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SOCIAL RIGHTS MONITOR 2020

COUNTRY MONITOR: NORTH MACEDONIA



In recent years, the Republic of North Macedonia has increased its efforts and achieved progress in key areas identified by the Council as necessary for the opening of accession negotiations, the European Commission reports. Specifically, efforts have focused on the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime, reform of the intelligence services and public administration.¹ The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted North Macedonia on several levels. Firstly, the pandemic pushed the government to declare a state of emergency and therefore rule by decree between March 2020 and June 2020. The unprecedented situation also caused the postponement of parliamentary elections, planned for April 2020, to July 2020. Although the

socio-economic consequences are still hard to assess, a loss of 4 to 6 percentage points of GDP is forecast for North Macedonia, as is the risk of unemployment for thousands of citizens. Fiscal repercussions of temporary government support measures are also expected.² This picture is intertwined with what the National Strategy Group identifies as the most pressing social issues, such as youth unemployment, emigration and a low minimum wage. Although youth unemployment has been decreasing since 2011, when it was 47%, it was still extremely high in 2019, with 30.5% of young people aged 15-29 unemployed.³ Also, the minimum wage is much lower than the European Union average, considered both in terms of wages in euros and in purchasing power parity.⁴

1 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia 2020 Report https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

2 Ibid.

3 Eurostat (2020) Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and country of birth <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitView-TableAction.do>

4 Eurostat (2020) Minimum wage statistics <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1568.pdf>

	2018	2019	EU-28 2019
Gini index ⁵	31.9	30.7	30.1
Unemployment ⁶	20.8%	17.3%	6.3%
Gender Equality Index ⁷	N/A	N/A	67.9 (2020)
In-work poverty ⁸	8.7%	8.4%	9.2%
Housing Overcrowding ⁹	46.4%	43.5%	15.6%
CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor ¹⁰		NARROWED	N/A

Selected indicators on the state of social rights

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Unemployment is a major feature of the labour market in North Macedonia. More than one-fifth of the Macedonian labour force was jobless in 2018.¹¹ Moreover, around 80% of the unemployed are long-term unemployed, largely reflecting the skills mismatch that characterises the job market. Overall, 15% of the workforce are long-term unemployed, though the rate has been decreasing steadily in the last few years, a positive trend. The employment rate increased in the year before the pandemic struck but remained low.¹² It is disproportionately harder for women to access the labour market: the female employment rate was 45.2% in 2018, compared to 66.6% for male employment.¹³

EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Public expenditure on education has averaged around 3.7% of GDP over the last five years, and it is still below the OECD average.¹⁴ Since the country gained independence, participation in schooling in North Macedonia has increased, leading to an rise in the educational achievements of young people. However, according to PISA scores, North Macedonia has the poorest performance of learning outcomes in the Western Balkans region. Socio-economic differences do not affect learning outcomes in North Macedonia, in part due to the general low level of performance throughout

5 Eurostat (2020). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12

6 Eurostat (2020). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en

7 European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020>

8 Eurostat (2020). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

9 Eurostat (2020). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en

10 CIVICUS (2020). Civic space monitor – Macedonia: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/macedonia/>

11 Eurostat (2020) Enlargement countries - labour market statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Enlargement_countries_-_labour_market_statistics#Employment_rates

12 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia 2020 Report https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

13 Eurostat (2020) Enlargement countries - labour market statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Enlargement_countries_-_labour_market_statistics#Employment_rates

14 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

the country. Nevertheless, the learning outcomes gap between urban and country areas is one of the highest among PISA-participating economies. In science, for instance, 15-year-old students living in rural areas are 1.5 years of schooling behind those who live in urban areas. Ethnicity, especially for the Albanian minority, is another relevant factor of differentiation of learning outcomes, and this gap increases the further students advance in the education system.¹⁵

In 2019, 30.5% of young people aged 15-29 were unemployed in North Macedonia, more than twice the average rates of the euro area (12.9%) and of the EU-27 (11.9%). Youth unemployment also depends on gender: in 2019, 28.6% of young men were unemployed and 32.5% of young women.¹⁶ The low labour-market activity rate of the young population is strongly linked to educational inequalities, as 42% of low-educated individuals were inactive in 2015.¹⁷ Unemployment is not the only pressing issue in North Macedonia. The rate of NEETs (people not in employment, education or training) was 31.4% in 2019, with a wide gender gap of 12.1 percentage points: the rate of female NEETs was 37.4%.¹⁸ Youth underemployment (when workers are highly skilled but working in low-paying jobs; or they are highly skilled but working part-time in low-skill jobs; or they would prefer to be full-time) is another alarming feature of the labour market.¹⁹ According to a 2019 report by Finance Think based on ILO data, underemployed youth accounted for

12.5% of North Macedonia's employed population aged 15-19, almost 5 percentage points higher than the EU-28 average. The rate was higher for women overall: on average, 19% were underemployed.²⁰

This situation has triggered a brain drain from North Macedonia. Over one-quarter of the national population had emigrated by 2017, and more than one-third of the university-educated workforce was living abroad that year. Among people with some kind of higher education, almost 40% have emigrated. Dissatisfaction is especially high in the education sector: in 2017, about 70 % of people employed in North Macedonia's higher education system were planning to emigrate, and 20% of this group had already applied for jobs abroad.²¹

Successive governments of North Macedonia have tried over the years to tackle youth unemployment. The National Strategy Group reports that in the last decade public measures to combat youth unemployment have focused on three main policy areas: macroeconomic and sectoral actions and their impact on job creation; education and training policies and their relevance to the labour market; and labour-market policies that bridge the gaps between labour supply and demand. The process of planning, design and implementation of active labour-market programs (ALMPs) started in 2007 and has been implemented through operational plans (OPs). The OPs follow the guidelines set out in strategic documents,

15 OECD (2019) OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: North Macedonia https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/079fe34c-en/1/2/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/079fe34c-en&csp_=b01967bbf6919870948b05a9f-57ca5a4&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book

16 Eurostat (2020) Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and country of birth https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/yth_empl_100/default/table?lang=en

17 Nikica Mojsoska Blazevski, Marjan Petreski & Despina Petreska (2015) Increasing the Labor Market Activity of the Poor, Females, and Informal Workers: Let's Make Work Pay in Macedonia https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287973216_Increasing_the_Labor_Market_Activity_of_the_Poor_Females_and_Informal_Workers_Let's_Make_Work_Pay_in_Macedonia

18 Eurostat (2020) Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#:~:text=The%20latest%20data%20available%20for,for%20those%20aged%2030%E2%80%9334

19 European Commission (2017) Youth policies in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – 2017 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlformer_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf

20 Finance Think (2019) Analysis of youth underemployment in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-study-22.pdf>

21 World Bank (2019) Migration and Brain Drain <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32481>

including the National Employment Strategy and the National Action Plan for Employment. Aimed at young people, the separate Action Plan for Youth Unemployment 2012-2015 was followed by the more recent Action Plan for Youth Unemployment 2016-2020.

This last strategic document foresees the creation of a skills forecasting system to inform both policy design and individuals' choices over education and work. The skills forecasting model is based on demographic projections, employer and vacancies surveys, education data, employment projections and sectoral studies. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education and Science both use it and provide data for it. Other measures, too, are envisaged by the Action Plan for Youth Unemployment for 2016-2020. These include actions to create job opportunities, for example through subsidised employment for young people and young people at risk of social exclusion, as well as through support for SMEs. The plan also includes flexicurity; traineeships and apprenticeships (although clear guidelines have not been elaborated yet); career guidance and counselling services; and the development of entrepreneurship competences.²²

INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) has set up an inter-ministerial group for the integration of refugees and foreigners. Its priorities also include the preparation of the Draft Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Foreigners for 2017-2027. The focus of

the Draft Strategy is the improvement of educational services for refugees, especially language courses, as a fundamental means of integration. Besides the inadequacy of the educational and mentorship services for refugees in North Macedonia, the lack of precise official figures on immigration represents a major issue for the integration of immigrants, the IRIS Network reports. The large number of irregular movements leads to the deportation of irregular immigrants to Greece (the main access point for immigrants to North Macedonia) on a daily basis.²³ The European Commission, in its 2020 Report on Macedonia, mentions the need for the country to have a more-systematic approach to the registration and profiling of migrants.²⁴

According to the Law on Social Protection, basic social protection, permanent social protection, nursing care and one-time financial assistance is available to all refugees, asylum-seekers and persons under subsidiary protection. Medical aid for these groups in protection centres is mainly provided by the Red Cross in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The Centres for Social Work (CSW) are in charge of social protection management and the Centre for Integration handles the dissemination of adequate information, as well as support for refugees in their applications for social assistance. The only persons with complete access to social rights are those under humanitarian protection, victims of human trafficking, recognized refugees, persons under subsidiary protection and foreign nationals with permission to remain in the country permanently. The integration of refugees in North Macedonia consists of three main services: inclusion

22 European Commission (2017) Youth policies in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – 2017 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlformer_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf

23 IRIS Network (2019) Regional Shadow Report <http://iris-see.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Regional-Shadow-Report.pdf>

24 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

of refugees in the national welfare system; support for refugees to become self-reliant through employment, education, housing and other means; and legal aid to enable refugees to be fully integrated into North Macedonian society, either as citizens or as holders of permanent residence permits.²⁵

The inclusion of the Roma minority has received increasing attention in recent years, which has resulted in an increase in government funds. However, the low use of the funds remains an issue, together with the slow implementation, coordination and monitoring of all interventions to increase Roma inclusion in North Macedonian society. Roma are victims of racism, segregation and discrimination, despite the existence of a legal framework that protects the human rights of minorities. More broadly, barriers exist that prevent the Roma minority from accessing employment, health-care, education, justice and housing.²⁶

TAX SYSTEM

In January 2019, the government introduced a reform aimed at redistributing the fiscal burden towards the wealthiest 1% of the population. The increased revenues resulting from this reform were meant to finance new social protection rights, which were linked to the tax reform

under the umbrella of a wider social reform package. This package included the New Law on Social Protection, which introduced guaranteed minimum assistance; the Law on Social Security for Older Persons, which introduced social pensions; and amendments to the Law on Child Protection, which introduced educational allowances. However, the policy was rolled back only 11 months after its introduction by the same government that proposed it. The arguments in support of this decision included the fact that the reform, as conceived, led to an improvement of less than 1% in the equality of income distribution but had led to tax avoidance equivalent to 50% of the expected revenues. The European Social Policy Network disputes these arguments from different perspectives. For instance, it notes that the most recent data available on inequality refer to 2018 and that an improvement of 0.6 percentage point in the Gini coefficient is not negligible. And if the government's objective was to reduce fiscal pressure on a certain income group, it would have been better to change the progressive personal income tax thresholds. The ENSP also points out that, by rolling back the entire reform, the government lost political credibility.²⁷ On a more positive note, the above-mentioned measures introduced together with the tax reform have been identified by the NSG as a positive step towards reducing inequalities in North Macedonia.

25 Ristevski, V. (2016) Access to social protection and naturalization for refugees and persons under subsidiary protection in the Republic of Macedonia <https://civicamobilitas.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACCESS-TO-SOCIAL-PROTECTION-AND-NATURALIZATION-FOR-REFUGEES-AND-PERSONS-UNDER-SUBSIDIARY-PROTECTION-IN-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-MACEDONIA.pdf>

26 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/next/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

27 ESPN (2019) North Macedonia rolls back progressive taxation <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22203&langId=en>

FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS

MINIMUM WAGE AND IN-WORK POVERTY

The incidence of low wages is high in North Macedonia, with a 25% rate of low-wage earners in 2014.²⁸ In 2012, a statutory minimum wage was introduced, with the positive consequence of protecting workers of non-unionised sectors. However, until amendments to the law were introduced in 2017, the minimum wage did not apply to all sectors. Sectors that had been left out included textiles, clothing and leather production, all of which have high concentrations of low-wage workers. The self-employed are not covered by minimum wage provisions in North Macedonia. Between 2012 and 2018, the minimum net wage increased by 51%.²⁹ However, the minimum wage in North Macedonia is significantly lower than that in the EU.³⁰ Moreover, despite the efforts of authorities to enforce compliance with the minimum wage, evidence shows that in many cases employers apply it as a social insurance contribution threshold, paying amounts above the minimum wage in cash to avoid higher contributions. Despite these problems, the impact of the minimum wage on in-work poverty and equitable wages has been positive.³¹ Nevertheless, the National Strategy Group highlights that the IMF mission to North Macedonia has suggested lowering the minimum income base for social security,³² though government policies have not yet moved in this direction.

In-work poverty in North Macedonia is not as pronounced as out-of-work poverty, and in 2016 it was slightly lower than the EU average at 9.6%. Of employed persons in North Macedonia aged 18-64, 8.9% were at risk of

poverty after social transfers in 2016. However, employment status has an impact on the incidence of in-work poverty in North Macedonia, and the self-employed are the group at highest risk of being affected. Among employed workers, those who are employed part-time are the most hit by in-work poverty. The length of their contract also influences the rate of in-work poverty. In-work poverty among employees on temporary contracts stood at 5.9% in 2016, while the rate was 4.8% for those on permanent contracts. Since 2012, temporary employment has increased by 16.2%. However, part-time employment is to a large extent involuntary: Labour Force Survey data for 2017 show that in 63% of cases, the main reason for working part-time was the lack of alternative jobs.³³

PRECARIOUSNESS AND WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Although informal employment declined after 2013 to 18.1% in 2017, it still represents a significant issue for the Macedonian labour market, especially among low-skilled workers.³⁴ Therefore, this last group is at high risk of precariousness. Furthermore, part-time workers' high risk of in-work poverty is also the result of the precarious conditions of their work.³⁵ Self-employed workers, too, are subject to precariousness.

Precariousness in North Macedonia also concerns workers' health and safety conditions. Health and safety in the workplace are regulated by the Law on Occupational Safety and Health, whose fundamental principle is "the principle of prevention of occupational injuries, occupational diseases and work-related illnesses".

28 Eurostat (2020) Wages and labour costs https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Wages_and_labour_costs#Gross_wages_2Earnings

29 ESPN (2019) In-work poverty in North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21098&langId=en>

30 Eurostat (2020) Minimum wage statistics <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1568.pdf>

31 ESPN (2019) In-work poverty in North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21098&langId=en>

32 IMF (2020) Country Report No. 20/24 Republic of North Macedonia <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2020/English/1MKDEA2020001.ashx>

33 ESPN (2019) In-work poverty in North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21098&langId=en>

34 European Commission (2020) Commission Staff Working Document – North Macedonia 2020 Report https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

35 ESPN (2019) In-work poverty in North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21098&langId=en>

Between 2007 and 2010, the law was applied relatively little, but its application increased over time, thanks to the introduction of legal entities responsible for conducting risk-assessment evaluations and implementing the law's provisions.³⁶ More recently, the recruitment of additional inspectors has had a moderately positive impact on the capacity to administer health and safety at work. However, according to the European Commission, legislation has not been sufficiently implemented. In 2019, CSOs reported 141 workplace injuries of which 22 were fatal.³⁷

GENDER EQUALITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In 2018, the gender employment gap in North Macedonia stood at over 20%, higher than that in all except one EU country.³⁸ With the collaboration of the European Gender Equality Institute, North Macedonia introduced its first Gender Equality Index in 2019, based on 2015 data. From this report it appears that performance in terms of the gender power balance is satisfactory, partly thanks to the gender quota for members of parliament introduced 17 years ago. But significant gender inequalities persist, especially in income, earnings and the sharing of household responsibilities. Overall, the 2015 Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia, at 62, is below the average index for the EU-28, which is 66.2.³⁹ North Macedonia's 2017 gender pay gap was 12.5%. When taking into consideration characteristics such as education, years of service, age and occupation profile, this gap increases to 17.3%. When only people who have completed primary education are considered, the gap is 28%.⁴⁰

Patriarchal gender roles are imposed in many households in North Macedonia, especially among the Roma and Albanian ethnic minorities. The incidence increases further for ethnic minorities in rural areas.⁴¹ These gender roles result in women spending seven times as much time as men on domestic tasks.⁴² This stereotypical division of gender roles is mirrored in the labour market, as some jobs are carried out predominantly by women – and these are among the least regulated and lowest paid. Moreover, women are primarily employed in lower-level positions. Female inactivity is also influenced by ethnicity: 40% of Roma women and 46% of Albanian women are inactive.⁴³

Measures to improve the work-life balance focus on maternity guarantees, paternity leave and the childbirth allowance, the National Strategy Group points out. Fathers have the right to up to seven days of paid childbirth leave, although this comes under a wider law that includes leave for other personal and family matters. Fathers are also entitled to take parental leave not used by the mother. However, few fathers use their paternity leave. Other measures for work-life balance mentioned by the NSG include mothers' entitlement to a daily total of 1.5 hours of breaks during working hours for breastfeeding until their child reaches the age of one.⁴⁴ Also, workers are protected from overtime and night work while pregnant and until their child turns one, and this can be extended until the child is three (Labour Law, article 64). The National Strategy Group also mentions some cases of unlawful changes to women's job roles at the end of their maternity leave.

36 Balcanosh.net (2018) Occupational safety and health – Study of Macedonia <http://project-balcanosh.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/OCCUPATIONAL-SAFETY-AND-HEALTH-STUDY-MACEDONIA.pdf>

37 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

38 Eurostat (2020) Gender statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics#Education

39 Carovska, M. (2019) Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/system/files/events-files/gender_equality_index_macedonia_eng.pdf

40 Eurofound (2018) Living and working in North Macedonia <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/north-macedonia#equality-and-nondiscrimination-at-work>

41 USAID (2019) USAID/North Macedonia Gender Analysis Report <https://banyanglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/USAID-North-Macedonia-Gender-Analysis-Report.pdf>

42 Carovska, M. (2019) Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/system/files/events-files/gender_equality_index_macedonia_eng.pdf

43 USAID (2019) USAID/North Macedonia Gender Analysis Report <https://banyanglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/USAID-North-Macedonia-Gender-Analysis-Report.pdf>

44 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2020) <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/>

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION

HOUSING

Homeless people, street children and housing deprivation are the most visible forms of poverty and social exclusion in North Macedonia. The effectiveness of policy interventions aimed at tackling housing deprivation is jeopardised by the lack of official data and of comprehensive assessments. Housing deprivation in the country consists of substandard housing, lack of housing affordability and housing insecurity.⁴⁵ In 2017, according to Eurostat, 47.3% of people in North Macedonia were living in overcrowded dwellings, almost the double the EU average for 2018.⁴⁶ The rate was 64.1% for that part of the population at risk of poverty. In the same year, 10.1% of the population suffered from severe housing deprivation. That is, as well as living in overcrowded conditions, they were also affected by at least one of the following factors: lack of a bath and a toilet; a leaking roof; or a dwelling considered too dark. Finally, 11.7% of people in 2017 lived in households that spent 40% or more of their equalised disposable income on housing. The Roma minority is the ethnic group most affected by housing deprivation. In 2016, 28% of the Roma community lived in inadequate housing.⁴⁷ Another aggravating element is massive internal and external migration, caused by the weakness of the national economy and high unemployment. Migration results in a lack of decent and affordable housing in bigger cities and abandoned housing stock in rural areas.⁴⁸

The government's approach is defined in the National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and

Social Exclusion (2010-2020). The European Social Policy Network points out that the document defines a broad strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and that it was not accompanied by monitoring mechanisms, nor did it have a fiscal scenario or budget. Hence, its implementation could not be effectively assessed.⁴⁹ Housing is mentioned in the document as one of the policy priorities, and no specific objectives or indicators are mentioned. The overarching objective is to 'achieve standard and harmonised housing conditions for the citizens which are considered socially excluded in housing'.⁵⁰

GOOD PRACTICE HABITAT MACEDONIA

Habitat Macedonia⁵¹ is a social enterprise formed by an NGO and two limited liability companies and is affiliated to the global non-for-profit poverty housing network Habitat for Humanity. Its mission is to provide simple, decent and affordable housing solutions for those living in poverty. Habitat Macedonia's varied nature is combined with a heterogeneous portfolio of actions, which bring together volunteer, construction, capacity-development, community-development and advocacy components. These raise public awareness of the transformational ability of decent housing. However, the most original feature of the social enterprise's operation is its partnership model with microfinance entities.

45 ESPN (2019) National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion – North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21634&langId=en>

46 Eurostat (2020) Housing Statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics#Housing_quality

47 ESPN (2019) National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion – North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21634&langId=en>

48 Habitat for humanity (2020) Country profile North Macedonia <https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/North%20Macedonia.pdf>

49 ESPN (2019) National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion – North Macedonia <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21634&langId=en>

50 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2010) National Strategy on Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia 2010-2020 <https://mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/strategy.pdf>

51 Habitat for Humanity Macedonia (2020) What we do <http://www.habitat.org.mk/?page=program>

JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

To carry out a green transition, North Macedonia has made some progress towards harmonisation with EU standards. Since 2011, only a few new laws on environmental issues have been adopted. The environmental legislation mostly consisted of the adoption of amendments to existing laws and the development of subsidiary legislation. The main motivation is the need to meet the requirements of the EU acquis. The speed of the process has not been fast, and alignment of the legal framework with the EU acquis remains at an early stage. A major reason is limitations to the national capacity for implementation,⁵² and North Macedonia's technical and administrative capacity needs to be improved. The country is preparing a climate law and a comprehensive strategy on climate action which are consistent with the EU 2030 framework. On the other hand, preparation of the National Energy and Climate Plans in line with obligations of the Energy Community is in its final stages, as is the mainstreaming of climate action in other sectors. However, the European Commission notes in its 2020 report on North Macedonia that more efforts are needed to implement the Paris Agreement.⁵³

FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

Poverty remains a primary issue in North Macedonia, as over 20% of population was at risk of poverty in 2017. The percentage is very similar even after social transfers have been taken into account. Both indicators are around 5 percentage points above the EU average.⁵⁴

In the view of National Strategy Group, North Macedonia has made considerable progress in recent years to reduce poverty. The country is currently undergoing a comprehensive reform of its social protection system, which includes a complete reform of cash benefit schemes, as well as changes in how services are designed and delivered to beneficiaries. It is expected that this reform will help better target children and families with children living in poverty and that it will protect them more effectively from the devastating effects of poverty, the NSG states.

GOOD PRACTICE

MACEDONIA ANTI-POVERTY PLATFORM (MAPP)

In early 2020, a new initiative was launched to give a stronger voice to young people, who The MAPP⁵⁵ is a network dedicated to the fight against poverty, which is part of the European anti-poverty network. Its actions to mitigate poverty and its effects include advocacy and lobbying, research and analysis and concrete interventions. Among other documents, the MAPP produces the Poverty Watch reports, communication tools that aim to describe key developments and trends on poverty. They assess the impact of the EU, identify the key issues that have an impact on people in poverty and propose solutions. The approach of the MAPP is a participatory one: it strives to involve people experiencing poverty in decision-making processes that directly concern them.

52 United Nations (2019) Environmental Performance Reviews North Macedonia https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/epr/epr_studies/ECE_CEP.186_Eng.pdf

53 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

54 Eurostat (2020) Income poverty Statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Income_poverty_statistics&oldid=440992#At-risk-of-poverty_rate_and_threshold

55 Macedonia Anti-Poverty Platform (2020) About us http://www.mpps.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=88&Itemid=104

HEALTHCARE

Overall, the organization of healthcare in North Macedonia is based on a well-established health system and network of public health services with good geographic distribution. However, differences exist at regional level for access to ambulatory specialists and healthcare at secondary level. The health network was introduced in 1991 with the goal of partially incorporating private healthcare actors into the public health system. Their role within the system is to provide health services – which are purchased by the Health Insurance Fund – when the public system is insufficient. Social discrepancies also affect healthcare in North Macedonia. Almost one-third of all health services are paid for out of pocket, so these have a big impact on inequalities in terms of unmet needs.⁵⁶ The National Strategy Group specifies that access to social protection, including healthcare, is guaranteed to asylum seekers, people who have been given asylum status and people with subsidiary protection.

A lack of medical staff, particularly specialists, and the underuse of technologically advanced medical equipment are other major issues for the national health system. To mitigate health inequalities, a programme has been activated that targets mainly the Roma community, people living in remote areas, people living with HIV/AIDS, drug users and people with disabilities. The Roma community encounters several obstacles in accessing health services.⁵⁷ It should be noted that the performance of health services in Macedonia over the past decade has been hard to assess due to a lack of quality statistics and data.⁵⁸ The National Strategy Group also mentions the introduction of an electronic health data management system in 2013 as a positive innovation that, among other things, substantially reduced waiting times for medical appointments. Despite its weaknesses, the healthcare system of North Macedonia responded well to the initial outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020. Nevertheless, a second wave hit the country in the summer, and the system came under considerable stress.⁵⁹

56 European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2017) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Health system review https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/338955/Macedonia-HiT-web.pdf?ua=1

57 European Commission (2020) Commission Staff Working Document – North Macedonia 2020 Report https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

58 European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2017) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Health system review https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/338955/Macedonia-HiT-web.pdf?ua=1

59 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia Report 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

CIVIC SPACE

Based on the results of the monitor realised by CIVICUS, civic space in North Macedonia can be defined as narrowed. The National Strategy Group recognises the efforts of previous governments to involve civil society organisations in decision-making processes. Specifically, the NSG mentions the creation of the Code of Good Practice for Participation of the Civil Society in Policy Making Processes as relevant progress. However, there is a strong need to update this document in the coming years, as it was part of the Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the Civil Sector 2012-2017. Some criticisms were raised about the lack of implementation of this strategy, especially by local governments.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The legal framework for freedom of association was elaborated by a working group in the Ministry of Justice with the participation of prominent members of civil society. It was introduced in 2010 and is formally defined in Article 10 of the Law on Associations and Foundations. The law is harmonised with the European Convention on Human Rights and, in most part, with the Fundamental Principles on the Status of Non-Governmental Organizations in Europe adopted by the Council of Europe. However, its implementation in practice still remains a challenge. In 2017 a substantial number of cases were reported of indirect pressure, inspections and obstruction on the part of the institutions. In fact, the law does not include a regulation on protection

from involvement of third parties.⁶⁰ Recently some changes have been introduced through the Law for Public Gatherings and the Law on Police, which are not in line with legislation or with the nature of civil society activities.⁶¹ According to the National Strategy Group, these dispositions are a threat to the right of peaceful assembly.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Concerning freedom of speech, North Macedonia is 92nd in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index ranking elaborated by Reporters Without Borders, three positions higher than the previous year and with a score improved by 0.38 points. The national report by Reporters Without Borders points out that, although the current government has ceased to finance advertising of its actions, municipalities have not, and this remains a limitation to press freedom and a form of pressure. Furthermore, senior government officials demonstrate a tendency to threaten and insult journalists. The number of physical attacks on journalists has declined, but there is a growing practice of cyberbullying and verbal abuse.⁶²

Social dialogue in North Macedonia is weak, as is the role of social partners. Trade union membership is decreasing in parallel with unions' capacity to represent workers' rights. In the private sector, bipartite social dialogue is poor, and social partners do not contribute to the reinforcement of collective agreements.⁶³

60 Ognenovska, S. & Trajkovska, S. (2017) Monitoring of the Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in Macedonia in 2017 <https://rcgo.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/report-on-the-enabling-environment-for-civil-society-development-in-macedonia-in-2017.pdf>

61 USAID (2019) North Macedonia 2019 Human Rights Report <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NORTH-MACEDONIA-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

62 Reporters without Borders (2020) North Macedonia <https://rsf.org/en/north-macedonia>

63 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia 2020 Report https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

SOLIDAR's Social Rights Monitor 2020 has been developed in the framework of the Together for Social Europe programme co-funded by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). It provides an insight into the state of social rights in 17 European countries. The Monitor assesses the state of social Europe in terms of equality of opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection, inclusion and civic space based on the observations of Civil Society Organisations working on the ground in combination with statistical data and scientific findings. It does so on the basis of observations of National Strategy Groups set up in each of these countries by a SOLIDAR member or partner. The 2020 Monitor also analyses to what extent these aspects are reflected in the Country Specific Recommendations of the European Semester process towards a socially sustainable recovery after the Covid-19 crisis.

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