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arise Action for Reducing
Inequalities in Education

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National Report for
North Macedonia



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Step by Step Foundation for Education and
Cultural Initiatives – North Macedonia

ARISE

Action for Reducing
Inequalities in Education

National Report for
North Macedonia

Skopje, 2021

ARISE Consortium



Centar za obrazovne politike
Centre for Education Policy



STEP BY STEP



Contents

List of Abbreviations	5
Introduction	7
1. General policy context relevant for equity	8
1.1. Equity in national legislation and strategic documents	8
1.2. Poverty as source of inequity	11
2. Equity in education	14
2.1. International data about impact of SES on achievement (PISA)	14
2.2. Main obstacles for low SES students	18
3. Description of the existing policy measures aimed at reducing inequity	23
3.1. Education	23
3.2. Health system	28
3.3. Social care and welfare	31
4. Recent changes in last years that affected equity in education	34
4.1. Short summary of main reform initiatives that help promote equity	34
4.2. How are reforms seen by different stakeholders	37
5. Key conclusions and recommendations	39

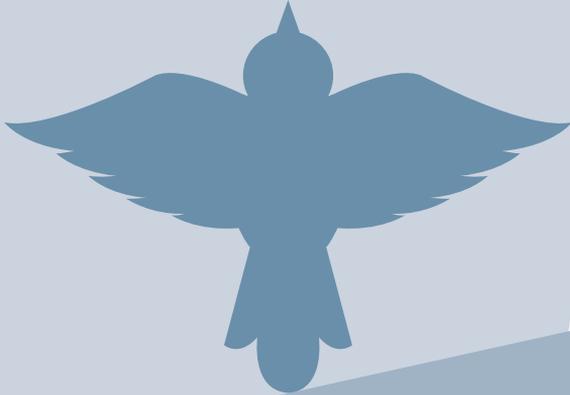




List of Abbreviations

ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EWIS	Early Warning Identification System for Students at Risk
HIF	Health Insurance Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
LSG	Local Self-Government
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SES	Socio-economic status
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization





Introduction

The national report was created within the project Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education (ARISE¹), a regional project implemented in Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey and funded by the European Commission. The project aims to support inclusion of students with low socio-economic status by building national and regional partnerships of civil society organisations from six aforementioned beneficiaries to engage in advocacy and constructive policy dialogue with governments, raise awareness among education stakeholders and pilot interventions targeting low SES students at the school level.

Data and information presented in the national report are collected through a policy questionnaire fulfilled after the analysis of equity-related policy documents and consultations with relevant institutions and experts and focus group and interviews with policy makers, school principals, teachers, school support staff, students, parents, civil society organisations and educational experts. Focus group and interviews are implemented to obtain stakeholders' perspective on equity-related issues in general and in the educational context of a country.



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1 More information about project: <https://www.arisenetwork.eu/en/>

1. General policy context relevant for equity

1.1. Equity in national legislation and strategic documents

According to the Constitution, all the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia enjoy equal freedom and rights regardless of the sex, race, skin colour, national and social background, political and religious beliefs, financial and social position.² Article 44 states that everyone has the right to education. Education is available to everyone under equal conditions. Primary education is compulsory and free of charge. Furthermore, article 54 states that restrictions of freedom and rights cannot discriminate on the grounds of sex, race, skin colour, national and social background, political and religious beliefs, financial and social position. The Constitution provides for an Ombudsman, who protects the constitutional and legal rights of the citizens when violated by the government, and other organs or organizations with public authorization. The Ombudsman pays special attention to the protection of the principles of non-discrimination, proper and equitable representation of the community members in the national government and local government organs, as well as in the public institutions and services.³

The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination regulates the prevention and prohibition of discrimination, the types and forms of discrimination and the procedures for protection against discrimination. According to this law, “Equity” is a principle of equality of all people to enjoy and practice their rights and freedoms. According to this Law, it is forbidden to discriminate people on the

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2 The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, article 9

3 Ibid

grounds of race, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, being a member of a marginalized group, language, citizenship, social background, education, religion and religious beliefs, political beliefs, other beliefs, disability, age, family or marital status, financial situation, health status, personal or social status, or any other discriminatory grounds.

The General Education Strategy does not tackle the issue of equity directly. Only one part of the strategy recommends gender and sex equity.⁴ Gender equity is an issue in the MoES Operative Plan for Gender Equity for 2020 and Improvement of the Gender Aspect of the Education System – equal possibilities both for men and women.

Based on the assessment of the factual situation and needs, The National Strategy for Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia in 2010–2020, suggests strategic goals for improvement in the analysed fields. In line with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the strategy is intended for the welfare of all the citizens in the Republic of Macedonia, regardless of their social background. It contains various measures and activities in several fields which are a basis for the creation of action plans with deadlines and duty-bearers for each measure. The main goal of the Strategy is to reduce poverty and social exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia by better implementation of human and social resources, improvement of the living, working and social conditions for all the citizens, systemic and institutional collaboration for development and improvement of the standard and the quality of life.⁵

Alongside the proposed measures and suggestions for each of the defined fields, it is also emphasized that it is essential **to establish a new, modern concept in the treatment of socially excluded individuals and to create a new social model** that focuses on the individual and personality, rather than the reason for exclusion, affil-

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- 4 MoES, (2018): Comprehensive Education Strategy, 2018–2025 and Action plan, Skopje
 - 5 MoLSP (2010): National Strategy for the Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia. (revised 2010–2020), Skopje



iation, diagnosis, disability or any other grounds for social exclusion of the citizen.⁶

The legislation in the Republic of Macedonia (The Child Protection Law) defines early childhood development as preschool education that includes not only childcare, but also measures and activities for health promotion of the children and improvement of their intellectual, emotional, physical and social development. Childcare and education of young children take place in the kindergartens, and the children who do not attend one can be organized in other ways which are not institutional, such as through licensed private agencies or individual child-minders, providing care in private homes.

In spite of the fact that equity is not directly mentioned in the legal and strategic documents, there have been certain initiatives for developing and implementing educational, economic, social, marketing strategies and packages, supported by national and donor funds, which refer to the vulnerable groups in the past period. Among others, these initiatives covered: internet access for the deprived families, computers and other devices, free kindergarten attendance, reduced school fees for state university students, scholarships for the education subsystems, free bus transport for the students in compulsory education, monthly financial help for students who study in a different city, one-time financial help for young people age 16–26, and unemployed, subventions for heating and other household devices etc.

The collection of field data revealed that part of the interviewees, although they claimed not to be familiar with the legislation, believe that protection of vulnerable groups of people regulated in the legal documents is difficult to implement in reality, especially the protection of individuals and families of low social and economic background. They are familiar with most of the measures that the Government, local governments, work and humanitarian organizations have implemented. However, they think it is not enough because it takes a systematic approach to overcome the problems families and children from a lower social and economic status face.

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6 Ibid



1.2. Poverty as source of inequity

Poverty is often understood as inability to meet the basic needs for survival and bad living conditions, such as lack of food, clean water and shelter, lack of clothing and medicaments. It affects mainly the unemployed and/or individuals with low income, and is connected to bad housing conditions, inappropriate health care and restrictions in the field of education, culture, sport and recreation. The affected individuals and families often find themselves on the margins of social activities.

In The National Strategy for Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion individuals, families and groups of people whose resources (material, cultural and social) are at a level below the minimally acceptable way of life in the country where they live are treated as poor. Social exclusion is a broader notion than poverty, which is reduced mainly to lack of material goods or money.⁷

According to the latest data, the poverty risk rate in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2019 was 21.6%. The analyses of the types of households indicate that the poverty risk in households of two adults with three or more dependent children was 44.7%, single parent with dependent children 42.6% and households with dependent children 26.2%. According to the most frequent activity status, the poverty risk rate for the employed was 8.5% and for the unemployed 41.7%, whereas it was 7.7% for the retired. Child poverty rate was 27.8%.⁸

More than 100,000 children across North Macedonia, 28% of the country's youth, are affected by poverty. One out of 300 children living in poverty goes to preschool, while only two-thirds attend secondary education. Moreover, 73% of Roma children who attend school never complete their education. Roughly 3 to 4 children per household are of age to go to school, yet the costs of sustaining schooling for this many children have become a financial burden.⁹

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7 Ibid

8 State Statistical Office, http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2020/4.1.20.113_mk.pdf

9 4 Efforts to Alleviate Child Poverty in North Macedonia in <https://borgenproject.org/child-poverty-in-north-macedonia/>



Table 1: Poverty and social exclusion indicator, 2017–2019 (final data)¹⁰

	2017	2018	2019
Poverty risk rate % of the population	22.2	21.9	21.6
Number of individuals below the poverty risk threshold, thousands	460.3	455.1	448.1
Poverty risk rate for a single member household– annual equivalent income in denars	90 120	97 000	100 643
Poverty risk rate for a household of four (2 adults and 2 children below the age of 14) – annual equivalent income in denars	189 252	203 700	211 351
Poverty risk rates before the social transfer and before retirement, % of the population	40.7	40.8	41.1
Inequity in the income distribution, S80 / S20,%	6.4	6.2	5.6
Inequity in the income distribution, Gini coefficient,%	32.5	31.9	30.7

Finance Think and UNDP MK analysis from 2020 (Beyond Income Inequity in North Macedonia)¹¹, proves that poverty strongly affects the field of education. The data shows a significant difference between children from deprived households compared to ones from privileged households. Thus, 37% of the young who live in deprived households leave school, compared to an insignificant 1% from privileged households. In addition, although compulsory, the rate of students who have completed their secondary education is amazingly low among deprived families. Poverty also impacts university enrolment rate. The poorest families are in a worse situation, with 0% university education rate, compared to 40%-70% rate among the richest families.

Although government policies declaratively advocate for decreasing economic inequality, it is very difficult to make an impact on the financial wellbeing of the citizens only through government intervention, without increasing productivity. (Economy expert)

10 State statistical office – News Release: Poverty indicators in Laeken, 2019, http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2020/4.1.20.113_mk.pdf

11 Marjan Petreski, 2020. “Beyond income inequality in North Macedonia: An overview,” Finance Think Policy Studies 2020–04/27, Finance Think – Economic Research and Policy Institute.



As far as access to healthcare is concerned, the data show that the lack of healthcare services is most obvious among the poorest population. Still, the organization of the healthcare system is such that the differences are not so striking.

Poverty influences the activities in the labour market as well. The greater the poverty, the greater the unemployment. Unemployment may not be a direct result of poverty. There are other important factors in addition to poverty: access to jobs, education degrees, personal attributes, traditions etc.

Despite of the fact that unemployment is wide-spread in North Macedonia, the indicators show that the youth from privileged families fare significantly better, including five times better on the prime underemployment indicator, i.e. “works fewer than 35 hours, but would like to work more”. Again, such inequity can be related to the personal endowments of the parents potentially exposing the children to education inequities that in turn have determined the inequity in the labour market.¹²

Poverty and exclusion are not individual problems. They affect everyone. They are not only a sign of economic dependence, but also a violation of human rights.

In these times of an on-going race after money, it is very difficult to devote attention not just to the material aspects of inequality but also to the emotional consequences caused by SES. (Psychologist)

People without income and money feel excluded from the public and social life. Poverty violates human and children’s rights to a dignified and good quality life and living conditions and standards, and is the result of insufficient financial resources, inadequate and insufficient education, health care, housing, lack of access to public services, economic and social exclusion.



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12 Ibid

2. Equity in education

2.1. International data about impact of SES on achievement (PISA)

The negative impact of poverty and unequal opportunities in education starts in early childhood. The attendance rate of children 3–5 years of age in kindergartens is much higher among privileged families than in poorer families. In addition to the other factors, like access to preschool institutions and cultural background, finances can also be a barrier for the poorest families. This negative tendency continues in the higher tiers of education.

In the past years, the Republic of North Macedonia took part in **TIMSS – (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)**, an international study that measures students’ knowledge and skills in mathematics and science in the fourth and the eighth grade, as well as in **PISA (Program for International Student Assessment)**, international study for assessment of students’ competencies, knowledge and skills to apply what they have learned at school in real-life situations after they have completed the compulsory education, at the age of 15. The country took part in TIMSS in 1999, 2003 and 2011 with a sample of eighth-grade students, and in PISA in 2000, 2015 and 2018. The results from the studies are a good indicator of the quality of the education system in general, compared to the other participating countries.



Table 2. TIMSS results¹³

TIMSS		Math results	Science results+
TIMSS 1999	RN Macedonia	447	458,
	International average	500	500
TIMSS 2003	RN Macedonia	435	449
	International average	500	500
TIMSS 2011	RN Macedonia	426	407
	International average	500	500

TIMSS 2011 results reveal a strong connection between the students' achievements and their social and economic status. Generally speaking, the higher the parents' education, the better paid jobs they have *i.e.* the family enjoys a better social and economic status and offers more resources at home.

Table 3. Students' average achievement in TIMSS assessment and SES

		High SES		Equal SES		Low SES	
		% students	Average results	% students	Average results	% students	Average results
Math	RN Macedonia	38	458	30	428	32	401
	International average	32	494	33	471	36	448
Science	RN Macedonia	38	443	30	409	32	383
	International average	32	501	33	481	36	458

It can be concluded that at an international level, just as in RN Macedonia, students who attend schools where most pupils come from privileged families achieve better results in mathematics and science, compared to schools where pupils come from families that have similar social and economic status and schools where students come from deprived families. It can also be said that the percentage of students in all three categories in our country is similar to the international one, and that the distribution of students is pretty much the same in all three categories.¹⁴

13 State Examination Centre, <https://dic.edu.mk/%d1%82%d0%b8%d0%bc%d1%81%d1%81/>

14 Lameva, Beti, 2013, Report on Students' Achievement in the Republic of Macedonia: TIMSS 2011 (trends in international mathematics and science study)/ Beti Lameva, Reshad Ramadani. – Skopje: State Examination Centre



In the past years, the Republic of North Macedonia took part in the PISA study in 2000 (PISA 2000 plus), 2015 and 2018. The comparative results, although lower than the international average, have an improving trend.

Generally speaking, the achievements of the students in the Republic of Macedonia are really modest: they are in 62nd place in science, 66th place in reading comprehension and 67th place in mathematics.¹⁵

Table 4. Students' average achievement in the three PISA assessment cycles so far

Year	Science	Reading	Math
OECD average	489	487	489
2018	413	393	394
2015	384	352	371
2000	401	373	381

PISA results for 2018 are the best so far, *i.e.*, they are significantly better than the country results in the past two assessments. The Republic of North Macedonia is ranked 2nd in progress achieved between two PISA assessments, including rank 1 in the progress of reading comprehension results, rank 2 in the progress of mathematics results and rank 3 in the progress of science results.¹⁶

The comparison of the results from 2015 and 2018 shows that:

- ▶ the results of the reading comprehension assessment have improved by 41 points, from 352 points in 2015 to 393 in 2018;
- ▶ the results of science assessment have improved by 29 points, from 384 in 2015 to 413 in 2018;
- ▶ the results of mathematics assessment have improved by 23 points, from 371 in 2015 to 394 in 2018.

The Chart illustrates the difference in PISA results for the deprived families and the privileged families in North Macedonia, with 5% to 10% drawback for the students from the poorer households.

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15 OECD, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_MKD.pdf

16 PISA 2018, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=MK-D&treshold=10&topic=PI>



Table 5. PISA 2018 results for the deprived families and the privileged families

PISA results ¹⁷	Deprived families	Privileged families
Reading	353	386
Mathematics	365	395
Science	381	408

The greatest difference in the students' achievements is in *Reading* (41 points), whereas the smallest is in *Mathematics* (23 points). 2018 PISA results show that the students in our country lag 3 school years behind their peers in the OECD countries. 30–40 points on the PISA scale equal a year of school education. The total variance of the results for North Macedonia is 91% of the average total variance in the OECD countries (93%).¹⁸

Out of the total variance represented as a relative percentage of the OECD average, 57% are interpreted as difference among the schools, whereas 45% of the variance is interpreted as result difference within the schools themselves. In the OECD countries 29% of the reading achievement average variance is due to the differences in the results among the schools, whereas 71% of the variance is due to the differences in the results within the schools.¹⁹

2018 PISA results reveal that most of the 15 year old students do not have knowledge and skills in science, reading and math. 6 year old students, who attend the first grade, have the smallest number of classes (552 classes), compared to all the other participants in PISA. By the time students are 14 years-old, they will have had nearly 900 hours less instruction than students on average across OECD countries. Short learning time in schools limits the breadth and depth of study and the scope to pursue additional subjects or remedial classes.²⁰

17 State Examination Centre, Report on Student Achievements in the Republic of North Macedonia – PISA 2018, Skopje, 2020

18 OECD, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_MKD.pdf

19 Ibid

20 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9b99696c-en.pdf?expires=1614259111&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=97A9A9F3446AF24D5C-09D4A86C4B21E3>





Students' reading performances in the lowest international decile of the scale of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) are among the worst, compared to other countries and economies that take part in PISA. (Result 332 PISA, rank 70/75, 2018).²¹

Students' reading performances in the second lowest international decile in the scale of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) is among the worst, compared to other countries and economies that take part in PISA (Result 363 PISA, rank 69/76, 2018).²²

Students' reading performances in the international average scale of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) are among the worst, compared to other countries and economies that take part in PISA (Result 391, rank 68/76, 2018).²³

Despite of the fact that students' achievements in all three PISA tests in 2018 are better than the achievements in PISA 2000 and PISA 2015, they are still rather low and far below OECD average.

2.2. Main obstacles for low SES students

The rate of children who attend preschool institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia is still a reason for concern. The rate of attendance in preschool institutions for 3–6 year old children has increased from 21.8% in 2007 to 40.2% in 2019²⁴, but it is still low compared to the neighbouring countries, and far below OECD countries' average (95%). The fact that only 30% of the children attended accredited preschool education in 2018/2019 indicates that we are way behind the 95% target EU value for education and training by 2020.²⁵

Unequal access to education is strongly influenced by the social and economic status and location. The attendance rate of 3–5

21 PISA 2018, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=MK-D&treshold=10&topic=PI>

22 Ibid

23 Ibid

24 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020

25 World bank data on inequity in education, <https://unesco-wide-production.herokuapp.com/countries/north-macedonia#?dimension=all&group=all&year=latest>

year old children is 56% for children from privileged families, and nearly 0% for the most deprived families. Furthermore, in 2016 the regions in the East and Pelagonia had 32% attendance of children at the age of 0–5, compared to only 8% in the Northeast. All of the parents, regardless of income, have to cover about 21% of the preschool program expenses (25 euros per month), which is an additional impediment for the families with low income. As a result, well-off households that can afford preschool education are more likely to take the advantage of the public resources.²⁶ What is more, more students with favourable SES are enrolled in primary and secondary schools than students with poor SES. From 2006 to 2016, the average number of enrolled students from any social and economic status has increased, which is especially obvious among the poorest students with an increase rate of 18%. Students who come from families with an average income undergo the greatest increase in tertiary education enrolment, about 12%. However, preschool and tertiary education are still rather inaccessible for the poorest students, especially for those who come from rural areas.²⁷

Preschool education participation is also rather low among minority groups. More than half of the Macedonian children attend preschool education, compared to less than one in five Albanian children. Only 2.6% of the 4 year old Roma community children attend preschool education. Children from urban areas are six times more likely to enrol in preschool education, compared to the children from the rural regions.²⁸

Chart 5 illustrates, the difference in PISA results of the deprived and privileged households in North Macedonia, with 5% to 10% drawback of the students from deprived households.²⁹

26 BIRN, Kevin, Analyses of the Situation of Women and Children in the Republic of North Macedonia [online source] Skopje, UNICEF Office, 2020

27 World Bank, 2019, Republic of North Macedonia Public Finance Review: Sowing the Seeds of a Sustainable Future

28 BIRN, Kevin, Analyses of the Situation of Women and Children in the Republic of North Macedonia [online source] Skopje, UNICEF Office, 2020

29 State Examination Centre, Report on the Students' Achievements in the Republic of North Macedonia PISA 2018, Skopje, 2020



Other education indicators also show significant difference between students who live in deprived and privileged households. For example, 37% of the youngsters who live in the poorest households have left school, compared to insignificant 1% of the most privileged households.³⁰

Also, although compulsory, the rate of secondary school graduates is amazingly low among the poorest segments.

Young people from smaller towns cannot choose between gymnasium and vocational high school to their liking, as small towns have just one type of secondary school. They have to decide whether to commute or stay in a different place where they can attend the school suitable to their interests. In a situation when families struggle with finances, they decide to take advantage of the school in their community, despite the fact that it is not their genuine interest.

In the period 2011 to 2017, the number of secondary schools has increased to 131, whereas the number of students continually decreases. In 2016/2017 there were a total of 72,482 students. It is interesting to mention that 76,394 were enrolled at the beginning of the school year, and this number decreased to 72,482 by the end of the school year.³¹ It turns out that in the course of the year 3,912 (5.12%) have been “lost”. The decreasing trend of students continues. If in 2016/17 76,394 students enrolled in secondary school, the following 2017/18 71,458 enrolled in secondary schools, which is 4,936 students less.³² There are no clear indicators for the reasons for such a dramatic decrease in the number of secondary school students. The lack of relevant information makes it difficult to define whether it is due to population decline or movements or emigration. This is despite all the positive steps taken to make up for



30 World bank education inequity data, <https://unesco-wide-production.herokuapp.com/countries/north-macedonia#?dimension=all&group=all&year=latest>

31 According to: State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, STATEMENT, Primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia in 2017/2018, Number/No: 2.1.18.09; State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, STATEMENT, Primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia at the end of 2016/2017, Number/No: 2.1.18.06

32 State Statistics office of the Republic of Macedonia, STATEMENT, Primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia at the beginning of 2017/2018 school year, Number /No: 2.1.18.09



this phenomenon (free transport, free textbooks, students' dormitories, scholarships etc.).

Access to mainstream education for children and students with disabilities remains poor with limited access to school buildings, lack of appropriate supplies and learning materials and insufficient support for teachers. Children and students from Roma communities continue to face barriers to regular and quality education and training. The new Law on Primary Education considerably strengthens the legal requirements for inclusive education. However, government investment is also needed. As of January 2019, the cost for 400 Roma children enrolled in early childhood education and care is covered by the state budget through block donations to 20 municipalities.³³

Parents, schools and local authorities have an important role to play, same as the highest competent education organisations and agencies. I believe that one of the most important things is high level of awareness of the issues and preparedness to resolve them in the most efficient way. This means that all of the above entities must assume some of the tasks and responsibilities that fall to them so that the measures can be implemented with success. (Education expert)

The poorest segments are in a worse situation when it comes to university education, since the university degree rate is limited to 0%, compared to 40% to 70% rate for the richest segments. Their decision not to continue the education does not correlate with their abilities, but with the lack of finances to support the studying expenses, as well as the need to contribute to the family budget as early as possible.

I believe that disparities, especially those affecting vulnerable groups, are increasing, and psychological consequences brought about by the pandemic (death of a close person, loss of parent's employment or diminishing family income, divorce, etc.) will continue to plague us in the coming period. (Parent)

The poor financial status of the families is often emphasized as a reason for the choice of a certain secondary school. Students who

33 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020



come from deprived families usually decide to enrol in a secondary school that will enable them get a job after they have completed the secondary education. These unequal opportunities are mainly connected to the qualities of parents, and are a continuation of inequalities in early childhood. They are not directly connected with the income, bearing in mind that primary and secondary education, and to a great extent higher education, are free.³⁴



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34 Marjan Petreski, 2020. “Beyond income inequality in North Macedonia: An overview,” Finance Think Policy Studies 2020–04/27, Finance Think – Economic Research and Policy Institute.

3. Description of the existing policy measures aimed at reducing inequity

3.1. Education

The educational system in the Republic of North Macedonia is regulated through laws and by-laws governing each individual tier. Pre-primary education is primarily regulated through the **Law on Child Protection**³⁵ and primary education through the **Law on Primary Education**.³⁶ Overall, secondary education is governed by the **Law on Secondary Education**³⁷, which regulates matters in general secondary education and partly in secondary vocational education. A special **Law on Vocational Education**³⁸ governs vocational education, whereas higher education is regulated through the **Law on Higher Education**.³⁹

The educational system of the Republic of Macedonia comprises pre-primary, primary (for children aged 6–14), secondary (children aged 15–17/18) and higher education.

Children up to the age of 6 attend public or private preschool facilities (i.e. kindergartens), kindergartens within private schools and early childhood development centres.⁴⁰

35 Official Gazette of the RM no. 23 from 14.02.2013

36 Official Gazette of the RM no. 161 from 05/08/2019

37 Official Gazette of the RM no. 44 from 20/09/1995 and amendments to the law

38 Official Gazette of the RM no. 71 from 08/06/2006 and amendments to the law

39 Official Gazette of the RM no. 82 from 08/05/2018

40 State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2017, Statistical Overview No. 2.4.18.02/893.





Public spending on education and training was at 3.7% of GDP in 2019. Government investment in early childhood education and care increased, and 1284 additional public pre-school places were made available in 2019. However, the overall level of enrolment remains low. Whereas the EU Education and Training target for 2020 on early childhood education and care attendance is set at 95%, only 40.2% of children from 3–6 years of age in North Macedonia were enrolled in licensed early childhood education and care institutions in the 2019/2020 school year.⁴¹

The ECEC system is heavily geared towards urban, densely populated areas and to working parents. The urban enrolment area rate is over six times higher (37.2%) than that in rural areas (5.9%)⁴². Of 84 municipalities in the country, 29 have no facilities and offer no ECEC provision. This approach to financing of the ECEC system is seen to reinforce inequalities between poorer and wealthier areas and population groups. Only 0.3% of children from the poorest quintile benefited from ECEC, in contrast to over half (55.9%) of the wealthiest children in 2013.⁴³ In addition, in 2016, the share of 0–5-year-old children in kindergartens was about 32 per cent for the East and Pelagonia regions, but only 8 per cent for the North-east region.⁴⁴

The goal of Primary education is for children to gain general education and prepare for further general or vocational education. Primary education is of nine-year duration and is compulsory and free for all children aged 6–14. It is provided in regular primary schools, special primary schools for children with disabilities in their physical and mental development⁴⁵, schools for compensatory primary education of adults and primary music and ballet schools, totalling 991 primary schools (including satellite schools

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- 41 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020
 - 42 Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, (2011): *MULTIPLE indicator cluster survey: 2011*, Skopje
 - 43 World Bank, (2015): SABER Country Report, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
 - 44 World Bank, *Public Finance Review: Fyr Macedonia*, 2018
 - 45 The 2019 Law on Primary Education introduced mainstreaming of children with disabilities as the only option that should commence as of 2023; special schools are being transformed and renamed into resource centres that will provide support to mainstream schools.

that as separate facilities function and are part of central administrative school units).⁴⁶

In 2018, the gross enrolment rate in primary education was 63.91% and the net enrolment rate 92.97%. These ratios do not include children (mainly Roma) that are not registered as citizens (they do not have a personal identity number) which means that the actual coverage rate for the respective cohorts is even smaller.

Secondary education is also compulsory and free for all children and is of four different types: general secondary, secondary vocational, art education and education for students with disabilities. Secondary vocational education can be of 2-year, 3-year or 4-year duration. At the end of the 2-year and 3-year vocational education, students take a final exam and are not allowed to progress into higher education. Students completing 4-year vocational education as well as those attending secondary general schools have the choice between School Matura and State Matura, depending on whether they wish to continue into higher education or enter the labour market.⁴⁷ The gross coverage rate in secondary education in 2018 was 41.80% and the net coverage rate 69.63%.⁴⁸

The new Law on Primary Education and the new Law on Teachers and Associates in Primary and Secondary Schools aim to improve the quality of education. They include measures to make education more inclusive and to strengthen the professional development of teachers.⁴⁹

Higher education is provided in public and private higher education institutions. The number of students enrolled in 2019/2020 was 51 734, with the majority (close to 86%) attending public, i.e. state, higher education facilities and 14.0 % attend private higher education.⁵⁰ In higher education, the overall enrolment rate of students was 33.3% for the 2018/2019 academic year, 26.4% for males and 40.4% for females.⁵¹

46 State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, Primary and Secondary Schools at the beginning of the school year 2017/2018, Number 2.4.18.04/895

47 MoES: Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018–2025 and Action plan, Skopje, 2018

48 State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, Primary and Secondary Schools at the beginning of the school year 2017/2018, Number 2.4.18.04/895

49 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020

50 State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, Newsletter, Number: 2.1.20.26, 06.07.2020

51 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020





As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the teaching process for primary and secondary education was organised through distance learning.

One of the most significant innovative measures introduced in the last 20 years was the increase in the duration of **compulsory education**. As of 2008, education i.e. schooling, is mandatory from the beginning of primary to the end of secondary education.

The decision to introduce compulsory secondary education for all children had a positive impact on progression rates from primary into secondary education, which rose to 95% in 2011 as well as on the decrease in the attrition/drop-out rates in primary education to 1.37% and in secondary education to 2.26% in 2017.⁵² This decrease in drop-out rates was expected, taking into account the supplements and amendments to the Law on Secondary Education that provide for penalties for parents who do not ensure their children's regular attendance in secondary education and also the introduction of positive measures for supporting at risk groups, including free transportation, scholarships and free textbooks.

One of the most important factors for facilitating equity is the inclusive, warm emotional climate in the schools, where all students irrespective of their differences feel welcomed, accepted, understood and safe. (Education expert)

The current National Strategy for Education⁵³ envisages further increase of the duration of mandatory education by making the final year of pre-primary education (age group 5–6 years) compulsory. This reform should help increase the coverage of children in pre-school facilities, thus helping children acquire basic competences before they enter primary school.

Students from the main ethnic minority groups – Albanian, Turkish and Serbian, attend primary education, and Albanian and Turkish students also attend secondary education and take the State Matura in their mother tongue. Students from minority ethnic groups are required to learn the Macedonian language from grade 4 to the end of their secondary education. Approximately one third of all schools are bilingual or trilingual.

52 Drop-out rate is recorded as students who have officially left school, i.e. withdrawn their documents in the course of a school year.

53 MoES: Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018–2025 and Action plan, Skopje, 2018

Efforts must be made to improve the sensitivity of teachers towards students with low SES. The individual approach is one of the possible solutions for improving the achievements of this group of students. (Policy maker)

As of 2009, **Conditional Cash Transfer Programme** helped increase the participation of students with low SES in secondary education. Thus, financial incentives are being provided to parents from vulnerable groups, i.e. families at social risk who receive social welfare, whose children regularly (at least 85% of the scheduled lessons) attend school. Nevertheless, in 2011 only 50% of the students from the poorest quintile were enrolled in secondary schools, in comparison to the 83% from the top quintile.⁵⁴

Other measures have been undertaken in the form of financial incentives for parents from vulnerable groups through securing state scholarships, free textbooks in primary and secondary education, free transportation and accommodation for students whose primary or secondary school is in a location different from their home, etc. All these measures and activities have been yielding positive results and will continue to be implemented in the coming years.

The Government has introduced a number of initiatives for encouraging more equitable outcomes between and among ethnic groups. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) adopted the Concept for Intercultural Education (2016), which is a normative document aimed at promoting diversity in education and cooperated with US-AID (2017–22) in strengthening of interethnic integration, by improving curricula and textbooks, and renovating schools.

With the aim of facilitating communication between schools and parents and decreasing drop-out among Roma, the 2019 Law on Primary Education introduced education mediators and mentors. Education mediators undertake activities for informing families of the opportunities for and access to education and organise regular meetings aimed at sensitising beneficiaries and teachers about the specificities of this vulnerable group that impact their education. They cooperate with various experts and teachers with the aim of improving student performance and undertake activities to contribute to preventing students from dropping out.⁵⁵

54 OECD (2019), OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: North Macedonia, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris

55 <https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-north-macedonia-en/16809edd7c>





Another set of measures was introduced by the Government focused on improving access to higher education for minority groups, such as introducing enrolment quota for ethnic minorities (in 2003) of 23% of the total number of students enrolled in state higher education facilities). In 2004 the first Albanian language university was founded, and today there are two state and one private universities offer higher education in the Albanian language.

The Strategy for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion⁵⁶ reflects the intention of the state for balancing the degree of inclusion and wellbeing between the social strata. One of the many goals of this Strategy is to facilitate full coverage of students in primary and secondary education, improve the population's overall literacy and education levels, facilitate education for vulnerable groups and adapt the education system to labour market need and strengthen the marketable potentials and skills of the potentials and capacities of the population for work. The Strategy is underpinned by the willingness of the Republic of Macedonia to improve the quality of life of all its citizens and its aspirations for full integration into the European Union, and as such respect for implementing European initiatives for social inclusion.

The Government undertakes, in cooperation with civil society and international organisations such as Unicef, UNDP and USAID, activities and measures for improving the inclusion of vulnerable groups, primarily those with low SES, in the education system. These measures include financial support and incentives in the form of scholarships, professional support for improving the quality of learning and progression of children and youth with low SES in education, training of teachers for working with and improving their sensitivity towards children and youth with low SES, providing schools with equipment and learning and teaching aids, constructing new kindergartens and early childhood development centres in rural areas and smaller towns, etc.

3.2. Health system

Health care in North Macedonia is provided by a mix of public and private providers funded through a statutory health insurance

56 <http://mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/strategy.pdf>

system, with costs split between the health insurance fund (public costs) and the patient (private costs).

The two central institutions in the health care system are the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Health Insurance Fund (HIF). MoH is responsible for health policymaking, organization of the health care system and the enforcement of health legislation, while HIF is responsible for purchasing services from public and private providers on behalf of users.

The Law on Health Care⁵⁷ (2012, last amendments from 2016) defines the MoH's wide range of responsibilities and roles in what is in practice a highly centralized system. It regulates the system of health care and the organisation of the provision of services, defines the guaranteed rights, interests and obligations of all stakeholders, in particular the interests and obligations of the state and various authorities, their operation, employment, duties and rights of staff, responsibilities, evaluation and termination, protection of workers, the quality of services to be provided, the work of the various chambers and other quality assurance and supervision mechanisms.

The Law on Health Insurance⁵⁸ (2018) regulates the citizens' health insurance, the rights and responsibilities of the health care system and the beneficiaries and the manner in which the health insurance is to be organised and implemented. The **Law on Public Health**⁵⁹ regulates the basic functions, responsibilities and duties of the public health care system, the operation of the organisations and the financing of public health, focusing primarily on the responsibility of the state for the overall health status of the population and the comprehensiveness of measures and activities targeting the entire population, with due attention devoted to socio-economic and other risk factors.

The 2020 National Health Strategy⁶⁰ is the fundamental health policy document for the country and defines the vision for health

57 Official Gazette of the RM no. 43 from 29/03/2012

58 Official Gazette of the RM, No. 192/15 <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ZAKON-ZA-DOBROVOLNO-ZDRAVSTVENO-OSIGURUVANE-zak-luchno-so-br-192-od-2015.pdf>

59 <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/zakon-za-javno-zdravje/>

60 http://zdravje2020.mk/doc/strategija_zdravje2020_novo.pdf



development with common objectives and clear priorities towards better health and well-being of the population. It introduces a range of instruments for improved consultation and dialogue, and ensures beneficiary satisfaction and targeting of most pressing health issues. It identifies the MoH as responsible for formulating, developing, implementing and monitoring health policies.

Immunisation is mandatory and free for all children aged 0–18, and the immunisation calendar is developed in full compliance with WHO guidelines and requirements. The **National Immunisation Programme**⁶¹ is funded from the state budget and coordinated by MoH, and all vaccines are procured from the state. The MoH’s Department for Preventive health Care is responsible for monitoring activities towards full coverage. The State Health Inspectorate is responsible for ensuring the safety of the immunisation process. The Bureau for Medicine controls the quality of the vaccines. Immunisation services are provided by 34 outpatient clinics, 144 mobile teams and a polyvalent patronage service.

All children under the age of 18 benefit from the same free and accessible health care services as defined by law, irrespective whether their families contribute into the state budget i.e. Health Insurance Fund. This pertains to primary, secondary and tertiary health care. Whilst there are special health care facilities that focus on school-aged children (for immunisation purposes, for regular bi-annual health check-ups, for provision of general medical care), there are no mechanisms that correlate school attendance and performance to provision of health care services, or that especially target low SES students.

A special health care measure aimed at low SES families was the initially piloted (2012) but then adopted appointment of Roma health mediators. The aim of this measure is improving the health of Roma and their access to healthcare by improving communication between the Roma community and the healthcare system. The mediators help facilitate the access to healthcare services, establish trust in the relationship between the physician and the patient, as well as establish good habits and practices regarding health, hygiene and nutrition in Roma communities.

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61 Ministry of Health, [National Immunisation Programme](#), 2019

3.3. Social care and welfare

The Law on Child Protection⁶² defines early childhood development as preschool education encompassing measures for care for children, measures and activities for health promotion and intellectual/cognitive, emotional, physical and social development. Care for and early education of children at preschool age is one type of child protection provided through the system of activities and measures for care, feeding, education, sports and recreation, culture and entertainment aimed at maintaining and improving the intellectual, emotional, physical, mental and social development of children under the age of 6, i.e. until primary education. In addition, kindergartens can also accommodate preschool-aged children, providing care and meals for children from 6 to 10 years of age. No special preconditions are tied to this opportunity, i.e. children from disadvantaged or vulnerable groups do not receive preferential treatment.

Child protection is an action organised by the state based on the rights of children, the rights and obligations of parents for planning for the family and the rights of the state and local authorities for developing and implementing humane population policies.

Child protection is facilitated by securing conditions and standard of living commensurate to the physical, cognitive, emotional, moral and social development of children. The state and local authorities are responsible for providing appropriate financial and/or materials support to parents/caregivers for supporting, raising, caring for and protection of children, as well as for organising and ensuring the operation of child protection institutions and services.

The Government provides additional types of assistance to families with low SES or those with greater need for assistance:

- ▶ **Child allowance**, for children up to 18 years of age in families with low SES.
- ▶ **Child disability allowance**, available to children with identified physical, sensory or mental disability until the age of 26.
- ▶ **Financial assistance for children without parents or parental care.**

62 Official Gazette of the RM no. 23 from 14/02/2013



- ▶ **Salary top-up**, provided to parents with a child with disabilities who cannot work full-time.
- ▶ **Housing assistance**, available to social welfare beneficiaries and children without parents until s/he reaches the age of 26.
- ▶ **Conditional cash transfers**, aimed at improving enrolment and attendance in secondary education of children from households who are social welfare beneficiaries.

In this crisis any help is welcome for the population groups living in poverty, but it is not enough to solve their problems. (Parent)

Child allowance is an entitlement and is provided in the form of a financial transfer / compensation aimed at covering part of the costs of child rearing and development until the child reaches the age of 18; this type of support is dependent on the financial status of the household, provided to low-income families and beneficiaries of social welfare/guaranteed minimal assistance, in line with the Law on Social Protection.

Education allowance is a social transfer provided with the aim of covering part of a household's costs resulting from the child's education, also dependent on the financial status of the household and under the same conditions resulting from the Law on Social Protection as above. Provision of this type of assistance is conditioned on attendance of the child at 85% or over of the total number of lessons held at school in a given period.

In addition, depending on the financial status of the family, the state/local authority covers part or all of the costs related to attending kindergarten or vacationing in a public facility.

The system of social welfare is organised and managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Social welfare is awarded to individuals who are unemployed, who actively seek work, who have no other assets to support themselves, as well as individuals and households that have income less than the established social welfare assistance and that have no assets that could generate income.

The implementation of the **National Deinstitutionalisation Strategy 2018–2027**⁶³ has already started and contributed to inclusion of

63 MoLSP, National Deinstitutionalisation Strategy for the Republic of Macedonia 2018–2027 „Timjanik”, Skopje, 2018

children with disabilities in society. Currently, children and adults are moved from institutional care to foster care of small community homes.

The entitlement for the state's or local authorities' participation in the costs for care and education or vacation and recreation of children using public services is also accorded to a child from a family whose financial situation has been affected by a natural disaster (fire, flood, earthquake, etc.) and in this case the full costs for the respective service is covered by the state budget.

Primary schools may organise provision of a snack or meal for children during the hours they spend in schools. However, this is not mandatory, and many rural schools are not able to find a provider. Costs for the snack/meal are covered by the families. In cases when families are recipients of minimal assistance from the state (social welfare), the municipality may cover the costs partly or completely.



4. Recent changes in last years that affected equity in education

4.1. Short summary of main reform initiatives that help promote equity

In the last 15 years, the main priorities of the Government were: improvement of the accessibility of and access to education in all of its tiers (pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education), with the aim of facilitating equal opportunities for all students in the country; and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, by modernising curricula, continuing teacher training, introduction of contemporary teaching and learning methods, creating clear standards for monitoring and tracing of students, and facilitating personal and professional / career development of all individuals involved in providing education.

The Government undertook many initiatives targeting vulnerable categories of children, youth and families with low SES. These initiatives resulted with adoption of developmental strategic and operational programmes the measures of which are financed by the state budget and/or donors, including Strategy for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion, the National Health Strategy, the Law on Health Care, the Law on Health Insurance, the Law on Prevention of and protection from Discrimination, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, the Programme for Construction and Reconstruction of Primary Schools, as well as measures for awarding diverse financial incentives and stimulæ for families from vulnerable groups through, for example, state scholarships, free textbooks, free transportation and free accommodation for primary and secondary school students, education mediators and mentors for Roma students. In gen-



eral they targeted the education, health and social welfare sectors being aimed at improving the health status and standard of living of children and families with low SES, as well as the inclusivity of the education system.

Full mapping and monitoring of the country's individuals with low SES is necessary so as to facilitate more efficient policy development and implementation. (School Principal)

The new **Law on Social Protection** was adopted, marking the start of a reform of the social protection system. As a response to the COVID-19 outbreak, a decree was adopted amending the Law on Social Protection in order to allow for people facing loss of earnings to be entitled to Guaranteed Minimum Assistance from the following month. The proportion of employed people at risk of poverty was 8.8%, while for pensioners it was 7.9%.⁶⁴

Implementation of the 2018–2027 **National Strategy on De-institutionalisation** has started and has already contributed to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the society. Re-settlement of children and adults from institutional care to foster families or community-based housing is on-going.⁶⁵

In the last period, special emphasis was placed on Roma, as the most vulnerable population group, whose low SES adversely affects the education participation of Roma children and youth and the quality of their life. To this end, the state signed in 2005 the Declaration for joining the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, thus committing itself to paying due attention to improving the participation rates of Roma in the country's social and economic life by introducing measures for improving their education, employment, health care and housing. Measures defined within the Roma Decade are still in force and implementation and have been augmented by additional ones.

The daily stress levels in an environment where so many basic survival preconditions are lacking or in short supply, significantly exceed those found in families where meeting basic needs and dignified life is not challenged. (Parent)

64 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020

65 Ibid.





In cooperation with a number of international organisations, donors and civil society, the Government has been implementing projects aimed at improving the education for and educational status of children and youth with low SES, including: *Interethnic Integration in Education Project* (2012–2017)⁶⁶ which brought together diverse ethnic groups to promote understanding and overcoming divisions, strengthened communication and institutional capacities, established schools models and renovated school buildings; *Readers are Leaders project* (2013–2018)⁶⁷ which improved students' early literacy and numeracy and improved systems for assessing these skills; *Children with Visual Impairment Project* (2014–2019)⁶⁸ supported children with impaired vision by providing them with individualised support, equal access to quality education and opportunities for employment; *Social Inclusion through Technology* (2016–2018)⁶⁹ assisted students with disability to acquire soft, business and IT skills by linking them with mentors and providing them with access to training through Internet; *Inclusion of Out-of-school Children in Education* provided students who were beyond the mandatory school age, students from marginalised communities and Roma students with education opportunities; *Inclusion of Roma children in public kindergartens* (2016/17)⁷⁰ addressed the neglect of Roma children at early age (two years before start of primary education) by improving and supporting their integration into public preschool education; *Roma Education Programme* (FOSM) provided over many years scholarships, professional and advisory support aimed at improving the education and socio-economic status of Roma children and youth; *Computers for Socially Vulnerable Categories*⁷¹ donated through the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy used computers/IT equipment from institutions and citizens to socially vulnerable categories of social welfare recipients. In addition, many NGOs implement local-level projects for and involving children and youth with low SES.

66 <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/education-in-macedonia/>

67 <https://stepbystep.org.mk/proekt-ral>

68 <https://www.usaid.gov/north-macedonia/documents/1863/children-visual-impairment-project>

69 <https://www.usaid.gov/macedonia/documents/education-overview-apr-2017>

70 https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/mart-2017-ns_article-preku-proektot-inkluzija-na-decata-romi-vo-javnite-detski-ustanovi-4-150-deca-romi-vkluceni-vo-predu.nspx

71 <https://denar.mk/52299/ekonomija/kompjuteri-za-socijalno-ranlivate-kategorii-proekt-na-mioa>

Pre-primary education must become free and more broadly accessible. Kindergartens must be opened in rural communities and smaller towns. Participation in pre-primary education improves the likelihood that students with low SES improve their achievements in their further education. (Education expert)

European Commission, in its “**North Macedonia 2020 Report**“, concludes that reforms of the education system are at an early stage. Public expenditure on education, at some 3.7% of GDP on average over the last 5 years, remains below the OECD average. Enrolment and completion rates in secondary and post-secondary education have risen only marginally in this period. Education outcomes are below most regional peers, even though the PISA 2018 results indicate improvement in all three assessed subjects: reading, mathematics and science.⁷²

4.2. How are reforms seen by different stakeholders

Low SES individuals very often fail to achieve quality cooperation with local authorities in communities where they live. Reasons for the lack of cooperation can be found in the absence of trust in political appointments of local duty-bearers and management of local government institutions and public facilities and services (libraries, schools, religious facilities), that are seen as possible providers of opportunities for information provision, socialisation, emancipations and use of free time. Research participants believed that if the provision of opportunities or services at local level is improved, innovative solutions can be found for addressing the educational, health and financial issues affecting individuals and groups with low SES.

Some of the research participants from the health sector highlight the low level of awareness among individuals with low SES about the importance of their own health and the health of their children. Thus, many children fail to receive regularly their mandatory vaccines, in particular preschool-aged children, and in addition the parents themselves are afflicted by transmittable diseases such as

72 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020



tuberculosis, jaundice, sexually transmitted infections, as well as lice and scabies.

Some parents from vulnerable groups are of the opinion that they lack information and knowledge about their own health care, but also that medical services provided by public institutions are too expensive for them given their financial situation. They highlight that they cannot afford basic medication prescribed by doctors, leaving them without the much-needed disease treatment.

NGOs emphasize the following issues as most prominent for their own operation and as primary focus in the activities they implement with children and adults:

- ▶ Parental care and responsibility, parenting skills, importance of education, extracurricular activities;
- ▶ Health care and promotion, securing health and social insurance;
- ▶ Legal support (advice and covering of costs of issuing documents);
- ▶ Financial and humanitarian assistance (donations of furniture and appliances, food and hygiene packages, new-born packages, etc.);
- ▶ Educational and psychosocial support for children and parents.

Participants in the research expressed a number of comments on the processes applied when creating education policies; in their opinion, policies are created by small groups of individuals although sometimes representatives of stakeholders take part formally in the respective processes. Solutions proposed are more based on internationally relevant trends rather than on the real situation in the country and evidence reflecting it. Thus, some solutions fail during the implementation.

There is a general opinion that procedures lack transparency, whereas public debate is merely formal, since comments and suggestions from stakeholders are rarely taken into account.



5. Key conclusions and recommendations

The SES is one of the factors that exert the strongest adverse influence not only on the quality of life of families affected by it, but also on the education of children and youth in all its tiers – from pre-primary to higher. Its negative effects include low level of participation in education, likelihood of drop-out, poor quality of learning and insufficient progression through the education process.

Children with low SES are characterised by the lowest rates of participation in pre-primary education and lowest achievements in primary education, which later causes many problems for them in the upper tiers, i.e. secondary and higher education.

The Government creates policies for improving the situation through addressing poverty and undertakes measures in the areas of economy, such as strengthening families with low SES through training and employment, and of education, such as increasing the coverage i.e. enrolment of vulnerable groups of children and youth in the education system and providing financial, advisory and professional support for children and youth with low SES. These efforts are enhanced with the contribution of international organisations, donors and a large number of NGOs/CSOs working on empowering children and youth with low SES and improving their access to quality education. The impression remains, however, that all such initiatives suffer from lack of coordination and fragmentary realisation. Coordination is more than necessary and can be achieved through two approaches: vertical coordination, namely Government – local authority – education institutions – families, and horizontal coordination, namely economic measures – health care measures – education measures.

National level policies aimed at supporting local communities in empowering vulnerable population groups need to be strengthened by



mechanisms that improve the flexibility in implementation of support measures. This would facilitate efficient inclusion of children and youth with low SES in education and society.

There is a need to focus on inclusive economic growth, where all segments of society enjoy equitable opportunities; inclusive growth is not only equitable by nature, it also represents a more efficient investment for countries on their development path. A more inclusive education – with equitable and fair education opportunities for all has the potential to be a significant moving force for inclusive growth. However, providing only educational opportunities will not be sufficient to improve access to education and facilitate progression. Enrolment of children in school also requires interventions for actively removing numerous barriers and risks children who are at a disadvantage face, such as child labour, juvenile marriages, violence and discrimination. Therefore, a “campaign-like” approach to meeting immediate needs can help mitigate problems specific groups in the population face, but cannot produce long-term effects or betterment. Full resolving of the problems children and youth with low SES face in education requires parallel interventions in education, health and the economy. Improving the financial situation of families through guidance, training and employment, complemented by on-going campaigns aimed at adults and children to raise their awareness on the need and importance of education is a necessary prerequisite for long-term results.

In the coming year, the country should in particular⁷³:

- ▶ implement the new strategic framework for education, particularly the targets for pre-school education;
- ▶ increase support for teacher training and teacher professional development and ensure an effective assessment process;
- ▶ improve access to quality education for all, in particular preschool enrolment, children with disabilities and children from Roma communities.



73 EU Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020



<https://www.arisenetwork.eu>



<https://www.facebook.com/ARISEproject/>



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