married before the age of 18, compared to only two per cent of women in the wealthiest settlements,⁴⁶¹ which confirms the direct link between education, poverty and early marriage.

In North Macedonia, the phenomenon of child marriage is more characteristic for the Roma community, linked to their lower economic and social standing of the family.⁴⁶² Comparing to the figures for women overall, in Roma settlements, 45.1 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years old were married or in a union before the age of 18, and 15.5 per cent of Roma women were first married or in a union before the age of 15.⁴⁶³ The most frequent justifications for child marriage in North Macedonia are pregnancy, the need to preserve the family's 'honour', and to have "a better life in Western countries".⁴⁶⁴ The last justification in particular applies to cases in which the groom, who lives and is employed abroad, returns to North Macedonia to find a bride. This is a particularly desirable outcome for families experiencing economic hardship.⁴⁶⁵

Main challenges in ending violence against women and girls and combating harmful practices

- There is no comprehensive and systematic process of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the NAP for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018 –2023), including the Operational Plans for local governments in accordance with the NAP.⁴⁶⁶
- Beside the efforts in providing protection services and GBV referrals for women survivors of violence, there is a need for further action to increase the number of specialized services across all regions of the country, and to ensure a budget for additional qualified human resources to be engaged as service providers.
- In terms of health services for immediate treatment of women survivors of violence, the Ministry of Health program for protection of mothers and children adopted in 2019 considers only free health services for women victims of sexual violence, but not for women victims of other forms of GBV.⁴⁶⁷
- The viability of mobile teams working with vulnerable populations remains uncertain.
- The government and CSOs have expressed concern over the low number of THB victims identified, and experts point out that most government institutions are not working on proactive identification.
- Police lacks adequate funding and equipment to conduct proactive investigations, while the Organized Crime and Corruption Prosecution Office lacks sufficient resources, including staff, to handle all cases under their jurisdiction.
- There is general lack of capacities to accommodate victims of THB with only one available shelter.
- Child marriages predominantly occur among Roma with low economic and social standing of the family, linked to poverty, school dropout and early pregnancy, which can be detrimental for girls' reproductive health.

⁴⁵⁹ Gender Equality Platform. 2022. Shadow Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in North Macedonia.

⁴⁶⁰ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² UNFPA, Child Marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Overview).

⁴⁶³ SSO and UNICEF, MICS 2018-2019.

⁴⁶⁴ UNFPA, Child Marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Overview).

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Action plan for implementation of the Convention for Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2023.

⁴⁶⁷ Balshikjeska, M and Nushkova, A. 2020. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in North Macedonia - October 2018 - October 2020, National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.

4.6. Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction

Table 12

SDG indicators on Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction

Indicator	Previous available data	Latest available data
16.7.1: Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups	Percentage of women employees in the MoI: 2020 - 19.8% 2019 - 19.7% 2018 - 20.1%	Percentage of women employees in the MoI: 19.9% women; 80.1% men Source: Yearly report on advancement in GE, Ministry of Interior (2021)
	Percentage of women in the Army (MoD): 2020 - 9.9% 2019 - 9.5%	Percentage of women in the Army: 9.9% Percentage of women soldiers in the army: 6% Percentage of women officers in the army: 17% Source: Annual report on advancement in GE, Ministry of Defense (2021)
	Percentage of women soldiers (MoD): 2020 - 5.5% 2019 - 4.7% 2018 - 5%	Percentage of women diplomats: 40.3% Percentage of women in directorial positions in diplomacy: 22% Percentage of women ambassadors: 34% Percentage of women general consuls: 12.5%
	Percentage of women officers (MoD): 2020 - 15.5% 2019 - 14.4% 2018 - 13%	Source: Gender budgetary statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022)

National legal, institutional and policy framework

The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), signed on 13 August 2001, putting an end to the armed conflict, includes the principles of non-discrimination and equitable representation of different ethnic communities in the military and in the police forces, however it does not explicitly include gender equality and women's issues, nor does it recognize the role and critical importance of women and girls in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

The OFA also refers to the return and rehabilitation of refugees without applying gender lenses.⁴⁶⁸ Overall, the content of the OFA lacks a gender perspective. Women's participation in the peace negotiations of the OFA was also minimal at only five per cent of delegates.⁴⁶⁹ The situation echoes that of other conflicts affecting the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in which women accounted for a very minor share of negotiators in Bosnia (no women were part of the Dayton Agreement, 1995), Croatia (only 11 per cent were women; the Erdut Agreement, 1995), and Kosovo (under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, only 3 per cent women; the Rambouillet Agreement, 1999).⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ EPI. 2015. Ohrid Framework Agreement Review on Social Cohesion.

⁴⁶⁹ UN Women. 2020. Keep the Promise, Accelerate the Change: Taking stock of gender equality in Europe and Central Asia 25 years after Beijing.

⁴⁷⁰ See: Council on Foreign Relations, Women's Participation in Peace Processes: <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/explore-the-data>

The landmark UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) is the key document to support the integration of a gender perspective into the peace and security field, underlining the role of women and the importance of women's inclusion in preventing and resolving conflicts, as well as in peacebuilding.⁴⁷¹ Since 2013, North Macedonia has adopted two National Action Plans (NAPs) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Following the first NAP for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2013-2015, the Government of North Macedonia adopted the second NAP for 2020-2025.⁴⁷² The government adopted a strategic framework to implement the second NAP on 1325, with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) coordinating the plan's preparation and implementation. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Crisis Management Centre and the Protection and Rescue Directorate are responsible for preparing operational plans for the implementation of the NAP, in coordination with the MoD. MoD is responsible for coordinating the monitoring and reporting processes through the formation of a special working group for these tasks. In addition, the NAP encourages local self-government units to prepare operational plans for the implementation of the NAP in coordination with the MoD, in an effort to localize UNSCR 1325.⁴⁷³

The second NAP outlines the following strategic goals:

- Leadership - Gender transparency in the selection, retention and promotion to leadership positions.
- Inclusion - Gender transparency in public life.
- Facilitation - Appropriate gender motivators that create an effective and enjoyable environment.
- Protection - The security and justice sectors provide comprehensive and effective gender protection.
- Communication and Advocacy - Effective and comprehensive communication and training to support gender equality and transparency (parallel strategic goal).

According to focus group discussions with CSOs held in February 2022, only three CSOs were involved in the development of the first NAP for 1325 and 10 CSOs participated in the planning of the second NAP. Overall, limited budgeting has been one of the greatest implementation challenges for the first and second NAP for 1325. Furthermore, the second NAP does not include measures on relief and recovery to address the specific needs of women and girls affected by disasters and crisis, including displacement and forced migration (as per the fourth pillar of UNSCR 1325). Considering that North Macedonia, as all countries in the Western Balkans region, is prone to the phenomenon of violent extremism, the link between the women, peace and security agenda and the role of women in preventing and combating violent extremism is missing.

Another important milestone related to peace and security is the Long-Term Defence Development Plan for 2019-2028,⁴⁷⁴ adopted by the MoD, which includes goals related to gender equality and women's representation in security and defence and is in line with the strategic commitment of the government and the goals of the second NAP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The Long-Term Defence Development Plan reflects the principle of women's equal representation in the defence sector with the incorporation of the principle of gender equality in all aspects of the work processes, in the planning and management of human resources. The plan focuses on increasing the share of women (without setting specific targets), and gender sensitization of all employees in the MoD, with special emphasis on officers and the managerial and command staff in the armed forces. It includes a gender perspective in the education, training and development of the personnel in the MoD, alongside gender considerations in programs of the Military Academy. Measures for increasing the number of women meeting the established criteria for managerial and commanding duties and undertaking measures for involving more women in military missions are also outlined. The effectiveness of the implementation of the Long-Term Defence Development Plan 2019-2028 to ensure gender parity across the security and defence sector has not yet been assessed.

⁴⁷¹ Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

⁴⁷² Available at: <https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/2020-2025.pdf>

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Available at: <https://www.mod.gov.mk/storage/2021/06/LTDCDP-2019-2028-finalna-verzija.pdf>

Overview of current trends in women's representation in security and defence institutions

Despite the government's efforts, women are still under-represented across all levels of the security and defence sectors. The reasons for this are predominantly linked to the persistence of masculine organizational cultures in the various institutions. In 2021, in the Ministry of Interior (Mol), 80.1 per cent of employees were men.⁴⁷⁵ Compared to 2020, when the number of women employees constituted 19.8 per cent, there has been almost no change in women's representation in the Mol. It is worth noting that the gender gap among employees is high across all ethnic groups and widest in the Albanian community where for every nine men employed in the security sector, there is only one woman employee.⁴⁷⁶ Women from Turkish, Serbian, Roma and Vlach communities are substantially underrepresented (representing less than one per cent of the total employees from each ethnic group).⁴⁷⁷

In 2021, women represented 14 per cent of the participants in professional development trainings organized by the Mol, although official information on any increase or decrease in women's enrolment in Mol's training over time is not available. The existence of a "glass ceiling" is particularly visible in command positions in police stations; of a total of 80 police stations, women were police commanders in only five.⁴⁷⁸ The Mol has 18 certified trainers on gender equality responsible for raising awareness and building the capacity of police personnel on the issues of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the ministry.

Table 13

Employees of the Ministry of Interior, by ethnicity and sex, 2021

Ethnic group	Women (%)	Men (%)
Macedonian	17.1	57.5
Albanian	1.9	19.3
Turkish	0.2	1.1
Serbian	0.3	1.1
Roma	0.1	0.5
Vlach	0.1	0.1

Source: Annual report of state administration bodies on improvement of gender equality-Ministry of Interior (2021)

Regarding administrative personnel in the Ministry of Defence, in 2021, 55 per cent were men, and compared to 2020, the share of female personnel increased by 1.2 per cent. However, women are under-represented in the army; they represent only 10 per cent of all army staff. Considering the different positions in the army, women account for only 17 per cent of officers and only 6 per cent of professional soldiers.⁴⁷⁹ Still, these figures do represent a 1.5 per cent increase in women's military employment as compared to 2020. Women are no better positioned among the civil personnel of the army, where they represent 34 per cent of employees. A total of 36 Gender Advisors have been appointed in the MoD and the Army⁴⁸⁰ and the MoD can be pointed out as a positive example in the adoption of measures and policies related to gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

⁴⁷⁵ Mol, Annual report of the public administration bodies on the advancement of the situation with equal opportunities for women and men 2021.

⁴⁷⁶ Mol, Annual report of the public administration bodies on the advancement of the situation with equal opportunities for women and men 2020.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Jovanoski, Z. 2021. The best army platoon is commanded by a woman - is gender equality improving in the security-intelligence community?, 360 Stepeni.

⁴⁷⁹ Ministry of Defence, Annual report on the advancement of gender equality 2021.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Table 14

Share of women and men in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2021

Rank/ position in the Army	Women (%)	Men (%)
Officers	17.0	83.0
Non-commissioned officers	11.2	88.8
Professional soldiers	6.0	94.0
Civil personnel	34.0	66.0

Source: Annual report of state administration bodies on improvement of Gender equality- Ministry of Defence (2021)

Just under half of diplomats (40.3 per cent) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were women in 2021 (or 104 women), while there were 154 men diplomats.⁴⁸¹ At the same time, the share of women in higher ranking position is significantly lower; they occupy 22 per cent of directorial positions and 21 per cent of special advisor positions in the ministry.⁴⁸² Women are only 34 per cent of ambassadors from North Macedonia and 12.5 per cent of Consuls General.⁴⁸³ On a positive note, the share of women in trainings for professional development is increasing. The data for 2021 indicates that the women make up 51.5 per cent of those enrolled in diplomat training programs, although there are no data to indicate whether this is an increase or decrease from previous years.⁴⁸⁴

Table 15

Share of women and men in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021

Position	Women (%)	Men (%)
Diplomats	40.3	59.7
Directorial positions	22.0	78.0
Special Advisers	21.0	79.0
Ambassadors	34.0	66.0
Consuls General	12.5	87.5
Members of the diplomatic corps (diplomats in missions)	41.0	59.0

Source: Gender budgetary statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021)

Crisis management, protection and rescue in North Macedonia is organized as a single system for tracking, preventing, and mitigating the consequences of natural disasters and other emergencies, regulated by the Protection and Rescue Law.⁴⁸⁵ The Law on Crisis Management regulates the entire risk management approach to crisis management from the local to the national level.⁴⁸⁶

North Macedonia was one of the 168 countries represented at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan in 2005 and accepted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Government of North Macedonia officially adopted the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2009 with the participation of over forty CSOs, although only two of them worked specifically on women's rights or gender equality (the Women's National Council and the Macedonian Women's Lobby).⁴⁸⁷ Analysis indicates that neither gender equality nor women's empowerment were considered as cross-cutting issues or as a specific component in the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. Further efforts are needed to fully integrate gender issues into national disaster risk management efforts. At the local level, the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje provided support to municipalities in North Macedonia to develop strategies and plans for crisis management and prevention. Analysis of strategies adopted in five municipalities (Konce, Karbinci, Kavadarci, Veles, and Mavrovo and Rostuse) confirms that they use gender-sensitive language and include specific measures and activities to address women's vulnerabilities. However, no data or information on women's participation in the preparation of these strategies was available.⁴⁸⁸

When it comes to women's representation in institutions and bodies dealing with crisis management, stereotypical perceptions of crisis management as a male profession still persist. Women represent only 27 per cent of a total of 288 employees of the Crisis Management Centre.⁴⁸⁹ Leading management positions of director and deputy director are occupied exclusively by men. At the Directorate for Rescue and Protection, out of the total number of employees (274), 194 (or 70.8 per cent) are men. Of a total of 23 managerial positions in the Directorate, women occupy eight (or 34.8 per cent).⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gender budgetary statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2021.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 36/04, 49/04, 86/08, 124/10, 18/11, 41/14, 129/15, 71/16 and 106/16.

⁴⁸⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 29/05, 36/11, 41/14, 104/15 and 39/16.

⁴⁸⁷ Crisis Management Centre of the Republic of Macedonia. 2009. National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction of the Republic of Macedonia.

⁴⁸⁸ See: <https://idscs.org.mk/en/2020/11/06/improved-capacity-for-crisis-response-in-municipalities-in-north-macedonia/>

⁴⁸⁹ Interview, Coordinator for Equal Opportunities, Directorate for Rescue and Protection (Conducted on 02.02.2022).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

Table 16

Employees of the Crisis Management Centre disaggregated by sex and ethnicity, 2021

Ethnicity	Women (number)	Men (number)	Total (%)
Macedonian	48	131	62.2
Albanian	18	57	26.1
Turkish	8	17	8.7
Roma	3	2	1.7
Vlach	0	1	0.4
Serb	0	1	0.4
Bosnian	1	1	0.7
Total	78 (27 %)	210 (73 %)	100

Source: First annual information on the level of implementation of the yearly operational plan of NAP of the UN Resolution 1325

Refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons

North Macedonia has developed procedures for determining whether persons claiming asylum are refugees in line with obligations to protect refugees under the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its 1967 Protocol. North Macedonia is also a signatory to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954) and the Convention on Reduction of Statelessness (1961). In response to a recommendation of the CEDAW Committee in 2018, the Government of North Macedonia acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in January 2020.⁴⁹¹ 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. North Macedonia in 2018 passed the Law on International and Temporary Protection,⁴⁹² establishing protection on the basis of sex and gender in processes

of international and temporary protection of asylum seekers and refugees. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for monitoring the movement and stay of foreigners in North Macedonia. The Sector for Asylum within the Mol is the body responsible for asylum procedures.⁴⁹³ In 2016, the government adopted Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for dealing with vulnerable categories of foreign persons, SOPs for dealing with victims of human trafficking and SOPs for preventing and dealing with gender-based violence in crisis conditions. However, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the implementation of the SOPs have not been created, making it challenging to understand their scope and impact on vulnerable categories in general and women and girls in particular. The country has policies in place to address discrimination, but there are no specific frameworks focusing on hate crimes, violence, xenophobia, or discrimination against migrants. The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (2020) does not contain specific provisions regarding migrants, while the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 specifically mentions migrants and asylum seekers in relation to access to justice.

According to UNHCR, a total estimated 41,257 arrivals in mixed movement came to North Macedonia by the end 2020,⁴⁹⁴ while until September 2021, a total of 13,110 new arrivals - among them 314 refugees, 21 asylum-seekers and 558 stateless persons,⁴⁹⁵ were registered, with only 43 asylum claims submitted. There is no sex- or age- disaggregated data regarding the number of women and girls among the migrants, and further efforts are needed to collect and systematize disaggregated data on refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. The countries of origin of refugees are predominantly Serbia and Kosovo,⁴⁹⁶ with 322 refugees in 2019, 271 in 2020, and 263 in the first half of 2021; Syrian Arab Republic with 17 refugees in each of 2019, 2020 and for the first half of 2021; and Afghanistan with 5 refugees in 2019, and 6 in 2020, and for the first half of 2021 each. Among the asylum-seekers, 21 persons were from Afghanistan in 2019, 2020 and for the first half of 2021, and there were 19 persons from Syria in the same period.⁴⁹⁷

North Macedonia has a system on migrant data collection within both the Mol and SSO. The Mol periodically collects and publishes data on regular and irregular entries and exits of foreigners through the country's borders. Publicly available data of irregular

⁴⁹¹ See: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/1/5e143fb14/north-macedonia-accedes-key-statelessness-treaty.html>

⁴⁹² Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no.64/2018.

⁴⁹³ See: <https://help.unhcr.org/northmacedonia/asylum-procedure-in-north-macedonia/>

⁴⁹⁴ UNHCR North Macedonia Fact Sheet, February 2021, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/6172aee7f.pdf>

⁴⁹⁵ UNHCR North Macedonia Fact Sheet, September 2021, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/60d09560d.pdf>

⁴⁹⁶ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder, https://popstats.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?_ga=2.42565029.1073775-656.1654504982-810618660.1652702748

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

entries only covers 2010-2017 and records migrants' country of origin, without information on sex/gender, age, or disability status.⁴⁹⁸ Compared to the migrant crisis in 2015, the number of migrants decreased in 2018 and 2019, and fewer women migrants were detained. However, several problematic areas persist, including meeting international standards for accommodation, ensuring the legal basis for detention, providing necessary information on the reasons and duration of detention, as well as providing access to legal assistance. In such conditions, the vulnerability of women, especially those who are pregnant or travelling with small children, is increased and they face additional risks of harm while they are detained in inappropriate conditions without legal or other types of special assistance.⁴⁹⁹ At the ministerial level, the national institutional mechanism for gender equality does not participate in the inter-ministerial coordination bodies on migration, where it could have an important role in ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated and that relevant national policies and planning frameworks are gender sensitive, including response and contingency plans.

According to the EU Progress Report for 2022,⁵⁰⁰ some advancements have been made on the inclusion of Roma. North Macedonia adopted the new Strategy for Roma Inclusion for 2022-2030,⁵⁰¹ covering antigypsyism, education, employment, social care and health care, housing, civic registration and culture. The Strategy, however, does not systematically address participation, empowerment or capacity building for Roma people. The country also adopted NAP for protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights of Roma women and girls for 2022-2024.⁵⁰² During 2018-2019, the Government launched a campaign for the registration of Roma persons without a birth certificate or citizenship. A total of 750 people were identified from the campaign, although CSOs claim that the number of unregistered people is much higher.⁵⁰³ Obstacles to birth registration and unregulated civil status lie in the inability to collect all the necessary documents due to complex administration, discriminatory treatment, poverty and marginalization. In 2021, the Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination recorded seven cases of discrimination based on Roma ethnicity. Roma women and girls remain particularly vulnerable to discriminatory treatment, often due to lower level of education and unemployment.⁵⁰⁴

COVID-19 pandemic crisis response

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the security of women, especially the most vulnerable, such as women who are poor, women with disabilities, elderly and widowed women, single mothers, women victims of violence, as well as other groups of women.⁵⁰⁵ For the first time since the country's independence, the President of the Republic of North Macedonia declared a state of emergency in March 2020, at which point the country introduced measures to mitigate the health crisis. The government established the Coordination Crisis Headquarters and crisis coordination bodies in local self-government units for the full coordination of all state bodies at central and local levels. Among other measures, kindergartens, primary, secondary and tertiary education facilities were closed (and replaced with online education), and a work from home regimen was established to prevent the spread of the virus.

In response to the socioeconomic effects of these restrictions, the government adopted three packages of crisis measures to support the citizens and the economy, at a total cost of 550 million EUR, or approximately 5.5 per cent of the GDP. Included in the packages were measures to stimulate the economy (fiscal and monetary), to support businesses and preserve jobs, to extend social protection for the most vulnerable citizens, to protect the health and safety of workers, to stimulate consumption, and to develop and improve the competitiveness in the private sector. Analysis of the measures aimed to address the effects of COVID-19 shows that a gender perspective was only included sporadically, or often only in exceptional cases. Out of 46 analysed measures related to the COVID-19 crisis that could have had a gender-dimension, only 14 could be considered to be gender-sensitive, and only two of the measures could be considered gender transformative. This amounts to gender being taken into account in only 35 per cent of the measures, while the majority of measures were gender neutral.⁵⁰⁶

⁴⁹⁸ See: <https://data.gov.mk/dataset/njierajihn-mnrpahtn-od-2010-do-2017-rodnh>

⁴⁹⁹ Milenkovikj, S. 2019. Policy Brief Gender Aspects of Migration: Vulnerabilities and needs of women migrants in North Macedonia and steps for developing gender-sensitive, evidence-based solutions and policies, USAID, p.7.

⁵⁰⁰ Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en

⁵⁰¹ Available at: [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategy for inclusion of Roma 2022-2030 final version.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategy%20for%20inclusion%20of%20Roma%202022-2030%20final%20version.pdf)

⁵⁰² Available at: https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/N%20Do%20P_z%20za%20zastita%20promocija%20i%20ispolnuvanje%20%20ona%20cov%20oprava%20ona%20zenite%20i%20odevoj%20%20Romki%2015.03.2022.pdf

⁵⁰³ Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022-2030.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Bashevska, M. 2020. Rapid Gender Assessment on the Impact of COVID 19 on Women and Men in North Macedonia, UN Women.

⁵⁰⁶ Risteska, M. 2020. Analysis of the impacts of COVID-SARS-19 on gender and diversity, OSCE Mission to Skopje, p. 56.

Main challenges related to women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction

- North Macedonia has a strong framework under which to implement UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security with the second NAP on 1325 (2020-2025) under the Ministry of Defence. Some important gaps, however, include the limited engagement of CSOs in the development and implementation of the NAP 1325, as well as the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the NAP. Moreover, the implementation of the NAP is perceived mainly under the authority of MoD, overlooking the comprehensive nature of UNSCR 1325 and the NAP.
- Despite the progress of the country considering the adoption of national strategies related to defence and security, men still dominate in these sectors, while women have a very minimal presence in institutions and processes. In this regards, MoD sets an example for institutional gender mainstreaming, however more investments and dedication at all levels is needed to achieve significant results.
- Macedonian and Albanian men represent the majority of employees in the MoI when the intersections of gender and ethnicity are considered. The gender gap in employment in these sectors is high across all ethnicities and widest for Albanian women.
- Despite some progress, women are still represented with very low numbers in the army, especially in higher decision-making positions.
- Even though women make up a significant share in the diplomatic sector, they hold lower ranks overall in terms of decision-making (ambassadors, general consuls and special advisers).
- Crisis management is perceived as a male profession and women's participation is very low in the Centre for Crisis Management and Directorate for Protection and Rescue. This contributes to the lack of gender perspective in the implementation of crisis measures.

5

CONCLUSIONS

5. CONCLUSIONS

In general, North Macedonia has demonstrated increasing effort to implement legislation to promote gender equality and protect women's rights over the last decade. However, where there are efforts made to address GEWE via state policies, the policies lack a consideration of how gender intersects with other axes of inequality, such as disability, ethnic minority status, age, and place of residence, among others. In terms of gender statistics, there is a need in investing to increase the capacities of the State Statistical Office to enhance the work on gender indicators, by introducing new indicators and systematizing the collection of data with line ministries, primarily aligned with the SDG gender-related indicators. In addition, budget transparency and improvement of public financial management reforms, including introducing systems for monitoring and making public allocations to promote gender equality publicly available to increase accountability to women and men, is a crucial investment for North Macedonia. The analysis shows that national action plans on gender equality, violence against women, and women, peace and security lack adequate allocated budget for their full implementation to achieve concrete impact in the lives and wellbeing of women, as well as appropriate monitoring and evaluation of their implementation.

Contrary to the high number of women MPs, North Macedonia has a very low representation of women in local government (2 out of 80 mayors). Thus, it is important to extend the use of gender quotas in the elections of mayors for all municipalities across North Macedonia, as established for the City of Skopje, where the percentage of women is set at 40 per cent by the electoral code. When referred to women's participation in the public sector, women are still persistently under-represented in decision making positions in public administration, including the diplomatic service, army and police. Therefore, it is essential to adopt targeted measures, including temporary special measures, such as a gender parity system, for the accelerated recruitment and appointment of women to decision-making positions in public administration, diplomatic service, army and police. More efforts should be done to adopt strategies and programmes to facilitate and promote the involvement of women in political and public life, in particular women belonging to disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, Roma, refugees and asylum-seekers, including with capacity-building in leadership, campaigning and

constituency-building. Finally, concrete action should be taken to regulate the participation of women with disabilities in public and political life with an inclusive legislation, in accordance with the implementation of the Convention for Rights of People with Disabilities.

North Macedonia has made limited progress in terms of inclusion of Roma women and girls over the years. The assessment of the achievements of the National Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020 noted that the implementation of this strategy and the relevant action plans for education, employment, housing, health is not fully implemented.⁵⁰⁷ The key challenges remain in reducing women's unemployment and transforming the informal economy into a formal one, while in the field of health - the short life expectancy of Roma, the high infant mortality rate, and the high rate of child marriage and early pregnancy among Roma women and girls, are all elements of concern. It is important to ensure that the existing public mechanisms for providing access to health care, housing, employment and social protection programmes reach stateless Roma persons, in particular women and girls, in accordance with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness ratified in January 2020. In this regard, public services should be available to ensure access to affordable and high-quality health care and family planning and sexual and reproductive health services, including taking measures to prevent stigmatization and prejudices against Roma women among medical practitioners. Along with Roma women and girls, rural women have been found by the analysis as one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to the formal labour market, as the majority work in the informal agricultural sector. In this light, it is important to provide women in rural areas with access to different types of pensions, allowances, and public childcare services to uphold an adequate standard of living and ensure that they benefit directly from social protection programmes, as well as adopt measures to register and recognize the work of rural women and make provisions for recognizing their rights to land property, loans, and social benefits.

The legislative framework on violence against women and girls and domestic violence has been strengthened. The systemic lack of national funds to implement national plans on VAW and DV, along with the delayed implementation of operational plans in

⁵⁰⁷ <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategy%20for%20inclusion%20of%20Roma%202022-2030%20final%20version.pdf>

local governments, limit the state capacity to prevent, respond and address VAW. There is an urgent need to provide adequate technical and financial support to expand state-run shelters and referral centres, including for women and girls victims of trafficking, ensuring that shelters provide full and barrier-free access to legal, medical and psychological support.

Commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals are not mandatory and therefore provide less of an incentive to fulfil them. Considering the non-binding status of the SDGs, additional resources should be invested to ensure better understanding of the SDG agenda by all state institutions and agencies, and to devise incentives for these state bodies to adhere to these commitments. In addition, there still remain international instruments critical for GEWE concerns to which North Macedonia has not yet committed. For instance, North Macedonia has not ratified the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118) – both conventions are essential to reinforce equal pay measures, women’s protection from harassment in the workplace, among others. The country should adopt effective control mechanisms to ensure compliance with the obligation of equal pay for work and ensure the enforcement of the provisions in the Law on Labour Relations, including article 107 thereof. The international community has to play an important role in driving North Macedonia to adopt these instruments and begin their implementation. Apart from policies, implementation mechanisms and structural constraints, the measures taken by the State to raise awareness among society are still sporadic; instead, such measures should play an important role in reducing discrimination and inequality caused by stereotypical gender norms. Indeed, in North Macedonia, gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes remain deeply entrenched and prevalent in society, infringing on women’s enjoyment of the right to equality and perpetuating violence against women. Accordingly, much remains to be done to change patriarchal norms and public attitudes towards gender roles in the country.

Analysis carried out for this CGEP indicates that despite many positive efforts, the implementation of normative acts, policies, strategies and commitments is still incomplete and that there is considerable room for improvement before substantive equality for women and girls is achieved. Additional efforts beyond the elimination of structural barriers and discriminatory practices against women and girls are needed, with an explicit focus on enacting affirmative measures to ensure that women fully exercise their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Women’s and girls’ empowerment implies their access to education, training

and professional development; their access to safe sexual and reproductive health; their ability to live free from violence; their participation in political and social life with equal rights and opportunities; their access to the labour market while benefitting from the social schemes provided by formal jobs; and their control over productive resources, land, income and assets. Although North Macedonia has ratified the most important human rights treaties and adopted significant national policies on GE, “the rights of women and girls, children, ethnic communities, in particular Roma, persons with disabilities and refugees are more likely to be compromised.”⁵⁰⁸ Women and girls from minority ethnic groups, including Roma and Albanian, women and girls with disabilities, migrant women, single mothers, and others, are found to be at risk of further social exclusion and discrimination based on their pre-existing vulnerabilities. In order to advance GEWE in North Macedonia, the particular situations of women and girls belonging to marginalised groups will have to be given greater consideration. In turn, this will support the development of tailored and inclusive policies and strategies to increase the wellbeing of all women and girls.

⁵⁰⁸ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025.

6

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall recommendations

- Enhance the collection, analysis, use, and dissemination of comprehensive data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability.
- Continue improving the production and dissemination of gender statistics by building the capacities of the SSO and the other actors in the statistical system. Enhance collaboration and establish clear protocols with administrative data producers in the national statistical system for streamlined production, analysis, use, and dissemination of gender statistics.
- Continue building the capacities of public administration employees on GE and gender mainstreaming to ensure systematic inclusion of gender perspective in national and local policies, strategies, plans, and measures.
- Ensure systematic monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of laws, policies, strategies, NAPs, and measures aimed at advancing the situation with GEWE.
- Increase support to women's CSOs to implement activities at grass-roots level, in terms of financial support and capacity building.
- Practice inclusive/participatory creation of policies in consultation with target groups/stakeholders (women in rural areas, Roma women, women with disabilities, among other).
- Implement community outreach and awareness raising campaigns to tackle gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.
- Establish measures to enhance the capacities of Commissions for Equal Opportunities in municipalities to actively participate in annual planning and budget allocation. Regulate publication of reports drafted by Coordinators for Equal Opportunities on implemented activities, as well as monitoring of the implementation of planned activities aimed at GEWE at local level.
- Design and adopt targeted measures, including affirmative measures, such as a gender parity system, for the accelerated recruitment and appointment of women to decision-making positions in public administration, including the diplomatic service, military service, and law enforcement.
- Adopt strategies and programmes to facilitate and promote the involvement of women in political and public life, in particular women from disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, such as Roma women, refugees, women with disabilities, and other, including capacity-building in leadership, campaigning and constituency-building to prepare them to stand for election.
- Working with civil society, the Committee on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in the Parliament and the Sector for Equal Opportunities in MLSP, as the key institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality, should prepare and implement programmes, long-term strategies and legislation that aim to counter gender stereotypes and prejudice concerning women and men in decision-making power.
- Adopt measures to increase the participation of women with disabilities in public and political life, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Introduce gender quotas in mechanisms for citizen participation in policy-making processes at the local level, such as citizen forums, local self-administration, public hearings, and citizen gatherings, in order to increase the percentage of women in local government structures.
- Dedicate budget for support of women's CSOs, associations, and other women's groups in order to increase their visibility and legitimacy and to sensitize the community about the need for more substantial involvement of women in public life and in the local governments.

Recommendations on women's participation in governance and public life

- Raise awareness and encourage political parties to develop gender action plans, as well as to promote the nomination of women as chairs of parliamentary committees and to eliminate structural barriers for women to be appointed at decision-making positions in the Parliament.
- Extend the use of gender quotas, in the electoral law, to include local elections in all municipalities across North Macedonia.

- Systematically collect data to monitor the dynamic of women's representation in political and public life, specifically by collecting gender/age/disability disaggregated data on women/men in decision-making and management positions in public institutions, including the security and defence sectors.
- Build capacity and increase awareness of the media (journalists and editors) on reporting on gender equality issues, with a particular focus on gender-sensitive reporting on women in politics and women decision-makers.
- Reassess and tailor active labour market programs and services offered mainly through the Employment Service Agency (ESA) in order to improve support for women's employment, especially young women, to reduce the persistent gender employment gap in the labour market with the expansion of financial support.
- Adopt measures to improve young women's skills and qualifications through formal learning and informal training, especially at the local level, ensuring that not only unemployed women (those registered in ESA and seeking a job) are targeted, but also that those who are not actively looking for a job are included. Involve local women's organizations as a mediator between the local/central government and economically inactive young women.

Recommendations on women's economic participation

- Ratify the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118) and transpose the provisions of the conventions into national legislation to further protect women's labour rights.
- Adopt effective control mechanisms to ensure compliance with the obligation of equal pay for work of equal value and ensure the enforcement of the provisions in the Law on Labour Relations, including Art. 107 regarding minimum pay.
- Expedite the amendment of legislation concerning paternity leave to meaningfully prolong the period of paternity leave, consider making paternity leave compulsory for fathers and promote and facilitate access to information and support for men with respect to shared parental responsibilities.
- Adopt legislation and programmes to facilitate access to the formal labour market and give priority to the adoption of legislation and public policies to recognise caregiving as a form of labour.
- Undertake research and analysis related to gender pay gap and adopt appropriate measures to address it, especially at local level, in both urban and rural areas.
- Monitor and evaluate the progress, efficacy and impact of measures taken to support women's entrepreneurship, to underpin the implementation of the recent women's entrepreneurship strategy, including a transparent monitoring and evaluation process, supported by the production of sex-disaggregated data via national statistics and government-funded programmes.
- Promote flexible working arrangements to support women to re/enter the labour market, especially young women, including part-time work, work from home, job-sharing, etc., which allow for greater work-family balance.
- Assess the reasons for inactivity of women on the labour market, both in urban and in rural areas, and support LSGUs to create an enabling environment for women to increase their activation on the labour market.
- Adopt measures to register and recognize the work of rural women in agriculture and make provisions for recognizing their rights to land, property, loans, social benefits.
- Implement awareness-raising campaigns and gender-sensitive public education on gender equality and female participation in the labour market, including on equal distribution of care work and responsibilities among family members.
- Adopt measures to accelerate women's access to employment, including by providing targeted, lifelong and continuous training for women in traditionally male-dominated fields and by opening job positions for women in male-dominated professions.
- Provide measures to enhance ICT skills of women entrepreneurs.
- Enhance measures towards eliminating harassment, including sexual harassment, at the workplace.

Recommendations on girls' and women's participation in education and training

- Adopt measures to ensure that children from vulnerable groups, such as Roma girls, remain in education, with specific targets/quotas to support their progression from primary to secondary school.
- Along with scholarships, design and implement other measures to reduce the financial burden for studying in secondary education for the poorest households, such as favourable loans, cash assistance or in-kind support, particularly targeting girls from the poorest quintile and from ethnic minority groups.
- Expand enrolment and/or performance scholarships targeting girls in specific subjects (e.g., girls in technical and biotechnical engineering, architecture, electrical and mechanical engineering, etc.) to reduce gender segregation in particular educational fields.
- Improve education about and the use of ICTs in schools, with special programmes targeting girls, to increase their self-confidence and interest in the field.
- Increase the number of scholarships for girls in STEM and ICT fields.
- At STEM faculties, implement measures to prevent discrimination and harassment, through the appointment of a person responsible for gender equality and discrimination.

Recommendations on the advancement of women's health and wellbeing

- Ensure access to affordable and high-quality health care, family planning and sexual and reproductive health services for all women and girls.
- Develop a new Action Plan, following the evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health (2018-2020) which aimed to improve access to modern contraceptive methods, including universal coverage by state health insurance of all costs related to modern contraceptive methods, for the prevention of unplanned pregnancies.

- Ensure access to affordable and high-quality health care and family planning and sexual and reproductive health services, take measures to prevent stigmatization and prejudice against Roma women among medical practitioners, as well as for women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, and migrant and refugee women, regardless of citizenship status.
- Provide information on the impact of the delivery of age-appropriate education on SRH in schools and ensure that adolescents have access to accurate information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including on responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, especially among Roma girls.
- Ensure that modern forms of contraception and treatment for sexually transmitted infections are available to all women and girls and raise awareness on the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV and about responsible sexual behaviour, including for men and LGBT people.
- Raise awareness among women and girls, especially among Roma and girls in rural areas, on the risks of early pregnancy for the health and wellbeing of girls and provide free access to modern forms of contraception.
- Enhance and promote preventive care related to malignant neoplasms among women of all ages. Promote and increase the use of HPV vaccine.
- Promote healthy lifestyle, raising awareness on the importance of physical activity and sport and implementing measures to facilitate girls' and women's engagement in sport and physical activity, such as improvement of infrastructure, measures addressing sexual harassment, and other, as relevant.

Recommendations on ending violence against women

- Continue strengthening the legislative framework on violence against women and domestic violence in compliance with the Istanbul Convention, including the enforcement of Criminal Code amendments.
- Evaluate the impact of the implementation of the NAP for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018 –2023) followed by drafting of a new, revised, and costed five-year NAP that includes actions for the establishment and implementation of Operational Plans for local government with effective budget allocations.

- Allocate sufficient funds to implement national and local policies to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls, including in situations of heightened risk (e.g., for women with disabilities, women from ethnic minority groups, LGBTBI women and girls, and refugees/asylum seekers/stateless women).
- Create a system to systematically collect data on cases of violence and discrimination against women, disaggregated by such indicators as cases recorded by Centres for Social Work, cases recorded by police, the number of temporary protection orders issued, cases brought to court, etc.
- Ensure a sufficient number of fully functional available and accessible specialized services in accordance with the standards of the Istanbul Convention, including psycho-social support, legal aid, crisis centres, shelters for victims of sexual violence, sexual violence referral centres, counselling for perpetrators with appropriate geographical distribution; provide adequate technical and financial support to expand the services of existing shelters and referral centres, ensuring that shelters provide full and effective access to legal, medical and psychological support.
- Ensure continuous monitoring of the situation with available services for women survivors of violence and their children, implement assessment of the criteria and conditions for licencing to ensure that services fulfil the relevant standards, in accordance with the IC.
- Ensure availability of support services accessible to women with disabilities.
- Strengthen cooperation with and capacities of local CSOs as providers of specialized services for survivors of violence thus creating sustainable services, financially supported by the state and local self-government units.
- Expand the Programme for the protection of mothers and children of the Ministry of Health, granting access to free health care services for women victims of all forms of VAW.
- Ensure that future calls for social housing of the Government of North Macedonia explicitly include women victims of violence as eligible candidates.
- Develop specialized services for perpetrators, in accordance with the standards set in the Istanbul Convention.

Recommendations on combating trafficking in human beings

- Ensure the effective enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation, including by providing immigration authorities and other law enforcement officials, border police, prosecutors, and judges with mandatory training in gender-sensitive application of the law.
- Allocate appropriate human, technical and financial resources to implement the national strategy and the NAP for combating trafficking in persons and illegal migration for 2021-2025 and evaluate the impact of its implementation.
- Increase the coverage of the mobile teams for the identification of trafficking victims; develop strategies for the identification and referral of victims; and accelerate the adoption of mechanisms to provide restitution and compensation to victims of trafficking.
- Increase the capacities of the existing centre for accommodation of victims of trafficking.
- Establish an independent national rapporteur or designated mechanism, as an independent organizational entity, to ensure effective monitoring of anti-trafficking activities, in line with GRETA recommendations, including development and maintenance of a comprehensive statistical system on THB, by sex, age, type of exploitation, country of origin and/or destination.
- Adopt measures for prevention of child exploitation by forced begging and sex trafficking through forced marriages, including migrants and refugees who have been smuggled, particularly women and unaccompanied minors.

Recommendations on preventing early and child marriage

- Enforce existing legislation that defines “extramarital life with a child” to include children between the ages of 16 and 18, in order to prevent child marriage.
- Organize in-depth research and population surveys alongside awareness-raising campaigns on the consequences of child marriage.

- Develop databases and a system for regular data collection on child marriages and common-law marriages.
- Ensure availability and accessibility of healthcare services, especially gynaecological and paediatric services, counselling on family planning and free access to contraceptives in communities most affected by child marriage and in rural areas.
- Develop integrated approach within the educational system, with policies and measures to ensure institutional response to child and early marriage (particularly among Roma girls) by introducing soft measures to ensure regular school attendance, as well as continuous sex education. Ensure that school staff is educated further to have an active role in preventing early marriage, i.e., school drops.
- Adjust budgets at the central and local levels so that they are gender-responsive and based on gender analysis and ex-ante assessments of the impacts on women and men, taking into account different needs during crises, including for refugees, asylum seekers and stateless women and girls.
- Implement measures to support women in diplomatic missions, such as financial support for childcare/kindergarten.
- Monitoring of crises and their impacts should include sex-disaggregated data, as well as information about the gendered impacts of crisis measures and policies as a basis for evidence-based policy-making. At minimum, regular reports and reviews should include sex-disaggregated indicators on socioeconomic status, health, education, access to basic services, as well as violence against women and children, and domestic violence.

Recommendations on women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction

- Apply positive discrimination measures or gender quota in the recruitment, appointment, promotion, and training of the personnel of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, Centre for Crisis Management and Directorate for Protection and Rescue in order to increase the number of women employees.
- Introduce data collection systems to produce national sex-disaggregated data for high-level positions in security and defence institutions.
- Introduce gender-sensitive curricula and programs for the education and training of all personnel in the security and defence structures (Police Academy, Military Academy, etc.).
- Increase the investment in fellowships for trainings and education of young women in Police Academy, Military Academy etc., to enable them to pursue military and police careers.
- Support the involvement of the civil society organisations in the implementation of the second National Action Plan to implement UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, expanding its reach beyond the MoD, and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation.
- Adopt measures to ensure that rural women are represented in decision-making processes at all levels, including with regard to policies concerning disaster risk reduction, post-disaster management and climate change.
- Ensure that the existing mechanisms for ensuring access to health care, housing, employment and social protection programmes reach stateless Roma persons, in particular women and girls, in accordance with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
- Allocate budget and define specific actions in support of migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, and stateless women and girls, under the second NAP 1325 to have access to free legal aid, economic empowerment measures, and protection against violence (in line with the pillar 4 on Relief and Recovery of UNSCR 1325 on WPS).

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ANNEX

Detailed methodological note

The CGEP is drafted according to UN Women methodology and is based on an in-depth data analysis and desk review of information collected from the national statistical agency and other central and local institutions; existing reports, studies, and comprehensive gender analyses conducted in North Macedonia in various policy areas; legislative, policy, institutional and operational frameworks for gender equality; as well as other relevant documents and reports, including those submitted to international bodies. The drafting of the CGEP encompassed various stages of data collection, analysis, and validation. At various stages, various relevant stakeholders were involved, to discuss and provide a comprehensive and overarching overview of the situation with GEWE in North Macedonia.

The first stage of drafting of the document consisted of desk review and in-depth sectorial gender analysis of relevant national policies, strategies, laws, and other relevant documents, available online and obtained from relevant institutions and ministries, as well as international conventions, strategies, and action plans relevant for the advancement of the situation with GEWE in the Republic of North Macedonia. Furthermore, during this stage, various analyses and research were consulted, for a more comprehensive overview of the situation with GEWE.

The second stage of the preparation of the CGEP included consultations with relevant stakeholders, held in person and on-line. Consultative meetings were organized in order to discuss key topics, and to identify priorities in the area of gender equality for the country as a whole and as the focus for the forthcoming period. Consultations were conducted with 24 partners from the national UN agencies, the government, including gender institutional mechanisms, and partners from the international community.

List of interviews:

Name/surname	Institution/organization	Date
Svetlana Cvetkovska Elena Grozdanova Mabera Kamberi Darko Docinski Mladen Frckovski Maja Papatolevska Mirjana Aleksevska	MLSP	17.02.2022
Jasmina Markovska Antoanela Stankovska Budimir	SSO	18.02.2022
Irena Nikolov	ZELS	21.02.2022
Biljana Stevkova	Ministry of Defence	22.02.2022
Zhaneta Poposka	OSCE	21.02.2022
Irena Ivanova	EU Delegation	15.02.2022
Tatijana Temelkoska	UN RCO/OHCHR	16.02.2022
Jasmina Belcovska-Tasevska	UN RCO	
Lilian Kandikjan		
Sanja Bojanic	UNDP	16.02.2022
Artur Ayvazov	UNICEF	16.02.2022
Tihomir Nikolovski	UNHCR	17.02.2022
Zhaklina Geshtakovska Aleksovska	UNFPA	24.02.2022
Afrodita Shalja-Plavjanska		
Emil Krstanovski	ILO	Written
Katerina Spasovska	IOM	
Vesna Ivanovikj Castarede	UN Women	Written

Furthermore, an online consultative meeting - focus group discussion, was held on 14 February 2022 with representatives from civil society organizations, namely: Macedonian Women's Lobby, National Council for Gender Equality, Association of Business Women, Reaktor – Research in Action, Kvinna till Kvinna, Polio Plus – Movement against Disability, Helsinki Committee, Rural Coalition, CRPM - Centre for Research and Policy Making, Centre for Change Management, Luludi, Agora, Journalists for Human Rights, and ECHO. The focus group was aimed at discussing the progress with GEWE in the country at the grass-roots level, identifying the challenges and obstacles to be addressed, reflecting on the viable strategies to achieve gender equality in North Macedonia, as well as the needs for capacity development for improved implementation of relevant legislation, policies, strategies, and measures for the advancement of GEWE.

The final stage in the preparation of the CGEP consisted of three validation sessions with various stakeholders, held as hybrid meetings, with possibility to participate both in-person and online, on Zoom. Invitations to participate at the validation sessions were sent to stakeholders that contributed to the consultation meetings, as well as other relevant stakeholders, that could provide relevant feedback on the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the CGEP. A summary of the CGEP was sent to the relevant stakeholders prior to the validation sessions, while the comprehensive analysis was presented at the sessions by the national consultants. The comments and notes provided at the validation sessions were accordingly integrated in the final version of this CGEP. The first validation session was held on 18 April 2023 with representatives from civil society organisations: Reaktor, CRPM, Association of Business Women, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Radar, National Council for Gender Equality, HERA, Florozon, Rural Coalition, Open Gate/La Strada, Kvinna till Kvinna, and Akcija Združenska. The second validation session was held on 19 April 2023, with representatives from national institutions: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Secretariat for European Affairs, Employment Service Agency, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Good Governance Policies, Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services, State Statistical Office, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The third validation session took place on 20 April 2023, with representatives from the international community: UN RCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, IOM, ILO, OSCE, Slovak Embassy, Embassy of Sweden, Embassy of Switzerland, Embassy of France, and EUD.

The document underwent a peer-review process during different stages of its drafting and finalisation. It was peer-reviewed by colleagues from UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and by colleagues from UN Women North Macedonia Programme Presence Office with expertise in different areas relevant for the CGEP. The comments and inputs provided during the peer-review process have been duly integrated in the final document.

The CGEP presents a summary of the context in which it is developed, analysing the current state of human rights, the situation regarding gender equality in the current political setup, the achievements under the 2030 Agenda to date, and the importance of partner support. The document analyses the policy and legal framework that applies to North Macedonia, focusing on the international commitments to gender equality, domestic legislation, and the strategies that national institutions have adopted, as well as the existing gender institutional mechanisms. Furthermore, it goes beyond a quantitative analysis and includes a qualitative analysis of the bottlenecks and main obstacles for achieving gender equality in North Macedonia. Finally, the CGEP contributes to furthering of the partnership between the UN and North Macedonia towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, by providing an overview of the situation and opportunities for joint action.



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