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A LEVEL OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE AGENDA 2023 THROUGH THE ENFORCEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is an issue that is given great importance. The Sustainable Development Goals treat gender issues in a sensitive manner and build expectations that gender equality will be considered as a priority in the new global sustainable development policy of countries. In the Republic of North Macedonia, in general, national strategic documents and policies pay attention to gender equality and incorporate the gender dimension which is also reflected in the index of gender equality, which is 64.5 points of a possible 100. This fact leads to the general review that gender inequality is still present and it manifests in various dimensions especially in rural areas. This paper is methodologically based on a review and analysis of the legal framework in the field of gender equality, rural development and agriculture; data from recent research and analysis related to the SDGs; consultations with local civil society organizations as well as with women from rural areas. Based on the research that is done, the main conclusions lead to the direction that the biggest gender gap is noticed in employment, wages, as well as in women's participation in social and political life. These gaps are especially visible in local communities in the country. Also, to the conclusion could be added that the contribution to the fifth goal of sustainable development – Enforce Gender Equality is generally provided by the state through legal legislation and strategic documents, but what is missing is the real and equal progress and contribution to achieving the goal in everyday social life, especially in rural areas.

Key words: gender equality, Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030, index of gender equality

Introduction

North Macedonia is committed to continuously improving gender equality. Gender inequality manifests itself across different dimensions and is particularly pronounced in rural areas. The poverty rate in 2018 was 21.8 percent for men and 22 percent for women. About 6 percent of women living in poverty are employed and 35 percent are not employed. About 55 percent of

unemployed women were without any education or had only primary education. (National Voluntary Report, Government of North Macedonia, 2022, 40-43). The actual position of women from rural areas is less favorable compared to men from rural areas, but also women from urban areas. Analyzes of the implementation of strategies for balanced regional development show that, despite the investments, limited access to basic services contributes to a lower quality of life for the population from rural areas in general, but women from rural areas are much more affected by this situation. Due to the interconnectedness of human rights, the non-use of rights in one area leads to limited opportunities for the use of rights in other areas of the life of rural women. Non-inclusion in all levels of decision-making processes contributes to the neglect of their specific needs by national and local policy makers. From the other side, we have the commitments as state to our contribution to the Agenda 2030 and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among which is also SDG 5 – Gender equality. SDG 5 seeks to provide women and girls with equal rights, opportunities to live freely without discrimination or any form of violence. This is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to remove many of the root causes of discrimination that limit women's rights in the private and public spheres of life. Eliminating gender-based violence and rape is a priority given that it constitutes a violation of human rights.

SDG 5 has nine targets and 14 indicators. Six of the targets are *outcome targets*: (World in data, SDGs, Gender Equality, 2020)

- ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- ending violence and exploitation of women and girls
- eliminating harmful practices such as child early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- increasing value of unpaid care and promoting shared domestic responsibilities
- ensuring full participation of women in leadership and decision-making
- ensuring access to universal reproductive rights and health .

The three *means of implementation targets* are:

- fostering equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services for women
- promoting empowerment of women through technology
- adopting and strengthening policies for gender equality, and supporting legislation to enforce it.

1. Index for gender equality

The Gender Equality Index is a composite indicator that measures the complex concept of gender equality and assists in the comparative monitoring of progress (EIGE, 2017a). The Index is formed by combining gender indicators into a single summary measure. It consists of six core domains (Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power and Health) and two additional domains (Intersecting Inequalities and Violence) (Diagram 1). The Gender Equality Index measures gender equality by showing how far (or close) each member state is from achieving complete gender equality. It provides results at both EU member states level and EU level. It measures

gender gaps that are adjusted to levels of achievement, ensuring that gender gaps cannot be regarded positively where they point to an adverse situation for either women or men. The Index measures both the level of progress and the gender gap in different domains. The Gender Equality Index assigns scores between 1 and 100, where 1 indicates total inequality and 100 indicates the full achievement of gender equality in the country. Index scores close to 1 indicate a low level of achievement in the domain (e.g. low rates of higher education completion) and a wide gender gap (pronounced differences in achievement between women and men), while Index scores close to 100 indicate high achievement in the domain (e.g. high rates of higher education completion) and minor or non-existent gender gaps between women and men.



Diagram 1 – Domains of the Gender Equality Index

The Gender Equality Index score for North Macedonia for 2022 is 64.5 points out of a maximum of 100 and shows an increase of 2.5 points compared to the previous measurement in 2019. If progress is achieved at this pace (2.5 points every four years¹), the country will need approximately 57 years to achieve gender equality in all domains. For comparison, at the EU level, the pace of progress achieved so far is one point every two years, which is considered a slow and insufficient pace of progress toward achieving gender equality at the EU level (EIGE, 2021). However, social changes and development are not linear processes and can be accelerated by appropriate policies in a favorable socio-economic context at national and international level,

¹The data used for the measuring of the Index in 2019 are the last available data for the indicators from 2015, while the data used for the measuring of the Gender Equality Index 2022 are the last available data from 2019

but they can also be slowed down as a result of regressive policies in terms of equality, or unfavorable context in the country and globally. That is why ensuring continuity in measuring the progress of the Index and its integral domains is of exceptional importance in order to monitor the changes and policy impact and detect the areas where there is a need for improvement of gender equality policies and their implementation in practice. If the Index scores in each of the domains are considered, progress can be observed in the domains of Work, Money, Knowledge and Power. Progress is at a standstill in the domain of Time (due to lack of new data) and the domain of Health, where an insignificant change (+0.1 point) can be observed. Compared to the last measurement, the country does not show a decline in any of the domains that make up the Index (Table 1).

Figure 1: Gender Equality Index, North Macedonia, 2015-2019

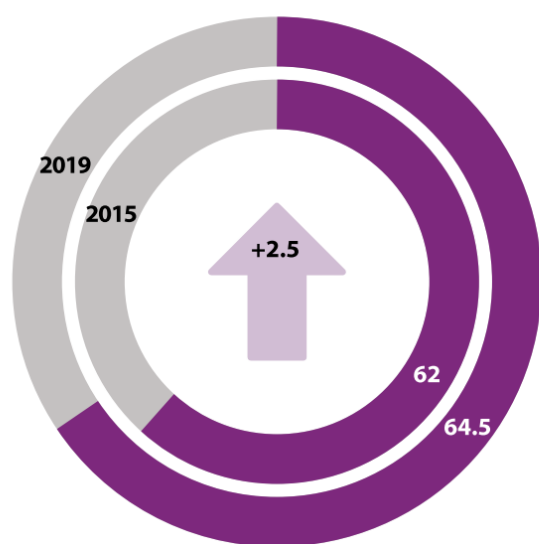


Table 1: Gender Equality Index, total and domains, 2015 – 2019

	2015	2019	Progress (2015 – 2019)
Gender Equality Index	62	64.5	2.5
Work	69.4	70.7	1.3
Money	62.1	64.3	2.2
Knowledge	59.6	62.4	2.8
Time	55.8	55.8	0
Power	52.6	58.6	6.0
Health	87.1	87.2	0.1

Source: State Statistical Office

2. Strategic and legislative framework

The contribution of the country in the part of achievements of results and indicators in SDG 5, prioritizes a range of measures, including efforts to strengthen institutions in support of victims of gender-based violence, harmonization of EU legislation with international standards, gender-responsive budgeting when designing new policies and programmes, and raising of awareness concerning gender-based violence. The following legal and strategic initiatives help to the promotion and upgrade of gender equality in the country:

- **A new draft law on gender equality** – which mentions women in agriculture, traditional unpaid work and domestic work, definitions of gender and recognizing rights of all

humans, etc. which as a legal regulation is fully aligned with international gender regulation but it is not approved by the citizens as well as by the members of the Parliament which also means in the country increase of anti-gender movements especially in the municipalities which also affects the work of them in the field of creating equal opportunities for all citizens in the communities. Overcoming gender stereotypes, participation, balanced participation, empowerment of women etc. are part of the basic principles of the law;

- **Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027** - strives to improve the state of gender equality in accordance with international standards, recommendations and obligations, recognizing that gender equality as one of the key aspects for the prosperity of the entire society;
- **New law on prevention and protection against discrimination** – in which intersectional discrimination is recognized as a more serious form of discrimination, and gender identity and sexual orientation are added as grounds for discrimination. In 2022, the new **National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026** was adopted;
- In the area of the labor market, the **amendments to the Law on Labor Relations in 2015** regulated the right to equal pay for women and men, as well as equal treatment in employment, working conditions and social insurance schemes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, no. 74/15);
- **A new Law on Labor Relations** is being drafted, which is intended to comply with Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on the balance between the private and working life of parents and persons involved in care (Official Journal of the EU, 188/79) , with which reforms would be made in the current system of maternity leave and parental leave would be introduced, which includes a special right to father's leave, which in the existing regulation is obtained exceptionally by canceling/terminating the mother's right to maternity leave
- In the field of education, in 2019 a new **Law on Primary Education** was adopted (Official Gazette of RSM, No. 161/19) which prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, including on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation as well as on gender identity. Affirmative measures for overcoming discrimination and promotion of equality in the educational process are also foreseen.

3. Real picture of gender equality in North Macedonia

There is currently a high level of participation of women in the public sector. The Public Sector Employee Registry (2018) indicates that 54 percent of employees are women and 46 percent men. In general, women are overrepresented in almost all types of institutions, and especially in judicial institutions. By contrast, men have a high level of representation in the security sector, public enterprises and transportation sector. About 36 percent of managerial positions in the public sector are held by women. With regard to educational achievements, women outperform men. Most recent data indicate that 17 percent of women are graduates of tertiary education, compared to 15 percent of men. Additionally, 40 percent of women participate in formal or informal education and training, compared to 23 percent for men. (State Statistical Office, 2022). With regard to political representation, there has been an increase in the number of women in

decision-making positions. As a legal requirement, every third candidate in party lists for parliamentary seats is required to be female. The number of women MPs in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia is increased and maintained thanks to affirmative legal measures. In 2021 year, 40.2% of elected MPs were women, while at the end of 2022 the percentage of women in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia reached 42.5%. In the current composition of the Government of North Macedonia we have 5 women, 1 vice-president for good governance and ministers of Defense, Environment, Labor and Social Policy and minister for culture. However, at the local level the situation is less balanced. Namely, the number of women decision-makers is the lowest at the local level. In 2021, out of a total of 27 women candidates, two women from a total of 81 mayors, for 80 municipalities and the city of Skopje. Women are also almost four times less represented than men in positions of decision-making in companies in the country, a situation that does not notice improvement, but deterioration. (State Statistical Office, 2023)

3.1. The domain of violence

North Macedonia still does not have available data to calculate the composite indicator for the domain of Violence, although it is important to note that the State Statistical Office has taken a significant step forward in this regard recently. In the period August – September 2022, the State Statistical Office conducted the first national survey on gender-based violence (GBV) in the country, applying the Eurostat methodology, and with the support of the IPA funds (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance of the EU). This survey will be conducted every five years, and it is included in the current SSO Programme for statistical research 2023 – 2027. The next national survey on gender based violence is planned for 2027. The survey on the well-being and safety of women in North Macedonia shows that violence against women is widespread and more than half of women (54 percent) have experienced some form of violence since the age of 15 (OSCE, 2019). Almost half of women (44 percent) have experienced psychological, physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, while 14 percent have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. The situation at the EU level (EU-28) shows a higher prevalence of physical and sexual violence, that is, 33 percent of women have experienced this type of gender-based violence since the age of 15. (SSO, Gender Index Equality, 2023, 37-45). However, it is important to note that the differences compared to the EU should be interpreted through the social context of the country versus the EU countries. Namely, the countries with longer practices and policies for the promotion of gender equality, awareness raising and a functional system for prevention and protection from violence against women (the Nordic countries and most of the countries in Western Europe) have higher rates of recognition and reporting of violence (OSCE, 2019). Hence, the rates of reporting and registering violence are often higher in these countries compared to contexts where violence against women is often considered a private matter that should remain within the confines of the home, where the stigma for women victims of violence is high, there is a high level of normalization of violence, and there are weak institutional mechanisms for prevention and protection of victims, as in the case of North Macedonia (OSCE, 2019). Sexual harassment is among the frequent forms of violence in the country. A high 30 percent of women in the country have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15. Younger women and women with a higher education degree, who live in urban areas, on average are more exposed to sexual harassment, which in turn indicates greater awareness and recognition of violence among these groups of women (OSCE, 2019). The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official

Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 24/21) and the recent amendments of the Criminal Code (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, NO. 36/2023), stipulate specific provisions on sexual harassment, also covering online sexual harassment and online stalking. In the upcoming period, it will be crucial for the competent institutions to fully and consistently apply the existing legislation, in order to protect and support the victims of gender-based violence, and to dedicatedly work on the prevention and protection from all forms of violence against women and girls and gender-based violence as prescribed in the legal framework and strategic documents of the country.

3.2. Women from rural areas

Women from rural areas do not have enough information, they are little informed and use their legally guaranteed rights and the opportunities that belong to them and that can contribute to the improvement of their situation. Here we would just mention that during the Covid crisis, as many as 96% of women in rural areas pointed out that they face insufficient information as well as social exclusion from the happenings in society, so they pointed out their need to receive daily, regular and up-to-date information. (Rural Coalition, 2021). According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, as many as 62% of women in rural areas are not active in the labor market due to being engaged in the household and caring for children and the elderly, and 47% of unemployed women in rural areas do unpaid work on family farms. This position of women also leads to a large number of restrictions in the part of using the rights that belong to them. Namely, women cannot exercise their employment rights, such as the right to sick leave and the right to paid maternity leave. Access to social protection for women is limited due to the distance from cities and urban centers, insufficient awareness of the type of social services that are available to them as a right, but also due to the lack of social services adapted according to their specific needs, as well as care needs for children and the elderly. This real position of rural women disables a greater use of their rights from other areas, such as their inclusion in public and political life as well as their participation on the labor market. At the same time, rural women also underutilize insufficient primary health care rights, including rights related to sexual and reproductive health, pregnancy and childbirth. Deprivation of ownership of agricultural land and property (only 5-6% of women in rural areas own property, and 12% of agricultural land (National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development), unequal distribution of income and resources in the household, limited access and offer to education, non-inclusion in household decision-making, limited access to public services are also significant challenges faced by rural women. (CEDAW Report, 2023)

Conclusions

Achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda requires a strong involvement of public sector institutions, as well as national institutions in the area of human rights protection. Activities to achieve the SDGs can be an incentive for countries to check the effectiveness and accountability of their institutions. Meeting the specific goals of the SDGs in most countries will require a certain degree of institutional transformation of the supervision, management and services of the institutions. North Macedonia reaches some of the indicators listed in SDG 5, but by 2030 there is still a lot to be done especially in the areas that were highlighted as key areas for improvement in the paragraphs of this research paper.

In order to reach the indicators foreseen in SDG 5-Gender equality, North Macedonia should focus its work and activities in the following fields by 2030:

- Political participation of women in the society;
- Elimination of all forms of violence and creating quality preventive mechanisms;
- Reducing the gender wage gap;
- Promotion of access to the labor market and economic empowerment of women as well as time balance;
- Reducing the gender gap between urban and rural areas in the country;
- Advancing the legislation, as well as its implementation;
- Improvement of systems of collection and processing of gender-disaggregated data;
- Increasing the property ownership of women;
- Increasing the opportunities for the participation of women in IT technologies, as well as in the highest segments of scientific research work as well as leading positions in public and business sector.

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