



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL POLICY

**Presentation of the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Macedonia
on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

Minister

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Geneva, November 1, 2018

Distinguished Chair,
Dear Committee Members,

The equal opportunities concept implies that women and men should have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic and cultural development, as well as equal voice in civil and political life. For both women and men, equal opportunities present absence of obstacles to economic, political and social participation on the ground of sex. This implies promoting the principle of introducing equal participation of women and men in all areas of the public and private sector, equal status, equal treatment in the exercise of all rights and in the development of their individual potentials through which they contribute to the social

development, as well as equal access and equal benefits from the results produced therefrom. This is the concept that the Republic of Macedonia is adhering to with the aim of achieving equality in its society.

Gender equality presents a common obligation and priority of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, and, as such, it is a part of the *Program of the Government 2017–2020* and a commitment from the *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda*, at both national and local level.

The general priority of the *Government's Work Program 2017–2020* reads that the Government of the Republic of Macedonia shall carry out a policy of promoting women's rights, and of increasing their participation in the political, economic and public life. To that aim, the Government is to establish a special government body for gender equality to work on the integration of the gender perspective in the processes of policy-making and budgeting, which is currently done by the Equal Opportunities Department within the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, as the coordinator in the field.

For that purpose, in 2018 the Government adopted the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–2020* containing the following priorities:

1. Establishing an effective and efficient system for achieving gender equality by means of functional support mechanisms at the national and local level, harmonizing indicators for measuring the progress of gender equality, and providing gender-disaggregated statistics;
2. Integrating gender-responsive budgeting in policy and program creation;
3. Sensitizing the public to the various forms of violence against women, and strengthening institutional capacities for taking actions aimed at protection of such victims;
4. Harmonizing the legislation with the EU and international standards;
5. Enhancing the level of gender equality in priority thematic areas, that is, in healthcare, education and employment;
6. Building a culture of equal opportunities, and promoting equal treatment and non-discrimination on the ground of sex.

At the beginning, I would like to highlight the results achieved by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in the period from 2017 to 2018, followed by a brief overview of the situation as presented in the report.

In this two-year period, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy:

1. Implemented the gender-responsive budgeting project, which presents an essential tool for monitoring the activities for mainstreaming gender issues into main policies, since public budgets involve all policy areas. Gender budgeting is considered an essential strategy for raising awareness and understanding gender issues and the gender impact on budgets and policies. Gender budgeting provides transparency to fiscal planning, and measures the results and the impact in terms of strengthening gender equality goals. To that end, the preparation of the new *Law on Budgets*, which is to correspond to the efforts for gender-responsive budgeting, is in its final phase.
2. A legal representative has been appointed in compliance with Article 21 of the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*, whose legal obligation is to work on and conduct the procedure for identifying unequal treatment of women and men.
3. The new *Law on Termination of Pregnancy*, which is in its final stage of adoption, will provide a new administrative form with short deadlines, so as not to endanger women's health. The new changes provide women with the freedom of choice to have an abortion by the 12th week, in consultation with their gynecologists. Women

shall be given the freedom of choice to terminate pregnancy by the 22nd week of gestation, conditioned by assessment from a commission composed of two gynecologists and one social worker. Furthermore, upon reaching the 22nd week of gestation, a special expert commission, composed of not only gynecologists and obstetricians, but also of a pediatric surgery, pediatric cardiology, cardiac surgery, neurosurgery, and anesthesiology specialist and a social worker, shall be established to assess the approval of pregnancy termination. In case of congenital fetal anomaly, women shall have to right to terminate their pregnancy on the ground of the specialists' opinion. In addition, amendments to the contraceptives on the positive list of medicines for citizens are planned to be made in the upcoming period.

4. In the first six months of 2018, the newborn mortality rate decreased from 26 to 17%, compared to the same period last year. Macedonia currently holds the regional record of a surviving newborn born after 23 weeks and three days of gestation. This is due to the Government's investment in incubators for the Intensive Care Unit of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Clinic, as well as in the teaming up of professionals and the employing of 20 nurses. The Government shall continue to invest in new equipment to be used in the Clinic's Intensive Care Unit.
5. In cooperation with UN Women, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy discussed and agreed on the need to open a regional center for gender-responsive budgeting knowledge-sharing. Given the Macedonian Government's commitment to gender issues, our country will coordinate this process, thus jointly developing the economy and human capacity in the region.
6. In 2019, in cooperation and with the financial support of the World Bank, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy will start implementing a project for economic empowerment of women for the purposes of amending the legislation regulating the rights to property, as well as a project for improving the situation of LGBTI people in Macedonia.
7. As regards violence against women, in December 2017, the Republic of Macedonia finally ratified the *Istanbul Convention*, and, on October 9, 2018, it adopted the *Action Plan* for its implementation until 2023. The first activity that we are beginning to undertake with the financial support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the preparation of the *Law on Gender-Based Violence*.

Moreover, the amendments and the new *Law on Social Protection* are in progress; this will be a historic step forward in the enhancement of social protection, and for the first time after so many years we will have a new law that will separate financial entitlements from services. We will create services at the local level that will support all vulnerable categories of citizens. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is conducting a process of a comprehensive reform of the social and child protection systems. The reform aims to make the amounts of benefits compliant to the citizens' needs so as to help them get out of poverty. The social financial assistance will be reformed and upgraded to guaranteed minimum assistance. Beneficiaries will receive an amount that will satisfy their minimum subsistence needs, which has not been the case with the existing social financial benefit. Furthermore, beneficiaries will be provided with support for completing their education and for acquiring skills, thus becoming competitive in the labor market. In addition, in order to achieve one of the biggest priorities of eradicating child poverty, easier access to child allowance will be provided by making the entitlement accessible to families with children that have low incomes, who will no longer have to meet the condition of having one employed family member, which has thus far been the crucial factor in the entitlement to child allowance. Another novelty in child protection is the introduction of the educational allowance for children who regularly attend classes in primary and secondary schools, to support their parents in the payment of school expenses, hence preventing early school drop-out. In addition to these entitlements, each household that is a guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiary will receive additional 1,000 Macedonian denars monthly

during the six winter months to cover heating costs. Thus far, due to administrative difficulties, this measure has been scarcely used. Moreover, the reformed social protection system provides enhanced activation of guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries, by including all work-age household members into the active employment programs for the purposes of obtaining qualifications and employment, whilst also obliging them to regularly attend training and to accept job offers. These measures will directly impact the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens. To that aim, in the past period work has been done on redefining the institutional framework of the social protection system, redesigning the social protection financial benefits in the manner I just explained, enhancing the existing and introducing new social services realized by a Working Group of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the expert support from four local experts, who, together with an international expert, have prepared the proposal for the social protection system reform. This document is based on a comparative analysis of social protection systems of different countries, an analysis of the current social protection system of the Republic of Macedonia and the identified strengths and weaknesses thereof, as well as on the financial analysis and costs estimates for the introduction of the program. As a result of the activities accomplished within the consultative process, the draft text of the new *Law on Social Protection* has been prepared.

8. Special methodologies have been adopted for determining the costs for hiring external providers of the services stipulated in the law.
9. The *Law on Labor Relations* is being amended and made compliant to the *Parental Leave Directive* that refers to the equal application of parental leave for both parents, that is, for both women and men, hence eliminating the traditional role of women and men, as well as to the recognition of the joint responsibility of both genders in the raising and upbringing of children.
10. To the aim of creating equal opportunities for women, a new loan of 33.4 million dollars has been approved by the World Bank, for the purposes of the realization of a project which aims to develop social protection and early childhood development and care. This project will be implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Finance. The project will include construction of new and renovation of existing kindergartens, and conversion of existing buildings into institutions for preschool children. Here I would also like to highlight the cooperation with the non-governmental sector and the preparation of the gender index at the local level, which was presented a few days ago by the non-governmental organization Reaktor, which shows that in municipalities where there are kindergartens 7 women are employed in contrast to 10 men, whereas in municipalities in which there are no kindergartens 4 women vs. 10 men are employed. The project with the World Bank will be aimed precisely at this, that is, at opening new kindergartens in rural areas and in municipalities where there are none. We as a Government have been working on improving this situation by having 24 newly-opened kindergartens in total by the end of the year, eleven of which have already been opened. Moreover, we are strengthening the staff with 1,025 employments, and are enhancing preschool curricula.
11. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy increased the minimum salary to 12,000 Macedonian denars, which has a significant impact on economic independence of women in Macedonia, given that most women in rural areas work for minimum wages. With the adoption of the *Law on Minimum Salary* in 2017, for the first time, the minimum salary for workers in the textile, leather and shoe-manufacturing industry, in which the largest percentage of employees are women, was equalized.
12. At the beginning of April 2018, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Office for Management of Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths published a Public Call to all persons without registered births in the

Register of Births to submit applications for belated registration in the register of births, which is to expire at the end of October 2018. *Guidelines for On-field Actions* have been developed for the employees of the Office for Management of Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths, the employees of the Centers for Social Works and the non-governmental organizations. Workshops were organized with all stakeholders in the process of preparation of the guidelines and the adequate actions to be taken in relation to the public call and the registration. These Guidelines are expected to facilitate the work and inform all stakeholders about the actions relating to the public call. The on-field activities of the mobile teams relating to filling the Questionnaire for more efficient identification of non-registered persons are in progress in all municipalities. The teams are composed of members of the Office for Management of Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths, the Centers for Social Work, the Ministry of the Interior, the Roma Information Centers, the Roma health mediators, patronage nurses and non-governmental organizations. Since the publication of the public call about 650 persons that have not registered in the Register of Births have been identified and a Questionnaire with certain data relating to them has been completed and registered in a special Register. In November, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy will prepare Information for the Government containing proposals for overcoming the problem with the registration of these persons in the Registers of Birth.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, being the competent institution for the preparation of the Report and the competent institution for matters on which reports are delivered to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, has conducted the preparation of the Report. It contains all the changes that took place in the reporting period in respect of the legal regulations and the progress made in the social and economic life in terms of gender equality and the establishment of equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres of social life.

Now allow me to give a brief presentation on the areas of the *Convention* and the recommendations given by the committee in 2013, which are included in the submitted report.

In relation to the three principles arising from the *Convention*, which we as a country have accepted with the ratification of the *Convention* itself, the Republic of Macedonia has taken the following steps:

The equal opportunities for women and men in the Republic of Macedonia are regulated with the **Constitution as the highest legal act**. Moreover, provisions prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sex, as well as provisions incorporating the gender concept into the domestic legislation, have been included in numerous laws. The Constitution is a guarantee for prevention and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

With the aim of harmonizing the Macedonian legislation with the *Acquis Communautaire*, in 2012 a new *Law for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* was prepared, and, for the purposes of the enhancement and application thereof, new amendments are planned to be made in 2019. In order to achieve a standardized reporting model for the implementation of the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*, several rulebooks have also been adopted relating to the form and content of annual reports of institutions and local self-governments, as well as rulebooks on the work of coordinators for equal opportunities in state and local self-government bodies. Moreover, a rulebook on the analysis of contents of syllabi, curricula and textbooks for the purposes of promoting equal opportunities for women and

men has been adopted, which should lead to elimination of prejudice and stereotypes in education.

The *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* is a systemic law that regulates the equal opportunities of women and men, whilst also prohibiting discrimination on grounds of gender in the fields of employment and labor, education, science and sports, social security, including the area of social protection, pension and disability insurance, health insurance and healthcare, judiciary and administration, housing, public informing and media, information and communication technologies, defense and security, membership and affiliation in trade unions, political parties, associations and foundations, and other membership-based organizations, culture, and other fields.

The adoption of the new draft *Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination*, which has been in parliamentary procedure since July 2018 and is expected to be adopted by the end of the year, shall provide amendments to the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* in terms of the grounds of discrimination, that is, introduction of sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds of discrimination, and will also introduce intersectional discrimination as a separate form of discrimination.

To enable sustainable mainstreaming of the gender concept, in cooperation with UN Women, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy implemented the project for developing a specific module for **gender mainstreaming for civil servants and the integration thereof into the training program of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration**. Consequently, the **electronic module for understanding the gender equality concept** has been introduced, and all civil servants at national and local level are obliged to undergo training by the end of 2018.

On the basis of the Analysis of the national legislation, legal system and policies in terms of domestic violence and their compliance with the recommendations of the *Istanbul Convention*, the *Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection against Domestic Violence*, based on the principles set forth in the *Convention*, was adopted in 2013. Several institutions and the local self-government are responsible for the implementation of this law. In the procedures for providing prevention and protection against domestic violence to those unable to take care of themselves, in addition to the measures established by this law, the exercising of social protection rights and services is also provided, and, if necessary, a procedure is conducted for their placement under guardianship and appointment of a guardian, pursuant to the *Family Law*.

For the purposes of the successful implementation of the *Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection against Domestic Violence*, in 2015 the competent institutions adopted five bylaws that determined the manner of implementation and monitoring of the measures for protection against domestic violence, the assessment of the risk to the life and bodily integrity of the victim, and the risk of violence recurrence.

The Ministry of the Interior, which is working together with all stakeholders, each year actively joins and participates in the realization of campaigns aimed at raising the public awareness about the existence of the problem of domestic violence and protection of victims, as well as in numerous discussions, debates and public events. In order to establish and develop a coordinated approach to the protection of domestic violence victims, Standard Operating Procedures for actions to be taken by the police in domestic violence cases were prepared.

With the adoption of the *Action Plan for the Istanbul Convention*, a systemic law on integrated and coordinated actions in all forms of gender-based violence, namely, the *Law on Gender-Based Violence* is planned to be adopted in 2019. The *Law on Domestic Violence* will present an integral part thereof.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy annually provides finances for supporting projects of associations for protection of domestic violence victims, thus enabling the continuous operating of the national SOS line for reporting domestic violence, and the provision of help and conditions for temporary placement in a shelter for domestic violence victims, managed by an association. As of 2019, the SOS line is planned to operate 24 hours a day, in compliance with the *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention*.

For the purposes of prevention and protection against psychological and sexual harassment at work, the *Law on Protection against Harassment at the Workplace* was adopted in 2013, regulating the rights, obligations and responsibilities of employers and employees in terms of preventing psychological and sexual harassment at work, as well as the measures and procedures for protection against harassment at the workplace.

The laws also contain either misdemeanor or punitive provisions (depending on the law) that guarantee the protection and application of legal provisions on the rights of women and men and the obligations of the public and private sector regarding gender equality.

In relation to tackling **human trafficking**, the Republic of Macedonia has a comprehensive policy for combating human trafficking with coordinated actions of all relevant institutions and organization, arising from the fourth subsequent *Strategy* as well as the *National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2017–2020*.

The competent institutions act in compliance with the Standard Operating Procedures for taking actions relating to victims of human trafficking, which also provide all measures and activities to be undertaken by competent institutions in all stages of the procedure, that is, identification and referral, initial care and midterm assistance, repatriation, reintegration, criminal procedure, as well as informing and respecting the opinion and wishes of human trafficking victims, that is, actions in the best interest of the victim. The procedure is being coordinated by the National Referral Mechanism of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in cooperation with social workers from the Center for Social Work, labor inspectors, the Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration within the Ministry of the Interior, as well as with the Center for Human Trafficking Victims and with NGOs.

In compliance with the *Law on Free Legal Aid*, human trafficking victims are entitled to free-of-charge legal protection.

In 2018, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and NGOs, mobile teams for identifying vulnerable categories, including human trafficking victims, have been established in five cities, namely, in Skopje, Bitola, Gevgelija, Tetovo and Kumanovo. The objective of these teams is improved identification through proactive steps in discovering and preventing trafficking in human beings. The role of these teams is to work with vulnerable categories of citizens, including victims of trafficking in human beings, identification of the assumed victim as a victim of trafficking in human beings, initial referral and establishment of identity, early risk assessment, provision of information about the possibility of placing victims under an assistance and support program, and so on.

The Republic of Macedonia has signed bilateral agreements for facilitating the cooperation regarding trafficking in human beings with Montenegro and Kosovo.

With the support of the International Organization for Migration, indicators for identification of potential and actual victims of human trafficking and sexual violence are to be developed in Macedonia in the fields of education and healthcare.

In the event of unequal treatment on the ground of sex, **legal protection** in the Republic of Macedonia continues being provided via the established protective mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the courts and the appointed legal representative within the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, in compliance with the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*.

In cooperation with the United Kingdom, Portugal and Romania, in May 2015 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy started implementing the **twinning project “Support to the implementation of gender equality”**. The project activities were aimed at strengthening the capacities of all stakeholders in the field of gender equality. As part of the project, analyses of the national legislation in the field of gender equality were performed, which provided recommendations for required changes to the existing legislation and for harmonization with the EU legislation.

Distinguished Committee Members,

Pursuant to the Electoral Code, a **quota of 40% participation in the candidate lists** of the less represented sex was introduced, for candidates for Members of Parliament and for members of councils of the municipalities and the City of Skopje. This means that for every three positions, at least one must be for the under-represented sex and at least one additional position for every ten.

The number of women in the political and public life has increased during the reporting period. Specifically, in the 2014 parliamentary elections, 43 female Members of Parliament were elected. In the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, there were two female ministers, five female state secretaries, and five female presidents of parliamentary commissions. Furthermore, in the parliamentary elections in 2016 there were 41 women MPs elected, out of 120 MPs in total. In this MP mandate, the deputy Speaker of Parliament is a woman, five women are presidents of parliamentary commissions and seven are deputy presidents of parliamentary commissions. There are four female ministers in the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. In the local elections in 2017, out of 260 candidates for mayors, only 15 were women candidates, of whom 6 were elected mayors (Tetovo, Bitola, Staro Nagorichane, Mogila, Makedonska Kamenica, and Arachinovo). Out of 1388 councilors in local self-government units, 415 women were elected councilors. In the personnel structure of the Ministry of Defense, the percentage of employed women – administrative clerks is 40%. There are 8.85% women in the staffing structure of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia, of whom: 13.73% are officers, 11.13% are non-commissioned officers, 3.60 % are professional soldiers and 52.8% are civil staff.

For the purposes of eliminating stereotypes and discriminatory practices, in 2017 the Ministry of Education and Science withdrew from use two textbooks in which discrimination on various grounds was identified. To be precise, the Minister of Education and Science established Commissions for proposing withdrawals of approved textbooks, namely, the “Society” textbook for grade four and the “Civil Education” textbook for grade eight of primary education. Specifically, in the “Civil Education” textbook, the Commission noted that the women’s rights section on page 34 discriminated against women on the grounds of their health condition, and physical and intellectual disabilities. It also included discriminatory attitudes towards women who do not have children, that is, women who are not mothers, as well as discrimination against women on the ground of religion.

Pursuant to the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is obliged to perform regular analyses of the contents of syllabi, curricula and textbooks, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, for the purposes of promoting equal opportunities for women and men. This obligation arises from the *Strategy for Demographic Policies of the Republic of Macedonia 2015–2024*, as well as from the *Strategy for Gender Equality 2013–2020*.

A working group composed of representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Bureau for Development of Education, the Pedagogical Service and the Primary and Secondary Education Departments within the Ministry of Education and Science, the Center for Vocational Education and Training, and primary and secondary education teachers was established for the purposes of the effective conducting of the analysis. The working group has started analyzing the syllabus and the Macedonian Language textbook for second grade.

The employment policy in the Republic of Macedonia is defined in several strategic documents, including: the *National Employment Strategy 2016–2020*, the *National Action Plan for Youth Employment*, the *Action Plans for Reduction of the Informal Economy*, and so on. The active measure and services are defined annually in the operational plans for labor market services and in the active employment programs and measures. In 2017, the **Employment Service Agency** participated in the “Inclusion of Women from the Ethnic Communities in the Labor Market” project financed by the European Union. This project aimed to achieve an inclusive labor market in Macedonia, in which all citizens, including those from vulnerable categories, will have equal opportunities for access to resources.

Employment in the Republic of Macedonia is characterized with a very unfavorable gender structure, which has not changed for a longer period, mainly because of the unstable economic and social conditions in the country, and the mismatch of available and demanded profiles in the labor market. According to the Employment Service Agency, the share of women in the overall structure of the unemployed in December 2017 was 41%, which was considerably lower than that of men, which was 59%. The share of women in the structure of people actively seeking employment is lower compared to men and it stands at 47%.

The number of persons in the category of inactive population is 725 723, 35.6 % of whom are men and 64.4% are women, with an evident increase in the share of female population. The analysis by age groups leads to the conclusion that most of the inactive population, that is, 30.5 %, is aged 65 and over.

It is very important to emphasize that the *Law on Labor Relations* regulates the equality of salaries, that is, equal value guarantees equal salary.

The healthcare of women in the reproductive period is provided through a network of health facilities at all three levels of healthcare. Primary health care for pregnant women is carried out by gynecologists and in 2016 a total of 141 doctors, that is, 1 doctor for about 3600 women in the reproductive period, worked in the public sector. The percentage of pregnant women who have access and use prenatal and postnatal care is relatively high and ranges around 90%. Deliveries with professional help are maintained at a high level (99.9%). The patronage service conducts patronage visits to the maternity home after leaving the maternity hospital. The number of pregnant women who have access and use postnatal health protection (visits from patronage nurses) amounts to 83%.

The Ministry of Health has introduced several measures to increase access to healthcare for pregnant women, especially to vulnerable groups of women experiencing financial barriers, that is, free examinations are provided for laboratory examinations during pregnancy, free childbirth for pregnant uninsured women, Roma women, women from socially vulnerable categories and persons without identification and free hospital treatment of infants from uninsured mothers, Roma women, women from socially vulnerable categories and persons without identification, while pregnant women who have health insurance are exempt from paying health services related to pregnancy, at all levels of healthcare.

In 2015, the co-payment for healthcare services during pregnancy was abolished, and the costs are covered by the annual program conducted by the Ministry of Health. This measure facilitates the access of the vulnerable groups of women to these services.

Healthcare for children aged 0-6 is provided by preventive teams and patronage services. The healthcare and treatment of sick children is carried out through the work of the general practitioners/pediatricians as well as the pediatric departments within the hospital treatment. In 2016, the prevention teams performed an average number of 2.8 examinations per infant.

The patronage service with patronage visits covered 80% of the newborns with an average of 2.2 visits per newborn and 4.5 visits per infant.

For the purpose of protection against infectious diseases in the Republic of Macedonia, compulsory immunoprophylaxis and chemoprophylaxis is carried out in accordance with the *Law on Protection of the Population against Infectious Diseases* and the *Rulebook*.

Within the *Early Cancer Detection Program*, screening is organized for women aged 24–60. All gynecologists (who have contracts with the Health Insurance Fund) are engaged in screening for early detection of cervical cancer. They are obliged to send invitations to women to be screened. The functioning of the mobile gynecological unit is foreseen, especially for the rural areas where the most vulnerable population lives. This activity is carried out by health institutions in cooperation with NGOs. The Institute for Public Health has produced educational material for motivating women to take part in the screening.

In compliance with the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–2020*, the introduction of comprehensive sex education is envisaged.

Distinguished Committee Members,

The formal employment of women in agriculture, forestry and water economy is 20.3% of the total number of employed women in the Republic of Macedonia, and, according to the data for unpaid family workers 64% are women. Inequality in employment is most often the result of informal workforce, lack of land and/or ownership, traditional norms in rural areas and limited support for rural women in the access to resources.

For comparison, in the Republic of Macedonia, the percentage of women registered as real estate owners has increased from 16.63% in 2015 to 28.33%.

One of the biggest problems that seriously jeopardizes the survival of rural communities is the lack of a young working-age female population. Improved quality of life, greater opportunities in the labor market and the greater number of developed social services motivate migration movements in the female population from the villages to the cities. In order to overcome this great sociological and structural problem of the rural areas that has a direct impact on the formation of new families and the sustainability of the environments in general, continuous support will be introduced for active female members of agricultural households.

Most often the owner of the family farming is the husband, while women who usually also perform significant duties in farming are invisible in the agricultural statistics. This situation has initiated the importance of creating favorable conditions for economic empowerment of women in the field of agriculture and rural development.

From the aspect of the economic empowerment of women and their greater emancipation, the promotion of female entrepreneurship is of immense importance. In 2017, the **Ministry of Economy** financially supported female entrepreneurship. Of the 36 applications for subsidizing enterprises owned and managed by women, 18 female applicants met the criteria, resulting in the signing of a contract for subsidizing costs with the Ministry of Economy.

Article 16 of the *Family Law* determines the age of entering into marriage as marital obstacle where it does not allow for a person under the age of 18 to enter into marriage. The same provision provides for an exemption so that the competent court can, in a non-litigation procedure, allow the marriage of a person who has reached the age of 16 if it determines that he or she has reached the physical and mental maturity required to perform the rights and obligations arising in marriage, after obtaining an opinion from a health institution and providing expert assistance in the Centre for Social Work. In the procedure for issuing a decision for granting permission for marriage, the court will hear the minor applicant, their parents or guardian, and the person to whom the minor person wants to marry.

The Centers for Social Work, when performing the activities within their competence, monitor the situation in the vulnerable families and undertake measures for preventing juvenile marriages through professional and methodological work with the parents and minors, as well as by indicating the consequences in case of juvenile marriages, in order to prevent certain negative phenomena, to strengthen parental competencies and provide expert assistance to overcome broken partnerships and parental relationships in the family.

The Center for Social Work, as an exclusively competent body for guardianship, supervises the exercise of the parental right, and in case the parent abuses or neglects the parental right, it undertakes appropriate measures for protection of the person, the rights and the interests of the child (it may take the child away, place it in another family, institution or procedure for deprivation of parental right), their education, employment and health.

Distinguished Committee Members,

The recommendations and priorities for 2019 that the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has pledged to work on in the upcoming period for the purposes of promoting gender equality include:

- provision of affordable and quality services for sexual and reproductive health;
- provision of care for children and transferring the burden from women to society by building capacities and providing various forms of child care, as well as amendments to the *Law on Labor Relations* in the parental leave section;
- introduction of measures for achieving work-family balance;
- increase in the participation rate of women in the labor market and introduction of special measures for economic empowerment of women;
- implementation of the priorities and goals of the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–2020* and efficient implementation of the *Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*;
- implementation of the *Action Plan for the Istanbul Convention*;
- economic empowerment of women by amending the legislation concerning the right to property; and, of course,
- application of the new and previous (unimplemented) recommendations of the CEDAW Committee.

I would also like to use this opportunity to inform you that the Republic of Macedonia has been undertaking serious steps aimed at promoting gender equality, and hence at getting closer to the EU. I would like to highlight the good and strong cooperation between the Government and the UN agencies in Macedonia, which, I hope, will continue in the future.

Finally, I would like to introduce the members of our Delegation, which, for the first time, consists of not only representatives of the competent ministries, but also of Members of Parliament, in compliance with the Committee recommendations. I hope that we will be able to provide full and proper answers to your questions.

Thank you very much.

