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**Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights**

Fifth periodic report submitted by North Macedonia under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2021*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



List of abbreviations

SSO	State Statistical Office
OM	Ombudsman
TTC	Temporary Transit Centres
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court on Human Rights
FLA	Free legal assistance
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MH	Ministry of Health
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MC	Ministry of Culture
SPC	Social Protection Councils
SCPC	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
BPPO POCC	Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption
GMA	Guaranteed Minimal Assistance
PHP	Primary Health Protection
PCN	Perinatal Care Networks
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health

I. Introduction

1. The Republic of North Macedonia herewith Submits the Fifth Periodic Reports under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. The Report contains information about legal, administrative and other measures undertaken for the implementation of the Covenant in the period following the submission of the combined II, III and IV Periodic Report for the Republic of North Macedonia (E/C.12/MKD/2-4) which was considered by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 32nd and 33rd meeting of held on 13 and 14 June 2016.
3. This Report on the implementation of the International Covenant has been prepared to the greatest extent possible in line with the Revised general guidelines regarding the form and contents of reports to be submitted by states parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (E/C.12/2008/2), which the Committee adopted on 24 March 2009.
4. This report takes into consideration the Concluding observations (E/C.12/MKD/CO/2-4) of the Committee, adopted at its 49th meeting, held on 24 June 2016.
5. Civil sector organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia have also been consulted in drafting this Report, by submitting the draft report for comments, notes, or suggestions.
6. The Report refers to the period September 2016end of 2022.

II. Specific part

Article 1

7. See the Combined II, III and IV Periodic Report of the Republic of North Macedonia under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 2

Response to Committee Recommendations Nos. 8, 12, 22 and 26

8. Census of population, households and residences in the country was conducted throughout the period September 531, 2021. All planned activities regarding the census were successfully completed and the SSO is satisfied with the results, taking into consideration that the census was conducted after 20 years.
9. The census was conducted in accordance with international standards. Less than six months were needed to process the data which were made public on March 30th, 2022. The data is relevant, reliable and useful for planning economic and social policies which are the key objectives of the census. At the link below, by accessing the MAKSTAT data base, all public data of the 2021 census can be found https://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat__Popisi__Popis2021__Naselenie.
10. The strategic priority of the SSO is to reinforce and improve the data collection process in order to meet the needs of the users, by involving all official creators of the statistics which are part of the National Statistical system. Being the coordinator of the NSS, the SSO works on developing a system for training in line of supporting the process of collection, processing, and dissemination of relevant data.
11. In 2016 amendments and modification to the Law on Ombudsman were made (Official Gazette No. 181/16) in line of meeting the criteria for national institution with Status A. Through these amendments:
 - Harmonization of the Law on Ombudsman (OM) with the Paris Principles were made through introducing promotion of human freedoms, pluralistic approach in selection

of management positions in the institution and financial independence of the institution.

- Special unit for monitoring the developments and protection of children's rights and rights of people with disability was established, as well as special unit for monitoring the developments and protection of discrimination and equal and appropriate representation of the members of the communities.
- Harmonization with the provisions Stipulated in the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which will enable further enhancement of the competences of the OM being the national preventive mechanism against torture.
- An obligation is introduced for the annual report of the OM to contain recommendations for overcoming the situation, inclusion of the Government and the Assembly for responsible actions according to the recommendations of the OM, as well as reporting on the implementation of the concrete measures.
- The OM was authorized within its competences to submit a request to the Standing Inquiry Committee for Protection of Civil Rights in the Assembly for investigation of cases of violation of constitutional and legal rights and undertaking measures. The Commission for protection of human rights and freedoms was assigned to look into the request of the OM for inspection of cases of violation of constitutional and legal rights and to submit a report, while the Assembly was tasked to define the measures and
- Additional mechanism was established to enable implementation of the special reports regarding the obstruction of the work of the OM for non-compliance and non-implementation of their requests, proposals, opinions, recommendations, or indications.

12. The last amendments and additions to the Law on OM were made in February 2018 (Official Gazette No. 35/18) which, normatively, enabled the establishment of the OM as a mechanism for civil control providing support and protection of the victims, their rights and presentation of their interests in all proceedings during investigation of the action by persons with police authorizations and members of prison police. In addition, and for the purpose of operationalizing Article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to it (establishing an independent mechanism for its promotion, protection and monitoring), the Prime Minister and the Government recommended that the OM as an independent body accepts this mechanism as part of its powers and organizational setup. These new competences of the OM, which enable the strengthening of the protection of human rights in accordance with the standards of the CoE and other international bodies, should be implemented in close cooperation with the non-governmental sector.

13. The general acts of systematization of the jobs in the OM were approved by the Assembly in July 2017. In that direction funds were approved by the Ministry of Finance for a total of seven (7) new employments in the office of the OM by the end of 2017. Moreover, at the beginning of 2018, consent was provided for funds for 3 more persons in 2018, i.e., a total of 10 new employments was approved.

14. In 2017, the OM was appointed as an observer in the Management Board of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

15. The OM budget in 2018 increased by 5.3% compared to 2017, while in 2019 it increased by 10% compared to 2018.

16. In September 2016, the Assembly elected two deputies of the OM in the headquarters in Skopje, and in December 2019, two more deputies were elected to work in the Regional Organizational Unit of the OM in Bitola and Kichevo. In January 2020, the Assembly elected another deputy to fill the unfilled three (3) deputy positions in the headquarters in Skopje.

17. In July 2021, the mandate of one of the deputies of the OM in Skopje, as well as the deputies in the Regional Organizational Units in Tetovo, Shtip, Strumica and Kumanovo expired, after which the OM, following a procedure, submitted a Proposal for the election of deputies to the President of the Assembly, with request that it be put on the agenda of the

first next session of the Assembly. However, after almost 1 year of the proposal, the proposed deputies of the OM are still not elected, and this impacts the operation of the institution.

18. Pursuant to the Action Plan of the Government, the OM started amending the Rulebook for organization and scope of work of the Professional Service, the Team of the National Preventive mechanism, the special units and offices of OM and the Rulebook for systematization of the jobs in the professional service, after what the amendment acts were submitted to the President of the Assembly. Within the professional service, a new section mechanism for civil control was defined, and in the Section for protection of children's rights and rights of persons with disability, the execution of works in terms of monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has also been determined. Suitable jobs are also systematized, as a basis for employment and deployment in OM, with a description of the work, work tasks and conditions for each job.

19. In June 2022 a total of 35 people stayed in the temporary transit centres (TTC) Gevgelija and Tabanovce, none of whom are connected to the events in 2016 all of them were discovered during an attempt to enter/exit illegally in/out of the country (some of them in the direction south-north, part in the north-south direction) during the last month. The functioning of the two TTCs and their management is the responsibility of the Crisis Management Centre. The TTCs are of open type, and the MoI is responsible for the public order and conducts the registration of newly discovered migrants. The conditions for stay, health, and other type of protection, providing education and other services are the responsibility of the CMC and other competent institutions (MLSP, MH, etc.).

20. A new Law on international and temporary protection (Official Gazette No. 64/18) was adopted as well as a Rulebook (Official Gazette No. 79/19). This Law, specifically Article 16 regulates family reunification: "The members of the immediate family of a person with refugee status and a person under subsidiary protection, at their request, will be subject to a procedure for recognition of the right to asylum (paragraph 1). In paragraph 2, for members of the immediate family in accordance with paragraph 1 of this member, the spouse is considered, if the marriage was concluded before coming to the Republic of North Macedonia, common-law partner, minor children who are not married, parents of minor children if the minor children have acquired the right to asylum and other persons in accordance with the law. According to paragraph 3 of this article of the law, the principle of family reunification stipulated in paragraph 1 of this article will apply if there are reasons for exclusion from articles 8 and 10 of this law. According to paragraph 4 of Article 16 of the mentioned law, the person with refugee status acquires the right to family reunification with members of the immediate family after obtaining refugee status, and the person under subsidiary protection acquires it after two years from obtaining refugee status person under subsidiary protection.

21. The Law on International and Temporary Protection is harmonized with the European directives in the area of asylum, that is, international protection, namely:

- Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 13, 2011, on standards to be met by persons who are citizens of third countries or are stateless persons, in order to qualify as beneficiaries of international protection, for equal status of refugees or persons entitled to subsidiary protection and the content of the protection provided CELEX number 32011L0095;
- Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 26, 2013, for joint procedure for granting and withdrawing international protection CELEX number 32013L0032.
- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 26, 2013, establishing standards for the reception of applicants for international protection CELEX number 32013L0033.
- Council Directive 2001/55 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for the granting of temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons who are unable to return to their country and establishing a balance between the actions of member-states when receiving displaced

persons, as well as when facing with the consequences of such activities CELEX number 32001L0055.

22. Law on prevention and protection from discrimination adopted in 2020 in its discriminatory base includes the sexual orientation and gender identity.

23. The law on health care establishes that the principle of fairness of health care is secured by prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, age, nationality, social origin, religion, political or other conviction, property status, culture, language, type of illness, mental or physical disability in the provision of health care.

Article 3

Response to Committee Recommendations Nos. 6, 20 and 28

24. In recent years, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors has successfully integrated the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into its curriculum within the initial and continuous training of judges and public prosecutors. Namely, in the period from 2016 to 2022, a large number of trainings have been conducted in accordance with the rights from the Covenant.

25. In 2016, trainings were organized for:

- Court protection in cases of negligent treatment of patients.
- Protection of workers' rights with a special emphasis on the rights of pregnant workers in light of the latest amendments to the Law on Labor Relations / Holidays and Absences and other rights.
- Application of the Law on prevention, prevention, and protection from domestic violence.
- Termination of employment/Payment of gross salary in case of illegal termination of employment.
- Public debate on the national anti-discrimination survey.
- Application of the Children's Justice Act/Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Non-discrimination concept for legal practitioners (3 trainings).
- International and national court practice in proceedings for assessing direct discrimination.
- Shifting the burden of proof in discrimination cases.
- Article 11 of ECHR Freedom of assembly and association.
- Article 9 of ECHR – Freedom of opinion, conscience, and faith.
- Application of the Law on prevention and protection from discrimination.
- Indirect Discrimination Concept.
- Protection of rights of refugees and migrants in pursuance with the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Asylum and migration.

26. In 2017, trainings were organized for:

- Hague Convention on the International Implementation of the Right to Child Support (2007) with the Protocol on Governing Law for Support Obligations.
- Application of the Law on prevention, prevention, and protection from domestic violence.
- Anti-Discrimination Concept.
- Mobbing definition and types, procedures for protection of employees from harassment at work.

- Non-discrimination concept.
 - Efficient implementation of the Istanbul Convention / Standards for protection from gender-based violence (2 trainings).
 - Legal Debate on the Commentary on the Law on prevention and protection from discrimination (2 trainings).
 - Access to justice for the LGBTI communities.
27. In 2018 trainings were implemented for:
- Protection from discrimination and equal treatment of Roma in in pre-criminal and criminal procedure (3 trainings).
 - Asylum and European Convention on Human Rights.
 - Right to strike and legal framework for appropriate protection.
 - Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Macedonia.
 - Acting of competent institutions in family disputes.
 - Court procedure in the Law on prevention and protection from discrimination.
 - Focus group from the judiciary on the Comment on the Law on Prevention and protection from discrimination.
 - Civil and legal aspects of family violence.
 - Law and practice in protection of refugees in 2018.
28. In 2019 trainings were conducted on:
- Standards set by the Istanbul Convention (2 trainings).
 - Criminal acts against human health with an emphasis on medical malpractice / Negligent treatment of patients.
 - The procedure for returning an employee to work in accordance with a final judgment for annulment of a decision on dismissal/Compensation for damages from illegal termination of employment.
 - Judicial protection and criminal sanctions in cases of discrimination introduced by the new Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination.
 - Judicial practice of ECHR regarding right to surrogacy.
 - Article 11 in relation to Article 9 of the ECHR/Enforcement of ECtHR judgments against the state in which a violation was found due to non-registration of religious associations.
 - Application of the Law on Protection from Harassment at the Workplace Mobbing and the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (2 trainings).
 - Criminal sanctions in cases of discrimination; Harmonization of the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and the Law on Misdemeanours.
 - Analysis of the Law on Protection from Harassment in the Workplace.
 - Possibilities for improving the civil legal and criminal legal system for the protection of victims of domestic violence.
 - Practical application of the novelties provided for in Article 101 of LER prohibition of dismissal due to pregnancy, birth, and parenthood / judicial protection.
 - Access to justice in environment related cases Draft law on prevention and protection from violence over women and domestic violence.
 - Gender representation in security.
 - Law on prevention and protection from discrimination.
 - Law and practice in protection of refugees in 2019.

29. In 2020, trainings were organized for:
- Article 8 of the ECHR right to respect for private and family life.
 - Sanctions for perpetrator of gender-based violence and domestic violence.
 - Law and practice in protection of refugees in 2020.
30. Further in 2021, trainings were organized for:
- Access to asylum, principle of impunity and restrictions on the freedom of movement for asylum seekers.
 - Justice accommodated to the needs of children and children's rights.
 - Antidiscrimination.
 - Key principles for human rights in biomedicine.
 - Abuse of children and violation of rights.
 - Civil disputes arising from the Law on protection from discrimination.
 - Children refugees and migrants.
 - Practical application of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.
 - Burden of proof in cases of discrimination pursuant to the Law on prevention and protection from discrimination.
 - Justice for children (training of trainers).
 - Role of women and importance of implementation of the UN1325 Resolution.
 - Protection of foreign children in migration movements in the Republic of North Macedonia.
31. In 2022 trainings for:
- Asylum and human rights (2 training).
 - Asylum and human rights (training of trainers).
 - Discrimination and mobbing at work.
 - Raising the awareness for the role of women and importance of implementation of the UN1325 Resolution.
 - Justice for children (training of trainers).
 - Standards of the ECtHR for special investigative measures in the context of right to respect of private and family life (Art. 8 of the ECHR).
 - Workers' rights.
 - Environment and human rights (2 trainings).
 - Justice for children (4 trainings).
 - Duration of court proceedings, temporary measures and right to compensation of damage in discrimination cases.
 - Administrative disputes and human rights (rights of refugees and practice).
 - Judicial practice of ECHR regarding right to surrogacy.
 - Exchange of experiences and best practices for application of the Istanbul Convention.
 - Application of the Law on Protection from Harassment at the Workplace Mobbing and the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination.
32. A total of 2,113 participants attended these trainings, of which 816 judges, 156 public prosecutors, 435 expert judicial and public prosecutor associates, 135 lawyers, 320 representatives from relevant institutions and 251 students in the initial training of the Academy. Out of a total of 91 trainings realized in the mentioned period, 23 trainings were

organized by the Academy independently and 68 trainings were organized in cooperation with domestic institutions and organizations, with foreign partners and projects such as: GIZ Open Regional Fund for Southeast Europe, OSCE, Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers, UNHCR, UNDP, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Centre for Legal Research and Analysis (CLRA), Council of Europe, National Network against Violence over Women and Domestic Violence, TAIEX, Office for Representation before the ECtHR, German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation (IRZ), MTSP, Institute for Human Rights, FLOROZON, DCAF, Centre for civil Initiative – Prilep, ICITAP.

33. Also, in the period from 2016 to 2022, as part of the initial training for students, classes were planned for the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is covered in Module 3 in the subject of international law.

34. In 2020 a new Law on prevention and protection against discrimination was adopted (Official Gazette no. 258/20). This law regulates the prevention and prohibition of discrimination, the forms and types of discrimination, the procedures for protection, as well as the composition and work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The concept and content of the Law is based on the international norms and standards contained in most of the international documents adopted by the UN, EU, CoE and the Constitution, which are the basis for defining the provision of a mechanism of measures and activities for legal protection in the event of the occurrence of discrimination.

35. In March 2022, a new Strategy for equality and non-discrimination 2022–2026 with an Action Plan 2022–2024 was adopted.

- In accordance with the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022–2026, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia passed a Decision on the establishment of the National Coordinating Body for monitoring non-discrimination situations and the implementation of laws, by-laws, and strategic documents in this area (Official Gazette No. 218 from 10.10.2022).
- In January 2023, the Government adopted the Action Plan 2022–2024 with an estimate of costs for implementing the national strategy for equality and non-discrimination 2022–2026.

36. After the adoption of the Law on prevention and protection from discrimination (Official Gazette No. 258/2020), a Commission for prevention and protection from discrimination as a professional independent body for equality and non-discrimination in pursuance with the Paris Principles and international standards with the purpose of protection of the rights of all citizens. The new composition of the Commission was elected in January 2021.

37. Pursuant to Article 15 paragraph (2), and in connection with paragraph (4) of this law, it is foreseen that the Commission prepares and proposes the budget in accordance with the competences arising from the legal obligations, and that the Assembly determines and votes the section intended for the Commission. Consequently, the Commission disposes independently of the use, distribution, and purpose of the means of work provided by the Budget.

38. A new Law on Gender Equality is being prepared. In 2022, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the new Strategy for Gender Equality 2022–2027, which foresees a specific goal of reducing the gender gap in the economic participation of women and in the labour market, with an intersectional approach for which appropriate measures will be developed and activities that will be foreseen in the Action Plan for the Gender Equality Strategy which is currently being prepared.

Article 4 and 5

39. See the Initial Report of the Republic of Macedonia of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 6

Response to Committee Recommendation No. 14

40. Right to free legal assistance (FLA) is provided to all individuals living or residing on the territory of the country. The basic precondition for receiving FLA is the income of the applicant and their property status. Therefore, everyone is equal according to the Law on Free Legal Assistance (FLA).

41. The new LFLA of 2019 foresees two types of legal assistance: primary legal and secondary legal assistance obtained by a lawyer.

42. Primary legal assistance: Pursuant to the 2019 LFLA, legal assistance is provided by an authorized official of the Ministry of Justice, an authorized association, or a legal clinic. It can also be provided by mobile teams that also include representatives of the non-governmental sector. As for primary legal assistance from the MJ, it is provided through:

- 21 regional departments and 8 regional offices across the country,
- 16 authorized associations registered to provide primary legal assistance in the Register of Associations for Free Legal Assistance: the MJ, published on the following website: <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/bpp>; and
- 6 legal clinics for providing primary legal assistance registered in the Register of Legal Clinics of the MJ, published on the following website: <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/clinics>.

43. Secondary legal assistance: As of 2019, the LFLA excludes criminal proceedings and provides for secondary legal assistance for representation at all levels in civil court and administrative proceedings and administrative disputes.

44. Pursuant to Article 13 of the LFLA, secondary legal assistance is granted to a person who needs professional legal assistance from a lawyer for a specific legal matter and who is unable to pay the costs of the procedure due to his financial situation and whose request is justified.

45. The applicant for secondary legal assistance, in accordance with Article 17 of the LFLA, has the right to receive secondary legal assistance if, due to their financial situation, they cannot exercise the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law, without jeopardizing their own and the support of their family members with whom they lives in a joint household.

46. With the budget of the MJ every year since 2019, funds in the amount of 5,000,000.00 MKD have been provided for FLA.

Article 7

Response to the Committee Recommendation No. 32

47. The minimum wage law was first passed in 2012, but it did not provide for a minimum wage that is equal for all. Namely, in that period, starting from the average salary paid in certain activities, i.e., departments, for some activities the minimum wage was determined with the help of coefficients, which in turn resulted in deviations in relation to the amount of the minimum wage in the various activities. This concerned the department of textile production, footwear, production of leather and similar leather products, where the minimum wage was significantly lower compared to other activities. This situation lasted for 5 years, when finally, in 2017, the minimum wage was equalized in all activities and that trend has been maintained until today.

48. From 2017 until today, the minimum wage has been continuously increasing from a net amount of 12,000 MKD in 2017 (12,165, 12,507, 14,500, 14,500, 14,500, 14,934, 15,194, 18,000), in March of this year it reached a net amount of 20,175 MKD.

49. The successfully realized dialogue with the social partners in 2022 resulted in the modification of the criteria for the adjustment of the minimum wage, with which the minimum wage will be adjusted every year by 50% of the annual increase in the average net

salary and 50% of the increase in the cost of living. At the same time, a third criterion was introduced, which is a novelty, and it prohibits the minimum wage from being less than 57% of the average paid net wage for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office.

50. The newly defined methodology guarantees the sustainability and continuous growth of the minimum wage in proportion to the increase in labour productivity.

51. The minimum wage is a standard that ensures a basic existence, but, at the same time, it is also a starting point in the pursuit of decent earnings for every single worker, especially for workers in labour-intensive activities. Therefore, the trend of increasing the minimum wage remains one of the priorities going forward, along with the constant advancement of workers' rights.

Article 8

Response to Committee Recommendation No. 36

52. The Law on Labour Relations regulates the right to strike as a final form of pressure that can be exerted by workers in order to exercise their existing rights and interests.

53. The law foresees that the trade union and its associations at higher level shall be entitled to call a strike action and to start a strike in order to protect the economic and social rights of its members arising from employment, in accordance with the law.

54. The strike shall be announced in writing to the employer, i.e., employers' association against which it is taken, and the solidarity action shall be announced to the employer where the strike action is organised. The strike action shall not be called before the completion of the conciliation procedure in accordance with the present law. The obligation for conciliation, i.e., any other procedure for amicable settlement of the dispute shall not restrict the right to strike action, when such procedure is laid down in the present law. The solidarity action may start without conducting a conciliation procedure, but in any case, not before the expiry of two days upon the day of the start of the strike action in support of which it is organised. The letter announcing the strike action shall state the reason, place, day and starting time of the strike action.

55. The strike action shall be organised in a manner that shall not prevent or interfere with the organisation and performance of the work process for the non-strikers, or prevent the employees and the management to enter the business premises of the employer.

56. The employer may lock out the employees only in response to a strike action that has already started. The number of locked out employees shall not exceed 2% of the number of employees who participate in the strike action. The employer may lock out only those employees who, by their conduct, are inciting a violent and undemocratic behaviour, thus impeding the negotiations between the employees and the employer.

57. The employer shall be obliged to pay the contributions laid down by the special regulations at the lowest rate for payment of contributions for the employers who have been locked out for the duration of the lockout.

58. On proposal by the employer, the trade union and the employer shall mutually agree and adopt rules on the minimum services to be maintained for the duration of the strike action.

59. The organisation or participation in a strike action organised in accordance with the provisions of the present law and collective agreement shall not be deemed a breach of the employment contract. The employee shall not be placed in a less favourable position than other employees due to organisation or participation in a strike action organised in accordance with the provisions of law and collective agreement.

60. The employee may be dismissed only if he organised or participated in a strike action that has not been organised in accordance with law and collective agreement, or if he had committed another serious violation of the employment contract during the strike action.

61. The employee shall not be coerced to participate in the strike action in any way.

62. The employer, i.e., employers' association may request from the competent court to prohibit the organisation of a strike contrary to the provisions of the law. The employer may claim compensation of damages incurred due to a strike that has not been organised and conducted in accordance with the present law.

63. The trade union may request from the competent court to prohibit the lockout during a strike contrary to the provisions of the law. The trade union may claim compensation of damages that it or the employees incurred due to being locked out from work during a strike contrary to the law.

64. The decision on the prohibition of a strike shall be made by the competent court of first instance for labour disputes. The request for prohibition of a strike, i.e., lockout shall be decided in an urgency procedure.

65. The strike action in the armed forces, police, public administration bodies, public enterprises and public institutions shall be governed by a special law.

Article 9

Response to Committee Recommendations No. 10 and 16

66. The MLSP has launched a process of reforming social protection, which included precise definitions of key terms, introduction of modern beneficiary-oriented principles and clear division of responsibilities to relevant actors at central and local level in all areas of action, with the aim of further realisation of the processes of deinstitutionalisation, decentralisation and pluralisation in providing social services.

67. In 2019, a new Law on Social Protection was adopted with significant changes in the rights to financial assistance by introducing a system for providing social services and providing conditions for reduced dependence on institutional protection. Furthermore, there are systemic changes planned for unimpeded realisation of strategic processes in social protection, such as deinstitutionalisation, decentralisation and pluralisation.

68. The major changes in the social protection system refer to redesigning the rights to financial assistance in terms of scope, types, amounts and criteria for exercising the rights.

69. Changes have also been introduced in the classification and types of social services, in accordance with the manner, scope, procedures and standards for their provision. They resulted in corresponding changes in the institutional framework at central and local level and in the financing modalities of social services.

70. Licencing of service providers was introduced for the first time, which allowed further pluralisation and opportunities for greater involvement of non-state stakeholders in providing social services. The social service providers network has been expanded and 69 licences for providing social services have been issued to associations and private entities with a total capacity of about 3000 beneficiaries of social services.

71. In order to improve the implementation of social protection, the role and participation of municipal and regional actors was strengthened, foremost in the provision of social services for vulnerable groups of population at local, i.e., regional level, especially by encouraging the establishment of inter-municipal cooperation, including all concerned parties in the provision of social services, and taking into account balanced regional development. Municipalities, as carriers of social protection, should prepare detailed mapping of social issues and vulnerable groups, analysis of the facilities and the social services available in the municipality in order to strengthen the capacities for providing social protection and offer an adequate response to the needs of the local population by developing a regional network of social services.

72. The decentralisation process is supported by the introduction of municipal and regional councils for social protection (CSP). Councils for social protection in all statistical regions will enable sharing information about the measures and activities of municipal programmes for realisation of social protection, work reports and other necessary information from the municipalities of that region in order to appropriately plan and implement ongoing activities for the development of the network of social services of the statistical region.

73. For the realisation of these activities, several documents have been prepared with the support of the UNDP Office that are useful for establishing and functioning of the CSP in the local self-government units and statistical regions, namely:

- Handbook on the development of social services at regional level https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/publikacii_2022/Priracnik.pdf.
- Guidelines for the functioning of CSP of the statistical regions https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/publikacii_2022/Upatstvo.pdf.
- Guidebook through the social protection system for members of CSP of statistical regions https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/publikacii_2022/Vodic.pdf.
- Handbook for strengthening of the social protection capacities at local level https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/publikacii_2022/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA-f.pdf.
- Guidelines for the functioning of municipal CSP https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/publikacii_2022/%D0%A3%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-f.pdf.

74. With the aim of greater involvement of local self-government and regional structures in the planning and provision of social services, at the end of April 2022, intensive consultations were launched with the concerned parties of all 8 statistical regions in the country, which were realised with the support of the UNDP Office and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the project “Creating Job Opportunities for All – main phase”.

75. Securing funding for provision of social services is done through a new financing model, namely through announcing a public call for provision of social services by licenced social service providers and through a public call for provision of social services to municipalities. The price of social services is determined with a decision adopted at annual level, in accordance with the Methodology for establishing the cost of services depending on the norms and standards for providing social services (Official Gazette no. 264/19).

76. In 2020, funds were granted to four associations and private social service providers: personal assistance, assisted living and placement in an institution for treatment and rehabilitation of persons dealing with addiction, whereas in 2021, the number of licenced social service providers with which the MLSP signed an administrative contract increased to seven. In 2022, 9 such administrative contracts were signed.

77. The MLSP supported the reform implementation process, particularly in the part of delivering social services by municipalities, with the realisation of the “Social Services Improvement Project” with total available funding in the amount of 10.8 million Euro for the 2020–2024 period, provided through a loan from the World Bank. The Project is expected to strengthen the involvement of municipalities in the planning, development and provision of social services at local level, in cooperation with licenced service providers. Starting from 2020, 22 grant agreements for development and provision of social services at local level have been signed which include 27 municipalities, and will cover about 1040 beneficiaries. Furthermore, 19 social service providers obtained a licence/work permit, of which 15 provide home care and assistance, one day care centre for children with disabilities, one centre for active ageing of older citizens and one counselling centre. These service providers employ 250 persons, who provide direct services to 687 beneficiaries, of which 409 are women.

78. After the period for establishing and funding of the Social Services Improvement Project ended, in the second half of 2022 the MLSP implemented a procedure for securing funds from the Budget of RNM for provision of services by publishing a public call to municipalities. So far, administrative contracts for provision of services in the community have been signed with five municipalities along with a licenced service provider. This procedure will continue successively for all established social services in the community.

79. In terms of promotion of deinstitutionalisation, in 2022, 11 residential units for 55 beneficiaries were established whereby in December 2022 a total of 265 persons were living in residential units for supported living. As of the end of 2022, there are still 145 persons living in residential institutions for social protection who need to change their

form of protection and continue to live within the supported living service. At the end of 2022, the number of social service beneficiaries (by type of services: home; community; extra-familial protection) was 4717 (of which 686 – home services, 1253 – community services, 2778 – extra-familial protection including foster families and placement in facilities for the elderly).

80. Furthermore, with the aim of enabling the licencing process for social service providers, in the framework of the IPA project for deinstitutionalisation and modernisation of social services, a Guide for Licencing of Social Service Providers was prepared: <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/guide-ebook.pdf>.

81. The primary document for strategic planning in social protection is the National Programme for Development of Social Protection. The new National Programme for Development of Social Protection 2022–2032 is in the process of adoption, and contains goals, priorities, and guidelines for development of social protection, with medium-term and long-term measures and activities for realisation of financial assistance rights and social services, as well as continuation of the processes of pluralisation, deinstitutionalisation and decentralisation which are underway. The general aim of the National Programme is the development of a sustainable, adaptable and effective social protection system based on participation and guided by the needs of the beneficiary in order to strengthen them and equip them for an independent, productive and active life.

82. The Law on Health Insurance defines persons who enjoy health insurance rights into 15 categories of insured persons. In 2021, the number of insured persons covered by compulsory health insurance was 1,860,100, i.e., more than 90% of the population had health insurance.

83. Every year, the MH through a special programme provides payment of the compulsory health insurance contribution for citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia who are not covered under any basis for health insurance. In this manner, 256.000 persons have a regularly paid health insurance contribution and thus unhindered use of health-related services i.e., health protection.

84. In the interest of ensuring continuous improvement of the health of children and women of reproductive age with the aim of reducing infant and maternal mortality, activities are carried out every year for improving the quality and equal access to health services for mother and children, with a special focus on vulnerable categories of women as well as for providing timely and early access of every pregnant woman to quality antenatal health protection:

- Free examinations and laboratory tests during pregnancy, in relation to pregnancy, free childbirth for pregnant women for persons without ID;
- Free examination for women survivors of sexual violence;
- Medication abortion;
- Procurement of modern contraceptives (oral contraception, intrauterine devices, condoms) for women of socially vulnerable categories and women with repetitive abortions.

85. Every year, the Government adopts a programme for providing funds for hospital treatment without payment of participation for retirees and for providing funds for specialist consultation and hospital health services for beneficiaries of the right of social financial aid and members of their households in the country. This provides care in maintaining, monitoring and improving the health of retirees and beneficiaries of the right of social financial aid and members of their households.

86. The programme includes beneficiaries of old-age, disability, family and agricultural pension, who reside in the country and receive pension in the amount under 14,000 denars. The programme refers to cases of hospital treatment in hospital health facilities in the country following an acute illness, condition and injury or because of deterioration of a chronic illness.

Article 10

Response to Committee Recommendations Nos. 18, 38, and 40

87. In January 2022, the Government appointed a Deputy President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in charge of good governance policies. The purpose of this Cabinet is to create policies and coordinate the activities of the institutions in order to create conditions for transparent, high quality, efficient and effective execution of the work goals and assignments of the institutions. The same month, the Deputy President of the Government in charge of good governance policies was appointed as the member of Government in charge of implementation of the Code of Ethical Conduct for members of Government and public office holders appointed by the Government.

88. In 2022 17 procedures for violation of the Code were initiated. Of those, 14 have been completed, 6 of which resulted in a warning to the office holder (this refers to 1 Deputy President of Government, 3 ministers, the Secretary General of the Government and 1 director appointed by the Government). Furthermore, no basis for issuing a warning or other measure was established in 8 cases. 3 cases are ongoing.

89. With the aim of strengthening the integrity of the holders of the highest offices of executive government in accordance with the Recommendations of the Fifth Evaluation Round of GRECO, four trainings on the Code of Ethical Conduct were completed for Government members and public office holders appointed by the Government. The trainings included 141 of a total of 199 public office holders appointed by the Government, with an emphasis on the rules of conduct, that is, avoiding conflict of interest between public interest and private interests.

90. In order to assess the risks to the integrity of office holders, with the aim of minimising risks, integrity tests were conducted for public office holders with the assistance of international experts, which included 120 office holders. Following the analysis of the tests, in August 2022, a Risk Assessment Report was prepared with summary conclusions and recommendations for further action and creating future policies and plans. For that purpose, the Plan for Good Governance Policies envisions raising awareness and strengthening the integrity of the holders of executive power of the highest level, by continuation of the implementation of integrity tests for elected public office holders and special advisors and of the trainings for the Code of Ethical Conduct for holders of the highest executive functions.

91. In March 2022, the Cabinet proposed and the Government adopted an Information on the application of a legal provision of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests. In accordance with the Information, a biography data form was prepared which the institutions shall submit when making proposals for election and appointment of persons to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. The filled-in forms are submitted to the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption to be entered into the Registry of elected and appointed persons. This will have an impact on the increase in transparency of the election and appointment of persons by the Government.

92. With the aim of increasing transparency, the Cabinet proposed, and the Government adopted an Information on improving transparency and accountability of public sector institutions by publishing mandatory information in accordance with the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character on the web sites of institutions, as well as publishing most frequently requested information systemised by areas without prior request by citizens. Guidelines for improving the transparency of public sector institutions were also prepared based on the analysis of the most frequently requested information in the last two years, which have been submitted to the concerned parties.

93. The Strategy on Transparency and the Action Plan (expected to be prepared by June 2023) are being prepared, in the context of which a Memorandum on Cooperation was signed with the Metamorphosis Foundation. The whole process will be coordinated by the Deputy President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in charge of good governance policies.

94. The Cabinet is responsible for coordinating the institutions in charge of the fight against corruption, with the aim of implementing the recommendations of the Report of the

European Commission on the progress of the country for 2022, as well as the process of implementation of the Strategy on prevention of corruption and conflict of interests. For that purpose, institutions are required to submit to the Cabinet a plan with specific activities and the timeframe for their realisation.

95. Pursuant to a Government Decision, the Cabinet provides administrative and technical support to the National Commission in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Strategy on strengthening capacities for conducting financial investigations and confiscation of property. In cooperation with the State Statistical Office, 90 laptops were donated and delivered to the Ministry of Interior, the Financial Police Office, the Financial Intelligence Office, the Agency for Management of Confiscated Property, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office Skopje, the Property Recovery Office, and the Customs Administration.

96. On the Proposal of the Cabinet, the Government adopted an Information on promoting transparency and accountability of budget users and individual users by publishing basic public procurement information on the websites of institutions.

97. All budget users and all individual users are obliged to create a special tab on their websites for "public procurement" and to publish the following documents: annual public procurement plan, public procurement announcement (link to the ESPP announcement), notice of assigned contracts (link to the ESPP announcement), assigned contracts and notice of completed contracts (link to the ESPP announcement).

98. The adoption of the Law amending the Law on Public Enterprises ("Official Gazette no. 89/22") creates an appropriate legal framework for a more detailed regulation of criteria and the procedure for election and appointment of members of oversight and management boards in companies with majority state ownership. The new legislation proposes optimisation of the number of members in management and oversight boards and introduces criteria for the type of education and competences when appointing members of management and oversight boards. A Rulebook on the form and content of the public call, the manner of submission of the application, the application forms, the method of scoring the applications and selection of candidates and other issues related to the conduction of the procedure for appointment and dismissal of members of management, that is, oversight boards of public enterprises was adopted, which contributes to increase in transparency of government institutions.

99. In cooperation with an international organisation, 240 students and 180 directors, professors and the remaining staff from seven different secondary schools, six educational workshops were organised to raise awareness regarding anti-corruption aimed at employees, as well as five workshops for raising awareness regarding anti-corruption aimed at students in order to strengthen their integrity. Secondary-school students visited the Government for a simulation of a government session where they discussed the challenges faced by young people and proposed specific conclusions.

100. The Cabinet prepared a detailed proposal for a campaign to raise awareness regarding anti-corruption "Depends on Me and You", which will cover several aspects important to young people such as: the importance of strengthening integrity, anti-corruption policies focused on youth, the digital transformation of society and corruption in sport. The long-term idea is to utilise the help of international partners to transform the campaign into a regional project which will unite young people from Western Balkan countries.

101. The Cabinet proposed and the Government adopted an Information on establishing a Working group in charge of preparation of a new Law on Sports in cooperation with the MJ and the Agency for Youth and Sports. In order to raise awareness regarding risks of corruption, two conferences were held titled "Open discussion about corruption in sports and the harm done to young talents in sport" and "Open discussion about corruption in sport with an emphasis of the voucher measure".

102. In terms of corruption in sports, at the proposal of the Cabinet, the Government adopted an Information on signing the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, known as the Macolin Convention. Namely, the country acceded by signing the convention in October 2022, at the 17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for sport.

103. In 2022, 563 reports were filed to the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, and 20 cases were opened on their own initiative, 560 cases were closed. Of the 560 closed cases, 12 initiatives for initiating criminal prosecution proceedings were submitted to the competent public prosecutor's office, 6 initiatives for determining the responsibility of managers and officials were submitted to the competent institutions, 12 recommendations and 2 warnings were submitted to state institutions and organs for undertaking specific measures regarding ascertained conditions.

104. In the January–February 2023 period, out of 85 closed cases, SCPC submitted 4 initiatives for initiating criminal prosecution proceedings to the competent public prosecutor's office, 5 initiatives for determining the responsibility of managers and officials to the competent institutions and 8 recommendations to state institutions and organs for undertaking specific measures regarding ascertained conditions.

105. In 2022, in terms of proceedings in the field of conflict of interest, the SCPC registered a total of 142 cases, 110 of which were opened upon received reports and 32 opened on its own initiative, and adopted 164 decisions. In 2022, 1276 Statement of Interest forms were submitted to the SCPC by elected and appointed officials, of which an administrative check was completed on 1005 Statements of Interest.

106. In January 2023 the SCPC registered a total of 5 cases of which 4 were opened upon received reports and 1 was opened on its own initiative, and 4 decisions were adopted.

107. In the period from 2021 to the end of January 2023, in the field of conflict of interests a total of 11 initiatives were submitted, of which 1 was submitted to the competent basic public prosecutor's office for initiating criminal prosecution proceedings and 10 initiatives to the competent institutions for determining the responsibility of managers and officials. It was acted upon 6 of those initiatives, 3 initiatives were dismissed and the SCPC has not received a response regarding 2 initiatives.

108. In 2022 a total of 4423 Statement of Assets forms were submitted to the SCPC including 2836 submitted following election/appointment to office, 1306 following end of office term, and 281 regarding changes in assets. 71 cases were opened in order to check the data on assets and interests of officials, including 5117 upon received report and 54 in accordance to the Annual Plan for monitoring data on assets and interests for 2022 which envisioned checking the data on assts and interests of 10 directors of public enterprises, 10 directors of public healthcare institutions, 4 directors of inspectorates, 10 judges, 10 public prosecutors, and 10 Members of Parliament. A systemic check was conducted regarding whether elected and appointed persons acted in accordance with the legal obligations and submitted a Statement of Assets and Interests within 30 days of their appointment or termination of office, and a total 97 cases were opened. Of these 97 cases, based on:

- Not submitting¹/untimely submitting of asset declarations/statements of changes in assets, 23 cases were opened of which 17 on SCPC's own initiative and 6 following received reports;
- Checking² data from asset declarations –20 cases were opened of which 9 on SCPC's own initiative and 11 following received reports; and
- Annual Plan for monitoring data on assets and interests for 2022 resulted in acting upon 54 cases.

109. In January 2023, the SCPC adopted the Annual Plan for monitoring data on assets and interests for 2023 which envisions checking the data on assts and interests of 21 officials including: 5 public prosecutors, 5 judges, 6 Members of Parliament, and 5 Government public office holders.

110. Pursuant to the Law on prevention of corruption and conflict of interests, elected, appointed officials as well as authorised persons are obliged to submit a Statement of Assets

¹ Article 82 or 85 of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests.

² Article 92 of LPCCI.

and Interest within 30 days of their appointment/termination of office, as well as upon any change in assets.

111. In order for the State Commission to perform its competences more efficiently, with the support of the EU IPA II Project – Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Public Administration, a software solution was developed that includes several modules. More specifically, this software solution will enable the keeping of a registry of elected and appointment persons, electronic filling-in of the Statements of Assets and Interests, connecting the SCPC with other institutions in order to exchange data, as well as tool for analysis and processing of the collected data. This software solution will be introduced in stages, and it is expected to become fully functional by the middle of 2023.

112. The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO POCC) operates with a total of 14 public prosecutors. In the beginning of 2023, two more positions were made vacant (due to resignation by two persons, a registrar and a professional associate). They are expected to be filled this year, along with the employment of an IT specialist.

113. At the level of all public prosecutor's offices in the country, 50 persons are planned to be employed – professional associates, investigators, IT specialists and other administrative and technical staff, of which 4 positions are at the BPPO POCC.

114. The BPPO POCC budget for 2023 is 64,368,000 denars. This marks a reduction in comparison to 2022 when the budget was 65,099,000 denars.

115. At the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, a serious strengthening of the investigation centre of BPPO POCC was undertaken, particularly in relation to the qualifications of investigators. The current number of investigators is 15, most of whom come from the MoI: two persons from the Serious Crimes Unit, four from the Corruption Unit, two from the Cybercrime and Digital Forensics Department, one investigator from the Terrorism Investigations Department and one from the Violent Crimes, Human Trafficking and Mediation in Prostitution Department.

116. A public procurement is planned to be conducted by the middle of 2023 for the adaptation of some of the new facilities where the BPPO POCC is expected to be transferred. Moreover, forensic laboratory equipment and other technical equipment (several computers, printers, scanners, shredders, etc.) was taken over from the former Special Public Prosecutor's Office.

117. At the end of 2022, the BPPO POCC concluded an agreement with the Central Registry and the Agency for Real Estate Cadastre, whereby the BPPO POCC is connected to the two institutions and has direct electronic access to their databases. For the same purpose, similar agreements are being concluded with the Employment Agency, all banks in the country and the MoI.

118. In terms of corruption, in addition to the internal control framework, at the end of 2018 the legal framework for introducing efficient external control on the work of the police (including police officers from the Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards) was completed, broadening the competences of the external control mechanism for the work of persons with police authorisations.

119. For that purpose, amendments were made to the Law on the Ombudsman, the Law on Internal Affairs, Law on Police, Law on Public Prosecutor's Service, Law on Execution of Sanctions, Law on Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Law on Courts.

120. With this concept, a special unit is established within the Ombudsman – a civil control mechanism, which at the same time allows the Ombudsman to submit initiatives for the initiation of a procedure for determining disciplinary liability of police officers. A specialised unit was established at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption in charge of criminal prosecution of crimes committed by persons with police powers in the performance of their duties, as well as crimes committed outside of their duties by using force or methods of coercion, which resulted in death, serious bodily injury, bodily injury, unlawful detention, torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading action and punishment, if *ex officio* prosecution is provided for by a special law.

121. With the aim of full implementation of these laws, the MoI adopted a Rulebook amending the Rulebook on the performance of the duties of the Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards in May 2018.

122. In 2019, this external control mechanism started functioning, especially in regards to the competencies of the Unit in charge of investigation and criminal prosecution of crimes committed by persons with police powers within the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption – BPPO POCC. In 2021, this department changed its name to Special Unit for investigation and criminal prosecution of crimes committed by persons with police powers, and in terms of the cooperation with the Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards it can be said that is particularly good and communication is ongoing and without any problems. The general impression is that the existence of this Department by itself affects the awareness and the work of police officers in terms of their professional conduct.

123. The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Social Security for the Elderly, which entered into force in May 2019. All bylaws regarding the implementation of the new legislative have been published, and the first payment of financial aid in accordance with the reformed social protection and child protection system was made in June 2019.

124. A comparison of the data on the highest amount of paid financial right according to the new law – guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA) for December 2019 and the rights closest to GMA according to the old law of April 2019, show a transformation with greater coverage of beneficiaries. Total payments record an increase of 82%. The average amount of paid financial assistance for GMA per household for December 2019 (7152,00 denars) according to the new law is higher than the GMA (2945,00 denars) according to the old law, marking an increase of 142%, whereas average payments per household member for December 2019 mark an increase of 162% (GMA – 2637,00 denars, as opposed to SFA1006,00 denars).

125. Redesigned financial assistance rights can be only seen as a family package of rights in accordance with the needs of households and citizens. For persons/households at risk due to material insecurity (GMA and social security for the elderly beneficiaries) the amount of the right is projected to increase by 1000 denars monthly during the six winter months in order to cover some of the costs for energy consumption. The parallel reform in the field of child protection allows to guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries for the first time to be able to use child and educational allowance for children who regularly attend classes in primary and secondary school in order to support the parents in covering school costs, which prevents early school dropout.

126. Reforms in the area of child protection has allowed for an easier access to child allowance, in the way that the right is accessible to low-income families with children, even if there are no employed members in the family, which was a key prerequisite for exercising the right to child allowance. Beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance have been allowed to receive a child allowance as well.

127. Upon comparison, the data on payment and child allowance beneficiaries according to the amendments to the Law on Child Protection of May 2019 and the right to child protection according to the old law show a significant increase. According to the new law, the total payment, as well as the total number of beneficiaries in December 2019 is four times higher (an increase of 380%) in comparison to the old law. In December 2019 there are 15248 beneficiaries – families with children who received child allowance, as opposed to 2956 families in April 2019 (an increase of 415%), and the number of children in those families is 33037 in December 2019, as opposed 6924 children in April 2019 (an increase of 377%).

128. The new Law on Social Security for the Elderly is aimed at increasing the effectiveness of financial benefits for this category of citizens and reducing the poverty percentage among the elderly over 65 years of age, who cannot provide means of subsistence on any other grounds. The monthly allowance is about 6000 denars, funds intended for persons over 65 years of age with no other source of livelihood. An increase of 1000 denars per month during the six winter months is also projected in order to cover a part of the costs for energy consumption is also projected for this category of beneficiaries as well.

129. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2020 the Government adopted a Regulation with legal force amending the Regulation with legal force for the application of the Law on Social Protection during a state of emergency, which facilitated the access to the right to guaranteed minimum assistance for persons whose employment was terminated during the pandemic, calculated from April to December 2020. Taking into account that the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic continued into 2021, and in order to facilitate the access to exercising the right to guaranteed minimum assistance in extraordinary circumstances, in 2020 a Law amending the Law on Social Protection was adopted.

130. Since the adoption of the Regulation until December 2020, the number of GMA beneficiaries has increased by 15%. In accordance with the dynamics of submitted requests and the continuation of the pandemic in the following period, 5000 new households are expected to be included in 2021, whereas estimated fiscal implications for 2021 are around 10 million Euros.

131. Along with the legal amendments, amendments have also been prepared to the Rulebook on the manner of exercising the right to guaranteed minimum assistance, establishing the situation regarding income, property, and property rights of the household, establishing the right-holder, the request form and the required documentation which are in the procedure of being adopted.

132. With these amendments it is possible, in extraordinary circumstances, to facilitate the right to guaranteed minimum assistance such that the following are considered property that the beneficiary can alienate or rent and thus support themselves: an apartment in which they do not live, registered vehicle not older than 5 years (passenger vehicle, motorbike with a capacity greater than 50 cm³, van, bus, truck, combine harvester and tractor) and construction land with area larger than 500 m², except for the land on which the building in which the beneficiary lives is located.

133. The Republic of North Macedonia was among the first countries that signed the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), and the Assembly adopted the Law on Ratification in December 2017. The instrument of ratification was deposited in March 2018, and the Convention entered into force in July 2018.

134. In 2021, the Law on Prevention and Protection Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted. The Law is fully aligned with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and aims at expanding the system for prevention and protection against all forms of gender-based and domestic violence. According to the Law, Article 3 includes: physical and psychological violence, stalking, economic violence, sexual violence and rape, sexual harassment and online harassment, forced marriage, genital mutilation of women, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, as well as forced control over women.

135. The key novelties adopted in the new law involve the following:

- Includes new forms of violence introduced by the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence;
- Also includes definitions of certain terms that were not covered previously, such as gender-based violence (violence directed at or disproportionately affects women and includes the reasons and results from the unequal power relations between women and men), stalking, genital mutilation, sexual violence i.e., non-consensual sexual acts etc.
- Further includes definitions of vulnerable categories of women, namely: pregnant women, women with children and with children with disabilities, single mothers, women with disabilities, women from rural areas, women drug-users, sex workers, women migrants, women refugees, asylum seekers, women that have no citizenship, lesbians, bisexual women and transgender persons, elderly women, financially disadvantaged women etc.

136. Additionally, one of the key things is that this law in a special provision sets out the principle of acting of the institutions with due attention to the interests and needs of the victim in taking measures for prevention and protection from gender-based violence. This is

especially important, as one of the most serious problems is the non-reporting of violence by victims, which is most often the result of distrust in institutions, i.e., insufficient sensitisation of officials who act in cases of violence.

137. The MJ has made amendments to the Criminal Code (CC), which incorporate the standards of the Istanbul Convention. The draft law on amending the Criminal Code is undergoing a parliamentary procedure for adoption. The Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Crime by Violence is also undergoing a parliamentary procedure for adoption. With this draft law, victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence are entitled to compensation.

138. In October 2018, the Government adopted the Action Plan for Implementation of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2018–2023

(<https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/ap%202018/15.10NAP%20AP%20za%20IK%202018.doc>).

- Also, a priority goal in the Strategic Plan of the MLSP³ 2021–2023, within the Programme for Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination and the Programme for Social Security is the protection of victims from all forms of gender-based violence.

139. In addition, gender-based violence is included in the Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2027.

- In 2020, the MLSP conducted a campaign for reporting domestic violence in the state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in cooperation with the Public Relations Department of the Government of North Macedonia, it was distributed through social media and the public TV service. As part of this campaign;
- In cooperation with the OSCE, flyers were prepared and distributed in prominent places (markets, pharmacies, institutions, etc.) which contained the basic information on reporting domestic violence, i.e., where the victim can turn for help;
- 300,000 flyers and posters with basic information where victims can make a report, and the availability of specialised services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence were prepared and distributed with the support of the UNFPA Office;
- The first mobile application for assistance and support to victims of violence “Be Safe” was created in cooperation with UNDP, available in Macedonian, Albanian and Romani;
- Provided support in the form of food and hygiene packages for all registered women victims of domestic violence (359 food packages and 359 hygiene packages were distributed) in cooperation with partner organisations.

140. In 2022, the MLSP conducted a campaign for raising public awareness regarding violence against girls and women with the slogan “We are with you” <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/media-centar.nsp.x>.

141. In terms of human trafficking, the country has a legal framework which is aligned with European legislation, i.e., in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Criminal Code – Crimes against Humanity and International Law, the following acts are criminalised:

- Human trafficking – Article 418-a;
- Organising a group and instigating performance of crimes of human trafficking, trafficking of juveniles and smuggling of migrants – Article 418-c;
- Trafficking of children – Article 418-d.

142. With the amendments of the CC, one of the key benefits from the long-term commitments of the Commission and the OSCE Mission was implemented by introducing the principle of non-punishment of victims of human trafficking in the criminal legislation.

³ <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/Strateski%20plan%20na%20MTSP%20za%202021-2023%20FINALE%2014.01.2021.doc>.

The amendments to the CC, which entered into force on 1 January 2019, provided for an express provision for not punishing victims of human trafficking (Article 418-a, paragraph 7) and trafficking of children (Article 418-d, paragraph 8). The essence of this principle/provision is that it provides for non-punishment, non-prosecution and non-detention of victims. New provisions will allow for a more efficient identification, assistance and support for victims, who, given the situation that they are in, are forced by traffickers to perform criminal acts themselves. The application of the principle of non-punishment will encourage victims to cooperate with law-enforcement authorities in detecting and punishing perpetrators.

143. A Law on state compensation of victims of violent criminal acts was adopted (Official Gazette no.247/2022).

144. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for dealing with victims of human trafficking were adopted, which were revised and adopted in November 2018, and provide an appropriate framework for support, integration and voluntary return of VHT and migrants. In 2016, Standard Operating Procedures were also adopted for Unaccompanied foreign children (SOP for UFC) and Standard Operating Procedures for dealing with vulnerable categories of citizens (SOP for VCC). The existing legislation in the field of legal and illegal migration is a good legal basis for resolving individual requests of different categories of persons for legal and illegal stay.

145. The National Commission on Combatting Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration (2001) creates relevant measures and policies (criminal, social and protective measures for the victims, vulnerable categories and especially children). It is generally aimed at prevention and combatting human trafficking, identification of the causes for human trafficking, strengthening capacities for implementation of activities, raising awareness and education, reducing vulnerability, support and protection of victims and migrants, identification and referral of victims, assistance for victims and migrants, as well as improvement of penal legislation for more efficient prosecution of criminals. In the framework of the Commission a Subgroup for combatting Trafficking in children was established which is aimed at protecting child victims of human trafficking and coordinating the cooperation between members of the subgroup.

146. The National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration oversees the overall activity in terms of combatting human trafficking and is responsible for data gathering and analysis in the context of prevention, protection and criminal prosecution, monitoring of the implementation of the SOP, monitoring assessment of the implementation of the National Action Plan, adopting conclusions and providing recommendations for better combat by implementing laws, policies for better institutional response and recommendations for revision of strategic goals and preparation of an annual report. The National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration is elected from among the members of the Ombudsman.

147. In the framework of the Equal Opportunities Department within the MLSP, there is also a National Referral Mechanism which provides identification, assistance and help for victims of human trafficking, regardless whether they are children or adults, as well as coordinating all actors which are involved in combatting human trafficking and trafficking of children, and protection of victims.

148. In accordance with the data submitted by the Department of Criminal Intelligence and Analysis in the period from 2017 to 31 March 2022, one crime of “human trafficking” under Article 418-a of the Criminal Code of RNM was registered. The crime was committed in March 2022, and criminal charges were filed against one person, owner of a catering facility, and the victims of this crime were two female persons.

149. In the same period, 19 crimes of “trafficking of children” under Article 418-d of the Criminal Code of RNM were registered, in which there were 11 child victims and 28 persons were reported. Most of the crimes, 10, were registered in 2018.

Table overview of criminal acts of “Trafficking in children” under Article 418 d

<i>Year</i>	<i>Criminal acts</i>	<i>Perpetrators</i>	<i>Number of victims</i>
2017	1	1	1
2018	10	16	5
2019	5	6	3
2020	-	-	-
2021	-	-	-
01.01.–31.03.2022	3	5	2
Total	19	28	11

150. In terms of item 41 (b), 5 national strategies on combatting human trafficking and illegal migration and national action plan for combatting trafficking of children have been adopted so far as a tool and mechanism for uniting all relevant state and non-state concerned parties, as well as international partners. The most recent National Strategy on Combatting Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration prepared an Operative Plan for Combatting Trafficking in Children 2021–2022.

Article 11

Response to Recommendations Nos. 24, 42, 44 and 46

151. RomaThe Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030 was adopted by the Government in February 2022 and it covers 6 key areas: anti-gypsyism, education, employment, social and health care, housing, civil registration and culture. With the participation of the relevant institutions and representatives of the civil sector, National Action Plans were prepared for all key areas within the Strategy for Roma Inclusion for the period 2023–2025. For the implementation of the Strategy, during 2022, a large number of activities were carried out in all areas that it covers.

152. There is continuous implementation of the Law on unregistered persons in the birth register. The focus is on the possibilities and ways of registering unregistered persons. According to the latest data from the Administration for keeping birth registers, in the period from 20202022, about 320 people have received a special birth certificate, of which 115 people have received a special identification document, and for 100 people, the requests for issuing an identification document are in process. A new Law on unregistered persons in the birth register is being prepared.

153. As of the end of December 2022, 13 families (89 people, 29 adults and 60 children) remain displaced in temporary residences in Vizbegovo. Professionals from the center for social work, MLSP and two Roma non-governmental organizations are involved in working with these people.

154. A total of 11,223 Roma are registered with the Employment Agency as active job seekers. The measures from the Operational Plan for active programs and measures for employment and services on the labor market covered 105 Roma, who were employed through the active measures for employment. Of these, 38 people received support for self-employment, 67 people received employment through support for creating new jobs. Through the program for employment of public works, 128 people were hired, and 80 young Roma are beneficiaries of the youth allowance for employment of young people in production activities after completing secondary education.

155. The most positive activity in improving the health care of the Roma is the project for Roma health mediators, started in 2013 at the initiative of civil society organizations, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, whose goal is to improve the health status of the Roma. The project currently operates in 10 municipalities, with 16 executors, and it is planned to double the number of executors to 32 next year.

156. In the past period, a greater number of activities have been carried out to strengthen the role of local communities in improving the inclusion of Roma. With the support of the ROMACTED program:

- 15 local action plans have been developed in 15 municipalities for the period 2023–2026;
- A post-Covid-19 action plan has been developed for 15 municipalities that targets adult education, tutoring in schools for children who did not follow quality teaching during the pandemic and developing a risk plan for vulnerable groups;
- Preparation of a Manual for responsible budgeting for Roma at the local level is underway.

157. In order to reduce poverty, especially child poverty, a reform of the social and child protection system was carried out, i.e. a new law on social protection 2019 was adopted.

158. With this reform, the rights to financial assistance from social protection have been redesigned, which can only be seen as a family package of rights in accordance with the needs of households and citizens. With the new Law on Social Protection, social cash assistance is reformed and upgraded into a guaranteed minimum assistance, as a monetary right for persons/households at risk due to material insecurity.

159. At the same time, the strengthened activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA) was introduced in such a way that all able-bodied members of the household should be included in active employment programs for the purpose of their training for work and employment, starting from the need to connect social assistance with the activation of GMA users. The cooperation between employment and social protection services is strengthened and deepened, in order to support and activate GMA users who can be employed. The adjustment of the software solution of the Employment Agency and the centers for social work was carried out, which enabled the exchange of data in real time and the joint preparation of an individual plan for the most easily employable member of the household.

160. With the introduction of the Minimum Guaranteed Income, transfers to families with low or no income have increased significantly. The comparative data between the largest monetary right paid under the new law – guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA) for December 2019 and the rights that are most closely sublimated with the GMA according to the old law from April 2019, show a transition with a large coverage of beneficiaries. Total payouts show an increase of 82%. The average cash assistance paid per household to the GMA for December 2019 (7152.00 MKD) under the new law is greater than the SPP (2945.00 denars) under the old law, showing an increase of 142%, while the average payments per household member for December 2019 shows an increase of 162% (GMA-2637.00 KD compared to SPP1006.00 den).

161. With the parallel reform in the field of child protection, it was possible for the first time that beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum aid can use child allowance and educational allowance for children who regularly attend classes in primary and secondary school, in order to support parents in paying school expenses, thus preventing early school leaving.

162. With the introduction of a universal child allowance, (both for low-income families and GMP beneficiaries) the number of children benefiting from this right increased from 3724 to 21886. The education allowance for children in primary and secondary education was introduced (in support of families with low incomes in covering the costs of education) and thus the number of child beneficiaries of this right increased from 3800 to 28749, the compensation for part-time work for parents who take care of a child with disabilities increased to 50% average net salary in the country for the previous year.

163. Activities for the activation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market, especially of socially disadvantaged users, i.e. of GMA beneficiaries, through their involvement in specialized services (mentoring, psychosocial support) and skills development programs were implemented during 2022. The activation process is implemented with partial financial support from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), through the project “Activation of vulnerable groups on the labor market”. In 2022,

a total of 137 people were included in the project's active employment programs and measures, and 349 GMAP beneficiaries were included in the employment services (SIM program). Through electronic data exchange in 2022, a total of 2417 individual activation plans were made, while 625 users were involved in active employment measures.

164. North Macedonia has adopted the Guidelines for the Nutrition of the Population, which are available through the website of the Institute of Public Health (IPH). Standards for meals in kindergartens and schools are laid down in legally binding regulations. The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), as a monitoring system, is regularly implemented in the country, and is implemented by the Institute and Centers for Public Health (CPH). Based on the data obtained through that and other regular public health nutrition monitoring systems for other age groups, the professionals from IJZ and CJZ raise the population's awareness of the importance of adequate nutrition and improving health, through public presentation at national and local media. The printed materials are distributed through the network of Public Health Institutes and Centers throughout the country. In addition, the promotion of nutrition principles is carried out within the framework of the celebration of days dedicated to health conditions for which nutrition plays a major role in prevention and treatment (World Health Day, World Obesity Day, World Diabetes Day, cancer prevention campaigns etc.).

Article 12

Response to Recommendations Nos. 48, 50 and 52

165. Measures are continuously taken to achieve universal health coverage of the population. The activities are aimed at measures to upgrade the existing system of health care by enabling all citizens to be able to obtain a basis for acquiring health insurance, while for the most vulnerable the burden is taken by the State Budget through the Program for mandatory health insurance for citizens who are not mandatorily health insured.

166. There is also the possibility for citizens who are not covered by mandatory health insurance, to be able to voluntarily access mandatory health insurance only due to using the right to health services at the expense of the Fund.

167. In addition to this measure, several exemptions from the payment of co-payments were introduced through legal amendments and government programs, and the basic package of health services, although assessed as broad, was supplemented with some new rights under the burden of the mandatory health insurance (invitro, new aids, use of health services in private institutions, etc.) as well as with a large number of new (expensive) methods and technologies in the process of modernization of public health.

168. For persons with disabilities in the health care system, a series of activities are undertaken that improve their health condition. Before full realization is the implementation of the model for functional assessment of children and youth (ICF). Activities are regularly undertaken that go in the direction of removing age restrictions for access to free treatment, i.e. exemption from participation, as well as all kinds of exceptions in the legislation that discriminate against persons with disabilities, i.e. neglect their special features.

169. Measures have been taken for greater availability and accessibility to health facilities and health services, by removing physical barriers to health facilities as well as providing information in accessible formats for persons with disabilities. In that direction, the MH made amendments to the legislation with which each health facility must meet the standards for accessibility and availability of health facilities, in accordance with Article 4, paragraph 4 of the "Regulations on the necessary space, equipment and professional staff for establishment, starting work" and performing health activities in health institutions" ("Official Gazette No. 91/13). According to the Rulebook, horizontal and vertical communication for the movement of wheelchairs, as well as appropriate criteria regarding the width and height of the various openings (doors, windows and elevators) should be ensured in the health facilities, among other things. This issue is regulated by Article 11 of the Law on Construction ("Official Gazette" No. 130/2009, 124/2010, 18/2011, 36/2011, 54/2011, 13/2012, 144/2012, 25/2013, 79/2013, 137/2013, 163/2013, 27/2014, 28/2014, 42/2014, 115/2014, 149/2014, 187/2014,

44/2015, 129/2015, 129/2015, 217/2014 2015, 226/2015, 30/2016, 31/2016, 39/2016, 71/2016, 132/2016, 35/2018, 64/2018, 168/2018, 244/2019, 18/2020, 279/2020).

170. Regular trainings are held for health workers on the rights of persons with disabilities, in accordance with the human rights-based approach to disability. Every year, in accordance with the annual Action Plans for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the MH implements activities and measures to improve the healthcare of persons with disabilities.

171. In order to provide integrated healthcare for the elderly both at the level of services and at the system level in a situation in which, according to demographic data and projections, due to the aging of the population, the number of needs for the services of these persons will increase significantly in the coming years, The MH undertakes a series of activities. Several initiatives have been taken to ensure greater access to health services for the elderly, such as: home visits by patronage nurses, the “Rural Doctor” project and mobile pharmacies, as well as the piloting of integrated health and social care. In addition, with the support of the WHO, a project is being implemented to reform the healthcare system by strengthening primary healthcare in order to ensure fair access to it according to the needs and types of specific users of healthcare.

172. According to the priorities of the Health Strategy 2021–2030, activities for reforms in primary healthcare (PHC) are underway. The main goal of starting the reform process in PHC is to improve the quality of primary healthcare through the reform of the payment model of primary healthcare, which should encourage and ensure the improvement of prevention, definition and application of standards for the provision of services according to medicine based on evidence, drawing up guidelines and protocols, encouraging the handling of certain conditions at the primary level and reducing the degree of referral to a higher level of healthcare, increasing the number of doctors from general practice with specialization in family medicine, encouraging the realization of certain health services by nurses and facilitation of administrative work. At the same time, in order to improve the referral system, an upgrade of the My Term software is planned, with new modules.

173. In the interest of the development of human resources, according to the Program for the Education of Doctors and Medical Personnel in 2021, funds were provided to continue the co-financing of about 130 specializations of interest to public health. By amending the Program for the needs of specialist and subspecialist personnel in accordance with the network of health institutions (2019/2022), the number of specializations and subspecializations in the areas of interest has increased, and every year public health programs are adopted that contain a segment related to the development of human resources.

174. The total number of employees in the public and private institutions in the health sector in 2020 was 33,035, of which 6,258 were doctors, 1,641 dentists, 1,107 pharmacists and 15,826 health workers with university, college and high school professional qualifications (IJZ, 2021). The number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants in 2019 was 3.1, and in regards to the number of nurses, in 2019 it was 4.5 per 1000 inhabitants.

175. Within the framework of activities to strengthen the capacities of public health institutions and retain health personnel in public health institutions (PHI), during the past 4 years the basic salary of specialist doctors was increased by about 40%, of nurses between 20% and 23%, to general practitioners by 25%, and to healthcare workers by 15%. Also, the duty ratio has been corrected. The young doctor trainees are provided with health insurance, paid duty and a monthly allowance equal to the basic salary of a general practitioner. In addition, 446 new employments in public health were realized during the pandemic.

176. Participation as a mechanism to control increased and unnecessary use of health services by the system, in the country is limited to a level of 20% of the value of the health service.

177. According to the calculations, the participation is on average 5.5% of the price of the health service, which is due to the numerous exemptions from paying for it. According to data from the Health Insurance Fund, about 300,000 people annually enjoy some kind of exemption from participation, which represents 22.3% of patients.

178. Insured persons have the right to be exempt from payment for participation if, during one calendar year, they have paid participation in specialistconsultative and hospital healthcare, except for medicines and treatment abroad, in an amount higher than 70% of the average earned salary in the country in the previous year. In addition to this limit, lower limits of 40% and 20% for people with lower incomes, children and people over 65 years of age have been determined in the by-laws. If the insured have paid participation in the value of the maximum amount, they have the right to request exemption based on a decision from the HIF. Exemption from participation applies to the prices of the provided health services, except for drugs from the List of drugs in primary health care, treatment abroad and orthopedic and other aids.

179. In addition to exemptions after reaching the annual limit, the legislation provides for exemptions from participation for certain services and persons, namely:

- Insured persons for a medical examination at the selected doctor and emergency medical assistance on call;
- Beneficiaries of permanent financial assistance, persons placed in social protection institutions and in another family, according to social protection regulations, except for drugs from the list of drugs issued by prescription in primary health care and for treatment abroad;
- Mentally ill persons placed in psychiatric hospitals and mentally retarded persons without parental care;
- Children with special needs according to social protection regulations;
- According to the programs of the MH (blood donors, children up to 1 year old, etc.);
- WW2 veterans;
- Military invalids and their families;
- Insured persons who voluntarily donated blood, according to the program related to voluntary blood donation, adopted in accordance with the Law on Health Care;
- Insured persons who voluntarily donated tissue or organs.
- Insured persons who are beneficiaries of the right to biomedically assisted fertilization for the health services performed in biomedically assisted fertilization procedures carried out with autologous fertilization and allogenic fertilization for the first, second, third and fourth child, up to the third unsuccessful fertilization attempt.
- Insured persons have the right to reimbursement of travel expenses if they are referred to use health services related to dialysis and exercises for the rehabilitation of sight, hearing and speech outside their place of residence, which are carried out on an outpatient basis.
- Children up to the age of 18 and insured persons who need prostheses for lower and upper limbs, hearing prostheses, orthoptic aids and wheelchairs and medical aids for the function of physiological discharges are exempted from the participation determined for the use of orthopedic and other aids.
- For health services for approved treatment abroad, the insured person participates with 20% of the total costs, but not more than 200 euros in MKD equivalent.

180. The funds for the participation of the insured persons in the total costs for the treatment of certain diseases are determined by special preventive programs which are adopted by the Government at the proposal of the MH. With the mentioned preventive programs, which the Government adopts every year, the funds for the participation of insured persons in the total costs of health services (except for the drugs from the List of drugs issued by prescription in primary healthcare, for treatment abroad and for orthopedic and other aids), are provided with those Programs.

181. The Law on Medicines and Medical Devices (“Official Gazette” No. 106/2007, 88/10, 36/11, 53/11, 136/11, 11/12, 147/13, 164/13, 27/14, 43/ 14, 88/15, 154/15, 228/15, 7/16, 53/16, 83/18, 113/18 and 245/18 and 28/21) regulates the conditions and method for ensuring

the quality of medicines and medical devices, their safety and efficiency, the method and procedures for their production, testing, placing on the market, pricing, quality control, advertising and inspection. The Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices is responsible for the implementation of all procedures arising from the law, except for the formation of drug prices. Ensuring the availability and quality of medicines is one of the Agency's strategic goals, and it is precisely in this direction that it constantly works on building capacities and improving the procedures related to medicines and medical devices, because this is the only way to adequately respond to the challenges related to the pharmaceutical sector and pharmaceutical policies..

182. According to the Law, quality control of medicines covers:

- Regular quality control of every medicine put on the market in the country, at least once every five years; (as long as the first approval obtained for putting the medicine on the market is valid);
- Control of the quality of the first batch of the drug after receiving approval for placing on the market;
- Extraordinary quality control, at the request of the pharmaceutical inspector as well;
- Specific quality control, i.e. control of each series of specific categories of drugs (immunological drugs, drugs obtained from human blood, radiopharmaceuticals and others), at the request of the Agency.

183. The quality control of the medicine is carried out in two authorized laboratories for analysis and quality control of medicines at the Institute of Public Health and in the Center for Quality Control of Medicines at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Skopje. These laboratories are accredited, and the laboratory at the Faculty of Pharmacy is also a full member of the European network of Official Laboratories (OMCL), they have their representative in the working group for counterfeit/illegal medicines within the framework of OMCL.

184. The agency also has its own representatives in several expert commissions and working groups that work at EDQM and contribute to their work.

185. The Agency establishes and maintains a pharmacovigilance system with a database for detecting, collecting, monitoring, evaluating and ensuring the adequacy of new data on the safety of the drug or the drug under investigation, as well as on the risk/benefit ratio of the use of the drug or its interactions with other medicines.

186. The data on the quality, safety and efficiency of the drug are an integral part of the documentation that is submitted in the procedure for placing the drug on the market, and is evaluated by experts.

187. Medicines that are imported must not have a shelf life shorter than one year, which must be found on the contact packaging as well as on the instructions for the patient. Expired medicine is considered defective and its circulation is prohibited, which is subject to constant control by pharmaceutical inspectors.

188. A program for the education of doctors and medical personnel is approved every year. The program is primarily intended for health workers who provide secondary and tertiary healthcare in public health institutions, with the aim of raising the level of their professional knowledge and improving the quality of health services.

189. This program also includes further education of doctors of medicine, such as specializations abroad and co-financed private specializations in order to increase the number of specialist personnel in the health system.

190. In addition, the Program includes activities for the engagement of eminent doctors from abroad in order to provide training for doctors from public health institutions for specific procedures and techniques that are not performed in the country. The program also includes activities that are carried out in the Medical Simulation Center, and are primarily intended for doctors of medicine for the purpose of extending their work license, for the practical part of taking the professional final exam, as well as education for employees in emergency medical care.

191. Maternal and newborn health and primary healthcare emerged as a priority area requiring special focus. Over the past three years, the MoH, with the support of WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, has committed to addressing challenges in quality and coordination in maternal and newborn care. As part of this commitment, supported by national and international partners, a new perinatal service delivery model has been developed and incorporated into the draft master plan for 2020–2030. The goal of the new model of perinatal care is to provide quality, appropriate care in the right health facility, at the right time for all mothers and newborns. This model is being implemented in two pilot regions Bitola and Tetovo, and additionally in 2022 preparatory activities for the implementation of the Master Plan in the regions of Skopje, Strumica, Kumanovo and Shtip began. In parallel, a series of capacity-building activities were carried out (trainings on Effective perinatal care for gynecologists/midwives in Level I and Level II facilities and (development of capacities for neonatologists at Level I and Level II throughout the country).

192. The master plan envisages the stratification of perinatal healthcare and the provision of risk-appropriate care for women and newborns, and contains a clear division of perinatal, obstetric and neonatal care levels. The creation of perinatal care networks should help in the equitable distribution of safe and effective perinatal care. According to the National Perinatal Care Master Plan, Perinatal Care Networks (PCNs) are formally identified as operational delivery networks in the new architecture of a reorganized stratified perinatal care system. The PCN is designed to deliver a collaborative model of care, where every pregnant woman and newborn across the perinatal network has access to health care services with the capacity to provide family-centred, high-quality, safe and effective care, in accordance with their specific health needs and in close proximity to their communities.

193. The Committee for Safe Motherhood at the MH contributes as a coordinator to the Joint Program: Safe and Innovative Health Services in the Time of COVID-19 in the country. The program introduced innovative health services such as mobile gynecology clinic visits to remote areas, an e-immunization registry aimed at improving data collection and calculation of immunization coverage rates, and risk communication with immunization-skeptic populations, such as and raising awareness among women and girls on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence. These improved services address the significant reduction in their provision since the COVID-19 outbreak and enable more efficient administration and relevant real-time policy data on immunization, as well as greater public awareness.

194. The MoH, the Macedonian Medical Society and the Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians, together with the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics and the e-Health Directorate, worked closely together to identify the appropriate model for setting up mobile gynecological services that would be offered to women and girls in rural and remote areas; As a result of this joint effort, the operation of mobile clinics is integrated into the national e-health information system, as mobile clinics of the University Clinic of Gynecology and Obstetrics, allowing patients to easily refer to any other follow-up. There is no paper/parallel reporting and patient data is stored in accordance with national health data management regulations. Engagement and capacity building activities were carried out for teams of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) professionals to provide mobile SRH services⁴² SRH health workers have been trained how to work and provide services in mobile clinics (21 gynaecologists/obstetricians and 21 nurses/midwives). The provision of SRH services through mobile clinics has its own specificities, for which teams of professionals are trained before their deployment in the field. Informational material (more than 5000 flyers) was prepared in three languages (Macedonian, Albanian and Roma) and distributed among local communities for women and girls, on various topics related to the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls: safe motherhood, family planning, prevention of cervical cancer, RH and others. The mobile clinics were equipped with the necessary personal protective equipment, consumables and SRH goods and equipment. In order to ensure that information about the services is widely disseminated at the local level, a wide network of different partners has been engaged. Through the local branches of the Red Cross, the information has been transmitted to women and girls in rural areas through family doctors, social work centers, local TV and radio stations, social media, and local authorities and others. Red Cross volunteers in the field helped in the process of scheduling the examinations and supporting the work of the mobile clinics in the field, by setting up the tents and the necessary

infrastructure in the field. In addition, UNFPA, in cooperation with the MH, implemented an awareness campaign organized at the national level, with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of gynecological examinations, under the slogan “Examine yourself, protect yourself”. The campaign included national TV and social media promotion, with around 260,000 people reached on social media, including a documentary video showing the work of mobile gynecology clinics in the field, and a TV promotional video for cervical cancer prevention (promoted on 6 National TVs).

195. Given the fact that a visit to the mobile clinic is also an opportunity for a woman to report or seek support if she is a victim of gender-based violence, a sensitization material has been prepared for SRH professionals, so that they can recognize potential signs indicating that the woman or girl could be the victim.

196. Every year, the Government adopts health care programs in the field of prevention: national public health program, immunization program, brucellosis prevention program, HIV/AIDS prevention program, which regulate most of the activities aimed at dealing with, controlling and prevention of infectious diseases.

197. Activities for the improvement of the infectious disease surveillance system are underway. For a long time, we have been working on the digitization of the system, i.e. the introduction of electronic monitoring of infectious diseases within the national electronic system “My Term”, which includes the implementation of case definitions for the appropriate classification of reported cases of infectious diseases, in accordance with the legal regulations. In addition, the replacement of the syndromic ALERT surveillance with an electronic system is under preparation National system for quick information and alerting of clusters of infectious diseases in real time Infectious diseases ALERT 2.0.

198. In terms of improving the control and prevention of diseases that are transmitted through food/water, in November 2018, an official National Protocol for the actions of the competent institutions in case of suspicion and occurrence of alimentary infections and intoxications was prepared. The purpose of the document is to establish a single protocol for communication and coordinated action of the competent institutions in case of suspicion the occurrence of acute food poisoning, as well as defining the deadlines for delivery and storage of the samples taken and their results.

199. According to the annual program for public health, every year activities were carried out for physico-chemical and bacteriological analysis of drinking water and surface water samples.

200. Vaccination in the country is mandatory and free for all children aged 0–18. The Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases and the annual Program for Mandatory Immunization of the Population also provide for mandatory immunization of the population against certain infectious diseases. In the second half of 2019, two new vaccines, against rota virus and pneumococcal infections, were introduced in the regular immunization calendar. Vaccination against diseases caused by Rotaviruses was started with live oral pentavalent rotavirus vaccine (RV5), giving three doses to children from 60 days of age to 32 weeks of age. Vaccination against diseases caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* began to be carried out by giving a pneumococcal conjugate vaccine. All children over 60 days of age, up to 5 years of age at the latest, are subject to vaccination with the pneumococcal vaccine. Infants aged 2–11 months are vaccinated with two doses and one dose of revaccination (booster dose). Children older than 12 months are not given a revaccination (booster dose), and children aged 2 to 5 years are vaccinated with one dose of vaccine.

201. In addition to the introduction of new vaccines, the Immunization Calendar has been updated with new types of vaccines. During 2015, polyvalent vaccines are included in the immunization calendar. Thus, apart from the trivalent vaccines previously, four, five and six-valent vaccines are now in use, for different ages – as vaccination or revaccination. Five and six-valent vaccines are applied to children in the first year of life to complete the primary vaccination (Hepatitis B, HiB, DiTePer and Polio). Polyvalent vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio have been introduced for revaccination of school children. Namely, the second revaccination against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio, among children in the second grade, began to be implemented with the quadrivalent DTaP/IPV vaccine. The third revaccination against diphtheria, tetanus and polio among children, in the

final grade of primary education, that is, at the age of 14, began to be carried out by giving the trivalent Td/IPV vaccine. The polio vaccine has changed from OPV to IPV.

202. Since 2018, free vaccination of certain categories of the population (risk groups) against seasonal flu has been started, which is applied mainly before the start of the flu season, but is also carried out during the season.

203. After the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more precisely from February 2021, free vaccination of the population against the COVID-19 disease was started. This process is ongoing, the public health authorities approved the application of the 4th dose of this vaccine.

204. On a preventive level, the competent ministries (MES, MH and MLSP) in accordance with their legal obligations and annual work programs, take measures to inform and educate young people and the rest of the population in order to prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. The MH envisages preventive activities to prevent the abuse of drugs, tobacco and alcohol in the annual programs for healthcare: national program for public health, for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, program for addictions, etc.

205. Protection of health from the harmful consequences of smoking is regulated by: Law on Health Protection, Law on Public Health, Law on Protection from Smoking and other by-laws. The anti-smoking regulations are aimed at protecting the environment, banning smoking in certain public premises as well as banning cigarette advertising, cigarette trademarks and the tobacco industry. In 2006, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was ratified. In 2014, 10 smoking cessation counseling centers were opened within the 10 public health centers, where smoking cessation services are provided, such as: counseling through individual and group work, distribution of educational materials about the harms of tobacco use and smoking cessation procedures and recommended therapy in the form of tablets, patches, etc. The Institute of Public Health and the 10 centers for public health annually mark the World No Tobacco Day May 31, organizing campaigns through education of the population or separate groups such as children and adolescents against the use of tobacco, a press conference is organized for the mass media, propaganda material is prepared in the form of posters, brochures, flyers, etc.

206. The list of essential medicines was determined and published in 2015 ("Official Gazette" No. 19/2015) and it contains medicines for chronic diseases as well as antiretroviral medicines.

207. Pursuant to the Law on Health Insurance, the Health Insurance Fund publishes a List of medicines that fall under the responsibility of the Health Insurance Fund, which determines: List A List of medicines for primary healthcare and List B List of medicines for hospital healthcare. The insured person can exercise the right to medicines only from the medicines that are listed in the List of Medicines that fall under the responsibility of HIFM (Positive List of Medicines), while the rest are paid in full by the insured persons. The insured person realizes the right to medicine on the basis of a prescription for a prescribed medicine, which is issued by the selected doctor or their substitute. Insurers have the right to reimbursement of the costs of purchased drugs from the List of drugs by submitting a request to the HIF.

208. Antiretroviral therapy drugs are provided to all diagnosed patients through the annual HIV/S Program.

209. The healthcare of persons with mental health problems is carried out at all three levels in primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare. Mental healthcare in primary healthcare is the responsibility of selected physicians. At the secondary level of healthcare, there are three specialized health institutions (PJU Psychiatric Hospital Skopje Skopje, PJU Psychiatric Hospital Demir Hisar and PJU Psychiatric Hospital "Negorci" Gevgelija) which has resulted in the regionalization and availability of health services. Psychiatric or neuropsychiatric departments also function within general and clinical hospitals.

210. At the tertiary level, the psychiatric activity is carried out at the PJU UC for Psychiatry Skopje, which, in addition to the health activity, also carries out educational and scientific-research activity, that is, it is the base for the department of psychiatry within the Faculty of Medicine Skopje at UKIM Skopje.

211. Mental healthcare is still dominated by institutional treatment. To the greatest extent, care is provided in the three special psychiatric hospitals with a total capacity of over 1,200 beds, in which patients are accommodated according to the regional principle, and in the UC for Psychiatry in Skopje with a capacity of 55 beds. There are also possibilities for hospitalization in neuropsychiatric departments in hospitals.

212. As part of the process of decentralization of mental healthcare, a system of community mental health centers has been established, where treatment is based on a holistic approach for adequate socialization and integration of people with mental disorders.

213. Pursuant to the Law on Mental Health, the health institution is obliged, after the reception and deployment of the person with mental illness, to appoint an expert team for the treatment and rehabilitation of the person with mental illness. The professional team prepares an individual treatment and rehabilitation program that aims to improve the health status of the person with mental illness at least to the extent that the person is qualified for care and treatment in the community. In the program, control examinations are mandatory at least once a month, in order to determine the state of mental health of the person.

214. Also, according to the Law on Mental Health, no person may be placed in a health facility without their consent or without a decision of the competent court, which should make a decision within 48 hours. Each involuntary hospitalization is reported to a competent court within 24 hours, after which the court appoints two psychiatrists from another institution who perform control/professional supervision on the justification of the involuntary hospitalization and inform the court which makes the final decision.

215. A new Law on Termination of Pregnancy has been adopted, which abolishes the existing procedures and barriers in the procedure for approval of termination of pregnancy, in order not to limit access to and implementation of the procedure for safe termination of pregnancy.

216. Within the framework of the annual program for active healthcare of mothers and children, access to healthcare is made possible for several target groups, including the Roma community and that

- Free examinations and laboratory examinations during pregnancy, related to pregnancy, free childbirth for pregnant women, who are outside the mandatory health insurance system and persons without an identification document;
- Free examinations for women, who are outside the mandatory health insurance system, who have suffered sexual violence;
- Procurement of medication for medical abortion in order to access safe termination of pregnancy for vulnerable categories of women in accordance with the latest European recommendations through the use of modern medications;
- Procurement of modern contraceptives (oral contraception, spirals, condoms) for women from socially vulnerable categories and women with repeated abortions.

217. In order to solve the problem with the lack of gynecologists, amendments to the Law on Health Care were prepared, with which doctors from hospitals and clinics from Skopje are enabled to work in health facilities in other cities where there is a shortage of staff.

218. In addition, in the interest of increasing the number of specialists in gynecology, with the co-financing program, doctors of medicine who will enroll in specialization, i.e. subspecialization in gynecology and obstetrics and will complete the specialization on time, conclude an agreement with the Health Insurance Fund of Macedonia for a selected gynecologist and for them, the capitation is calculated on an incentive basis for a duration of 36 months.

219. In relation to the activity of gynecology and obstetrics for the area of Shuto Orizari, within the network of health institutions, there is a gynecological clinic.

220. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a program was implemented: Safe and Innovative Health Services in the Time of COVID-19 in North Macedonia. The program introduced innovative health services, such as visits to mobile gynecological clinics in remote areas, as

well as raising awareness among women and girls about sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.

221. The operation of the mobile clinics is integrated into the national e-health information system, like the mobile clinics of the University Clinic of Gynecology and Obstetrics, allowing patients to easily refer to any other follow-up.

222. The restrictive provisions of the Law on Termination of Pregnancy were removed by the adoption of a new Law on Termination of Pregnancy, which abolished the existing procedures and barriers in the procedure for approval of termination of pregnancy, in order not to limit access to and implementation of the procedure for safe termination of pregnancy.

223. Regarding the protection against drug abuse, based on Article 19 paragraph 1 of the Law on Control of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (“Official Gazette” No. 103/08, 124/10, 164/13, 149/15, 37 /16, 53/16 and 193/17), the Government adopted the National Drug Strategy 2021–2025, which, among other measures, foresees a wide range of activities aimed at reducing the demand and supply of drugs through prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social assistance, as well as further development of capacities and improvement of coordination and communication between competent institutions. Harm reduction programs and substitution treatment programs are included in the National Strategy for HIV/AIDS. Through the annual program for the treatment of addictions, funds are provided for substitution therapy for about 2000 drug addicts.

224. According to the national strategies for HIV/AIDS, prevention consists of education, voluntary and anonymous testing and counseling in the appropriate centers, distribution of condoms, establishment of a system for epidemiological and behavioral monitoring, improvement of care provision and support for people living with HIV/AIDS. AIDS (antiretroviral therapy) and others. Through NGOs, a basic package of prevention services covers the key populations affected by HIV, psycho-social support, HIV testing and counseling, SRH services. Needles, syringes, condoms, lubricants and informational and educational materials have been distributed among all key affected populations.

225. Activities for early detection of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in women of reproductive age (15 to 64 years) are also carried out by providing free gynecological examinations and testing for HIV/AIDS and STIs, distribution of condoms and distribution of promotional material regarding with the method of protection. Voluntary, confidential counseling and testing of members of populations exposed to the greatest risk of HIV/AIDS is carried out in 10 Public Health Centers, IPH, CIDFS, HC SkopjeBit Pazar and Institute for TB.

226. Within the framework of the annual program for HIV/AIDS, the MH every year provides services that enable a long and quality life for people living with HIV and high adherence to antiretroviral therapy, including psychosocial and peer support and positive prevention (sexual health education and counseling; tackling stigma and discrimination and promoting condom use). These activities are implemented through an established program for positive prevention and psychosocial support for people with HIV and their partners with prevention at MSM that includes: prevention services focused on people living with HIV and their partners and for support within the community (peer counseling , socio-therapeutic groups, trainings for positive prevention, accompaniment and assistance in accessing health services and therapy, assistance in home or hospital conditions, informative and educational materials); psychosocial support (counseling, covering travel costs for initiation of therapy and medical control for HIV, provision of assistance from basic food and hygiene products, assistance to infirm or hospitalized patients, connection to institutions and services of other associations); trainings for education and sensitization of health workers regarding HIV to reduce discrimination in the health sector; production of educational material; activities to raise public awareness, normalize HIV services in the public and mobilize greater social support. During the past years, at least 90% of diagnosed people living with HIV received antiretroviral therapy, while as many as 94% of those on therapy had suppressed virus.

227. Since 2018, the MH has taken over the funding of HIV/AIDS activities that until then were financially supported through the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

228. The overview of funds allocated to the Program during the past 5 years is given in the table:

<i>Year</i>	<i>National Budget (thousands MKD/EUR)</i>	<i>Donations (thousands MKD/EUR)</i>	<i>Total funds (thousands MKD/EUR)</i>
2017	27 000/435 484.00	56 765/15 564.00	83 765/1 351 045.00
2018	87 360/1 409 032.00	11 300/192 258.00	98 660/1 591 290.00
2019	87 700/1 414 516		87 700/1 414 516.00
2020	87 700/1 414 516		87 700/1 414 516.00
2021	84 200/1 358 065		84 200/1 358 065.00
2022	100 700/1 624 193		100 700/1 624 193.00

229. Harm reduction programs and the program for substitution treatment are included in the National Program for HIV/AIDS, that is, in the Program for the Treatment of Addictions. With these programs, funds are provided for the maintenance of the stationary and field programs for the reduction of harm from the use and injection of drugs managed by civil associations, as well as for the expansion of the programs in other regions. The amount of funds intended for the implementation of the activities of this Program during the past 5 years is consistent.

230. The Law on the Control of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances regulates the cultivation of cannabis for medical and/or scientific purposes and determines the conditions under which it can be done. According to the Law, the cultivation of cannabis is allowed only to legal entities that have an authorization for the cultivation of hemp issued by the MH, after previously obtained consent from the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Article 13

Response to Recommendation 54

231. Regarding preschool education, MLSP in cooperation with the Roma Educational Fund (REF), implemented the project Inclusion of Roma children in public municipal institutions kindergartens. The academic year 2021/2022 is the fourth year in a row where, on the basis of a conclusion from the Government, Roma children from social risk groups are included in preschool education with exemption from parents' participation and their stay is ensured through the block grants awarded by the MLSP to the municipalities. The number of Roma children enrolled in kindergartens in the Republic of North Macedonia at the national level is 462 children, which is 1.25% of the total number of children enrolled in kindergartens.

232. Regarding secondary education, 920 scholarships for Roma secondary school students have been awarded in the academic year 2022/2023.

233. Roma Information Centers (RIC) work with citizens and provide information according to the problems and needs of the community.

Article 14

234. The Republic of North Macedonia has free education.

Article 15

235. MC contributes to the development of civil society by enabling the availability of cultural values for citizens, implementing a cultural policy in which the key values are freedom of creativity, equality and the universal good, and the most important driving principles are accessibility, participation and equal conditions and rights for all.

236. In the function of dispersing culture and creating a social environment to encourage creativity at the regional and local level, MC permanently supports the realization of cultural content in all municipalities, with the aim of contributing to encouraging balanced cultural development throughout the country.

237. The Law on Copyright and Related Rights (“Official Gazette” No. 115/2010, 140/2010, 51/2011, 147/2013, 154/2015, 27/2016.) ensures effective protection of moral and material interests of the creators, that is, the author, their rights, co-author, transfer of rights, author royalties.

238. This law also defines the meaning of co-authorship, the transfer of rights, copyright compensation, as well as the enjoyment of criminal, civil and misdemeanor protection. Foreign authors and foreign holders of related rights enjoy the same protection as domestic persons on the basis of factual reciprocity, that is, in relation to their moral rights in all cases and in relation to the right of resale and databases that are protected as related rights.

239. The country is a signatory to international conventions, treaties and agreements in the field of copyright protection and related rights, namely:

- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO);
- Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (Bern Convention);
- International Convention for the Protection of Performers, Phonogram Producers and Broadcasting Organizations (Rome Convention);
- Convention for the Protection of Producers of Phonograms from Unauthorized Duplication of their Phonograms (Phonogram Convention);
- The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO);
- Convention on the distribution of program signals for transmission by satellite (Satellite Convention);
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);
- The World (Universal) Convention on Copyright.

Agreements

240. On SOIS:

- WIPO agreement on copyright and
- The WIPO agreement on performances and phonograms

241. EU directives:

- Council Directive 93/83/EEC of 27 September 1993 on the coordination of certain rules relating to copyright and copyright-related rights applicable to satellite broadcasting and cable rebroadcasting;
- Directive 96/9/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of March 11, 1996 on the legal protection of databases;
- Directive 2001/29/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of May 22, 2001 on the harmonization of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society;
- Directive 2001/84/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of September 27, 2001 on the right of resale in favor of the author of an original work of art;
- Directive 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of April 29, 2004 on the implementation of intellectual property rights;
- Directive 2006/115/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of December 12, 2006 on the right to rent and the right to use and certain rights related to copyright in the field of intellectual property (Codified version);

- Directive 2006/116/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of December 12, 2006 on the term of protection of copyright and some related rights (Codified version);
- Directive 2009/24/EC of May 5, 2009 of the European Parliament and the Council on legal protection of computer programs (Codified version);
- Directive 2012/28/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of October 25, 2012 on certain permitted uses of orphan works;
- Directive 2014/26/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of February 26, 2014 on the collective management of copyright and related rights and of the multi-territorial license for the rights of musical works for online use in the internal market;
- Other acts: Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS Agreement) of the World Trade Organization.

242. The provisions of the Law on Culture regulate the protection of freedom necessary for scientific research and creative activity ("Official Gazette" no. 31/98, 49/03, 82/05, 24/07, 116/10, 47/11, 51/11, 136/12, 23/13, 187/13, 44/14, 61/15, 154/15, 39/16, 11/18 and 11/18). In accordance with it, the realization of culture is guaranteed by determining the national interest in culture and providing conditions for its realization.

243. The financing of the national interest in culture is done with funds from the country's budget. With these funds, MC finances the work of national institutions in the culture and participates in the financing of projects of national interest in the culture of other legal and natural persons. For the realization of the national interest in culture in accordance with the National Strategy, it adopts an annual plan for the realization of the national interest in culture.

244. MC in September of the current year for the next year has announced annual competitions for financing projects of national interest in separate areas and cultural activities. The annual competitions contain conditions for participating in the competition, criteria and criteria based on which the project will be evaluated, the percentage of the institution's participation in the financing of the projects, the deadline for submission of applications and other information. Annual contests are published in the media and last at least 30 days from the day of publication.

245. During the year, it can also announce other tenders for financing projects of national interest, namely tenders for: purchases of publications, purchases of museum materials, works of art and music, translation of works by authors from the country into foreign languages, scholarships for deficient personnel in culture, development of creative industries, balanced cultural development and realization of manifestations and activities in the country and abroad that are of national interest in culture.

246. As an exception, it can allocate funds for the realization of projects of national interest in the field of international cultural cooperation or in the field of cultural heritage protection, which for objective reasons could not be submitted to the competitions for the current year.

247. The subjects whose projects are chosen on the annual tenders sign contracts with MC for financing a project of national interest in the field of culture.

248. The Ministry supports projects that are in function of the development, affirmation and promotion of culture, the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of our country and all this supplemented by projects by and for the youth. Particular attention is paid to equal gender representation, inclusion of persons with disabilities and intercultural dialogue. The criteria, priorities and criteria on the basis of which the projects are evaluated by individual activities are contained in the applications that are an integral part of the competitions. The evaluation of projects and programs is carried out by commissions composed of experts and competent persons in the specific field, respecting the principles of multi-ethnicity and non-existence of conflict of interests.

249. Regarding the encouragement and development of international contacts and cooperation in the field of culture, it should be noted that in addition to funding after the Annual Competitions of MC, bilateral documents are drawn up and harmonized with other countries, which model a formal-legal framework for deepening cooperation through the implementation of specific activities, complex manifestations are organized and created:

Days of Macedonian culture abroad in countries that are in the focus of the RNM's foreign policy (EU presidents, European capitals of culture, countries with which bilateral documents are concluded for the first time, etc.), cooperation with international organizations is also being intensified. Also, the activity of the cultural and information centers abroad in New York, Sofia, Istanbul, Zagreb and Tirana is carried out with a tendency to open new centers in other countries, the representations of the state at traditional international events such as the Venice Biennale, Book Fairs throughout the world and other major events. Through the functioning of the National Commission for UNESCO of RNM, all activities related to UNESCO are carried out in the areas covered by this organization: education and science, culture, information society, environment, etc.
