

18 NORTH MACEDONIA - National report on family support policy & provision

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18.1 Trends and issues related to demography

(i) Fertility rates

The current fertility rate for North Macedonia in 2020 is 1.486 births. The total fertility rate during the last decade is slowly decreasing. This number indicates a Macedonian position in the group of countries where fertility is below the level of replacement. The reasons for such a situation are complex: cultural, demographic, economic, and health-related factors (Table 1).

Table 1. *Fertility rates*

Year	Fertility rate
2010	1.56
2011	1.46
2012	1.51
2013	1.49
2014	1.52
2015	1.50
2016	1.50
2017	1.43
2018	1.42

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(ii) Families with children by number of children

There are no available data for this question in the provided Excel Sheet. In North Macedonia, households with two children are the most frequent households with children. The Republic of North Macedonia completed its last census in 2002; after this period no official statistics are available.

(iii) Percentage of the population from 0 to 19

Percentage of the population from 0-19 is decreasing. This is happening due to the lower birth rate. Fewer children and negative net migration are resulting in a decreasing population. Total fertility rates typically decrease as incomes rise, education rates rise, and infant mortality decreases. Couples get married and start having children later, and have fewer children overall. Similarly, slowing population growth and increasing life expectancies will result in an aging population (Table 2).

Table 2. *Population 19 years and under*

Year	%
2010	25.2
2011	24.8
2012	24.3
2013	23.9
2014	23.5
2015	23.2
2016	22.9
2017	22.6
2018	22.4

2019

22.1

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(iv) Percentage of population over working (retiring) age

The percentage of the population over 65 years is increasing in the Republic of North Macedonia. From 2010 to 2019, we have 2.5 more people of this age group. This implies that life expectancy is longer, and that the Macedonian population is older. Macedonia is no exception to the aging trend: the percentage of elderly to working age is expected to increase from 20 percent in 2018 to 56 percent in 2100 (Table 3).

Table 3. *Population over working age*

Year	%
2010	11.6
2011	11.7
2012	11.8
2013	12.0
2014	12.4
2015	12.7
2016	13.0
2017	13.3
2018	13.7
2019	14.1

Note. Eurostat Database 202

(v) Cultural/social/ethnic diversity and identities

The Republic of North Macedonia is a social, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional state. The population of the Republic of North Macedonia is diverse. At the beginning of the 21st century, nearly two-thirds of the population identified themselves as Macedonians. Albanians are the largest and most important minority in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the 2002 census, they made up about one-fourth of the population. The Albanians—most of whom trace their descent to the ancient Illyrians—are concentrated in the northwestern part of the country, near the borders with Albania and Kosovo. Albanians form majorities in some 16 of North Macedonia's 80 municipalities. Other much smaller minorities (constituting less than 5 percent of the population each) include the Turks, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Vlachs (Aromani) (*North Macedonia, State Statistical Office, 2004*). The Turkish minority is mostly scattered across central and western North Macedonia, a legacy of the 500-year rule of the Ottoman Empire. The majority of Vlachs, who speak a language closely related to Romanian, live in the old mountain city of Kruševo. Religious affiliation is a particularly important subject in North Macedonia because it is so closely tied to ethnic and national identity. With the exception of Bosniaks, the majority of Slavic speakers living in the region of Macedonia are Orthodox Christian. Turks, and the great majority of both Albanians and Roma are Muslims. Altogether, about one-third of the population is of the Islamic faith. Socially excluded and vulnerable groups are unemployed people; single-parent families; street children and their parents; victims of family violence and homeless people. Roma people are the group in major social risk in North Macedonia. The phenomena of homeless people, street children, and housing deprivation are the most visible forms of poverty and social exclusion in North Macedonia (Marinakou, 2017).

(vi) Migration patterns

Historically, the Balkans have experienced high rates of natural increase in population. The rate declined remarkably in the 20th century in response to industrialization and urbanization. The rate of natural increase in North Macedonia at the end of the first decade of the 21st century was about three-fifths less than it had been in the mid-1990s. Birth rates for the same period declined relatively steadily by about one-fifth, to about three-fifths of the world average. Movement from rural to urban areas in North Macedonia in the early 21st century was much more common than the reverse. Emigration to other parts of Europe, as well as to North America and Australia, has also had a significant influence on demographic trends in North Macedonia. North Macedonia immigration statistics for 2015 was 130,730.00, a 0.79% increase from 2010. Macedonians have a long tradition of migration. Although the most popular destinations are recognized, the number of emigrants living abroad is unknown. The population census

conducted in 1994 provided 159,548 citizens of Macedonia staying abroad. This census had some weaknesses. It was conducted in 23 countries only (Danforth, 2020).

It could not be conducted in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, thus only an insignificant number of persons from this country were covered. The next census conducted in 2002 applied different methodologies. Based on interviews with the households it brings the amount of 22,995 people staying abroad up to one year and another 12,128 staying longer. These data measure different things and are not comparable with the previous census results. However, it is estimated that 258.000 people moved out of Macedonia in the decade between 2008 and 2018. An increase in emigration was recorded in 2015, the first year of the ongoing political crisis, and 2018 was a record year with 33.337 recorded emigrants (Markiewicz, 2006).

18.2 Trends and issues related to family structures, parental roles and children's living arrangements

(i) Family household types

The development of the family in Macedonia in the past century was marked by very expressive patriarchal forms and contents. As a result of the various external and internal factors affecting its existence, the family in Macedonia undergoes gradual transformations but many elements maintain the patriarchal aspect to this day. A characteristic form of the family in the Republic of Macedonia before the transition process was the patriarchal family, which completely realized the main functions as a basic economic unit. Although the Macedonian family still demonstrates patriarchal elements, it gradually transforms into a modern family under the impact of the shifts.

According to Radulovic (2017), significant characteristic factors of the family organization and the family relations in Macedonia are the diverse ethnicity and religion of the population, the different types of settlements, agricultural development, industrial development, vocational education, scholastic formation, and habits and traditions. It all contributes towards a parallel existence of various forms of family life (family communities, under-age partners marriages, prejudice over authority of the mother and father) and all forms of the egalitarian, modern family, present in the city and industrial centres. In the recent years Macedonian average household size is 3.7 members, typical for nuclear families (parents with their children) (Table 4).

Table 4. *Average household size*

Year	%
2011	3.7
2012	3.7
2013	3.7
2014	3.7
2015	3.7
2016	3.7
2017	3.7
2018	3.7

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(ii) Marriage and divorce rates

The number of marriages is decreasing, whilst the number of divorces slowly increased compared to the previous years (Table 5, 6). The contrast in numbers is significant when compared to data from the first census of 1994 with more recent data. In the last decades, the number of marriages has decreased from 15.736 in 1994 to 13 814 in 2019, whilst the number of divorces has augmented from 710 in 1995 to 1 990 in 2019 (North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020). Some of the factors for such trends are: alterations of ethical and moral standards, a general predominance of individualism, the emancipation of women, and reduced influence of religion. Furthermore, the increased average age at first marriage, extended studies, postponed employment (due to studies or unemployment), and unresolved housing.

Table 5. *Crude marriage rate*

Year	%
2010	6.9
2011	6.2
2012	6.8
2013	6.8
2014	6.7
2015	6.8
2016	6.4
2017	6.4
2018	6.5

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

Table 6. *Crude divorce rate*

Year	%
2010	0.8
2011	0.9
2012	0.9
2013	1
2014	1.1

2015	1
2016	1
2017	1
2018	0.8

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(iii) Lone parent families

There is still no single legal definition of this term in our legislation. Our society, which is constantly changing the forms and functioning of everyday life, hardly allows a criterion to be established based on which a person or family will receive this status. According to this, it is difficult to come up with a general definition that will cover all the elements for single-parent families. The percentage of mothers with children in the Republic of Macedonia is 7% while fathers with children are 2%. The total percentage of these types of families (which do not bear a special name, e.g., single families / single-family families), according to the Statistical Office (2020) is 9%.

(iv) New family forms such as same-sex couple households

According to the Family Law of the Republic of Macedonia (2014), a de facto partnership or cohabitation is a community in which a man and a woman live at least one year without getting married. Macedonian extramarital communities enjoy the same rights of married couples as far as the right to mutual economic support and property rights are concerned, including legal protection against domestic violence. The Republic of Macedonia does not officially recognize any kind of same sex community, either marital or extra marital.

(v) Family structures and changes across social groups

Macedonia is facing a long period of political and economic transition which has additionally influenced the family structure and the society in general. The economic instability of the past two decades has caused increased labour migration in the European Union and overseas, resulting with an augmented number of families with at least one member of the household abroad. Moreover, with the introduction of the free market economy, the participation of women in the labour market led to further transformation of family roles. In fact, there is an ongoing

debate on whether the increased economic emancipation of women in Macedonia is one of the main reasons for postponing marriage and birth. Political, economic and social changes shape and transform family models as well. Macedonia has started to gradually abandon the patriarchal and extended family models, and substitute them primarily with nuclear families, but also with single-parent families and reconstituted family models, mainly due to the increased divorce rate. The nuclear family model, on the other hand, is undergoing transformations by itself. In fact, in the past decade, traditional marriage appears to be challenged by the increased number of couples who choose to avoid the commitments of marital communities. Thus, following the example of Western societies, Macedonia has reduced the legal difference between cohabitation and marriage (Avirovic & Radulovic, 2016).

(vi) Children and youth living in institutions

Children and youth beneficiaries of social protection are divided into several categories such as: children without parents and parental care; children with upbringing and social problems; and neglected children and children with disabilities in their development. Institutions for accommodation of children and youth without parents and parental care are the following: Institution for Babies and Small Children - Bitola that takes in children from 0-3 years of age and the Institution for Children and Youth "11th October"- Skopje, that provides care for children from the age of 3 to 18 years. Beside these public institutions, in 2002 the first private institution for children without parents or parental care, SOS Children's village, was opened in Skopje (First children's embassy in the world-Megjasi, 2009).

(vii) Children in out-of-home care such as foster care

As an alternative form of fostering in the Republic of North Macedonia there are 140 foster families in which 219 children without parents and parental care are accommodated, and at the same time 31 potential foster families are registered. (the information is from April 2009; data provided from Institution for Social activities of Macedonia). Foster families in the cities are as follows: 1 Skopje - 43; 2 Prilep – 32; 3 Makedonski Brod – 18; 4 Krushevo – 11; 5 Veles – 9; 6 Kochani – 7; 7 Bitola – 7; 8 Kumanovo – 5; 9 Gostivar – 4; 10 Strumica – 1; 11 Probishtip – 1; 12 Kratovo – 2 (Total 140). Foster families receive modest assistance from the MoLSP and the current foster care system is considered to offer good prospects for children who would otherwise be without adequate care. However, foster care in Macedonia still lacks a clear framework for accreditation and, most importantly, quality control. In Macedonia there are two institutions for accommodation of children and youth with social upbringing and behavioural problems, the Institution for Care and Upbringing "25th May"- Skopje, that accommodates children and youth with social upbringing problems from the age range of 7-18 years for both

males and females, and the Institution "Ranka Milanovic" - Skopje that accommodates neglected male children and youth aged 10 -18 (UNICEF, 2008).

(viii) Home-based support

According to the Social protection law article 74 (2019), home services can be provided. Services for providing assistance and care in the home of a person with temporary or permanently reduced functional capacity, are as follows:

-Assistance and home care, and personal assistance.

The newest governmental initiative providing home-based support is the National Deinstitutionalization Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for 2018–2027, 'Timjanik', presents the vision, objectives and strategic approach of the Government, as well as actions to be advanced in the implementation of the transition from institutional care towards a system of social care in the family and community supported by social services.

18.3 Trends and issues related to socio-economic disadvantage and welfare

(i) Poverty rates

Poverty rates in North Macedonia are showing decreasing trends in the last decade, including both indicators: total population at risk of poverty, and total population at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

(Total population at the risk of poverty rate (cut-off point: 60% of median equivalized income after social transfers)

Table 7. *Poverty rates*

Year	%
2010	27
2011	26.8
2012	26.2
2013	24.2
2014	22.1

2015	21.5
2016	21.9
2017	22.2
2018	21.9

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(People at risk of poverty or social exclusion)

Table 8. *Poverty rates*

Year	%
2010	49.9
2011	53.6
2012	53.5
2013	50.5
2014	46.9
2015	46.1
2016	46.1
2017	47.2
2018	45.9

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(ii) *Employment/unemployment rates*

The total percentage of people in employment is increasing from 43.5 in 2010 to 51.7 in 2018 (Table 7). The Republic of North Macedonia since its independence is suffering from high rate of unemployment. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable category are young people. The rate of youth unemployment since the independence of North Macedonia (1991) was constantly over 50% until 2015, when for the first time it dropped below 50%, but we still have a high rate of youth unemployment, above 45% (more about this in the next chapter). According to the State Statistical Office data (2019), in the second quarter of 2019, the active population in the Republic of North Macedonia is 962,463 persons, out of which 794,283 are employed and 168,180 unemployed. The activity rate in this period is 57.1, the employment rate is 47.1, while the unemployment rate is 17.5. With the aim to achieve a higher employability of young people, the Government, in recent years, has been working on new measures through a combination of employment, education, and social assistance policies (more in the next chapters).

(Total employment (15-64 years))

Table 8. *Employment rate*

Year	%
2010	43.5
2011	43.9
2012	44
2013	46.1
2014	46.9
2015	47.8
2016	49.1
2017	50.5
2018	51.7

Note. Eurostat Database 2020

(iii) Patterns of economic and employment disadvantage related to gender, age, ethnicity, migrant status, and other social dimensions

North Macedonia has committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and aligned its legislation to achieving *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality. North Macedonia has adopted several laws and mechanisms to advance gender equality. The Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men obliges public institutions to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men and to integrate gender into their policies, strategies and budgets through specific measures to reduce gender inequality (Ministry of labor and social policy, 2017).

Despite significant legal changes, gender gaps and inequalities continue across all levels.

Significant discrepancies exist between legal frameworks and their implementation, especially in rural areas. Gender gaps appear in labour-market activity, with high inactivity among rural and ethnic minority women. There is a 27 percentage-point gap in labour-force participation between women and men. A traditional gender division of work exists in which men spend more time on paid work and women spend more time performing domestic activities. Gender roles play a part in occupational segregation. Women in rural agriculture work longer hours than men, but a larger percentage of women's work is unpaid (Sproule, Dimitrovska, et al., 2019).

Women often work in the informal sector after having children; this labour does not contribute to their pension or healthcare. There is very strong gender discrimination in terms of vertical distribution of jobs, as women are more likely to be in low-paid or even unpaid family jobs than men. The more traditional the community to which they belong, the more striking is the vertical distribution of job places among men and women (Kazandziska, Risteska, et al., 2018).

There is no institution that deals exclusively with disputes relating to equal remuneration. Instead, cases must be brought to the attention institutions dealing with broader discrimination and equal employment opportunities. There are separate programmes for promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men, and national employment programmes that contain measures concerning gender-based discrimination.

There is a gender imbalance in decision-making bodies in political parties. There is a visible gap in women's participation in political-party management and decision-making. Although women hold 38 percent of parliamentary seats and 16 percent of ministerial ones, this standing is facilitated by a gender quota that does not yet assist Roma or Turkish women. Women participate less in local policy agenda setting and decision-making, primarily due to their shortage of time, and a lack of trust that their involvement would result in change.

Even when represented, women struggle to voice their specific needs in policy debates. There are challenges with the policies and planning that respond to gender-specific needs.

Participation of Roma and Albanian women in local-level decision-making, public-sector employment, education (especially for Roma women), and the formal labour market remains low. An estimated 8.5 percent of women in rural areas are members of a political party. There are few instances of women holding leadership positions at the local level, and women effectively are excluded from policymaking and planning processes. While gender-responsive budgeting will be compulsory with the new Organic Law on Budgeting, the capacity and understanding to carry out gender-responsive budgeting in policy and budgets is lacking. At the governmental level, there is a lack of awareness regarding gender inequality, as it is not prioritized in efforts to address social cohesion. Although a cultural shift is emerging, traditional gender norms are more prevalent among Roma and Albanian populations—especially in rural areas—making those groups particularly vulnerable. Roma girls and women are subject to early marriage, have the lowest rates of school attendance, and are generally marginalized in the political, social, and economic spheres.

Young people comprise the majority of external and internal migrants, and they are changing the demographics of the country's regions by migrating from rural to urban areas and abroad. Emigration from rural to urban areas has increased the population in cities, especially in the capital, leaving many rural areas, especially in the Southeast region, with few young people. Recent surveys also suggest that many young people (as many as 77 percent) are considering leaving the country, primarily to migrate to European Union member states (58 percent). The main reason is poor quality of life: inadequate or underpaid work, poor working conditions, political and economic uncertainty, a poor education system, and discrimination. Consequently, many young people suffer from poor mental health and few mental-health services are available to support them.

Youth policy and youth infrastructure (such as youth centres, social content, and activities) are lacking. Employment rates among young rural women beginning at 20 years old divert negatively from those of urban women due to their domestic responsibilities (Centre for Research and Policy Making, 2012).

(iv) Patterns of education disadvantage

In the Republic of North Macedonia there is a lack of facilities at all levels of education. Hence, the problem of their accessibility appears, especially at the preschool level, and at the transfer from lower primary to upper primary and from primary to secondary education. In rural/mountain areas where schools are not located in every village and children live far away from the schools they should attend, the local education authorities should arrange local transportation with a financial help from the part of the state. In the total intake percentage of children enrolled in pre-school education in the Republic of North Macedonia, those from disadvantaged groups (from poor areas and families, minority groups, mentally and physically handicapped children) are least included in the preschool education and least challenged and prepared for inclusion in the compulsory school system. According to UNICEF's (2019) global report 176 million pre-school aged children are not enrolled in pre-primary education, and calls on governments around the world to increase investment to ensure every child is given the best start in life. In North Macedonia where almost 41,000 children – around 61 per cent of pre-primary-aged [3-6 years] children – are not enrolled in pre-primary education, the Government has committed to reforms to improve access and quality of pre-school. Students leaving compulsory education are mostly from the Roma ethnic group and from the poor families in rural and mountain regions.

Besides, recent studies indicate that 28 to 45 percent of youth aged 15 to 29 do not feel their education prepared them for employment. Seventeen percent stated that applied, practical, or vocational training would have better prepared them to meet labour-market demand, while 16 percent each cited foreign language and other training (which included vocational and skilled trades, sports, sciences, continued studies, and arts).

In addition, many of the young people lucky enough to be employed, work less hours than they want, hold insecure jobs, are overqualified, underpaid, hold temporary positions or are without a written contract – indicating a mismatch in skills and in supply/demand on the labour market.

(v) Major social welfare trends such as disadvantage risks, welfare benefit receipt levels

Employment is considered a primary pathway to individual independence and self-efficacy, as well as the best way to combat poverty and social exclusion. However, some categories of citizens face difficulty in accessing employment for different reasons; either temporary or for a prolonged period of time. The role of the social assistance is to provide for the material existence of those citizens and to preserve their living standard to a certain level, affordable and achievable by the state. Even among the workers who manage to find a job, there are some who will be employed at very low wages, working few hours, on temporary contracts, etc., hence

still living in poverty (so called, working poor). Similar to most European countries, North Macedonia has a comprehensive system for social security which comprises: a) contributory benefits (such as pension and disability insurance), b) passive and active labor-market programmes, and c) social assistance programmes for protecting income and consumption of the poor (Petreski, & Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2017). Passive policies are represented by the contribution-based unemployment benefit which is conditional on previous work history. The social assistance system in Macedonia can be characterized as categorical rather than universal, given that it guarantees minimum resources/income to specific subgroups of population, such as unemployed, disabled, etc. In addition, the system is fragmented, consisting of many types of programs rather than having a single, comprehensive program. In total, there are 16 separate benefit schemes that are defined by laws as “entitlements” or “rights” and two social programs. Of those, 11 are social and five are child protection benefits (Ministry of labour and social policy, 2019).

The nexus for social care provision in the community is often the Centre for Social Work. Currently, Centres for Social Work are particularly underrepresented in rural areas where they are needed most. Existing Centres and Social Workers are sometimes overwhelmed with more cases than they can possibly manage.

(vi) Housing problems

Poverty in Macedonia is such that many families live in overcrowded homes together with parents or grandparents and cannot afford new apartments. According to Hopkins’s (2018) review in the Financial Times, residential energy consumption in North Macedonia is high, unaffordable, environmentally degrading, and inefficient. With 28 per cent of the population unemployed, and 20 per cent living in poverty, many of the Macedonians who remain struggle to pay their bills.

Traditional gender norms and limitations on women’s freedom of movement outside the home result in some women not being in a position to learn new skills (such as teaching, information technology, hairdressing, and embroidery).

There is also a significant gender gap in ownership and control over property and assets. Traditionally, property is registered in the man’s name. Only 28 percent of women own property and rural women own even less. Fifty percent of women landowners are not active in the decision-making process on activities related to land, and fewer than 10 percent of women have a leading role in decision-making activities related to land. Women’s lack of owning assets contributes to their economic vulnerability (USAID, 2019).

In the Roma community there are a lot of problems. The area is excessively polluted, and the streets are not adequate. Additionally, there is wastewater that is passing through the streets. With the current level of poverty in Macedonia, the cost of legalizing homes is way beyond what many Roma can afford, and the legal process far too daunting. It is a problem faced by around 300,000 people in this country; almost 15% of the population (AECOM International Development Europe SL, 2019).

Summary: The broader socio-economic context and trends which influences children's, parental and family circumstances and environments:

Low motivation of teachers is among the factors that contribute to the low quality of education. In addition, most of teachers lack up-to-date competencies and resources to ensure that all children fully realize their right to quality education. This directly influences the quality of teaching, which in turn decreases the knowledge and skills acquired by children and lowers their employment opportunities.

There are important disparities between ethnic groups in terms of mother's education and wealth quintiles. In Roma communities, only 72 per cent of children of pre-school age are on track in the areas of social emotional development. Overall, there is a shortage of affordable and accessible early education options for preschool children, particularly in rural areas. Patterns of inequality and imbalance often correlate with socioeconomic status and ethnicity, and children most in need of educational services are least likely to receive them. This is both unjust and an ineffective use of resources, as early childhood education yields most returns when targeting poor children. The current primary function of the state kindergartens is childcare rather than education or development. Most kindergartens give preferential placement to working couples that can afford the fees. In effect, this means that wealthier families benefit more from state supported services than poorer ones. While access to early childhood development services doubled from 11 per cent in 2015 to 22 per cent in 2019, children from the richest families and children living in urban areas increasingly benefit from them more than the poor – by a margin of 56 per cent in 2019, up from 24 per cent in 2015. The lack of understanding of children's early development needs is a major barrier to meeting development goals. Prioritization of care over education in the national kindergarten system is reflected in the fact that kindergartens still fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy rather than the Ministry of Education (Waljee, Wood, et al., 2015). Besides cost, other underlying causes of unequal access include distance, the lack of appropriate accessible facilities, discriminatory attitudes, and preferential practices that constrain enrolment opportunities. Children with disabilities and Roma and Albanian children, face discrimination from parents and other children when they enrol. Meanwhile, an obstacle to the greater inclusion of children with

disabilities in the preschool and school system is the lack of personnel qualified to work with them.

There is also a pervasive social stigma against people seeking help from Centres for Social work – an embarrassment about neighbours finding out that a person is seeking assistance. This, in combination with low parental awareness about the role and the potential assistance and support that can be received through the Centres for Social Work, contributes to families who might benefit from assistance not reaching out to Centres and Social Workers for support. Also, the quality of child allowance and cash benefits are inadequate, basically leaving many children at risk of inter-generational poverty or social exclusion.

18.4 The national public policy orientations, frameworks, institutions and actors' which shape the goals, substance and delivery of family support policy and provision

(i) Membership to the EU;

NO

(ii) Relationship with the European Union

The Republic of North Macedonia's application for EU membership was submitted on 22 March 2004. The Commission delivered a positive opinion on 9 November 2005. The European Council awarded the country candidate status in December 2005. The European Commission first recommended to open accession negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia in October 2009. In 2015 and 2016, the recommendation was made conditional on the continued implementation of the Pržino agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the "Urgent Reform Priorities".

In June 2018, the Council adopted conclusions in which it agreed to respond positively to the progress made by the Republic of North Macedonia and set out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019, depending on progress made in certain key areas, such as judicial reform, intelligence and security services reform and public administration reform. On 24 March 2020, ministers for European affairs gave their political agreement to the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. On 25 March, the conclusions on enlargement and stabilization and association process were formally adopted by written procedure. The members of the European Council endorsed the conclusions on 26 March, 2020 (Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020).

(iii) Influential policy actors and their orientation to family policy, family support and social policy

The government has indicated support for family-friendly policy.

Frameworks - The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia (1991) contains several provisions regarding the family for example - The Republic provides particular care and protection for the family. The legal relations in marriage, the family and cohabitation are regulated by law. Parents have the right and duty to provide for the nurturing and education of their children (article 40). Children are responsible for the care of their old and infirm parents. The Republic provides particular protection for parentless children and children without parental care. Law on Family of 1992 - This law regulates the marriage and family, the relationships in the marriage and family, certain forms, special protection of the family, adoption, guardianship, sustenance, as well as the court procedure in marriage and family suits. According to the law the family is a living community of parents and children as well as other relatives, provided they live in a common household. Also, the family shall come into existence with the birth of children and adoption. The Republic of North Macedonia provides special protection for the family, maternity, children, minor children, children without parents and unaccompanied children. The Republic shall establish and provide scientific, economic, and social conditions for family planning and free and responsible parenthood. Also, there are Law on Protection of Children (2018), Law on social protection etc.

Institutions: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Centre for Social Work, Social protection institutions, Institute for Social Activities, Marriage and Family Counseling Centre, The Department for Violence and Injury Control and Prevention.

Paid maternity leave, paid paternity leave and parental leave, maternal and child health care, health protection at the workplace for pregnant and nursing workers, adequate facilities for breastfeeding and childcare, a child-care system, social security benefits, such as family and child allowances, and tax relief measures (Labour Relations Law Act, 2016).

Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, as is domestic violence, which remains common; both are infrequently reported. The government and some NGOs provide services to victims of domestic violence.

A 2017 ruling by the Administrative Court allowed people to change their gender in the country's official registry.

(iv) Influential lobbying groups

There are two lobbying groups. The first one is with conservative views that advocate for a nuclear family, legally married, with a hierarchy. On the other hand, the second one is more focused on free relationships, extramarital life, one-parent family, and same-sex marriages.

(v) Influential policy/research networks

National network to end violence against women and domestic violence - formed on December 7, 2010, by twenty CSOs that work on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. They functioned as a non-formal network until December 16, 2011, when they officially registered as a legal entity. Their mission is to achieve coordinated action of CSOs towards advancing policies and practices in combating violence against women and domestic violence. The network aims for recognition of women's human rights and their promotion in the Republic of Macedonia (National network to end violence against women and domestic violence, 2020).

Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women - non-governmental Organization. **ESE** develops and helps women's and civic leadership in the development and implementation of human rights and social justice in Macedonian society.

Health Education and Research Association (H.E.R.A.) - Leads a citizen action and encourages social change, improved sexual and reproductive health education and services, especially for the marginalized communities. The First Family Centre established in 2013 in Skopje as a specialized counselling centre for support and prevention against domestic violence is an example of good cooperation between the civil sector, local government, and business sector, providing free, confidential, and high-quality counselling and psychotherapy services for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

The Department for Violence and Injury Control and Prevention was established within the Institute of Public Health in 2004 as a lead agency for violence prevention in the health sector, and it was later in 2012 inaugurated as the Safe Community Affiliate Support Centre.

The first **shelter centre** was opened in 2004 in Skopje for the protection of victims of domestic violence. The process was followed by the opening of five more centres in the country and a national SOS line financed by the Government. Training of social workers and health professionals was also conducted (Galevska, Misev, et al., 2010).

Crisis Center "Hope" - NGO - is sustainable and specialized association for prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence. The association offers a comprehensive suite of support services with adequate quality, has database and expertise on advocacy aimed at promotion of laws and policies.

Florence Nightingale – Kumanovo is a non-governmental multi-ethnic association that works on prevention of domestic violence, protection of women and children, provides legal assistance, and lobbies and represents victims of domestic violence before the competent

institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia, in order to achieve full gender equality in the society.

(vi) The political system and its relevance to family policy/family support

There is a remarkable discrepancy in the way families are treated in the policymaking process in N. Macedonia compared to other domains such as economy, corruption, Euro-Atlantic integration etc. In fact, family policy is usually considered a sub-topic under social policy. However, as a candidate country to the EU, in the past decade N. 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, there are several gaps that have to be fulfilled and policies to be improved in order to achieve efficient family support institutions at the European level.

(vii) The democratic system and main political parties; (unitary vs federal state structures; centralized vs decentralized structures)

N. Macedonia has a multi-party system, and the main political players are divided into two ethnic blocs: Macedonian and Albanian. The current main parties in the Parliament are two major ethnic Macedonian parties: VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) with a right-wing populism ideology, SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) with social liberalism ideology; and three major Albanian parties: DUI (Democratic Union for Integration), BESA (Besa Movement) and AA (Alliance for Albanians), all with Albanian minority interest. Traditionally, a Macedonian party forms the government with the winning party from the Albanian bloc. In addition, there are smaller ethnic parties, minor Macedonian parties and few multi-ethnic parties.

(viii) The institutional framework for government and state roles and remits for family support in general and family support services in particular (e.g., Ministry roles, national vs local/regional government roles)

The main institutional framework for family support in N. Macedonia on national level is largely within the competencies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, followed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health. The main national institutions which act on local level include: the Public Centre for Intermunicipal Centre for social work in Skopje, Public Centres for Social Work in every city, Counselling Departments and Shelters for family violence victims. Other relevant family support governmental organization on national level are: National Council for Gender Equality, Service for people with mental and psychological disabilities, Coordinative body within the Government of N. Macedonia for the implementation of the

Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Department for marriage and family violence etc.

(vii) The ways in and degree to which professionals, parents/families, children and young people, and communities are involved in policymaking and reviews

Besides formal officials (ministers, advisors, members of the Parliament etc.) not many professionals are included in the policymaking of family support in N. Macedonia. Policymakers rarely turn to family data or family professionals to make evidence-based decisions. Moreover, public debates and research funding are limited, thus resulting with a challenging communication and cooperation between policymakers and professionals. As far as parents/families, children and young people are concerned, their opinion is even less considered and limited to communication with institutions on local level (i.e., families and schools). We consider that the degree of inclusion of professionals and families in the policymaking process (planning and developmental stages) is somewhat low and inadequate (Radulovic & Avirovic, 2018).

18.5 List the dedicated family and/or young people strategic that have been launched since the year 2000. For each policy document indicate

- Most important policy documents since 2000 are:

Legal framework:

- ❖ Child protection Law (num. 98/2000, last change was made on 275/2015)
- ❖ Social protection Law (num. 104/2019)
- ❖ Family law (80/1990, last change was made on 150/2015)
- ❖ Law on prevention and protection of domestic violence (138/2014, last change was made on 150/2015)
- ❖ Law on elementary education (161/2019)
- ❖ Law on the Ombudsman (35/2018)
- ❖ Law on Health protection (42/2012, last change was made on 37/2016)
- Strategic plans and political development documents:
 - ❖ Nacional strategy (2020-2025) and Action plan (2020-2022) for prevention and protection of children from violence

- ❖ Nacional strategy for deinstitutionalization in Republic of Macedonia 2018-2027 “Timjanik”
- ❖ Nacional health strategy in Republic of Macedonia 2020: “Safe, effective and fair health care system”
- ❖ Nacional strategy for equalization of the rights of persons with disabilities (2010-2018)
- ❖ Nacional action plan for children rights 2012-2015
- ❖ Action plan for employment of young people (2015, 2016-2020)
- ❖ Annual program for development activity for children protection
- ❖ Program for realization of social protection for 2018
- ❖ Social protection development program 2011-2021
- ❖ Program for conditional cash transfers for secondary students for the academic year
- ❖ Program for early learning and development (46/2014)
- ❖ Strategy for Roma people in Republic of Macedonia 2017-2020

(i) Whether participation of families and young people has been mentioned in the document

- Participation of children and families:
 - ❖ Child protection Law (num. 98/2000, last change was made on 275/2015)
 - ❖ Law on elementary education (161/2019)
 - ❖ Nacional strategy (2020-2025) and Action plan (2020-2022) for prevention and protection of children from violence
 - ❖ Nacional strategy for equalization of the rights of persons with disabilities (2010-2018)
 - ❖ Nacional action plan for children rights 2012-2015
 - ❖ Program for early learning and development (46/2014)
 - ❖ Annual program for development activity for children protection
- Participation of young people and families:

- ❖ Social protection Law (num. 104/2019)
- ❖ Social protection development program 2011-2021
- ❖ Program for realization of social protection for 2018
- ❖ Nacional strategy for deinstitutionalization in Republic of Macedonia 2018-2027 “Timjanik”
- ❖ Action plan for employment of young people (2015, 2016-2020)
- ❖ Program for conditional cash transfers for secondary students for the academic year
- Participation of families in general:
 - ❖ Family law (80/1990, last change was made on 150/2015)
 - ❖ Law on prevention and protection of domestic violence (138/2014, last change was made on 150/2015)
 - ❖ Law on Health protection (42/2012, last change was made on 37/2016)
 - ❖ Law on the Ombudsman (35/2018)
 - ❖ Nacional health strategy in Republic of Macedonia 2020: “Safe, effective and fair health care system”.
 - ❖ Strategy for Roma people in Republic of Macedonia 2017-2020

(ii) The extent to which such participation has been implemented

- Participation of children and families:
 - ❖ Child protection Law (num. 98/2000, last change was made on 275/2015) / Nacional action plan for children rights 2012-2015

Continuous cash benefits are provided by this law: allowance for children, allowance for disabled children, allowance for new-born child, and parent allowance for child.

This law defines the work of preschool institutions as forms of education for children. According to the State Statistical Office (2019), in 2019 there were 103 pre-school institutions and centres for early development who were taking care of 39,094 children (around 30% of all preschool children), which is an increase of 1.3% compared to 2018.

- ❖ Law on elementary education (161/2019)

The law provides quality and free education for every child. In September 2019/2020 there were 981 primary schools and 187,240 students; a decrease of 0.5% compared to the previous school year (State Statistical Office, 2020).

For the first time this law is very sensitive to children with a disability. It provides inclusive education for every child with disability through Resource Centres. Now and in the next two years, special schools will be in the process of transformation into the Resource Centres. In 2019/20 there were 732 students with disabilities in special schools.

❖ National strategy for equalization of the rights of persons with disabilities (2010-2018)

This National strategy ensures greater participation of persons with disabilities in the educational process, better social inclusion, and inclusion in the labour market. We are few steps forward, but despite existing legislation and policies, research shows that discrimination based on mental and physical disability is a widespread phenomenon in the country.

❖ Annual program for development activity for children protection

These programs provide a range of activities to stimulate the child's development. The government has taken measures to increase the resources and number of places in preschool institutions by investing in preschool infrastructure and high-quality training for preschool teachers. It is planned to implement a compulsory year of preschool education for children aged 5-6 in order to ensure that children are well-prepared before starting primary school (UNICEF, 2020).

• Participation of young people and families:

❖ Social protection Law (num. 104/2019)

The payment of the social allowance has now been streamlined and there has been significant progress in community-based care and protection resources over the past few years. Changes have also been made in job descriptions and internships, but the system of social work centres is still overloaded and staff morale is considered to be low. The new law includes other financial rights integrated into the social services offered. There is still insufficient research on the impact of the package of benefits and administrative measures on family poverty, but the benefits are aimed for people with disabilities, including children and families.

❖ National strategy for deinstitutionalization in the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2027
“Timjanik”

The National Deinstitutionalization Strategy (2018-2027) aims to ensure that no child under the age of 18 is placed in an institution. The number of children in institutions decreased from 182 in 2017 to 43 in 2019, and by March 2019, 384 children were placed in foster families.

❖ Action plan for employment of young people (2015, 2016-2020)

Action plan for employment of young people (2015) offered: self-employment grants, internship, training from well-known employer, employment subsidy, training for advanced IT skills and training for deficient occupations.

Main benefits from action plan (2015) are: the number of dropout young people (15-24) decreased by 15.3 percent; nearly 57 percent of young unemployed people who attended one of the training programs were employed one year after completing the program; around 2,500 young people have gained access to loans and grants for self-employment.

There are no available analyses on an Action plan for employment of young people (2016-2020), but according to the plan, the target for interventions until the end of 2020 are 42% of the young population (aged 15 to 29) and according to the SSO, the employment rate of young people (age 15-24) in 2019 was 46.9, and 48.1 in 2020.

❖ Program for conditional cash transfers for secondary students for the academic year

This program aims for better access and quality of secondary education for students from socially vulnerable categories. This program has been active since 2009.

• Participation of families in general:

❖ Family law (80/1990, last change was made on 150/2015)

The law, including changes of the law, is implemented through the definition of marriage, marital rights and obligations, parenting, adoption and guardianship, divorce proceedings, mediation.

❖ Law on the prevention and protection of domestic violence (138/2014, last change was made on 150/2015)

Law provides improving the measures for prevention, wide recognition, and improved protection of victims of domestic violence through a coordinated multisectoral approach at national and local level. Conducted activities: raising awareness, prevention of domestic violence, organized institutional support, protection, support and resocialization of the victim.

According to the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in 2019 (until October), there were 709 reported cases of domestic violence, of which 610 victims were women.

- ❖ Law on Health protection (42/2012, last change was made on 37/2016) / National health strategy in Republic of Macedonia 2020: “Safe, effective and fair health care system”

This law specifies the right to health care, more specifically regulations on primary, secondary and tertiary health care.

As a statistical indicator, we analyzed the health of pregnant women and mothers. According to the latest estimates, 98.6 percent of pregnant women receive prenatal health care, and 99.9 percent of births are attended by qualified medical staff. However, the perinatal mortality rate in North Macedonia was 16/1000 in 2016; among the highest rates from the countries in the same group; and the infant and child mortality rate below five years is higher than the EU average (Byrne, 2020).

- ❖ Law on the Ombudsman (35/2018)

It is implemented through continuous activities for protection of human rights and freedoms.

- ❖ Strategy for Roma people in Republic of Macedonia 2017-2020

The Roma Decade and national strategies enable greater inclusion of Roma people, improving their quality of life and reducing the risk of poverty. The strategy enables greater involvement of Roma children in the education system, reduction of drop-out children, improvement of the health care system, and inclusion of Roma people in the labour market. This strategy provides educational and health mediators, financial benefits and strengthening public awareness.

18.6 The main forms and modalities of child and family support provision since 2000 with a particular emphasis on approaches to, and developments in, child and family support services

(i) The priorities in child welfare and family policy

Child protection, from all aspects, is the main priority of many activities and documents: providing a clean and healthy environment (clean air is a significant challenge), protection from child violence, improving the educational quality and greater enrolment across all educational levels (especially preschool level). Priority groups are children from marginalized groups and children with disabilities. In terms of family policy, in the last period we were focused on stimulating the birth rate, as well as activities to improve parenting skills.

Through an analysis of the legal framework, national strategies, and action plans we can conclude that we have a good basis for support of the children, youth and their families. Problems arise during the implementation of those programs.

(ii) *The main types of family provision and support and key features (e.g., different types of cash support (universal and targeted, work-family reconciliation measures and children's/family services, childcare etc.) (no line limit here)*

- Cash support to families in general:
 1. Allowance for parenting (for a third child)
 2. Maternity leave (9 months for single birth, and 12 months for twins)
 3. Participation in the costs for attending preschool state institution
 4. Scholarships for talented elementary and high school students
 5. Scholarships for talented university students
 6. Credits for university students

- Cash support for social protection of financially unsecured families:
 1. Child allowance
 2. Guaranteed minimum allowance
 3. Housing allowance
 4. One-time financial allowance
 5. One-time allowance for newborn child
 6. Participation in the costs for care and recreation of children in a public institution for children.
 7. Conditional cash transfers for high school students who attend school regularly
 8. Scholarships for orphans

- Cash support for social protection of families with disabled child:
 1. Special allowance
 2. Allowance for disability
 3. Allowance for assistance and care from another person

4. Part-time salary compensation
5. Permanent allowance for a foster family
6. Participation in the costs in some medical treatment

(iii) The types of funding involved such as state, charity vs private sector providers and in terms of the different professionals/practitioners

Every year, the state provides self-employment loans for people who will be self-employed in the fields of agriculture, trade, manufacturing, construction, services, etc. In recent years, the state has also focused on stimulated employment of young people in vocational professions.

Due to that, a youth allowance was introduced for employment of young people in production after the completion of secondary education (up to 24 years). The state provides benefits to the employer if it employs people from marginalized groups.

The private sector has a different funding approach. Some companies offer free education/courses in the IT sector with the opportunity to employ the best students.

(iv) Approaches to policy monitoring and evaluation and consideration of limitations

There is a special body for monitoring and evaluation, called the Inspection Council. This body consists of 28 inspection services, 45 types of inspectorates, and about 800 inspectors. The inspection services are responsible for controlling the application of over 200 laws and bylaws arising from them. The central administrations of all inspection services are based in Skopje and associates in 30 other cities around the country.

As for the programs and national strategies, the institution responsible for the implementation of the document, after the scheduled time for implementation, conducts an evaluation of the objectives and based on the results creates the next program or national strategy. Data from these reports are public.

Policy monitoring and evaluation is also done by independent organizations, NGOs, and civil society organizations whose interests are policies for the protection of children, youth and their families.

(v) Limitations in national and official data and statistics

Access to information is regulated by the Law on Free Access to Public Information (num. 101/2019). This law defines the method of access to information and the obligation of the public clerk to regularly update the data.

We can find a significant information and data on the website of the State Statistical Office, but this kind of analysis is quantitative, there is lack of qualitative analysis, actually interpretation of the data in terms of some trends or policies.

An important problem in obtaining data and analysing them is the lack of a clear picture of the population in the country, given that the last census is from 2002.

18.7 Critical academic commentary on current family support policy and provision

Negative aspects of family support in North Macedonia

- Lack of programmes to support families as a whole
- There are programmes to lift children out of poverty but are currently quite ineffective
- There are social benefits, such as cash transfers, but are inadequate in amount, failing to cover the basic financial security of families with children
- There are not enough instruments for reconciliation of work and family life
- There are no formal family education and mandatory premarital and pre-parenting education
- There is no adequate access to essential services (such as quality pre-schools, day care services and health institution) in rural areas.

Recommended for improvement

- Holistic approach to family support needed by all family stakeholders
- Creating population public strategies
- National strategy for family support
- National family council
- Intersectoral cooperation between public institution working with families
- Introducing family support worker profile
- Introducing family education (curriculum in primary and secondary school)
- Improving the system for early childhood education
- Mandatory marriage and parent education courses for young couples
- Better access to preschool services, day care and health services

- Introducing the following categories: parent leave, different packages of maternity leave, and part-time work
- Improving existing strategies for woman access at family labor market.

Pressing policies and Impact of COVID 19

Families today are facing many challenges like poverty, social protection, couple and parenting issues, inequality, family violence, work and family balance, etc. However, those challenges are more meaningful today while we are facing coronavirus pandemic. The effects of coronavirus are far-reaching and go beyond family health. This outbreak is having negative effects on the financial situation, children education, work performances, social life, and family relations. Many people are going to lose their jobs and some already have significant reduction in their pay checks. Vulnerable families will suffer more because even before this situation they were struggling to pay their rents, bills or even to buy food.

On the other hand, people that are working and stable companies or institutions are having their own problems. With schools across the country closed, working parents will also struggle with the issue of childcare. Parents, especially mothers, are expected to stay home, and at the same time take care of their children, their education, the household, and get their work tasks done.

Research analyses shows that domestic abuse rates in our country are on the increase due to the strict limitation of movement and recommendation to stay home. The period of quarantine and social distancing it is very hard for extended families, multigenerational families, where all family members are living under the same roof. There are difficulties to manage everyday activities and interaction especially if there is an infected family member.

The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic can be categorized in the following result:

- (1) result in the short-term, but severe economic downturn.
- (2) put upward pressure on unemployment and poverty in North Macedonia,
- (3) cause social and psychological problems (a rise in the domestic violence, anxiety, depression) (UNDP, 2020).

Our government is trying to adjust its politics with other governments worldwide. The Ministry of Labour and Social Politics has adopted new ad hoc measures to protect the most vulnerable citizens: Report domestic violence - to encourage the victims to report violence. Offering shelter up to 12 months, health care, psycho-social intervention and treatment.

- Food donations to single parents, families, victims of domestic violence, shelters, etc.
- SOS lines to support foster parents
- Social help for the families without income up to 10.000 den
- Assistance for the families with disabilities
- Easier access to social help, shorter procedures, and other similar measures (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2020).

Since the pandemic outbreak the Government of North Macedonia proposed four packages of economic measures. They include direct financial support for several vulnerable categories:

- Low-income citizens (unemployed and social assistance beneficiaries). In mid-June 2020, domestic payment cards were introduced to the value of 9,000 denars for approximately 100,000 low-income persons, with an annual net income less than 180,000 denars in 2019 and less than 60,000 denars in Jan-Apr 2020.
- Low-income citizens (employed persons). Employed persons with net-income less than 60,000 denars in Jan-Apr 2020 are entitled to a one-time direct financial support of 3,000 denars to be spent on domestic products and services.

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