

4.1 General context

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Main challenges to social inclusion

Social inclusion starts from the fact that everyone in the Republic of North Macedonia should have the opportunity and access to the resources and services that make his life healthier, happier and more productive.

The Republic of North Macedonia is social, multiethnic and multi-confessional state. Signing of the [Ohrid Framework Agreement](#), by the President of North Macedonia and the representatives of the main political parties in 2001, ended the war conflict in the country. This Agreement addressed lot of challenges and disputes, and promotes peaceful and harmonious development of civil society while respecting the ethnic identity and the interests of Macedonian citizens. The Framework provisioned amending and changing of the Constitution of the Country.

Major challenges in North Macedonia regarding ethnic minorities, with particular accent to the Roma population, are:

- improving the quality and access to public services in particular health and social services, housing and transportation;
- overcoming the high level of social exclusion and discrimination, especially of certain ethnic groups, as well as Roma, but also other risk groups such as people living in institutions and persons with disabilities;
- Strengthening policies that support family, social networks and the protection of children's rights.

Education

Speaking of social inclusion, the main challenge in North Macedonia in the field of education is the development of programs for continuous education, with focus on the risk groups, and reducing school dropout.

The main priorities in the reforms in the primary, secondary and higher education in the

Republic of North Macedonia are the quality, social inclusion and cohesion and decentralization.

In 2008, North Macedonia introduced obligatory secondary education. The aim is to increase the education of the general population in the country, as well as to ensure wider inclusion of the most vulnerable groups in the education process.

The impact of education on the Ohrid Framework Agreement meant increased focus on priorities for financing higher education in a language spoken by at least 20% of the population.

The educational concept promotes inclusion as inherent and key element in preparation of all strategic documents.

The Roma population is the most marginalized in the education system in North Macedonia. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy adopted the Strategy for the Roma of the Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020 together with the National Action Plan for Education 2016-2020 ([Strategy for the Roma of the Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020](#) [National Action Plan for Education 2016-2020](#)). The strategic goal of this document is to improve the educational structure of the Roma community, especially among girls and Romani women.

In order to achieve this goal, several measures are envisaged: Scholarship for Roma secondary school students, Introduction of new forms of additional support for Roma secondary school students through mentoring and tutoring, Realization of activities for professional orientation of Roma high school students, Inclusion of Roma parents in parents' / school councils boards in secondary schools, Providing scholarships for Roma students, with the priority of students studying in faculties that produce teaching staff, and others.

Employment

Providing conditions for greater integration in the labor market of the long-term unemployed persons and different groups living in poverty and social exclusion as well as ensuring inclusive systems of social protection offering minimum assets for decent life, but in the same time to debar demotivation of looking for job are the main challenges of the country when speaking of social inclusion in employment processes. The state was additionally challenged with the COVID-19 crisis which brought to significant increase of the number of unemployed people.

Young people have low participation rates in the labor market. The low participation of youth is due to: i) shrinking employment opportunities and the difficulty associated with the transition from school to work, ii) the unwillingness of employers to bear the costs of on-the-job training for inexperienced youth as the pool of experienced jobseekers is high, and iii) the skills mismatch between employer's needs and the skills produced by the education system. Lower rates of participation can also be explained by increasing enrolments in higher education, following a government policy of extending public education facilities and reducing the cost of higher education.

In order to increase the employment rate among young Roma, as one of the most vulnerable categories, the MLSP adopted the National Action Plan for Employment 2016-2020. The

strategic goal of the plan is to increase the opportunities for Roma employment in dignified jobs. For this purpose, the following measures are foreseen: Organization of trainings for the employees in the Employment Centers for providing assistance to unemployed Roma in the search for work, Organizing information meetings for the unemployed Roma for promotion of employment opportunities for Roma at the local level, Implementation of programs for vocational training of persons (including Roma) for qualifications for occupations demanded on the labor market, Developing a program for practicing Roma with secondary education and higher education, availability of information on the employment opportunities of Roma, etc.

Competent institutions for undertaking these measures are MLSP in cooperation with ESA as well as with civil society organizations.

Definitions and concepts

In the Macedonian legislation, there is no definition of the term social inclusion. In the [National Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010-2020](#), it is stated that one of the preconditions for combating poverty is determined nationally accepted and adopted definition of social inclusion, based on which the situation will be analyzed, will facilitate methodological procedures and also define policies to be implemented in this area^[1].

However, a wider meaning of the term social inclusion in the Strategy is given and it is understood as a “process of integration of individuals in the society”^[2].

On May 2019, Macedonian government adopted a new Law on Social Protection ([\(????? ?? ?????????? ????????\)](#)). The new Law, same as the old one, mentions the term social exclusion in article 2, without defining it. The term ‘social inclusion’ was defined in the previous local strategies for social inclusion, social protection and poverty reduction 2011-2015 (adopted in 8 municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia: [Berovo](#), [Pehcevo](#), [Radovis](#), [Lipkovo](#), [Caska](#), [Konce](#), [Studenicani](#) and [Negotino](#)). These strategies define social inclusion as “process that guarantees people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, to have equal opportunities and resources needed for their overall inclusion in the economic, social and cultural life, as well as providing them normal living standards and welfare in their communities. This will enable them greater participation in decision making that positive influence their lives, as well as to access their basic rights”.

Strategy for Roma population in the Republic of Macedonia 2014 – 2020, concluding that there is no nationally accepted definition in North Macedonia, refers to the definitions given by the European Commission:

Social exclusion is a process where certain individuals are pushed towards the edge of society and are hindered to participate fully in social flows as a consequence of their poverty, lack of basic qualifications and opportunities for lifelong learning or discrimination.^[3]

Social Inclusion is a process that guarantees people who are in a state of risk and social exclusion, that they will acquire the opportunities and resources necessary for their full participation in the economic, social and cultural life, as well as to achieve decent, socially

acceptable level of living standards and well-being.

In the new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination ([????? ?? ??????????? ?
??????? ?? ?????????????????](#)), adopted on May 2019, Article 4 defines the following terms:

Discrimination by association is any distinction, exclusion or limitation of one person for affiliation with another person or group on any discriminatory basis; **Discrimination by perception** is any distinction, exclusion or limitation of a person for allegedly belonging to a particular group on any discriminatory basis.

Equality is principles according to all humans are equal, with equal obligations and rights.

Marginalized group is a group of individuals united by specific state in the society that is subject of prejudices, which have specific characteristics that makes them subject of violence and/or discrimination, with less opportunities for achieving protection of their own rights and freedoms.