

Family Support in the Republic of North Macedonia

Irena Avirovic Bundalevska, Makedonka Radulovic and Angelka Keskinova

Institute of Family Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, University SS. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje,

North Macedonia

Семейна подкрепа в Република Северна Македонија

Ирена Авирович Бундалевска, Македонка Радулович и Ангелка Кескинова

Институт по семејни истражувања, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет “Св. Кирил и Методиј”, Скопие, Северна Македонија

Authors Note

Irena Avirovic Bundalevska  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1609-000X>

Makedonka Radulovic  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3753-1521>

Angelka Keskinova  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3698-0501>

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the authorship and publication of this article.

The author's corresponding address is Faculty of Philosophy, UKIM, Blvd. Goce Delcev 9A, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia. Email: avirovic@fzf.ukim.edu.mk, radulovic@fzf.ukim.edu.mk, angelka@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

Бележки за авторите

Ирена Авирович Бундалевска  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1609-000X>

Македонка Радулович  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3753-1521>

Ангелка Кескинова  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3698-0501>

Авторите декларират, че нямат потенциален конфликт на интереси с авторството и публикуването на тази статия.

Адрес за кореспонденция с авторите: Философски факултет, Институт по семейни изследвания, бул. Гоце Делчев 9А, Скопие, Република Северна Македония. Email: avirovic@zfz.ukim.edu.mk, radulovic@zfz.ukim.edu.mk, angelka@zfz.ukim.edu.mk

Abstract

Ensuring children's rights and family well-being is a priority of every European country. The Republic of North Macedonia, as a candidate country of the European Union, shares the same family values and family policies as the remaining EU member states. However, despite the past governmental efforts in the area of legal harmonization, several gaps have to be fulfilled and policies to be improved to achieve efficient institutions at the European level.

To expand existing policies regarding family support, we consider crucial the analysis of the factual situation in the country, as a basic step towards further research. Therefore, this paper aims to initially provide an analysis of the family support legal framework of the country. Secondly, we intend to map governmental and non-governmental institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia which is responsible to provide family, children, and parents' support. By doing so, we can develop additionally omitted family policies or improve existing ones. Finally, the paper will present a list of competencies of the employees of family support institutions to evaluate more peculiarly their staff's skills standards.

Keywords: family support, family policies, institutions, skills standards, North Macedonia.

Резюме

Осигуряването на правата на детето и семейното благосъстояние е приоритет на всяка европейска държава. Република Северна Македонија, като страна кандидатка за Европейскиот савјоз, сподела савјите семејни ценности и семејни политики како останалите страни членки на ЕС. Врпреки предишните усилия на правителството во областа на хармонизацијата на законодавството, има неколку пропуски, които треба да бидат попълнени и политиките да бидат подобруени, за да се постигне ефективна институција на европејско ниво. За да разширим савјествуващите политики по отношение на поддрепата на семејството, савјатаме за решаващо анализът на фактичката ситуација во страната, како основна ствпка към по-нататвшни изследвания. Следователно целта на настоящата ствтия е првоначало да предостави анализ на правната рамка за поддрепа на семејството во страната. На второ място, взнамеряваме да картографираме правителствени и неправителствени институции во Република Северна Македонија, които са отговорни да осигуряват поддрепа на семејството, децата и родителите. По този начин може да разработим допвнително пропуснати семејни политики или да подобрим савјествуващите. И накрая, ствтијата ще представи списък на компетенциите на

служителите в институциите за подкрепа на семейството, за да се оценят по-специфично стандартите за умения на техния персонал.

Ключови думи: подкрепа на семейството, семейни политики, институции, стандарти за умения, Северна Македонија.

ARTICLE INFO:
Original Article
Received: 28, 04.2020
Revised: 20, 05.2021
Accepted: 07, 07.2021

Family Support in the Republic of North Macedonia

With a population of 2.022.547 (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2014) according to the last official census in 2002¹, the Republic of North Macedonia is a small landlocked country in the Western Balkans, which, since its independence in 1991, has faced a difficult period of transition. Besides the political and economic transformation, the processes of globalization, industrialization, and individualization have additionally changed the new social reality and family dynamics have undergone major changes in the past decades. As a candidate country of the European Union, the Republic of North Macedonia shares the same family values and family policies as the remaining EU states and works towards ensuring children's rights and family well-being to its citizens. However, despite past governmental efforts, the country faces numerous challenges in the field of social policy and family support strategies.

According to the UNICEF report from 2019, nearly one-third of Macedonian citizens are poor i.e. a calculated 30,4% of people live below the poverty line. The same numbers apply to the unemployment rate, which has been approximately 30% since the independence of the country.² Today, more than 100,000 children in North Macedonia currently live in a situation of poverty, and one out of four children in the country faces developmental challenges due to exposure to poverty. Moreover, children from poor families are more exposed to violent forms of discipline and more likely to be married before their 18th birthday. (UNICEF, 2019). Child marriages in North Macedonia are in particular common among marginalized communities, especially among the Roma ethnic group, besides past efforts to diminish those rates with educational and raising-awareness programs (“Empowering Roma children and families to exercise their rights”, “Decade of Roma inclusion” etc.). However, poverty affects all ethnic groups and influences negatively children’s future in general. According to the latest available data, only one out of 300 children living in poverty attends pre-school, and only two-thirds of children coming from poor families earn a high school degree. Finally, children coming from poverty-affected families often face discrimination.

¹ The estimation for 2020 is 2,125,971 people. Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, data available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html> (30/01/2020)

² In the first quarter of 2019, the unemployment rate in Macedonia has reached a record low of 17,18%. The highest unemployment rate was noted in 2005, reaching 38, 70%. Data from Trading Economics, available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/macedonia/unemployment-rate> (03/02/2020).

The figures from the UNICEF report clearly show that despite past efforts in the fields of family policies, family support, and children's rights, several gaps have to be fulfilled and policies to be improved to achieve efficient institutions in North Macedonia. Further in the paper, we will analyze existing policies, family laws, and family support institutions to determine the actual situation in the country and propose possible improvements.

Family Support Legal Framework in North Macedonia

The Republic of North Macedonia, as a candidate country of the European Union, shares the same family values and family policies as the remaining EU member states. In the past years, the country has been devoted towards the legal harmonization in the area of children's rights and family well-being with the EU and has improved several laws in the family domain.

The Social Protection Law (104/2019) regulates the system and organization of social protection, welfare rights, and social services, social protection beneficiaries; finances and supervises the performance of social protection activity, etc. This law was improved and amended in May 2019 and it cannot be evaluated yet, due to its short implementation.

The last changes of the Child Protection Law (98/2000) are from 2015 and this Law regulates the children protection system and organization which is achieved by providing certain rights and means to child organization as well as financial assistance to parents. The country offers a child allowance of approximately 15-25 euros monthly i.e. cash compensation for raising a child to 18 years to families of four with an income lower than 250 euros per month; there is an allowance for education which covers education costs up to 10-15 euros monthly to the above-mention family category. Every family in North Macedonia receives one-off financial assistance for a newborn which is approximately 80 euros for firstborn and 350 euros for second born and more. The Child Protection Law also provides participation in the costs of foster care as well as rest and recreation of children in public institutions for children of families affected by weather disasters or single-parent families. The special allowance for a child with developmental disabilities up to 26 years is 85 euros per month. According to the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (2019), the Macedonian average wage in 2019 was 410 euros (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2019), being one of the lowest in the Balkans in the past decades, followed just by neighboring Albania. The financial assistance offered to families and parents under the Child Protection Law is very low and should be increased in the future.

Changes within the Family Law (80/1990, last change was made on 150/2015) started during 2020, but the covid-19 pandemic and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia postponed its implementation. This law regulates marriage and family, relationships in marriage and family, certain forms of family protection, domestic violence, adoption, children's custody, support, and court proceedings and disputes in marital and family life. In our opinion, it is crucial to improve and update the Family Law in many areas, especially in the domain of family protection from domestic violence and violence against women. Latest research show that the most common victims of domestic violence in North Macedonia are women. In fact, in 2019, out of 709 cases of domestic violence that were reported, 610 victims were women. In 2018, the total number of newly registered victims of domestic violence was 919 people, out of which 665 were women. (Radulovic, Ilievski, & Bundalevska, 2020). (In this regard, The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination known commonly as the Antidiscrimination Law is from 2014 and regulates responsibility actions of the institutions and associations, their mutual coordination and cooperation in the area of domestic violence prevention and in protecting victims. The Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence (138/2014, last change was made on 150/2015) regulates the prevention and prohibition of discrimination, forms and the types of discrimination, the procedures for protection against discrimination, as well as the work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The purpose of this law is to ensure the principle of equality and prevention and protection from discrimination in the implementation of human rights and freedoms. For many years there were not enough legal norms to regulate domestic violence in North Macedonian and it was considered a separate crime. With the lasts, legal changes in 2019 physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence are considered domestic violence as well. However, besides past efforts to improve the legal system regarding domestic violence, we consider that it is a topic that needs the highest attention and immediate action.

Undoubtedly, in the past few years, North Macedonia has built a solid legal framework when it comes to family support and children's rights. However, the implementation of the legal system does not coincide always with the factual situation on the ground. This probably applies best to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence. According to the latest recommendations received by the European Commission on the country's progress, from the United Nations and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), North Macedonia has noted progress in this area, although mostly concerning

improvement of the legal framework. The situation concerning assistance and protection of women victims of domestic violence remains unchanged, as of 2019. Besides increasing institutional awareness to provide support to women victims from different forms of gender-based violence, North Macedonia has to implement legal changes more rapidly and increase the number of specialized services for assisting women and girls victims of gender-based violence.

Finally, remaining laws that we consider relevant in the area of family support include the Social Security of Elderly Law which regulates the social security for the elderly, the conditions and procedure for exercising and financing the right to social security for the elderly; the Law on elementary education (161/2019); the Law on the Ombudsman (35/2018), which is implemented through continuous activities for the protection of human rights and freedoms, as well as the Law on Health protection (42/2012, last change was made on 37/2016).

Mapping Family Support Institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia

The main institutional framework for family support in North Macedonia is provided by national institutions, international organizations, non-governmental institutions, and educational institutions. The main institutional framework on the national level is largely within the competencies of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, followed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health. Between 2019 and 2020 we have mapped major family support institutions in North Macedonia within the Cost Action dedicated to the *European Family Support Network. A bottom-up, evidence-based, and multidisciplinary approach*.³ However, in this paper, we will mention and list only the main institutions and their field of work, due to limitations in space.

In general, the field of action of the institutions from North Macedonia, both governmental and non-governmental include the following fields: education, violence and protection, children, youth rights and protection, social care, health protection, humanitarian work, people with disabilities, women equality and anti-discrimination.

The main national institutions which act on the local level include the Public Center for Inter-municipal Center for social work in Skopje, Public Centers for Social Work in every city, Counseling Departments and Shelters for family violence victims. Other relevant and active families support governmental organizations on the national level are: National Council for Gender

³ For more information visit: <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA18123/#tabs|Name:overview>.

Equality, Service for people with mental and psychological disabilities, Coordinative body within the Government of North Macedonia for the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Department for marriage and family violence, etc.

Most important international organizations with branches and activities in North Macedonia include UNICEF representative office, WHO representative office, Delegation of the European Union, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, USAID, United Nations representative office, SOS Children village's Macedonia, International organization for migration-IOM, Red Cross North Macedonia, etc.

Main non-governmental institutions from North Macedonia with agenda devoted to family support include NGO Roma Perspective, Macedonian center for civic education, NGO Center for parents of children with special needs, Association for Health Education and Research – HERA, National Network Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, NGO Open Gate: La Strada Macedonia, Women's organization of the city of Skopje, etc.

Both national and international institutions and organizations have played an active role in the past years in organizing campaigns, pieces of training, conferences, and events dedicated to family and family support in the above-mentioned separate fields of action. Among the most relevant and/or media covered training and programs were: Positive Parenting for Happy and Successful Children which created positive parenting materials aimed and assisting parents to help their child develop into a happy, confident, well-rounded person, supported by the Unicef; Program for active health protection of mothers and children in the Republic of North Macedonia, supported by the Ministry of Health; National strategy for sexual and reproductive health in the Republic of North Macedonia prepared in cooperation by the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Public Health, UNFPA (United Nation Population Fund) and the Dutch Embassy in North Macedonia.

While our research on mapping family support institutions in North Macedonia is concluded, we are in the process of evaluating national programs, which besides having a theoretical background provide practical training and sessions to parents, children and adolescents. Even though our research is not concluded yet, we can observe that there is a general lack of programs to support families in our country.

Finally, in the process of mapping family support institutions in North Macedonian, we regarded very important educational institutions, as the primary sources of forming future family support professionals. At the educational level, family and the broader area of family support are

studied mainly in higher education. At the main Macedonian state University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" family is studied by various institutes and study programs including Family Studies, Family Law, Pedagogy, Social Work, Sociology, Special Education and Rehabilitation. The Institute of Family Studies which functions within the Faculty of Philosophy from Skopje is the newest educational structure in North Macedonia that devotes its teaching and research to the area of family support with an interdisciplinary approach. It was established in 2014 and represents a pioneer institution in the area of family studies in the Balkans. Other Macedonian Universities where family is studied include the University "Goce Delchev", Shtip (Family Law and Social Law); the University of Tetovo (Special Education and Rehabilitation); the European University North Macedonia (Family Law); the University "Mother Theresa", Skopje (Social Work, Sociology); and the University "St. Climent Ohridski", Bitola (Pedagogy).

Family Support Workers

Family support workers provide emotional and practical assistance and guidance to children and families in need. The Republic of North Macedonia does not have an equivalent profile worker, instead, there are many other worker profiles in this field, among which the most significant are: social workers, psychologists, andragogues, pedagogues, lawyers, economists, doctors, special educators, speech therapists, special prevention pedagogues, sociologists, health workers, educators specialized in family studies, gender studies specialists, etc. They work in different settings and institutions, such as social care centers, shelters, counseling offices, foster care or adoption agencies, children protective services agencies, and other family services organizations.

In the process of mapping family support institutions in North Macedonia, we have researched as well the competencies of family support workers and have identified a list of personal skills and competencies that a family support worker should hold. We have identified the following family support worker competencies: knowledge of human rights and family law; knowledge of human and family development; knowledge of different family structures and family types; knowledge of factors and indicators that affect families; knowledge of basics of counseling; knowledge of reproductive health and family planning; assistance and support skills for families living with disabilities; assistance and support skills for families in social risk; and skills to determine the type of emotional support and help needed. As far as family support worker's personal skills are concerned, we consider that among the most important skills are: to be empathetic; to be confidential; to be objective; to have a non-judgmental attitude; to have good

interpersonal and communication skills; to have the ability to take initiative and work independently; to have the ability to build relationships with children and adults; to have leadership qualities; to be respectful for individuals' differences; to have the ability to plan and organize.

Conclusion

There is a remarkable discrepancy in the way families are treated in the policymaking process in North Macedonia compared to other domains such as economy, corruption, Euro-Atlantic integration, etc. Family policy is usually considered a sub-topic under the social policy. However, as a candidate country to the EU, in the past decade, North Macedonia had to undergo a process of legal harmonization of family policies and improve several legal acts. Nevertheless, the enactment of the legal system does not always coincide with the factual situation on the ground and despite past governmental efforts in the area of legal harmonization, several gaps have to be fulfilled and policies to be improved to achieve efficient family support institutions at the European level.

In our analysis of family support in the Republic of North Macedonia, we have identified the lack of programs to support families as the most negative aspect. For instance, there are programs to lift children out of poverty but are currently quite ineffective. Furthermore, there are various social benefits for families that live in poverty, such as cash transfers, but are inadequate in amount, failing to cover the basic financial security of families with children. Other negative aspects of family support in North Macedonia include scarce instruments for reconciliation work and family life, lack of formal family education and mandatory premarital and pre-parenting education as well as inadequate access to essential services, such as quality pre-schools, daycare services, and health institution in rural areas.

In conclusion, we suggest some directions and possible guidelines which could supplement and deepen existing policies regarding family support to improve the factual situation in North Macedonia:

- The holistic approach to family support with all family stakeholders included;
- Creating population public strategies;
- National strategy for family support;
- Creation of national family council;
- Intersectional cooperation between public institutions working with families;

- Introduction of the family support worker profile;
- Introduction of family education (curricula in primary and secondary school);
- Improvement of the system for early childhood education;
- Mandatory marital and parental education courses for young couples;
- Better access to pre-school services, daycare, and health services;
- Introduction of the following categories: father parental leave, different packages of maternity leave, part-time work;
- Improvement of existing strategies for women's access to the family labor market.

References

Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, retrieved from:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html>
(30/01/2020).

Child Protection Law (with changes from 2018), full text retrieved from:

<http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2018/198%202018%20ZAKON%20ZA%20ZASTITA%20NA%20DECATA%20%20%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%20%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D1%82-converted.pdf> (03/02/2020).

Country Progress Regarding the Issue of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Press Release (31.12.2019). retrieved from: <https://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/en/31-12-2019-press-release-country-progress-regarding-the-issue-of-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence/> (25/06/2020).

Family Law. (2014). full text retrieved from: <https://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Zakon-za-semejstvoto-20-10-2014-prechisten-tekst.pdf>
(03/02/2020).

Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. (2014), full text retrieved from:

<http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/Zakon%20za%20prevencija%20semejno.pdf> (03/02/2020).

Law on Prevention and Protection from Family Violence. (2019), full text retrieved from:

<http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2019/27,5Zakon%20za%20zastita%20od%20diskriminacija.pdf> (03/02/2020).

- National network to end violence against women and domestic violence. (2016). *Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection from Domestic Violence*. National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – Voice against Violence http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Monitoring-of-the-Law-for-DV_final-eng.pdf
- Natsionalna strategija (2020-2025) i Aktsiski plan (2020-2022) za preventsija i zashtita na detsata od nasilstvo, Vlada na Republika Severna Makedonija. [*National Strategy (2020-2025) and Action Plan (2020-2022) for prevention and protection of children from violence, Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia*].
- Radulovic, M., Ilievski, V., & Avirovic Bundalevska, I. (2020). *First Family Center Services of the City of Skopje Regarding the Victims and Perpetrators of Domestic Violence*. 5th International Scientific Conference on Social Deviations: "Family and Modern Societies: Challenges and Perspectives". Banja Luka: Centar modernij znanja, Resursni centar specijalnu edukaciju. pp. 240-253, ISSN 2566-3224.
- Social Protection Law. (2019), full text retrieved from: http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2019/28.5_zakon_SZ.pdf (03/02/2020).
- State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia. (2004). *Census of Population, Households, and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002, Final Data, Book I – Total Population according to Reasons of Presence-Absence, Age, Sex and Ethnic Affiliation*, State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia: Skopje, pp. 171-176.
- State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia. (2019). Soopshtenija: Pazar na trud [*Relationships: Labor market*]. <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie.aspx?rbtxt=40> (06/02/2020).
- Strategija za rodova ednakvost, 2013-2020, Vlada na Republika Makedonija. [*Gender Equality Strategy, 2013-2020, Government of the Republic of Macedonia*].
- UNICEF. (2019). *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a changing world*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children-2019>