



COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
MACEDONIA

ANALYSIS

OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN

RURAL AREAS

MORE OBSTACLES
THAN OPPORTUNITIES





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Women in Rural Areas - More obstacles than opportunities

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CSW – Centre for Social Work
- ESARM – Employment Service Agency of the Republic of Macedonia
- FB – Facebook
- HIFM – Health Insurance Fund of Macedonia
- MAKStat – Database of the State Statistical Office of Macedonia
- MES – Ministry of Education and Science
- MH – Ministry of Health
- MJ – Ministry of Justice
- MLSP – Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
- Mol – Ministry of the Interior
- MPS – Municipal Primary School
- MSCE – Municipal School Center of Electromechanics
- MSCT – Municipal School of Catering and Tourism
- MSS – Municipal Secondary School
- MSSD – Municipal Secondary School with a Dormitory
- MSSE – Municipal Secondary School of Economics
- MSVS – Municipal Secondary Vocational School
- NGO – Non-governmental Organization
- PAP Test – a procedure for examining changes in the cervix
- PHI – Public Health Institution
- PrHI – Private Health Institution
- PS – Primary School
- RM – Republic of Macedonia
- SS – Secondary School
- SSO – State Statistical Office
- UN – United Nations
- UN Women – UN organization for gender equality and the empowerment of women
- UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
- UNO – United Nations Organization
- VMRO-DPMNE – Political party: Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
- WAA – Women’s Agricultural Association

SUMMARY

The analysis titled “Women in Rural Areas – More Obstacles than Opportunities” is prepared within the scope of the “Civil Society Support to Social Cohesion and Diversity Policy Making” project and aims to show the position of women living in certain rural areas on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. This analysis, through a comprehensive overview of the legal framework, the policies and practices that affect the lives of these women and focus on the target areas such as education, healthcare, juvenile marriages and social protection, presents the current situation as well as the availability of services for rural women in these areas.

The analysis reveals the current position of the Republic of Macedonia in relation to the formal and legal achievements in the establishment of gender equality, and at the same time, through identifying problems and the challenges faced by rural women in daily life while exercising particular rights, it portrays the extent to which existing legal solutions, policies and practices allow these women to have equal access to education, social care and healthcare. Through presenting examples of good practices from international legislation, the analysis also includes positive experiences of full inclusion of rural girls in the educational process, improving the availability of social services on part of the rural women, as well as strengthening the healthcare of rural women including an overview of gynecological services.

The distinctiveness of this analysis comes from the fact that, to a great extent, the target group fails to identify any kind of problems or difficulties in exercising certain rights, and as a result, does not feel the need for making the issues current and known, which could result in finding adequate solutions. The diverse economic, social and social-cultural development of different regions in the Republic of Macedonia has shown that discussing these topics is undesirable, problematic, and even prohibited in some environments. Precisely because of this, providing a safe space was crucial for hearing honest life stories intertwined with problems and challenges in the everyday lives of these women.

Although it can be stated that today’s life of rural women generally differs from the lives of their ancestors, patriarchal matrix and the traditional division of male and female roles are still present in these environments to a great extent. Consequently, it is highly probable that attempts to resolve their problems with standard measures and policies will not give the desired result. The research team analyzed and transformed all the information obtained acquired from institutions as well as from women themselves into specific recommendations and measures that would not only influence the overcoming of problems and challenges that these women face, but they would also improve the general quality of their life.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the vast majority of the world has considerably changed its view of women's role in society. In the past, the role of the woman was largely tied to the household, and she was primarily perceived as the only one in charge of cooking and cleaning, taking care of the home and the family, while the role of the husband was tied to the public sphere, financial resources needed for the family's existence, and social activities. The division of the roles of the women and the man in the house, and hence in society, began many millennia ago, when the ancient Greek philosophers and theorists did not even regard the woman as a citizen, and therefore deprived her of the right to be equal to her husband in making decisions that affected the policy. She had the same status as the slaves and the children, without any right to vote, and it is no wonder that the authors of that time see men and women from a different perspective. "For men, arete, the glow is a matter of courage, intelligence and social success. For women, beauty, the ability to fulfill domestic responsibilities, and especially marital fidelity, are known virtues".¹

Many facts from different areas of life prove the existence of the fertile climate of oppression of women lasted for centuries, and even today. "Based on UNO data, women on the planet generally do not own land, but mainly cultivate it; they do not have capital, but work more for less money, especially when taking into account the free labour, which in world history is accurately identified with slave labor; by number, they are the majority of the voters, but inadequately represented in the government; have less access to cultural goods and the media, although the character of women in these areas is abused massively; education, health and academic institutions are less tolerant of women".² Not so long ago, women were not allowed to vote in elections and make decisions in many countries. The fact the women awakened and started to organize allowed them to raise their voices and start fighting for more rights. It can be stated that, over the years, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of life of women, especially in the area of existential issues, but some of the problems and issues affecting women persist. The success of the women's movement can be ranked starting from acquiring the right to vote, establishing equal access to education, and increasing the number of women in senior positions in public life, to their struggle for the legalization of abortion, the end of the female genital mutilation and eradication of gender-based violence.

According to a survey by the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency – Sida³ conducted in 2015,⁴ women in rural areas worldwide can become economically stronger if they have access to resources and if they have the knowledge and skills to adequately use them. If women have access to economic opportunities and control over the economic benefits of those opportunities, and if they can and know how to take advantage of these benefits in order to make strategic choices, positive life changes can be expected.

The existence of exploitative and discriminatory working conditions, gender segregation in the labor market, limited mobility, and the double workload for women are

1 Слaпшaк Свeтлaнa, Жeнски икoни нa XX вeк (Women's Icons of the 20th Century), Тeмплyм, Скoпje, 2003, cтp. 312.

2 "Sida" is a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish Riksdag and the government, with the aim to reduce world poverty. Their work contributes to implementation of Sweden's Policy for Global Development.

3 "Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment: Scope for Sida's Engagement", published by: Sida, 2015, p. 8, 9 and 10.

4 *Employment rate - percentage of employed persons to the working population aged 15 to 79.

only a few of the factors that influence not only women's access to a certain job but also their effectiveness and efficiency while performing work tasks. These working conditions often lead to health problems, including reproductive health problems. Unpaid work, both in the working and in the domestic sphere of life, which takes a lot of time and energy, is one of the most important obstacles to ensuring adequate income and economic empowerment of women. Data from the State Statistical Office show that "employment in the Republic of Macedonia is characterized by a very unfavorable gender structure. This structure remains unchanged for a longer period of time, primarily because of the unstable economic and social conditions in the country and the incompatibility of the available and necessary labor market profiles. The employment rate* of women in the Republic of Macedonia in 2016 was 33.8, and it was significantly lower compared to that of men, which was 52.3. The unemployment rate* of women was 22.7, while 24.4 of men. The activity rate* in women was lower, i.e. 43.8, and it was noticeably higher in men, i.e. 69.2".⁵

The time-use survey⁶ conducted by the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia in the period from May 2014 to April 2015 shows that the working day, which includes domestic activities* and employment* is longer for women and lasts 5 hours and 36 minutes than for men – 4 hours and 13 minutes. Unfortunately, the ratio of the percentage of work done with economic compensation differs for 1 hour and 44 minutes in favor of men, which certainly enables them to make a profit, have better positions and greater benefits. The data show that women in rural areas devote most of their time, that is, 4 hours and 22 minutes to domestic, unpaid activities, while only 1 hour and 18 minutes per day are being spent on an activity that allows them to make a financial profit.⁷ One of the main reasons for the economic dependence of women is the fact that they take the basic responsibility for unpaid work at home. The functioning of the home, and consequently of the society, largely depends on the unpaid work of women who provide the necessary care for young, elderly and sick family members. This limits women who want to devote themselves to effective engagement with income-generating jobs, and in many developing countries this situation results in women's acute poverty. Although data from the State Statistical Office⁸ show a decrease in the unemployment rate among women in the past 3 years, as presented in Figure 1 below, unfortunately, some studies show that "women earn 12.5% less than men for work of equal value; and the gap is increased by reducing the level of education; namely, it increases to 28.4% for people without formal education or without primary education. Women are 17.3% less paid than men for things of equal value, with the same degrees of experience or education".⁹

* Employment rate - percentage of employed persons of the working population aged 15 to 79.

* Unemployment rate - percentage of unemployed persons of the entire labour force.

* Activity rate- percentage of labour force of the working population aged 15 to 79.

5 "Women and Men in Macedonia" 2017, State Statistical Office, Skopje, p. 57, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.15.20.pdf>

6 Time-use survey, 2014/2015, State Statistical Office, Skopje, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.15.20.pdf>

* Cleaning the house, care for children and adults, gardening and caring for a pet, building and repairs, shopping and services and care for the household.

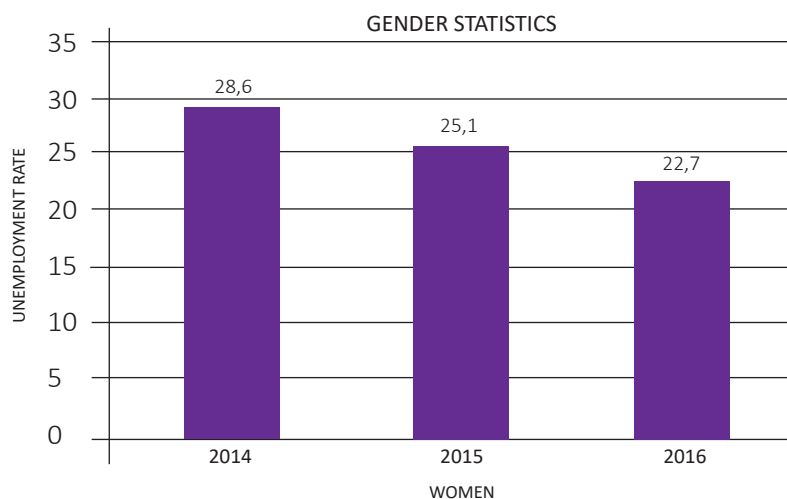
* Time spent on main and additional work and activities related to employment, breaks and trips during working hours and job search.

7 Time-use survey, 2014/2015, State Statistical Office, Skopje, p. 26, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.15.20.pdf>

8 http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/en/MakStat/MakStat__PoloviStat/125_PoloviStatistiki_en.px/table/viewLayout2/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef.

9 Finance Think, EdPlako Application, <<http://www.edplako.mk/истражувања/>>

Figure 1



As a result, more women than men do not have access to valuable resources and opportunities, which reaffirms their subordinate position in society. Data from the United Nations¹⁰ indicate that about one billion people live in extreme poverty, of which seventy percent are women and girls, and although women account for half of the human population, they own only one percent of the total property in the world. Poverty is increasingly feminized, and the restrictions on women's rights in certain parts of the world are often imposed by culture, tradition and religion.

In the Republic of Macedonia, since it gained independence to date, a progress has been made in promoting women's rights in all areas of life, both in terms of exercising the right to education and employment and in terms of healthcare. Although women's rights in the Republic of Macedonia are guaranteed by the Constitution, and with the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities, significant progress has been made in the institutional, political and legal framework, regrettably, it can be concluded that in our country there are still rural regions where women, for various reasons (tradition, culture, religion, etc.) do not have the opportunity of a solid education, cannot find employment, get married early and are obligated to form families, and have limited access to social and healthcare, which ultimately leads to a reduced quality of life.

The problems women in rural areas face are most often ignored by the competent institutions or dealt with regular measures that do not always lead to the desired result. Because of this approach, women from rural areas are in a very difficult situation and often the poorest, their work is undervalued, and so is their labor in the family household, the family responsibilities and the work on the family's agricultural property. In these households, the income is usually realized by the husband, who is traditionally the owner of the entire property. That makes women completely dependent on male family members. Most of the women living in rural areas are unemployed, and this is largely due to the low level of education, which is the result of early marriage and the obligation to create a family or care for others – younger brothers/sisters or older family members living in the same household.

10 "Worlds apart - Reproductive Health and Rights in an Age of Inequality", UNFPA, State of World Population, 2017, available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2017_EN_SWOP.pdf

The dominant patriarchal values and the traditional division of gender roles further affect the position of the rural women, both in the family and in society.

The distinctiveness of this research comes from the fact that the research team looked for various ways to reach the target group – rural women. Considering that not all regions in the Republic of Macedonia are not equally developed on economic, social and socio-cultural level, during the research, the research team faced a series of challenges related to motivating women to speak on topics that are, in certain environments, considered undesirable or even forbidden, and to providing a secure space, where they will feel safe and comfortable enough to produce honest answers. The research team found creative ways to “extract” answers from the interviewed women that do not fall into the category of socially desirable attitudes or presumably correct answers, but instead, to share their sincere life stories filled with problems and challenges imposed by life in a rural environment.

The target group of this research, to a great extent, fails to perceive that there are any problems or difficulties in exercising certain rights, which actually reduces their need for publicly sharing those problems, openly talking about them, and finding appropriate solutions. In order to raise public awareness and break gender stereotypes and prejudices, the research team decided that all participants in this research should be female.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to identify the situation of women living in certain rural areas on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, as well as to identify the problems and challenges they face in terms of access to various services. The data obtained during the research and the analysis itself are intended to demonstrate whether existing legal solutions provide and promote equal access to education, social care, and healthcare for women in rural areas, and how their position can be improved by providing specific recommendations for overcoming the problems and suggestions for improving the overall quality of the women's life.

The analysis provides a general overview of the situation in the Republic of Macedonia in terms of formal and legal achievements in establishing gender equality through the analysis of national documents. At the same time, through examples of good practices from international legislation, this document presents positive experiences, such as the full inclusion of rural girls in the educational process, the improved access to social services by rural women, and the strengthening of healthcare for rural women, with a review of gynecological services.

The research focuses mainly on four areas: **education, healthcare, child marriages and social protection**, with the aim to present the current situation, as well as the availability of the said services in those areas for rural women.

Four regions with different demographic characteristics¹¹ were included in the research: (Polog, the Southwestern region, the Eastern region and Southeastern Region), in which primary data were collected with different methodological tools and techniques. The target regions are indicated in red in Image 1 given below.

Image 1



From the regions given above, the following municipalities were included in the research: Polog Region – municipalities: Brvenica, Vrapciste, Jegunovce and Tearce (settlements: Zubovce, Toplica, Gloje, Pirok, Miletino, Jazinec); Eastern Region – municipalities: Zrnovci, Cesinovo – Oblesevo and Karbinci (settlement: Kauzlija); Southwestern region – municipalities Debarca (settlements: Velmei and Meseista),

11 More information on the mountain regions can be found at: <http://brr.gov.mk/mk/>

and Centar Zupa (settlement: Brastica); and Southeastern region - municipalities Radovis (settlement: Ali Koc) and Konce. The target municipalities are marked in red in Image 2.

Image 2



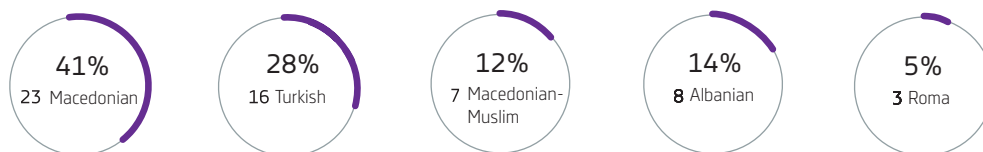
The research was based on the collection of qualitative and quantitative data obtained through the following research techniques and methods: desktop analysis, semi-structured interview with rural women and representatives of central institutions, focus groups with representatives of non-governmental organizations, public data analysis and case study, in which the following research tools were used: survey questionnaires, semi-structured interview questionnaire, questionnaire for focus groups, request for public records and a case study protocol.

Documentation analysis. The research framework included a desktop analysis of national laws, by-laws, and other relevant national and international documents. At the same time, based on the responses to the requests for access to public records, as well as the questionnaires received from central and local institutions, an analysis of statistical data and other relevant qualitative data related to education, child marriages, social and health protection of women from rural areas targeted by this research was conducted as well.

Semi-structured interview. This research technique covered a total of 57 respondents: a) A total of 22 respondents were interviewed in Polog, 11 of Macedonian ethnicity, 8 from Albanian ethnicity and 3 of the Roma ethnicity; of them, 4 had elementary education, 9 had completed secondary education, and 9 had university education, aged 22 to 57; b) in the Eastern region, a total of 14 respondents were interviewed, of which 8 of Macedonian ethnicity and 6 from the Turkish ethnicity – Yoruks women; of them, 6 had completed primary education, 7 had completed secondary education and 1 had a university degree, aged 18 to 54; c) in the Southwestern region, a total of 11 respondents were interviewed, out of which 7 declared themselves as Macedonian-Muslims, 7 of them had completed primary education, 2 had completed secondary education and 2 had high education, aged 25 to 58; d) In the Southeastern region, a total of 10 respondents from the Turkish ethnic community – Yoruks were interviewed, all of which had not completed primary education (4th grade), aged 30 to 71 years. The age of the respondents

ranged from 18 to 71, out of which 10 were with uncompleted primary education (4th grade), 17 with completed elementary education, 18 with secondary education and 12 had completed high education, while 25 were employed, 32 were unemployed. The percentage of respondents belonging to each ethnic community is given in Figure 2.

Figure 2



The conducted interviews provided insight into the perception of women from the target regions about their position in the society, as well as the availability and use of services in the above areas.

As part of the research, 3 interviews were conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, and the Ministry of Health. The conducted interviews offered insight into the perception of the representatives of the central institutions about the position of women from the rural place in the society, as well as the degree of utilization of certain services and services from the above areas.

Focus groups. For the purposes of the research, 4 focus groups were created with a total of 35 representatives of 31 non-governmental organizations, which deal with the issues and problems investigated in this research. The focus groups were created in the following regions: a) in Polog, the focus group consisted of a total of 9 representatives from the following non-governmental organizations: Education and Development Center – Tearce; Institute for Community Development – Tetovo; “Romano Avazi” – Tetovo; Association for Democratic Development of the Roma “Sonce” – Tetovo; Association for Local and Rural Development – Tetovo; “Zkatna Raka” – Tetovo, and “Women’s Forum” Association – Tetovo; b) in the Southeastern region, the focus group consisted of 7 representatives of the following non-governmental organizations: Community Center of Strumica Municipality – Strumica; “Prodolzen Zivot” – Strumica; “ZUG” – Valandovo; Regional Development Center – Gevgelija; “Rodova Perspektiva” – Strumica, and “Zenska Akcija” – Radovis; c) In the Eastern region, the focus group included a total of 9 representatives from the following non-governmental organizations: “Eho” – Stip; “Klaster Kreativa” – Stip; Union of Women – Stip; WZZ “Agro Vinka” – Vinica; Union of Machine Circles – Probistip; “Ambrosia” – Pehcevo; KHAM – Delcevo; “Glasi Tekstilec” – Stip; “Edukativen Centar” – Chesinovo-Oblesevo; d) in the Southwestern region, the focus group included a total of 10 representatives from the following non-governmental organizations: “Revograd” – Struga; “Prerodba” – Kicevo; P.O.U. “Bratstvo-Edinstvo” – Debar; Association for Multicultural Integration “Inkluzija” – Ohrid; Association for Equal Opportunities “Ezerka” – Struga; Association of the Albanian woman – Kicevo; “Akva” – Struga; Association “Aureola” – Vellesta Village; Association “Aureola” – Delogozdi Village.

The focus groups provided insight into the activities of non-governmental organizations from the target regions in identifying, analyzing and actualizing the problems faced by rural women in the areas covered by this study.

Requests for public records. To the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the 15 target municipalities, as well as 60 primary and secondary schools, 6 social work centers, 6 local health centers and 9 clinics and general hospitals from the target regions, a total of 102 requests for access to public records and questionnaires were sent, which were supposed to provide insight into certain qualitative and quantitative datasets regarding the target regions and the research topics.

Case study. This research technique aims to provide qualitative data that would give details on how certain phenomena and processes affect the quality of a woman's life as well as the consequences caused thereby. Within the research framework, two case studies have been conducted that show the lives of two women in reference to the analysis topics.

FORMAL AND LEGAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*

In the past 26 years of independence, the Republic of Macedonia has made some progress in establishing gender equality. A significant number of formal and legal measures have been adopted, but their full implementation in practice is yet to be achieved. Pursuant to Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the section on civil and political freedoms and rights stipulates as follows: “The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of their gender, race, color, nationality and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status”¹². Equal opportunities for women and men, apart from being guaranteed by the Constitution, are at the same time stipulated in a number of laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender¹³ and contain provisions that include gender as a concept in domestic laws¹⁴.

Raising awareness on the need for establishing equal opportunities for women and men, as well as the promotion and protection of women’s rights in all areas of social life, became an organized activity when the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy prepared the first National Action Plan for Gender Equality, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in December 1999. The document identifies the necessary goals and measures that would influence the promotion and protection of women’s rights in all areas of social life, including continuously raising awareness of the need for action towards establishing equality of women and men. It encompasses ten strategic areas of social life that require promoting in reference to gender equality, i.e. power and decision-making, violence against women, women trafficking, healthcare, human rights and peacekeeping activities.

In 2006, the Republic of Macedonia adopted the first Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. “This Law shall regulate the establishment of equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men, the general and special measures for establishment of equal opportunities for women and men, the rights and obligations of the responsible entities in ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, the procedure for determining unequal treatment of women and men, as well as the rights and duties of the Legal Representative for equal opportunities for women and men (hereinafter: the Representative) as a designated person for conducting the procedure for determining unequal treatment of women and men”¹⁵.

The aim of the Law is to promote the principle of establishing equal opportunities for women and men in the political, economic, social, educational and other areas of the life, that is, to influence the removal of existing obstacles to the establishment

*The section on formal legal achievements in establishing gender equality in the Republic of Macedonia, with the exception of the analysis of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence, comes from the doctoral dissertation by Diana Stojanovik Djordjevic, Ph.D., “Интегрирање на родовиот аспект во политиката како еден од условите за воспоставување на родова рамноправност во Република Македонија”, UKIM Institute for Sociological and Political-Legal Examinations, Skopje, 2014.

12 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 52/91 of 22.11.1991. Available at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/default.asp?ItemID=A431BEE83F63594B8FE11DA66C97BEAF> Accessed on: 24.09.2017

13 Gender in positive legislation in Macedonia is considered as a prohibited basis for direct in indirect discrimination

14 The Criminal Code; Law on Execution of Sanctions; Law on Secondary Education; Law on Higher Education; Law on Citizens’ Associations and Foundations; Law on Political Parties; Law on Internal Affairs; Law on Local Elections; Law on Inheritance; Family Law; Law on Culture; Law on Broadcasting Activity.

15 Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 66/06 of 29.5.2006. Available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/ZEM.pdf> Accessed on: 24.09.2017.

of this principle. “The law deals with the prevention of unequal treatment of women and men and the creation of conditions for introducing equal participation of women and men in all spheres of social life, primarily in the fields of politics, economics, education, social areas, etc.; it also includes the aspect of removing potentially existent discriminatory behavior”¹⁶. The law prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender in several sections and therefore precisely defines the notion of discrimination in Article 4 as “any discrimination, exploitation or restriction on grounds of gender that endangers or disables the exercise or the protection of human rights and freedoms, in both the public and private sector, in the fields of employment and labor, education, social security, culture and sports”¹⁷. According to this law, the absence of any form of discrimination is considered to ensure equal treatment between women and men, which is a too narrow determination of equal treatment and it is unlikely that it can lead to the establishment of gender equality in practice. During that period, the second National Action Plan for Gender Equality for the period between 2007 and 2012 was adopted. The following years were dedicated to the implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities and the establishment of mechanisms on a national and local level with the aim of promoting equal opportunities for women and men.

The current Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men was adopted in 2012. What makes this Law different from the old one is the emphasis on the establishment of equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men as the subject matter of the law. Experience has shown that the 2006 Law did not precisely determine the establishment of equal opportunities. Thus, Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Law on Equal Opportunities of 2012 reads as follows: “The establishment of equal opportunities for women and men shall be regulated by this and another law that regulate the issues of interest for the equal opportunities for women and men in the field of health protection and health insurance, social protection, access to goods and services, economy, labor relations and employment, education and professional development, economic and proprietary relations, use of public products and services (consumer rights), culture and sport, information and communication technologies, defense and security, judiciary and administration, housing, public information and media, state and public administration and other spheres of the social life.”¹⁸ What the legislator defined in 2006 as “an obligation” of the whole society (the establishment of equal opportunities), was re-phrased in 2012 as “a concern” of the whole society, that is, of all subjects in the public and private sector. A separate chapter in this law is dedicated to the application of the Law, and the stated “Entities that establish equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men shall be the bodies of the legislative, executive and judiciary authority, the local self-government units and other bodies and organizations of the public and private sector, public enterprises, political parties, mass media and civil sector, and all the entities providing goods and services available to the public and offered outside the area of private and family life and the transactions carried out in that context, regardless whether the referred entity is part of the public or private sector”¹⁹ (Article 3, paragraph 2). The Law explicitly and extensively lists areas

16 Analysis of the level of implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Skopje, June 2011, p. 3. Available at: http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/analiza_zem.pdf, Accessed on 24.09.2017.

17 Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 66/06 of 29.05.2006. Available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/ZEM.pdf> Accessed on: 24.09.2017.

18 Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 6/2012 of 13.1.2012. Available at: http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/zem_2012.pdf Accessed on 24.09.2017. English translation available at: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/44b26f664.pdf> Accessed on: 31.03.2018.

19 Ibid.

where discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment on the basis of gender are prohibited. According to the Law and the principle of equal treatment, every citizen has the right to employment without any restrictions, particularly “...discrimination shall be also prohibited on the basis of marital status, family status, skin color, political or other belief, activity in unions, ethnicity or social status, disability, age, ownership, social or another status”²⁰ (Article 3, paragraph 6).

The definitions specified in this law also include the definition of discrimination on the basis of gender and it reads as follows: “Gender based discrimination is any differentiation, exclusion or limitation on grounds of gender, resulting in endangering or disabling the recognition, achievement or exercise of the human rights and the fundamental freedoms on the grounds of equality of women and men in the political, economic, social, cultural and civil or other sphere, regardless of their race, skin color, gender, belonging to a marginalized group, ethnicity, language, citizenship, social background, religion or religious belief, education, political belonging, personal or social status, mental and physical impediment, material condition, health condition or any other grounds”²¹ (Article 4). Furthermore, the same Article contains different definitions for direct and indirect discrimination, i.e. “Direct gender based discrimination is when a person has been treated, is treated or would be treated worse than another person in a similar situation, on grounds of the gender”²², while “Indirect gender based discrimination is when apparently neutral provision, criterion or customary law places people of one gender into a particularly unfavorable position compared with persons of the opposite gender, unless that provision, criterion or customary law is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary”²³. Article 4 of this Law offers some new definitions, such as: “Full equality of women and men is equal rights, opportunities, conditions and treatment in all spheres of the public and private life and absence of cultural, social, economic and political conditions producing disproportion of the power and unequal distribution of the social goods between women and men. Equitable representation is any percentile representation of particular gender which is not lower than the percentile representation of that gender in the total population. Mainstreaming of a gender perspective is the integration of the gender perspective in each phase of the process of building, adopting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies – at the same time, considering the promotion and improvement of the equality of women and men”²⁴. This law recognizes the concept of “gender mainstreaming” as a necessary tool for promoting equality in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as a strategy for establishing gender equality in our society, which is why it is precisely defined.

The types of measures for the establishment of equal opportunities for women and men are elaborated in detail in this Law. Thus, areas requiring the undertaking of basic, normative measures for achieving the principle of equal opportunities are mentioned separately, and the measures themselves are defined as “General measures for implementation of equal opportunities shall also be the measures for implementation of full equality between women and men, defined by the policies and programs for systematic promotion of the principle of equal opportunities for

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

women and men and respect for differences, for changing the social and cultural customs in terms of women's and men's behavior for elimination of prejudices, as well as any other practice based on the inferiority or superiority of the one or another gender or of the traditional social role of the men or of the women"²⁵ (Article 5, paragraph 2). These include measures that stipulate systemic involvement of both men and women in the process of creating, implementing and monitoring policies and budgets in specific social areas. In the part of basic measures, there are also those measures that, according to this Law, should be undertaken in the education and professional development in order to eliminate gender biases and stereotypes in the curricula, textbooks and education programs, and they should be the result of regular analysis of their contents. Special measures provided for in this Law are considered "...temporary measures undertaken for the purpose of overcoming an existing unfavorable social status of women and men, resulting from a systematic discrimination or structural gender inequality resulting from historical and socio-cultural circumstances"²⁶ (Article 7, paragraph 1). These measures are meant to provide "...equal starting positions for women and men, equal treatment, balanced participation or equal social status, development of individual potentials that contribute to social development and equal use of the benefits of the referred development"²⁷ (Article 7, paragraph 2). The Law provides different definitions on some of the special measures, and thus "...positive measures are measures whereby under equal conditions, priority is given to persons of the less represented gender until equal representation is reached or the aim for which the measures are undertaken is achieved"²⁸ (Article 7, paragraph 3).

The entities responsible for the adoption and implementation of measures for the establishment of equal opportunities for women and men, as well as their obligations, are quite extensively and precisely defined in this law. Therefore, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph 1 of the Law, "The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter: the Assembly) within the framework of its competences shall be responsible for the elimination of all forms of gender based discrimination and improvement of the social status of women, shall integrate the principle of equal opportunities for women and men in the legal initiatives, policies and programs; organize public debates and discussions concerning the matters in the field of equal opportunities for women and men; analyze and give opinions for the influence of the legal provisions on the status of women and men, require reports and documentation from the competent institutions within the scope of work and prepare and publish reports for its work"²⁹. In accordance with this Law, the Assembly is obliged establish the Strategy for Gender Equality, as well as to monitor its implementation, while the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is obliged to draft a proposal, which also has the competence to appoint "...a coordinator and a vice-coordinator for equal opportunities and shall monitor the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities for women and men in the strategic plans of the line ministries and the budgets that cooperate with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy"³⁰ (Article 10, paragraph 3). The Government also has an obligation to publish statistical data on the representation of women and men in the appointed functions and decision-making bodies, in management and governance. Another novelty in this Law as the Government's obligation is the establishment of an inter-ministerial consultative

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

and advisory group for equal opportunities for women and men, which should be composed of officials/managerial civil servants, representatives of civil society organizations, associations of employers, experts, representatives of the local self-government, trade unions and other entities, and which is working in coordination of the MLSP. The group "...shall be obliged to promote the concept for inclusion of the gender aspects in the general policies of all public institutions, to monitor the integration of the concept in the sector policies in cooperation with the social partners and institutions in particular fields, to monitor the progress of harmonization of the national legislation with the legislation of the European Union and to give directions in the process of preparation of the strategy for gender equality and to monitor the periodical reports from the institutions"³¹ (Article 10, paragraph 8).

According to this Law, state administrative bodies have specifically defined obligations, that is, they are obliged to work on the promotion of equal opportunities through implementation of general and special measures. "The state administrative bodies shall be obliged, within the framework of their strategic plans and budget, to incorporate the principle of equal opportunities for women and men, to monitor the effects and the impact of their programs on the women and men, and to provide information within their annual reports"³² (Article 11, paragraph 3). Furthermore, this law obliges the Equal Opportunities Coordinator to issue opinions and suggestions for promotion of equal opportunities within the competencies of the state body, as well as to publish the annual work report on the website of the state administration body, which should also be submitted to the MLSP.

The MLSP is obliged by this Law to publish the analysis, reports and other documents related to equal opportunities on the Ministry's website. The deadline for submitting the annual report on the undertaken activities and the progress achieved to the Government is every June as stipulated by this Law.

The Law binds the local self-government units to prepare an annual plan in which they will establish the general and special measures. "The units of the local self-government shall be obliged to incorporate the principle for equal opportunities of women and men in their strategic plans and budgets, to monitor the effects and impact of their programs on women and men, and to inform in their annual reports, and to participate in the preparation of the strategy for gender equality in the part referring to the units of the local self-government"³³ (Article 14, paragraph 2), and at the same time, "In the process of adopting the development plans and other acts and decisions, the bodies of the local self-government units shall be obliged to review and to take in consideration the measures and activities proposed by the Commission for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and the coordinator for equal opportunities for women and men"³⁴ (Article 14, paragraph 3). This article also envisages cooperation of the local self-government with employers' associations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and associations working in the field of equal opportunities in order to provide proposals and measures for the promotion of equal opportunities and establishment of gender equality at the local level.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

In paragraph 8 of Article 14, the duties and responsibilities of the coordinator for equal opportunities at the local level are specified in detail: "...promotion of the equal opportunities for women and men and non-discrimination within the framework of the competences of the local self-government unit, shall give proposals and opinions about the equal opportunities to the council of the local self-government unit and to the institutions and organizations at local level, shall prepare reports about the situation with the equal opportunities and nondiscrimination within the framework of the local self-government unit cooperating with the commission for equal opportunities for women and men within the framework of the council of the local self-government unit, and shall raise joint initiatives for promotion of the equal opportunities and non-discrimination, shall cooperate with the non-governmental organizations and the other institutions at local level regarding issues of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, shall monitor the situation with the equal opportunities at local level, and shall propose initiatives for taking measures for improvement of the situation with the equal opportunities and nondiscrimination, and shall coordinate and cooperate with the Ministry in fulfilling his/her tasks".³⁵ The coordinator is obliged to at least once a year, to submit a report on his/her work to the MLSP and to publish the submitted report on the municipality's website.

Article 16 of the Law stipulates that "The political parties in their acts shall regulate the manner and measures for the promotion of the equal participation of women and men in the bodies and organs of the parties".³⁶

Article 17 of this Law which refers to the means for broadcasting public information states that "The Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Macedonia, within the framework of its competences, shall monitor the manner of broadcasting and presenting the women and men in the program concepts and contents and shall submit a report to the Assembly once a year"³⁷ (Article 17, paragraph 3). This Council has to prepare annual analysis related to gender issues in programs and contents of public broadcasting, which will also be submitted to the Assembly for review and adoption and will be published on their website for the general public.

In accordance with this law, all stakeholders are responsible for collecting and displaying statistically segregated and gender-segregated data and should submit them to the State Statistical Office.

The inability to adopt a National Action Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men over the six years during which the old Equal Opportunities Law (2006 - 2012) was in force, led to changes in the format of this document and it is has been envisaged in the current law as a Strategy for Gender Equality. This strategy is foreseen to be carried out in a period of eight years and, apart from the analysis of the situation, it should include the guidelines and measures for achieving the goals in different areas of social life; the content, the competent authorities and the responsible persons for its implementation; the necessary gender-segregated data; the methods for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the strategy, the necessary means for implementing the strategy, as well as the sources and ways of their provision.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

Regarding legal protection, the Law provides for a legal representative who, together with the Ombudsman, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, and the competent court are obliged to protect the right to equal treatment of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, who, in case of violation of this right, can file a complaint. “A complaint may be filed by any legal entity or natural person, personally or through an attorney-in-fact, in writing, orally to the minutes or in another form, by fax, or by e-mail”³⁸ (Article 22, paragraph 1), and it shall be free of charge, while the citizen is obliged to file the complaint within six months of the day of violation of the right, i.e. after one year at the latest. If the complaint itself contains ambiguities, insufficient facts and evidence, the legal representative is obliged to request clarification and amendment from the applicant, and if the representative finds that there is no violation of the right, if the deadline for submission is past due, if the complaint is anonymous, or if a procedure has already been initiated before a competent court or a final verdict has been reached, the legal representative shall not initiate a procedure and shall inform the applicant within 15 days. It is within the legal representative’s competence to determine the fact situation by taking statements from all involved parties in the case, and in case of initiating a procedure, the filed complaint is also submitted to the person against whom it was filed, so that he/she can plead/issue a statement according to the evidence. “The legal entities and natural persons shall be obliged, upon a request of the representative, to submit the data they have at their disposal about particular cases of discrimination, as well as to allow direct inspection of the documentation within a period of 30 days as of the submission of the request”³⁹ (Article 27). Based on the entire documentation, the legal representative draws up an opinion on the (non-)existence of unequal treatment on the basis of gender and, if a violation has been confirmed, recommends ways for its elimination. This opinion, apart from being submitted to the persons involved in the whole procedure, is also submitted to the MLSP, and “The person to whom the recommendation is addressed shall be obliged to act upon it and to eliminate the violation of the right within a period of 30 days as of the receipt of the opinion and notify the representative thereof”⁴⁰ (Article 29, paragraph 4). If he/she fails to act upon the representative’s recommendation, the representative has the right to initiate proceedings before competent courts. The legal representative also has the obligation to prepare annual reports containing all of his work and to submit them to the competent institutions and to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, where they will be published on the website.

Significant progress in promoting and protecting equal opportunities through a more complex approach to these issues has been additionally achieved with the adoption of the **Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination**, which is a complete legal framework for protection against discrimination on various grounds. The Law aims to provide measures and activities for the prevention of discrimination, but also establishes appropriate mechanisms and remedies for discrimination on various grounds. Therefore, this Law is a particularly important tool in tackling double and multiple discrimination that women, in particular, are confronted with as a result of the intersection of gender with other identities.⁴¹

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Article 3 of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination stipulates that: “Any direct or indirect discrimination, invocation and stimulation of discrimination and helping in discriminatory treatment on the grounds of sex, race, skin color, gender, belonging to marginalized group, ethnic origin, language, citizenship, social origin, religion or confession, other types of belief, education, political belonging, personal or social status, mental and physical disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health condition or on any other grounds established by the law or by ratified international agreements (hereinafter: discriminatory basis).”

In reference to the economic empowerment of women, the reduction of poverty, and the high rate of unemployment among the female population, the provisions that are included in the Law on Labor Relations are of great importance. This Law requires that the employer must not place the job seeker or employee in an unequal position on the basis of a number of criteria, including gender. At the same time, Article 6, paragraph 2 states that «women and men must be afforded equal opportunities and equal treatment in relation to: “1) access to employment, including promotion and vocational and professional training; 2) working conditions; 3) equal pay for equal work; 4) professional social security program; 5) absence from work; 6) working hours and 7) cancellation of the employment contract”.⁴² A separate chapter in this Law stipulates that there must be gender equality when publishing vacancies, that is, “the employer must not publish the vacancy only for men or only for women, unless the specified gender is a necessary condition for performing work” (Article 24, paragraph 1), and “the publication of the vacancy may not suggest that the employer gives an advantage to a particular gender in employment, with the exception of paragraph (1) of this Article” (Article 24, paragraph 2).⁴³ The protection of women in the reproductive period, which is regulated by this Law, refers to the prohibition of dismissal due to pregnancy, birth and parenthood in accordance with Article 101, paragraph 1, which reads as follows: “The employer must not terminate the employment contract of the employee during pregnancy, parenting and leave for care and custody of children”.⁴⁴ Ensuring equal conditions implies equal pay irrespective of gender, and Article 108 paragraph 1 stipulates that “The employer is obliged to pay equal pay to workers regardless of gender in equal work with equal requirements in the workplace”.⁴⁵ In this way and by obliging to this provision, the gender pay gap in the Republic of Macedonia could be greatly reduced. This Law prohibits working longer than full-time and explicitly forbids the employer to impose overtime to “female employees, in accordance with the provisions of this Law, for the purpose of protecting pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood; to a mother with a child up to three years of age and a single parent of a child up to six years of age, unless the employee has given a written statement that he voluntarily agrees with overtime”⁴⁶ (Article 120, paragraphs 2 and 3). According to this Law, the woman is protected in the reproductive period, so “employees, due to pregnancy and parenthood, have the right to special protection in the employment relationship” (Article 161 paragraph 1), i.e. “the employer is obliged to enable workers to more easily reconcile family and professional obligations”⁴⁷ (Article 161 paragraph 2). In addition, women receive some form of protection during pregnancy and after delivery, and thus “during pregnancy and one year after delivery, the employee shall not perform work if it imposes any danger to her health or the health of the child”⁴⁸ (Article 162 paragraph 1). In the separate section dedicated specifically to protection during pregnancy, it is stipulated that “the employer must not require any data on the pregnancy of the worker, unless she herself presents them for the purpose of exercising the rights during pregnancy” (Article 163, paragraph 1), and at the same time, “if the employee performs a work which during her pregnancy can have a detrimental effect on her health or the health of the child, the employer is obliged

42 Law on Labor Relations, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 74/15, Available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/ZRO%20Precisten%2074-15.pdf> Accessed on: 07.11.2917.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

to provide her with other appropriate work and salary, as if she had completed her job, if it is in her favour"⁴⁹ (Article 163, paragraph 2). During pregnancy and parenthood, the woman should be protected from night shifts and overtime, and the same are strictly forbidden during pregnancy or for mothers with children up to one year. An employee who has a child of one to three years of age may be ordered to perform overtime or work nights, only upon prior written consent"⁵⁰ (Article 164, paragraph 2). This right is transferred to the father of the child in case the child's mother is found incapable of caring for the child on her own, has abandoned the child or is deceased. One of the most important provisions in this Law, for women in the reproductive period, is the regulation of maternity leave. Article 165, paragraph 1 stipulates that "an employee during pregnancy, birth and parenthood has the right to a paid work leave for a continuous period of nine months, and if she gives birth to more children at once (twins, triplets and more), for up to 15 months"⁵¹. Article 171 protects the nursing mother by determining "that the employee who is breastfeeding the child after the expiration of the absence due to pregnancy, birth and parenthood will begin to work full time, but has the right to a paid break during the working hours for a duration of one and half an hour a day, a period of time which includes the daily break. The employee can exercise that right until the child is one year of age"⁵². By Prohibiting gender inequality, the Law on Labor Relations advocates equal opportunities and equal treatment in the field of labor relations, as well as ensuring equal conditions and equal pay regardless of gender, and also, to a great extent, protects women in various ways during the reproductive period, and provides them with formally guaranteed rights.

The Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence⁵³ is aimed at respecting human rights and freedoms, life, personal integrity, non-discrimination and the establishment of gender equality. This Law regulates the responsibility of institutions and associations, their mutual coordination and cooperation in order to prevent and eliminate domestic violence and provide protection to its victims. According to the Law, a National Coordinative Body against Domestic Violence has been established, consisting of competent institutions (MLSP, MJ, MH, Mol, MES), MPs from the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, the judicial system, the Ombudsman and civil society organizations.

According to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, the term "domestic violence" involves mistreatment, insulting, endangering security, bodily harm, sexual or other psychological, physical or economic abuse that causes a feeling of insecurity, endangerment or fear, including threats to such actions to spouse, parents or children or other persons living in a marital or extra-marital union or a common household, as well as to a current or former spouse, a partner or persons who have a child together or are in close personal relationships, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.⁵⁴ Competent bodies for prevention of domestic violence are: the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Justice, the units of the local self-government, the institutions that perform activities in the field of social protection, child protection,

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, "Official Gazette of RM", No. 138/14

54 <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/ZAKon%20za%20prevencija%20semejNo.pdf>

internal affairs, health, employment and education. All of these are obliged to undertake measures for the protection of the victim and prevention of violence, as well as to establish and maintain collaboration and coordination.

The victim has the right to assistance, support and protection from domestic violence, as well as to be informed by the competent persons about their rights, protection measures and procedures for their realization, and the available assistance and protection services.

The Center for Social Work undertakes the following measures for the protection of victims:

- 1) Accommodation in a center for victims of domestic violence;
- 2) Adequate healthcare;
- 3) Appropriate psycho-social intervention and treatment;
- 4) Psycho-social treatment at a counseling office;
- 5) Assistance to the family for the regular schooling of a child;
- 6) Legal assistance and representation, and
- 7) Economic strengthening of victims through their active inclusion in the labor market.

In cases of known endangerment of the life and health of the victim and family members, as well as when a child is a victim of domestic violence, a security plan for assistance is developed by a multi-sectoral expert team, the social work center, the police and health institution from the Center's area of competences. Representatives of associations working in the field of domestic violence, who can propose and implement measures and activities from the security plan for assistance to victims, participate in the work of the multi-sectoral expert team. Legal assistance is provided by the professionals in the Center for Social Work and in the associations. The right to free legal aid is realized by the victim in accordance with the Law on Free Legal Aid.⁵⁵ The Center for Social Work also provides the victim with the right to social and health protection in accordance with the law.

An amendment to the Law was made as an additional protection against abuse of positions of officials, according to which, whenever the Center for Social Work becomes aware that the domestic violence has been committed by a person who possesses firearms, shall immediately inform and, at the latest within 24 hours, shall submit a written notification to the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the institution or legal entity in which the person is employed.

Whenever a police officer receives a complaint about domestic violence, he/she is obliged to go to the scene and immediately prepare a police report, and within 12 hours at the latest of the intervention at the scene, shall also notify the relevant Center for Social Work.

55 Law on Free Legal Aid – Consolidated text (in Macedonian), "Official Gazette of RM", No. 161/09 and 185/11. Available at: <http://pravda.gov.mk/documents> English translation available at: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/54edf00d4.pdf>

The law also provides for health examinations and other medical treatment to be free of charge for the victim, for which appropriate medical documentation for the identified violation shall be issued. Furthermore, the Law also provides for a different type of temporary protection measures, i.e. removal of the perpetrator from the home and he/she is prohibited from approaching the home at least 10 and up to 30 days at the most; prohibition to threaten to commit domestic violence; prohibition to harass, disturb, telephone, contact or otherwise communicate with a family member, directly or indirectly; prohibition to approach to less than 100 meters of the place of residence, school, workplace or a certain location which is regularly visited by another member of the family; removal from home regardless of ownership, prohibition to possess firearms or other weapons or confiscated the firearms or other weapons; perpetrator is obliged to return the objects necessary for satisfying the everyday needs of the family; compulsory legal support to the family; it is mandatory for the perpetrator to be admitted to an appropriate counseling center; compulsory treatment of the perpetrator if he abuses alcohol, drugs and other psychotropic substances or has a mental illness; the perpetrator is obliged to reimburse medical and other expenses incurred from domestic violence and courts should pronounce any other measure considered necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of other family members.

EDUCATION

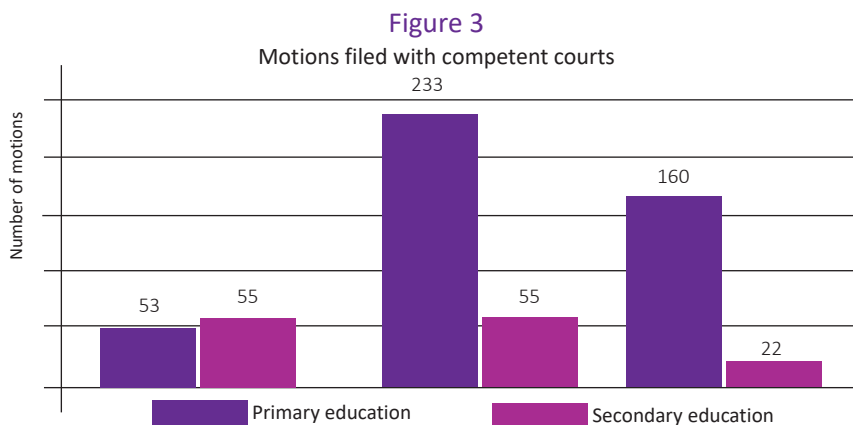
Education is an important factor contributing to a gender-equitable society based on equal opportunities and gender-balanced norms and practices. It is one of the instruments for raising people's awareness of their position in society, as well as of the rights and obligations that arise from state legislation. Being properly informed about gender issues can change their lives, and at the same time, it represents an initial step towards eliminating gender inequality.

Pursuant to Article 5 of the Law on Primary Education, "the parent, that is, the guardian of the student is obliged to enable his/her child to fulfill the obligation for compulsory primary education and upbringing"⁵⁶. In the same Law, Article 172 foresees finable offenses for the parent of the student if he/she fails to fulfill the requirements for enrollment and regular attendance: (4) A fine in the amount of 60 to 80 euros in denar counter-value shall be imposed for a misdemeanor to the parent, or guardian, if the student is not enrolled within the deadline determined in Article 47 paragraph (1) of this Law; (5) A fine in the amount of 80 to 100 euros in denar counter-value shall be imposed on the parent or the guardian for a misdemeanor if he/she does not appear on the determined date for counseling after the second sent invitation (Article 64-a, paragraph (2)); (6) A fine in the amount of 200 to 280 euros in denar counter-value shall be imposed on the parent or the guardian for a misdemeanor, if he/she does not appear on the determined date for counseling after the third invitation (Article 64-a paragraph (2)) ; (7) A fine in the amount of 300 to 400 euros in denar counter-value shall be imposed on the parent or the guardian for a misdemeanor if he/she does not allow his child to fulfill the obligation for compulsory primary education and upbringing (Article 5); (8) For each subsequent repetition of the misdemeanors referred to in paragraphs (1) to (7) of this Article, a fine double the amount shall be imposed in the current school year. Pursuant to Article 3, paragraph 1 of the Law on Secondary Education, "Secondary education is obligatory for every citizen, under equal conditions determined by this Law"⁵⁷. In the same Law, Article 109 provides for finable offenses for the student's parent if he/she does not fulfill the obligations for enrollment and regular attendance: (1) A fine in the amount of 600 to 800 euros in denar counter-value for a misdemeanor shall be imposed on the parent or the guardian of the juvenile student if the student is not enrolled in a secondary school or is not regularly attending school (Article 3 paragraph (1)); an amount of 80 to 100 euros in denar counter-value shall be imposed on the parent or the guardian for a misdemeanor if he/she does not appear on the determined date for counseling after the second invitation (Article 58-a paragraph (2)); (10) Fine in the amount of 200 to 280 euros in denar counter-value will be imposed on the parent or the guardian if he/she does not appear on the determined date for counseling after the third invitation (Article 58-a paragraph (2)); (11) For every subsequent repetition of the misdemeanors referred to in paragraphs (1) to (10) of this article, a fine in double the amount shall be imposed in the current school year.

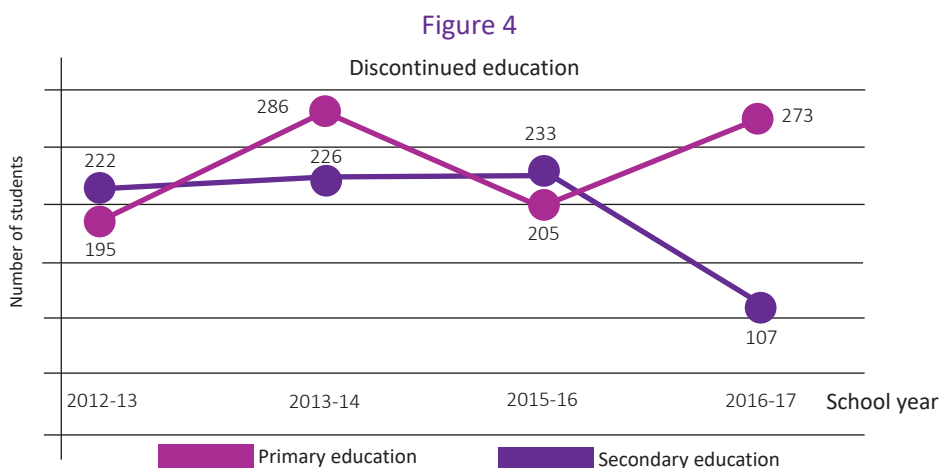
56 Law on Primary Education: "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017.

57 Law on Secondary Education: "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 44/1995, 24/1996, 34/1996, 35/1997, 82/1999, 29/2002, 40/2003, 42/2003, 67/2004, 55/2005, 113/2005, 35/2006, 30/2007, 49/2007, 81/2008, 92/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017.

The data obtained from the State Education Inspectorate for the purposes of this research shows that in the last three years, based on the above-mentioned grounds, it has filed a total of 578 motions with the competent courts against parents. Figure 3 given below contains the details of the number of motions by year and level of education.



The information provided in the Sixth Periodic Report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in Article 10, Education – Response to Recommendation No. 30 (a) (b) (c) of the Committee, point 121, states that “the rate of early school dropout is gradually declining and the rate of completion of higher education is on the rise”⁵⁸. However, if we look at the data in the same Report given under point 131,⁵⁹ referring to the “Women and Men in Macedonia” publication from 2015, as well as the data given in the publication “Women and Men in Macedonia” publication from 2017,⁶⁰ summarized in Figure 4, an increase in the number of students who drop out of school, especially during primary education, can be noticed, while that figure in this period, decreases with students in secondary education.



58 Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2017, p. 26.

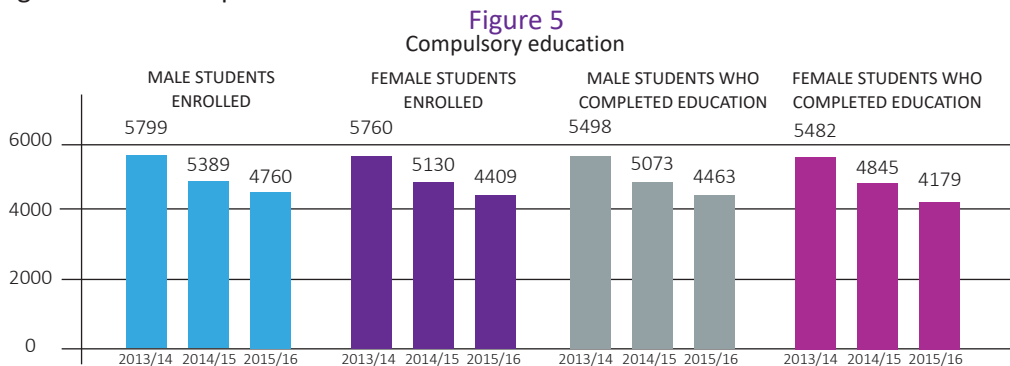
59 Ibid., p. 28.

60 “Women and Men in Macedonia”, 2017, State Statistical Office, Skopje, p. 42, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/Gender2017.pdf>

Rural families live relatively far from public schools, and girls' trip to schools in the nearest township further burdens the family budget and, at the same time, exposes girls to the risks of potential violence. Primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia is mandatory, although the Law on Primary Education⁶¹ and the Law on Secondary Education⁶² provide free transportation for students, and the state informs that "in the course of 2015, the Ministry of Education has taken measures that enable mobility in education (accommodation, transportation and financial means), in order to allow choice of education according to affinity, and not according to the place of residence"⁶³, we can still witness the media constantly informing⁶⁴ that this does not always work in practice because, in some municipalities, there is no organized student transportation from rural areas to towns or cities.

In order to obtain correct statistics on how many girls enroll in and complete compulsory education in relation to boys, and how many girls leave the educational process, a request for access to public records was sent to the Ministry of Education and Science regarding the target municipalities, and the response we received reads as follows: "...with the decentralization process from 2005, primary and secondary schools are under the jurisdiction of the municipalities"⁶⁵ and we were advised to request data from the municipalities directly. To this end, requests were sent to 15 target municipalities for access to public records, and by the end of the preparation of this analysis, we received 11 answers.

The obtained answers which are graphically shown in Figure 5, it can be noted that in the target regions, in the schools that delivered data from the past three years, the number of male students enrolling and completing compulsory (primary and secondary) education is higher. Unfortunately, not all schools have sent the requested sex-disaggregated data⁶⁶. It can be concluded that in order to obtain adequate gender statistics, the MES should oblige all schools to collect and to process data on the basis of sex, so that appropriate gender analyzes can be conducted and gender-sensitive policies can be created.



61 Article 61 (1) The student shall have the right to a free transport if the place of residence is at a distance of at least two kilometers from the nearest primary school.

62 Article 41-a (2) The student referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article shall have the right to free transport if the place of residence is at a distance of at least 2.5 kilometers from the secondary school in which the student is enrolled and attends school and if the chosen profession and profile are not included in the municipality in which the student lives. (3) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) of this article, if there are no available enrolment spots in the school or the schools in the municipality, the student has the right to free transport to the public secondary school in another municipality in which the student is enrolled, if the place of residence is at a distance of at least 2.5 kilometers and if the student attend classes.

63 Sixth periodic report on the Convention for Elimination of all of All Forms of Discrimination, 2017, p. 27.

64 Some of the media reports on these cases are available at: <http://mkd-news.com/detsa-za-ordenpeshachat-na-20-sekoj-den-po-4-km/>

65 Ministry of Education and Science, Response to the Request No. 12-8734/2 of 03.08.2017.

66 The Figure does not contain school data that were not disaggregated by sex.

Regarding female students who abandoned compulsory education, we obtained the following data from the municipalities who responded to our requests:

The Municipality of Valandovo informed us that in the past three years, a total of 33 girls have dropped out: from the “Straso Pindzur” MPS – Josifovo, 2 girls (one from the Macedonian and one from the Turkish ethnic community) dropped out in the 2015/2016 school year due moving abroad; from the “Josip Broz Tito” MPS, in the 2013/2014 school year, a total of 7 girls (one from the Turkish and six from the Macedonian ethnic community) dropped out due to going abroad or enrolling in another school; in the 2014/2015 school year, 7 girls (one Roma and six from the Turkish ethnic community), all due to moving abroad; in the 2015/2016 school year, 4 girls have dropped out, all from the Macedonian ethnic group, due to moving abroad or enrolling in another school; from the “Goce Delcev” MSS, in the 2013/2014 school year, 4 girls have dropped out (ethnicity is not listed for all students, and thus specific information about the ethnicity of the dropouts cannot be obtained); in the 2014/2015 school year a total of 4 girls have dropped out (ethnicity is not listed for all students, and thus specific information about the ethnicity of the dropouts cannot be obtained); in the 2015/2016 school year, a total of 5 girls have dropped out (ethnicity is not listed for all students, and thus specific information about the ethnicity of the dropouts cannot be obtained); Regarding the reasons for the student dropouts from this school, we received general data, such as going abroad, enrolling in another school, removing from or leaving the school, which are not sex-disaggregated. This makes it impossible to obtain specific information on the reasons why girls have dropped out of the school.

The Municipality of Stip notified us that, in the past three years, a total of 18 girls with a place of residence in the municipality of Karbinci dropped out of school: from the “Dimitar Mirasciev”

MSS school, in the 2014/2015 school year, a total of 7 girls were dropped out (one from Macedonian, three from Roma and three from the Turkish ethnic community); in the 2015/2016 school year, a total of 6 girls have dropped out (two Roma and four from the Turkish ethnic community); the reason for dropping from this school were indicated as follows: lack of interest in attending classes by students and their parents, juvenile marriages, enrolling in another school, going abroad, but without specific number of girls who have dropped out according to the reasons stated; from the “Kole Nehtenin” MSS, in the 2013/2014 school year, 1 girl from the Macedonian ethnic community dropped out due to transfer to part-time education; in the academic year 2015/2016, a total of 4 girls (three from the Turkish and one from the Macedonian ethnic community) dropped out and voluntarily terminated their education.

The Municipality of Strumica informed us that, in the past three years, a total of 13 girls with a place of residence in Novo Selo dropped out of the “Dimitar Vlahov” MSSD, as follows: 3 girls were dropped out in the school year 2013, all because of moving abroad; in the 2014/2015 school year, one female student dropped out because of moving abroad, and in the 2015/2016 school year, 9 girls have dropped out, 6 of them because of moving abroad, and 3 because of marrying. According to the given data, the girls who got married left the school in the second and third year. All students are from the Macedonian ethnic community.

The Municipality of Cesinovo-Oblesevo notified us that, in the past three years, a total of 9 girls residing in this municipality dropped out of school as follows: from the “Kliment Ohridski” MPS – Oblesevo, 2 girls have dropped out in the 2013/2014 school year; 4 girls the 2014/2015 school year; 2 girls in the 2015/2016 school year. All the girls are from the Macedonian ethnic community, but unfortunately, the letter does not list the reasons why these girls left school; from the “Straso Pindzur” MPS, v. Sokolarci report that there are no girls have dropped out of the school in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, while in the 2015/2016 school year, only one girl from the Macedonian ethnic community dropped out due to moving.

The Municipality of Delcevo informed us that, in the past three years, a total of 20 dropped out of school as follows: from the “Metodi Mitevski Brico” MSS, in the 2013/2014 school year there were no female dropouts, while in the 2014/2015 school year one girl from the Macedonian ethnic community dropped out, and in the year 2015/2016 – two girls, one of the Macedonian and one of the Roma ethnic community; unfortunately, the letter does not list the reasons why these girls left the school; from the “Vanco Prke” MPS, in the 2013/2014 school year, a total of 5 girls have dropped out, four of the Macedonian and one Roma ethnic community; in the 2014/2015 school year – 7 girls, four from the Macedonian and three from the Roma ethnic community, and in the 2015/2016 school year – 5 girls, four from Macedonian and one from the Roma ethnic community; unfortunately, the letter does not list the reasons why these girls left school; The “St. Kliment Ohridski” MPS reported that they do not have data on students who have dropped out of this school.

The Municipality of Kocani informs that in the past three years, a total of 4 girls have dropped out of school: from the “Ljupco Santov” MPS, according to data in the correspondence, there are no dropouts, while in the “Gjoso Vikentiev” MSS, in the 2013/2014 school year, 2 girls have dropped out, and in the school years 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 – one girl. The reasons stated for dropping out of this school are: enrolling in another school, removing and enrolling part-time studies, but without specifying or linking the sex of the students with the specific reason for dropping out.

The Municipality of Radovis reported that, in the past three years, a total of 197 dropped out: 2 girls of the “Kosta Racin” MPS – Podares, in the 2013/2014 school year; in the 2014/2015 school year – 2 girls; and in the 2015/2016 school year – 2 girls, all of the Macedonian ethnic community and all because of moving abroad; from the “Krste P. Misirkov” MPS, in the 2013/2014 school year, 20 students dropped out, 2 of whom from the Macedonian ethnic community due to a change of the place of residence, and 18 of whom from the Turkish ethnic community due to asylum or voluntary leave; in the 2014/2015 school year – 60 girls, 4 of whom are Macedonian and 56 of whom are from the Turkish ethnic community, due to asylum, a change of place of residence or voluntary leave; in the 2015/2016 school year, 23 girls have dropped out, 2 of whom from Macedonian and 21 from the Turkish ethnic community, as a result of asylum, change of place of residence and moving abroad; from the “Nikola Karev” MPS, 6 girls have dropped out in the school year 2013/2014, 2 from Macedonian and 4 from the Turkish ethnic community; 18 girls in the school year 2014/2015, 6 from the Macedonian and 12 from the Turkish ethnic community; 13 girls in the academic year 2015/2016, 7 from Macedonian and 6 from the Turkish ethnic community. All students have dropped out of this school as a result of asylum, changing their place of residence, moving abroad or transferring to another school;

from the “Orce Nikolov” MPS, v. Injevo, 5 girls have dropped out in the 2013/2014 school year, all of the Macedonian ethnic community, 13 girls have dropped out in the 2014/2015 school year, 11 of whom from Macedonian and 2 from the Turkish ethnic community, 15 girls in the 2015/2016 school year. 14 of whom from Macedonian and 1 from Turkish ethnic community; all the girls have dropped out due to moving abroad; from the “Kosta Susinov” MSS, 9 girls have dropped out in the 2013/2014 school year, one of which was expelled and 8 had left the school; in the 2014/2015 school year – 3 girls, while in the 2015/2016 school year – 6 girls, but unfortunately, the data provided in the letter does not specify the ethnicity of the students.

The Municipality of Ohrid informed us that, in the past three years, 27 girls have been dropped out of school: from “Vanco Pitosheski” MSCT, Ohrid, in the 2013/2014 school year, 5 girls have dropped out girls, all of whom are from the Macedonian ethnic community; in the 2014/2015 school year – 3 girls, all from the Macedonian ethnic community; in the 2015/2016 school year – 3 girls, all from the Macedonian ethnic community; unfortunately, the letter does not specify the reasons for the dropouts; from “St. Cyril and Methodius” MSVS notified us that, in the past 2 years (the school as a legal entity exists from September 1, 2014) there are no students who have dropped out of the school; from “St. Naum Ohridski” MSCE, 1 girl dropped out in the 2013/2014 school year; in the 2014/2015 school year – 4 girls, one from the Macedonian and the Turkish ethnic community, and two from the Roma ethnic community; in the 2015/2016 school year – 5 girls, two from the Macedonian and 3 from the Roma ethnic community; the letter gives the following reasons: switching to part-time school, enrolling to another school and going abroad, but unfortunately, these data are not disaggregated by sex, and they cannot be considered as useful in terms of dropouts; from “St. Kliment Ohridski” MSVS in the 2013/2014 school year, 3 girls have dropped out from the Macedonian ethnic community; in the 2014/2015 school year – 3 girls from the Macedonian ethnic community; the letter does not provide data for the 2015/2016 school year, as well as the reasons for the dropouts.

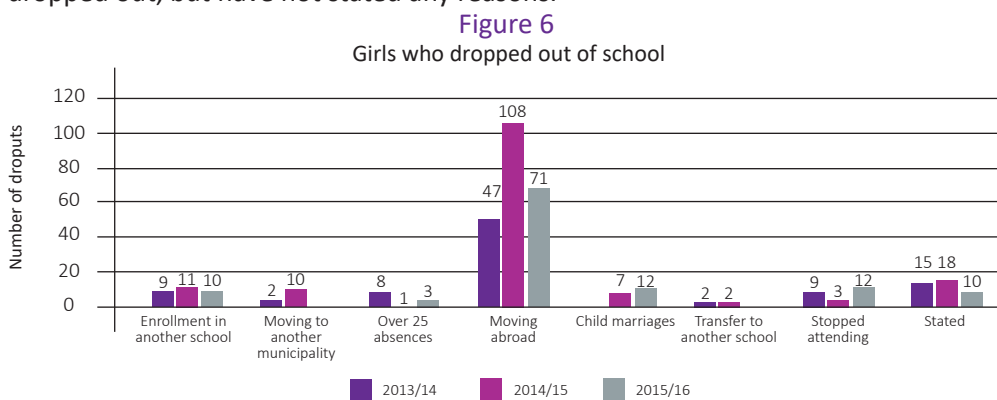
The Municipality of Konce informed us that, in the past three years, 16 girls have dropped out as follows: in the 2013/2014 school year, 2 girls from the Macedonian ethnic community dropped out of the school in this municipality due to moving to another place of residence; in the 2014/2015 school year, 7 girls from the Macedonian ethnic community dropped out because of moving to another place of residence, and 3 girls from the Turkish ethnic community for seeking asylum in another country; in the 2015/2016 school year – 3 girls from a Macedonian ethnic community and 1 girl from the Turkish ethnic community due to transfer to another school in another municipality.

The Municipality of Karbinci reported that, in the past three years, a total of 3 girls have dropped out: in the school year 2013/201, there were no dropouts; in the 2014/2015 school year, 1 girl from the Turkish ethnic community dropped out of the school, while in the 2015/2016 school year – 2 girls from the Turkish ethnic community. According to the letter, the reason for the dropouts is transferring to another school.

The Municipality of Kicevo informed us, that in the past three years, 12 girls have dropped out: 8 girls with a place of residence in the municipality of Plasnica in the 2013/2014 school year; in the 2014/2015 school year – 1 girl, while in the 2015/2016

school year – 3 girls. All girls who stopped their education are from the Turkish ethnic community and it is stated that each one had over 25 unjustified absences.

If we look at the data from the above-mentioned areas, we see that in three years, a total of 352 girls have stopped compulsory education on various grounds. These figures summarized in Figure 6 show that the highest number of girls dropped out in the 2014/2015 school year due to moving abroad, but it remains unclear as to what the specific reason is for having over 25 unjustified absences and dropping out of school, abandoning education, and what the specific reason is for all those girls who dropped out, but have not stated any reasons.



In order to obtain additional qualitative data, a questionnaire was sent to a total of 60 primary and secondary schools in the target regions, whereby data from a total of 27 schools were received, of which 12 schools notified us that girls regularly attend compulsory education in the target municipalities, i.e. there were no cases of girls who stopped their compulsory education at their school. The remaining schools, divided by target regions, provided us with the following information:

Polog Region:

From “Gojce Stojceski” MSVS, Municipality of Tetovo, we were informed that the girls from the municipalities of Brvenica, Vrapciste, Jegunovce, and Tearce who are enrolled in this school regularly attend compulsory education. However, in the past 3 years, 20 girls from the Albanian ethnic community, aged 15 to 18, from the above-mentioned municipalities have left education due to moving abroad with their families. The school considers that the immigration should be averted and that any departure from compulsory education affects the girls’ lives negatively.

From “8 September” MSES, Municipality of Tetovo, we were informed that girls from the municipalities of Brvenica, Vrapciste, Jegunovce, and Tearce who are enrolled in this school regularly attend compulsory education. However, in the past 3 years, 13 girls from the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities, aged between 15 and 18, have dropped out of school due to moving abroad, transferring to another school, personal reasons and getting married. The school considers that the disruption of education affects the girls negatively and that actions should be taken to prevent the migration of families abroad by ensuring work opportunities for the youth in the country.

Eastern Region:

The “Straso Pindzur” MPS, the Village of Sokolarci, the Municipality of Cesinovo – Obleshevo, informed us that there is only one case of a girl, the daughter of a single father who had had interruptions in her education, but after the school’s insistence and following the recommendations from the State Education Inspectorate – Kocani, she returned to school again. They also notified us that, this school year, the student regularly attends compulsory education.

The “Sinisa Stoilov” PS in the municipality of Zrnovci reported that, in the 2013/2014 school year, only 2 girls have dropped out due to moving abroad, while in the other years considered in this research, no girls from the school have abandoned education.

The “Vancho Prke” MPS, the Municipality of Delchevo, informed that in the last 3 years there have been 3 cases of girls of Roma nationality, aged 12 to 14, who have discontinued their compulsory education due to getting married. The school considers that the consequences of the disruption of education are: no opportunities for adequate employment, the girls are not socialized and face more serious problems at a young age, but have no experience in dealing with them. According to them, through advisory talks with the girls’ families, conducting workshops organized by non-governmental organizations on the topic of early marriage, and informing parents about the importance of their children’s education can influence the girls’ decision and stop them from abandoning compulsory education.

The «Dimitar Mirasciev» MSS, the Municipality of Stip, informed us that, in the 2015/2016 school year, 2 girls were enrolled in the first year in the Municipality of Karbinci who attended class irregularly, 3 girls were enrolled in the 2016/2017 school year, of whom 1 girl attended classes regularly, 1 girl went to another school, and 1 girl did not attend school regularly, and in the school year 2017/2018, 4 girls were enrolled and all of them attended classes regularly. The school stated that the reasons for not attending classes are of a personal nature or, as they say, students were disinterested in attending classes, due to which actions were undertaken to impose pedagogical measures, and the parents were invited to the school, but unfortunately, did not respond to the invite. In this school, in the last 3 years, there have been 2 cases of abandonment of education by girls from the Turkish ethnic community, aged 15 to 18. That reportedly happened because of lack of interest by the students and their parents for attending classes, insufficient information, and education. The school considers that leaving education affects the girls’ lives negatively because it limits their opportunities for equal participation in society and further influences the increase in juvenile marriages. According to them, properly educating girls at the youngest age about the importance, significance and impact of completed secondary education on their quality of life in the future, as well as the appropriate education of the parents for their significant role in the development and education of their children, can have an impact on girls and stop them from leaving education.

The “Slavcho Stojmenski” MSS, Municipality of Stip reported that, in the last three years, there were no cases of female students leaving the school from the municipality of Karbinci, but such cases occurred in the previous years, when 15 or 16-year-old girls from the Turkish ethnic community abandoned education due to one, most common reason – arranged marriages. According to the school, the traditional be-

liefs of parents, as well as making differences between children based on sex, affect this negative phenomenon, while at the same time, these girls almost always do not have equal rights as boys and are often not emancipated. The school considers that education, the direct visits of families, as well as the conversations with the girls' parents and raising their awareness, especially of the fathers, is of crucial importance for the continuation of these girls' education.

Southwestern Region:

The "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk" PS, the Municipality of Plasnica reported that, in the past 3 years, there were 4 to 5 cases of interruption of education by girls from first to ninth grade, all of the Turkish ethnicity, due to their moving abroad.

The "Debrca" PS, the Village of Belcista, Municipality of Debarca notified us that girls regularly attend compulsory education. There are cases of dismissal of students due to resettlement, and they have evidence that they are enrolled in other primary schools. They have no case of discontinued education by girls in the past 3 years, and at the same time, they reported that, as a school, they are ready to take all necessary measures and involve all stakeholders and institutions in case that happens. The school stated that they encourage girls not to leave compulsory education by holding a large number of lectures for girls and their parents, as well as educational workshops organized by the school and NGOs.

The "St. Naum Ohridski" MSS, the Municipality of Makedonski Brod reported that in the 2013/2014 school year, 14 girls have left their education, of whom 8 were Macedonians, 5 were Turkish and 1 was Bosnian; in the 2014/2015 school year, there was a decline in this figure, i.e. 3 girls have left their education, 2 Macedonian and 1 Turkish, and in the school year 2015/2016, the same number of students left their education, i.e. 1 Macedonian and 2 Turkish girls. According to the school, the reasons for dismissal are transferring to another school and moving, while among the girls, the most common reason for leaving school is getting married.

Southeastern Region:

The "Jane Sandanski" SS, the Municipality of Strumica, informed us that a 16-year-old schoolgirl from a Macedonian ethnic community, with a place of residence in the Municipality of Novo Selo, left her education in the last 3 years due to pregnancy and marriage, and after the birth of the child, she continued her education as a part-time student. They reported that, fortunately, in this case, she is a girl who, despite pregnancy and marriage, continued her education without any particular difficulties and achieves good success in part-time program exams. According to the school, through the educational and advisory role of the school, and its pedagogical-psychological service, it should encourage the girls not to abandon their compulsory education.

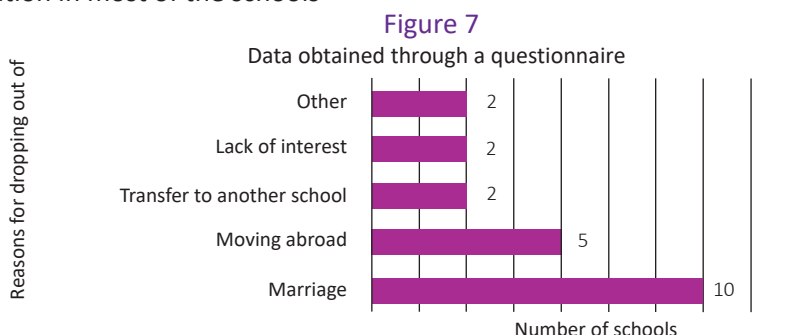
From the school «Nikola Karev» from the municipality of Strumica informed that as a result of the fact that this school has six technical vocations, the majority of the students are male. However, in the last 3 years, there are 2 cases of interruption of schooling of girls from a Macedonian ethnic community, one for removal as a result of a large number of unjustified absences and a second for marrying.

The “Josip Broz Tito” MPS, the Municipality of Valandovo reported that a small number of cases of girls leaving their education have been recorded, but usually, after a certain period, they return to their classes. In the school, there was a case of a girl from the Roma ethnic community who was unsociable at school, while outside school, she aced normally. Parents requested assistance from the services of the school, and an education inspector was informed about this case. Also, sisters from the Roma ethnic community dropped out of the school because of moving abroad. The school reported that after a few months, the whole family returned to the country, but the girls did not continue their education. In both cases, the girls were 12 to 14 years of age. The school considers that interrupting education affects the lives of girls negatively since, after the interruption, they usually start to work in clothes factories or get married. However, since there are not too many cases, the school management has not considered how they could encourage the girls from the Municipality of Valandovo not to leave compulsory education.

The “Goce Delchev” MSS, Municipality of Valandovo informed us that there have been 12 cases of girls aged 16-17 years old, representatives of the Macedonian and Turkish ethnic communities who have left their education in the past 3 years due to marriage, moving abroad, etc. Unfortunately, this is the only school of those who responded to the questionnaire that does not recognize the way in which the interruption of education affects the girls’ lives, that is, it considers that “there is not any particular impact on them”. However, the school considers that higher education, involvement in extracurricular activities, education of the parents, more information about marriage and the family as well as the obligations that arise from them, could influence the girls from this municipality and stop them from leaving education.

The “Costa Susinov” MSS from Radovis notified us that girls in this community regularly attend compulsory education, with small exceptions among Muslim girls – Yoruks. In this school, in the last 3 years, there have been about 10 cases of abandonment of compulsory education, with the most common reason being marriage. The school reported that most girls who interrupt their education have about 16-17 years old and are mostly of Turkish ethnic group Yoruks, but there are few students of the Christian religion as well, and often the reason for that is an unplanned pregnancy, in which case the girls continue as part-time students. The school considers that the disruption of education affects negatively the girls’ future.

If we summarize and graphically present the information reported by schools that have answered the questionnaire, the reasons for which girls dropped out of school, Figure 7 evidently shows that marriage is stated as a reason for discontinuation of education in most of the schools.



Considering the data presented above, it can be concluded that, schools, without exception, consider the girls' abandonment of education as a negative phenomenon and make efforts within their competences for raising awareness among the population (parents and students) about the need for compulsory education of girls, and, when necessary, take institutional measures.

An interview with representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science was conducted in order to obtain qualitative data that were meant to provide insight into the Ministry's perception of the different issues related to the (non-)involvement of girls from the rural areas in the educational process. The interview revealed that they believe there are appropriate conditions (availability to schools, proximity to schools, appropriate vocations) in schools in rural areas. According to them, the most frequent reason for abandoning compulsory education is moving abroad or enrollment in another school. Representatives of the MES stated that the collected data for the 2015/2016 school year indicate that 1408 students "dispersed" in that school year, of whom 656 were female students. These data do not correspond to the data of the State Statistical Office given in Figure 4. The information provided by the Ministry on the central level and, unfortunately, not processed according to municipality development, i.e. whether they refer to urban or rural areas, and at the same time, MES informed that, in accordance with Article 3 of the Law on Personal Data Protection⁶⁷, data on the ethnicity of students are not kept. According to MES representatives, the continuation of education among girls from rural areas can be encouraged by raising public awareness (direct communication with parents) about the importance of education. They emphasized the importance of appropriate education in the lives of girls from rural areas, because otherwise, as they pointed out, they are prone to non-socialization, non-democratization, economic dependence on the family/spouse, bad economic situation, early marriages, early pregnancies and similar occurrences that can affect negatively their entire life. In order to take measures aimed at improving access to education for rural girls, the MES considers that a multi-sectoral approach is needed for several institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health, followed by raising the public awareness and counseling to parents and students about the significance of education. the following data were obtained.

The following data were obtained from interviewing women of different ethnic backgrounds, with varying degrees of education and with different economic status in the target regions:

In Polog, women spoke about themselves, about how they pass the time and described their typical day, which indicated that there are no differences regarding the ethnicity of the respondents. Generally speaking, women who have finished primary education are mostly devoted to family and housework, and at the same time, consider that they do not need additional help from their partner, because he is busy earning money. According to them, the traditional role of women in the home and family is accepted as a desirable and everyday way of functioning, accompanied by due respect to the one that provides them with decent living conditions and economic security. Women with secondary education who are unemployed are more inclined to traditional and family values, while also respecting gender-disaggregated roles, that is, they do not feel the need to seek help in fulfilling their

67 Law on Personal Data Protection, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 7/05, 103/08, 124/10, 43/14, 135/11, 153/15 11 99/16.

domestic obligations, nor do they expect other family members to participate in it. Also, to a great extent, they bring up their children in that spirit, not seeing anything wrong about the situation. In contrast, women who are employed, even though they have work obligations, are also taking care of the home and the family. They believe that tradition should be respected, but not to be enslaved by it. Contrary to that situation, employed women with higher education are making efforts to build their professional life and have a career, while trying not to neglect the traditionally patriarchal women's responsibilities around the home and the family. They explained that they sometimes feel tired of obligations both at work and at home, and having in mind that they come from rural areas, it is very often difficult to balance the two and transfer the household obligations to other family members. One of the respondents with higher education, who is unemployed, is committed exclusively to domestic obligations, and her desire to communicate with someone is accomplished exclusively through social networks, or in her words, "through posting some thoughts and statuses on Facebook, as an attempt to communicate with someone".

In reference to the lifestyle of women in this region in the past and now, all respondents, regardless of the level of education, emphasized that there is a big difference between the lives of their mothers and grandmothers and their life in terms of the male-female relationships, i.e., nowadays, it is better for them than it was for their predecessors for various reasons. For some of them, it is better because of the contemporary home appliances that save the time in doing housework, and others believe they are better off because they have greater freedom in decision-making and movement than in the past, when women stayed at home most of the time. Some also believe that the roles have changed and men take part in housework as well. One of the younger respondents pointed out that «in my grandmother's time, it was awful – women were not entitled to saying a word or making a decision. In my mother's time, it was a little better, she finished secondary school and was not pressured to work in shifts neither by my father nor by the public". According to many respondents, tradition should be respected, and even though the role of the woman in the family has improved, they still think that at the time of their grandmothers, families were happier. Some of them concluded that although women in the past were uneducated, they were wiser and they held the families together.

Even though their general opinion is that they are equal to men, when they describe their day, the impression remains that they still live in the world of stereotypical gender roles. Most of them spend the day doing what they call "women's business" (washing, ironing, cleaning, caring for children and the elderly), while men mainly deal with "man's business", such as are painting walls, doing home repairs and the like. According to the women, this represents an even distribution of responsibilities around the home and the household. Therefore they consider themselves as equal members of the family. Regarding the availability of the family budget, the majority of the respondents pointed out that it is shared, even with the children (if they are adults), while others say that men in their families are in charge of managing the family budget, except in cases when a bigger decision should be made (such as buying an apartment or enrolling children at a faculty), when they include women in making the final decision.

Regarding the education of the respondents from the Polog region and how it affected their lives, it can be concluded that all the respondents who have only completed elementary education regret not having continued their education, and the most common reason for the abandonment of education is the financial situation of the family. One of the respondents from the Albanian ethnic community pointed out that, as the eldest in the family, she had to leave education to contribute to the family budget, which she regrets today. As a result of her bad experience, she today encourages her sisters and brothers to continue their education. One of the respondents from the Roma ethnic community pointed out that, due to the difficult process of recognition of several certificates for completed part of the elementary education abroad, she was forced to leave her education. She explained that “they did not recognize my education in Germany, I do not know what was the reason, I had all the records, but they did not accept them; they said that this could not be recognized here and I would have to continue my education with younger students, and I was much older and I did not want to go, so I dropped out in sixth grade”. Most of the respondents with completed secondary education did not continue their education due to lack of finances. Some of them said that, if the living conditions had been different while they were in school, they would have continued their education. However, some of them do not believe that people’s education is crucial for the quality of life. One respondent stated the following: “I think that higher education does not reflect a person’s success; what really matters is that one wants to learn informally and develop oneself. Education was not an obstacle for me because I am ambitious”. Some of the respondents said that they are satisfied with their lives, do not regret that they did not continue their education, because immediately after they finished high school, they managed to find employment and earn on their own. One of the respondents stated as follows: “I was happy with the place where I was employed, I had a good relationship with the employees, regular salaries, insurance, and bonuses”. The respondents with higher education claim that the financial resources were crucial in deciding on the continuation of education, as well as the choice of the faculty. Some of them, mainly due to the financial situation of the family, were unable to complete the faculty they wanted, but in order not to stop with education, they decided to enroll in any faculty. As a result, today they are employed according to their finished education, although in the past, they had other wishes and plans for themselves and their lives, for which they feel nostalgic.

Regarding employment, as well as job satisfaction, there are no differences regarding the ethnicity of the respondents from the Polog region. It can be generally concluded that women who have a primary education but are employed are generally not satisfied with their work and working conditions. Some of them seek employment abroad or try to get additional qualifications through courses and find a more decent job. Part of the women who have secondary education and are employed are satisfied with their lives, especially in the current social conditions, they earn and have health insurance, even though they probably do not have a good chance for advancement and career-building. Those women whose educational qualifications do not correspond with the workplace most often feel dissatisfied and unfulfilled, because they work exclusively to meet the existential needs. One of the respondents pointed out that “It’s hard, but I have to work. Children cannot work, they do not have any options here, so they want to leave”.

In the Southwestern region, when women with primary education talked about themselves and about their everyday life, they stressed that they are generally

satisfied with their current life, but their childhoods, without exception, were very difficult. They spend most of their days in performing household duties and working on the agricultural land they own, and they generally consider that rural life is very difficult. Some of the respondents who are currently dismissed workers due to the bankruptcy of companies claim their life was better when they worked, even though they worked in shifts. Some of the employed respondents with secondary education said that while living in a rural environment, they do not deal with agriculture, since they spend most of their time at work, resting or with the family.

Part of the respondents from this region point out that the tradition is less strong nowadays than it was in the past. They believe that today, young girls are more likely to be more emancipated and gender-aware, and because of that, they live much more freely and liberally, unlike their mothers and grandmothers who lived a life trapped in the “clutches” of tradition. All respondents noted that they distribute the family budget together with their husbands. Some of the respondents pointed out that, nowadays, many of the men perform a large part of the housework, which in the past was considered as, as they phrase it, exclusively women’s job. However, there are situations in which men assume part of the obligations only when they are in the mood to do so, or if they are asked by women to help. A small part of the respondents felt that it was their responsibility to take care of the housework because the man, by being employed and earning income, contributes sufficiently to the family.

The lack of financial resources forced some women from the Southwestern region to leave education and find employment at a very young age. One of the respondents claimed that due to the difficult financial situation, she married at age of 16 with her father’s approval. Women who have completed secondary education usually did not continue their education due to financial reasons but found ways for self-upgrading. One of the respondents with completed higher education considers that her education did not provide a satisfactory level of knowledge due to the significantly declining quality of the higher education institution where she studied.

On the other hand, some of the respondents from this region – Macedonians-Muslims (from the village of Brostica, located 1400 m above sea level) still live in the spirit of traditional, patriarchal values and divided gender roles, in which “female” and “male” differ greatly. According to their perceptions, it is inadequate for girls to go to high school because, if the girls establish or are being suspected of any kind of relationship with a peer, they can inflict irreparable damage to the family’s “honor” and social status. This fear is further amplified because secondary schools are quite remote, so some parents are worried about the safety of their daughters. Most women openly say that they would not let their daughters to go to secondary school, and some of the daughters say they decided not to continue their education because of the pressure from the environment, even though their parents encouraged them. One of the respondents pointed out the following: “We consider ‘smart’ those girls who stay at home, get married young and are obedient to their mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, and for those who want to study and travel we say they are “not smart”. They also pointed out that, in most cases, the state does not enforce the penalties for parents who do not send their children to secondary school.

According to these women’s testimonies, those among them who, in spite of everything, decide to continue their education and who then return home, begin

to perceive themselves as leaders and highly valued members of the community, yet their morale is perceived as “suspicious”. The respondents were of the general opinion that the economic independence that comes from education is undesirable because as one of them said: “If a woman earns, she can underestimate her husband and want to be above him”. One unanimous remark to these women is that those families who have moved away (since there is a large percentage of the displaced population of the village), accepted the modern values of Western societies very easily and without any problems, they are educated and employed. But in their native village, the traditional perceptions of gender roles prevail.

In the Eastern Region, women with primary education who are employed consider that their lives are quite hard because they work in shifts. Therefore, as they pointed out, they do not have much time for the household, but generally, they are satisfied because they are paid regularly and have health insurance. They have happy memories from their childhood, especially because their parents took care of everything. Like them, respondents with secondary and high education said that they had a happy childhood with beautiful memories and they wished they could go back in time. These women explained that they spend their day with regular family and work responsibilities, and the unemployed are engaged in agricultural activities. Young respondents pointed out that after completing certain domestic obligations, they socialize with their peers.

Overall, the respondents from this region do housework by themselves, even in cases where men are not employed. Apart from taking care of the entire household, some of the women even have to earn for the family. According to them, tradition does not affect their lives and do not perceive their families as traditional. Some of the respondents are generally satisfied with the environment they live in and claim they have everything they need in their lives; in contrast, some of the respondents pointed out that, if they had the opportunity, they would change many things in their lives, regarding continuing their education, creating a family, and the like. Regarding the traditional male-female roles, the respondents consider that in the past, tighter rules were in place and that the woman had greater awe and respect for the man, while today, women live a better life, have the opportunity to work and be independent. At the same time, they stressed that most families do not make a distinction between “female” and “male” obligations, but jointly perform domestic obligations and decide on the distribution of the family budget.

Respondents with completed primary education from this region pointed out that finances were the main reason why they abandoned education. According to them, education was seen as an unnecessary burden on the family budget, so they were engaged in handicrafts, knitting and embroidery, which they consider to be more effective and something that makes them happy. Some of the older respondents with completed secondary education did not continue their education for financial reasons, while one of the two younger respondents declared that she is still considering continuing education, and the other plans to continue education, or in her words: “Because you really learn something, and people learn as long as they live, right? And you want to improve yourself, and achieve something more, not that you cannot live without a university degree or that you do not understand things, but still, it’s nice to have a degree”. Respondents who did not continue their education due to getting married, regret it, i.e. they think they could have achieved a lot more in life if they had continued their education.

The majority of highly educated women with jobs that do not correspond to their education feel dissatisfied, but they accepted their job due to the lack of other ways of securing income for the family. Those women who have a university degree and work in the chosen occupation considered themselves very happy. One of the respondents from the region, the moment she had to decide between her career and her family, she chose her the family. Because of that, she did not get a job according to her higher education but decided to work with her secondary school diploma. However, she thinks she made the right choice because she is satisfied with her current job.

It can be generally concluded that, regardless of ethnicity, level of education, economic status and place of residence, women often, and almost always unconsciously, “play” their gender-specific roles. Accepting traditional and patriarchal rules of behavior and sharing responsibilities around home and family, they accept all additional obligations without making an effort to find a way to delegate and transfer them to other family members. Almost without exception, the financial situation is the main reason for the abandonment of education among these women, although, in the majority of cases, there was a desire for upgrading and continuing education. At the same time, lack of finances is the main reason for having a job that does not correspond to the level or type of education.

From the information we received through focus groups with representatives of non-governmental organizations in the target regions, working in the areas covered by this document, we obtained the following data:

The focus group participants from the Polog region pointed out that education is one of the most important tools that will help girls in the future, and therefore, the state should develop mechanisms that will create conditions for participation of children from all ethnic communities in the compulsory educational process. Representatives of Roma NGOs pointed out that Roma girls (generally children) are often not included in the education process due to lack of identification documents and/or poverty. The participants believe that the generally poor standard of living in rural areas is one of the reasons why girls abandon and fail to complete their compulsory education. According to them, parents often say that they do not have the necessary means to send their children to school, they do not have what to wear in the winter, and often, children work around the house or in the fields, helping their parents. As the representatives of the Roma non-governmental organizations pointed out: “If the school is far away, and both parents are unemployed, they do not have the right to social assistance, do not have clothes, so how could they send their child to school? What is that child going to eat at school? When you think about it, these are real reasons. Children work with parents, collect bottles, iron, paper and they work instead of stealing, or some go to the field. The family has to survive somehow, to live. They are not like us, they do not receive a regular salary and plan the money – they live from day to day”. The focus group participants agreed that all people in the region, regardless of their ethnicity, are guided by the idea “what good is education when there is no work”. In such an economic climate, they consider that the fine for parents is a measure that cannot function in practice because, in a situation of high rate of unemployment in rural areas, parents will have to go to prison because they simply cannot provide the necessary funds to settle the fine, which will further affect the already poor quality of life of these families.

The focus group participants from the Southeastern region agreed that, generally, the position of women in society and their involvement in the educational process largely depends on whether the family they were raised in is patriarchal, or extremely traditional because usually, such families tend to keep their female members uneducated and ignorant. As they pointed out: “There are extremely patriarchal families where the woman who is a wife, should be a servant, should not speak and discuss anything, for the man is the one who talks, therefore he is paid more. We have to work on raising our awareness, we have a lot of work to do”. According to them, regardless of whether women are from a city or from a village, they must be encouraged to get involved in the educational process, because if they are excluded from these processes, they can very easily become deprived of all kinds of freedoms: economic, sexual, freedom of movement, etc.

The focus group participants stressed the important role of the country’s highest authorities in when creating textbooks or, as one of the participants said, “At one point, we have been witnessed that the state was the one that limited us in terms of education, in the textbooks approved by the state itself which teach that a woman is a worthy woman only if she is a housewife, and if you are learning that since you are a little child, that success means being a mother and a housewife, then you cannot expect a child to strive for something higher, that a child would want to be a judge or a policeman – a successful woman should be a housewife”. They believe that the state, mostly through the education system, should work on eliminating the stigmatization of women and change the awareness in the direction of establishing gender equality. However, they do not neglect the role of the family since the earliest age when the foundation of character is established, and the education and upbringing further strengthen that foundation.

The focus group participants from the Southwest Region pointed out many times that education is a key factor for the empowerment of young generations. Apart from certain isolated regions of the municipality of Debar, in which the popular belief is that girls do not need secondary education, the other respondents consider that, precisely through education, women from their region have reached the desired social status and emancipation, and thus the possibility of economic independence. Some of the participants emphasized the aspect of upbringing in education, that is, they emphasized the need for comprehensive sexual education as a key to preventing juvenile marriages and how important it is for overcoming the traditional gender roles and the patriarchal view of women’s “honor” as essential to the status of family in the rural environment.

Considering the situation through the information received from the central and local institutions, the interviews conducted with women from the rural areas, as well as the focus groups made up of representatives from the NGOs, we believe it necessary to implement policies and measures in accordance with the needs and problems of women from the rural areas, which would promote the benefits of education in the girls’ lives. At the same time, in certain regions, women should have better access to educational institutions, particularly in reference to free transportation for students. Since access to education is identified as one of the reasons for discontinuation and abandonment of the education process, consideration should also be given to investing in alternative types of education for women living in rural areas, such as centers for distance education.

According to the information collected from the interviewed women, we believe that improving women's access to secondary and higher education levels would have a positive effect on their lives and their well-being in general. Acquiring a higher level of education increases the women's chances for regular employment and economic independence, both of which would contribute to the establishment of gender equality. Developing programs for the vocational training of girls and young women who discontinue their education would contribute to opening opportunities for gaining knowledge and skills, which subsequently leads to employment, higher income and effective participation in society. These programs will enable girls and women to improve themselves, which could provide them with opportunities for training in occupations traditionally perceived as "masculine" and career advancement.

HEALTHCARE

In Article 5 of the Law on Health Insurance⁶⁸, there are 15 points which stipulate mandatory insurance, i.e. list of eligible candidates that are the subject of the Law on Health Insurance.

Thus, among others, the farmer – the holder of the family agricultural holding from the second and third categories* is mandatorily insured in accordance with the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development⁶⁹, as well as a temporary unemployed person receiving monetary compensation from insurance in case of unemployment. Article 8 of the Law stipulates that mandatory health insurance provides beneficiaries with the right to basic health services under conditions determined by this Law, which include services in: a) in primary healthcare: a) in the primary health protection: 1) healthcare services for determining, monitoring and controlling the health condition; 2) undertaking professional medical measures and procedures for promotion of the health condition, prevention, elimination and early detection of the illnesses and other health deterioration; 3) providing urgent medical help, including the transport by ambulant vehicle when necessary; 4) medical treatment in doctor's office, i.e. in the home of the beneficiary; 5) health protection in case of pregnancy and childbirth; 6) implementing preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitation measures; 7) prevention, medical treatment and rehabilitation of the mouth and teeth illnesses and 8) medicinal products according to the list of medicinal products determined by the Fund by a general act approved by the Minister of Health; b) in specialized and consultative health protection: 1) examinations and determination of the diseases, injuries and health condition; 2) implementation of specialized diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation procedures and 3) prostheses, orthopedic and other instruments, auxiliary and sanitary devices and materials and dental-technical means according to indications determined by a general act of the Fund approved by the Minister of Health; c) in hospital (short-term and long-term) health protection: 1) examination and determination of the health condition, medical treatment, rehabilitation, care, accommodation and food in hospital conditions; 2) medicinal products according to the list of medicinal products determined by the Fund with a general act approved by the Minister of Health, as well as auxiliary materials which serve for application of the medicinal products and sanitary and another material necessary for medical treatment and 3) accommodation and food for the accompanying person during necessary accompanying for a child up to 3 years old, while in hospital treatment, but at most up to 30 days and 4) laser vision correction according to conditions and criteria determined by a general act of the Fund which is granted consent by the minister of health, and d) autopsy of deceased on the request of the health institutions⁷⁰. The law also stipulates that, based on the mandatory health insurance of the beneficiary, mandatory health insurance is also provided to the members of his/her family.

68 Law on Health Insurance, Consolidated text (in Macedonian), "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 65/2012, 16/2013 and 91/2013, Available at: <http://www.fzo.org.mk/WBStorage/Files/Zakon>; English translation available at akademika.com.mk.

* The holder of a family agricultural holding is an adult who is responsible for the management of the agricultural holding and who acts in the name and on behalf of the family agricultural holding and as such is registered in the Single Farm Register in the Ministry.

69 Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, Consolidated text, "Official Gazette of RM", No. 49/2010; 53/2011, 126/2012, 15/2013 and 69/2013, available at:

http://www.mzsv.gov.mk/files/Zakon_zajemjodelstvo_i_ruralen_razvoj_0.pdf

70 Law on Health Insurance, consolidated text (in Macedonian), "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 65/2012, 16/2013 and 91/2013, available at: <http://www.fzo.org.mk/WBStorage/Files/Zakon>

Women's health is particularly important since it determines the health and well-being of their children and their communities. Women from rural areas, whether employed or working with their families in the agricultural land, can exercise their right to health insurance, and thus the possibility of regular and preventive health examinations. However, a large portion of rural women in the Republic of Macedonia, due to limited access to information about their rights and opportunities for using health services, including counseling and family planning, instead of preventing certain conditions, see the doctor only after the occurrence of health problems. The lack of adequate infrastructure, public and efficient transport, as well as the insufficient resources available to these women, increases their isolation and limits their possibilities for easy, fast and safe access to health facilities where they would receive the appropriate health services.

Regarding this problem, detected in other countries in Europe as well, the Report on Rural Women in Europe⁷¹, the European Council recommends that states provide rural areas with quality transport, care, and medical services, including the area of reproductive health and family planning. At the same time, states are encouraged to provide mobile health clinics that will visit the outermost rural areas and will provide education on various health topics, adequate healthcare for all women on location.

In 2012, a campaign for cervical cancer screening was launched in the Republic of Macedonia, which included a free Pap test at the personally chosen family gynecology clinic. This campaign, in addition to its goal of preventing and diagnosing gynecological malignancies at early stages, also contributed to raising awareness among women about the need to find a family gynecologist. In accordance with the Program for Early Detection of Malignant Diseases in the Republic of Macedonia in 2017⁷², "on the level of the whole country, for women who have selected a family gynecologist, screening is performed by gynecologists from the PrHI in accordance with the preventive goals prescribed by the HIFM: gynecological examination, preparation and delivery of the material for cytological analysis"⁷³. The goal of this process is to prevent disease and to reduce the mortality of women from cervical cancer, which requires the inclusion of all gynecologists in screening and early detection of this disease, as well as raising awareness among women about the importance from regular gynecological exams and Pap tests.

With the aim of obtaining specific statistics on how many women use health services, with reference to regular gynecological examinations and PAP testing, the number of recorded cases of childbirth, spontaneously and deliberately terminated pregnancy among juvenile girls, as well as the number of recorded cases of interventions after unprofessionally terminated pregnancies, a request for access to public records was sent to the Ministry of Health regarding the target municipalities. Unfortunately, by the end of the preparation of this document, no response was received from the Ministry.

71 "Rural women in Europe" – Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Rapporteur: Ms Carmen Quintanilla Barba, Spain, EPP/CD 2010.

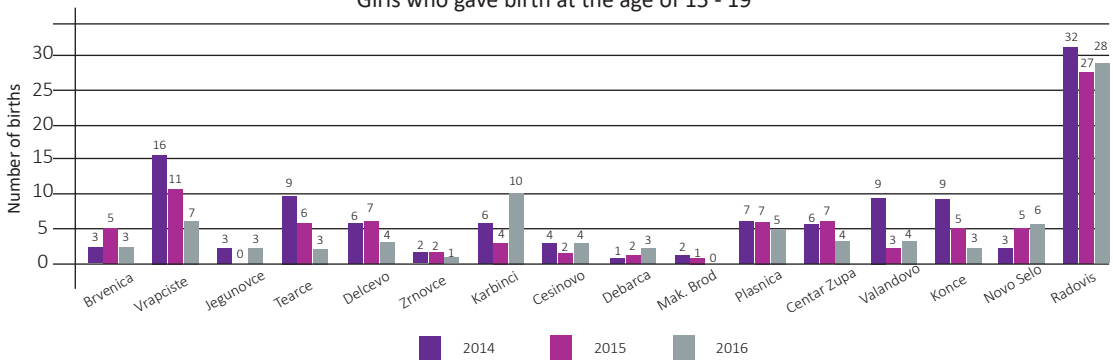
72 http://www.fzo.org.mk/WBStorage/Files/PROGRAMA_ZA_RANA_DETEKCIJA_NA_MALIGNI_ZABOLUVANA_VO_RM_ZA_2017_GODINA.pdf

73 "Програма за рана детекција на малигни заболувања во Република Македонија за 2017 година" (Program for Early Detection of Malignant Diseases in the Republic of Macedonia for 2017), "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No. 192 of 17.10.2016, p. 1

Data from the State Statistical Office available on MAKStat-database⁷⁴ given in Figure 8, indicates that in the target regions, the number of women giving birth aged 15-19 is generally within the limit of 16 births per year, except in the case of municipality of Radovis, where we have a significantly higher number of births, up to 32 in 2014. Unfortunately, since the age group of the statistics ranges from 15 to 19 years of age, we cannot have certain information on how many of the mothers were minors at the time of delivery. Also, there are devastating data which show that in certain municipalities, such as Karbinci and Konce in 2016, and Radovis in 2015 and 2016, there was one girl in each municipality who gave birth at the age of 15.

Figure 8

Girls who gave birth at the age of 15 - 19



We conducted an interview with a representative of the Ministry in order to obtain certain qualitative data that should provide insight into the perception of the Ministry of Health (MH) on various issues related to (non-) utilization of healthcare services by women from rural areas. She pointed out that there is no separate system for record keeping in the Ministry divided by the place of residence of the beneficiaries of the services, nor has there been any analysis of the programs implemented according to this criterion. According to her, the Public Health Institute collects certain data, but there is a very poor record of women who do not have access to health services since such an analysis has not been made. As they pointed out from the Ministry, they are looking for a way to start keeping such a type of statistics, because according to them, a mess was created by introducing the National System for Electronic Record Keeping in Health, better known as “My Date”⁷⁵, because the electronic health system collects patient data, and the Public Health Institute is in charge of the records. The Ministry believes that the coverage of healthcare centers is sufficient, as there are about 40 local healthcare centers on the territory of the entire country. However, according to them, it is necessary to make better use of human capacities, to establish better coordination and collaboration of healthcare centers, public health centers and general hospitals, whereby they will not work independently in each area, but instead, will work together in detecting all challenges and suggesting ways to overcome them.

When it comes to providing gynecological services, the representative from the Ministry believes that there is a sufficient number of 3D ultrasound appliances and that there is patronage service everywhere, but there is lack of coordination with the gynecologists, and at the same time, not all healthcare centers have gynecologists

⁷⁴ http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat__Naselenie__Vitalna/125_VitStat_Op__RodVozMajk_mk.px/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef

⁷⁵ <http://mojtermin.mk/>

on the staff; or In her words, “We have definitely lost the connection with the family gynecologists – they are not in the coordination system, they do not have the obligation to refer to the MH, their connection is stronger with the Fund». In her opinion, they have so far proved to be a disinterested partner in the implementation of actions that are government policies, since the Ministry has not found a way to motivate or to achieve proper cooperation. Therefore, rural women suffer have not chosen a family gynecologist suffer the gravest consequences because there is no appropriate mechanism for them to be called upon and provide free legal Pap testing in local healthcare centers. At the same time, data from the Health Insurance Fund show that the total number of gynecologists is 144, of which 43 are in Skopje, but according to the analyzes of the non-governmental organizations and the previous Government, there is a lack of another 150 gynecologists.⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Health does not keep a record of how many rural women use gynecological services (such as regular examinations, Pap tests, etc.), but in the conversation we had, they informed that the Public Health Institute keeps such data and, according to them, such services are not used by women in urban areas either, because the awareness for choosing a family gynecologist is at a very low level. The information in the Report for the realization of the program tasks in accordance with the National Annual Program for Public Health of the Republic of Macedonia for 2016 shows that the visit to the counseling centers on sexual and reproductive health has noted a downward trend in recent years. “One of the main reasons for the low attendance at counseling centers is the inaccessibility of properly equipped premises for this purpose, lack of qualified staff and inaccessible gynecological services⁷⁷.” In small places, as an additional reason for the low attendance, the Report also lists the working hours of the counseling service that do not guarantee adequate discretion for those people who want to visit. The Ministry stated that they tried to provide a gynecologist and nurse in the afternoon hours for women from rural areas or for those with low social status and those who do not have a family gynecologist, but unfortunately, this did not function in practice. In their opinion, the most likely reason was that the program was poorly developed. They believe that, currently, the biggest problem is the number of gynecologists and their distribution in the Republic of Macedonia because there is a lack of gynecologists for both neonatal and maternal care, while private gynecologists, who have a contract with the Fund, are out of the system and of the Ministry’s jurisdiction. According to them, one of the ways to reach out to women in rural areas or those from vulnerable categories is by mobile gynecological clinics. There are currently three of those: one from HERA, two from UNFPA, which were obtained during the immigrant crisis, and now they are given to the state for use, that is, they are located in the hospitals in Gevgelija and Kumanovo – the transit centers’ locations. The Ministry believes that with proper organization and distribution of gynecologists, as well as with adequate compensation for additional engagement, these mobile clinics can provide, at least in the beginning, service for women in remote and rural areas.

76 <http://www.mojmaticenginekolog.com/>

77 Report on the realization of the program tasks in accordance with the National Annual Program for Public Health of the Republic of Macedonia for 2016, p. 6, part 3. Available at: <http://iph.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/tret-del-2016-izvestaj.pdf>, Accessed on 11.12.2017.

Although the local healthcare centers with maternity hospitals, a total of 9 in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, are obliged to record and inform the Ministry about cases of child delivery in underage girls, the Ministry says that they have no information about such cases in the last 3 years. At the same time, the local health centers that have maternity clinics have no obligation to inform the Ministry of cases of spontaneous or deliberately terminated pregnancy in underage girls. According to the Ministry's findings, such abortions are most commonly performed in private healthcare centers, while the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate, the Health Fund and expert commissions from the Ministry are supervising exclusively when the situation complicates, so these girls they are brought to the Clinic of Gynecology and Obstetrics.

The Ministry informs that, unfortunately, the measures taken to improve access to health services for rural women are mostly "ad hoc" activities for solving the problems. There is no properly developed program, and at the moment, there are no funds for the realization of such a program. They consider that program activities should be systematically and well planned. According to them, the three mobile gynecological clinics should be used for now, and more coverage can be achieved with a good plan for visiting remote areas, or to stimulate gynecologists in rural areas with higher payments and better treatment. They believe that new goals should be defined with the Health Fund, as follows:

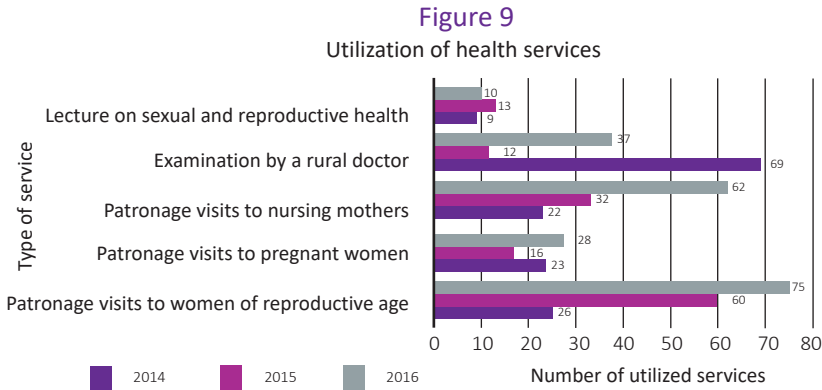
1. The first measure is to increase the number of gynecologists;
2. The second measure is to implement an appropriate allocation system as to avoid situations where there are too many gynecologists in one area, and there is a lack of them in another, especially a smaller areas/communities;
3. The third measure is to employ an additional stimulus for gynecologists who will want to work in remote and rural areas.

From the information received through a survey questionnaire sent to a total of 6 local health centers covering the target regions, the following data were obtained:

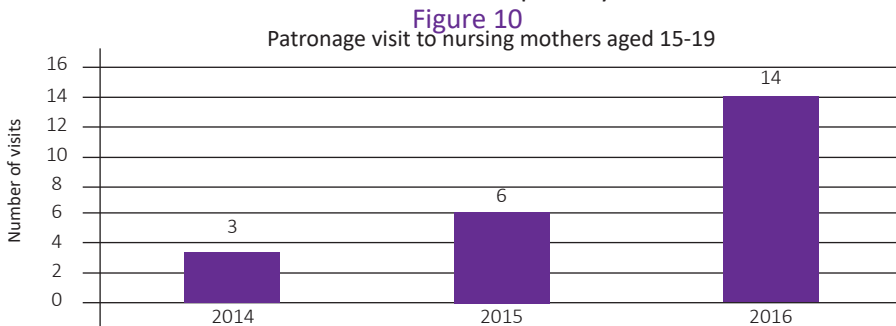
The PHI Health Center Tetovo reported that they do not have information about the number of used health services by women since only the private gynecologists have this kind of information, i.e. concessionaires of PHI Health Center Tetovo. There are currently 4 gynecologists and 27 patronage nurses. The Health Center informs that, in 2014, there was one recorded case of child delivery of a young girl (17 years old) from a Macedonian ethnic community, with a place of residence in the municipality of Jegunovce. For other issues related to recorded cases of spontaneous and deliberately discontinued pregnancy, divided by age of the patient and ethnicity; recorded cases of interventions after unprofessional termination of pregnancy, recorded cases of using free legal Pap tests, as well as recorded cases of regular health examinations of women, from the Health Center reportedly does not have this data; it is kept by the family doctors and Clinical Hospital Tetovo.

The PHI Health Center Stip informed us that, according to the information they have and referring to the use of health services by women with a place of residence in the municipality of Karbinci, in the past 3 years the situation has been as follows:

In 2014, a total of 192 health services were used by women from the Turkish ethnic community, in 2015 this figure is reduced to 175, while in 2016 there is an increase in the number of used health services in the Health Center in Stip – a total of 238 services. If we look at data related to sexual and reproductive health, as well as the utilization of the gynecological services given in Figure 9, there is an increase in the number of patronage visits, which indicates an increase in the number of women giving birth, and at the same time, there is a decrease in the number the attendees of the lecture on sexual and reproductive health. In this Health Center, there are a total of 7 patronage nurses.



The data obtained are divided by age groups, with the youngest age group being comprised of girls aged 15 to 19, which makes it impossible to collect accurate information on how many of the nursing mothers who used the patronage services were underage. However, the obtained data, as shown in Figure 10, indicates a significant increase in the utilization of this service in the past 3 years.



Regarding the rest of the questions related to the recorded cases of spontaneous and deliberately terminated pregnancy divided by patient’s age and ethnicity, recorded cases of interventions after unprofessional termination of pregnancy, recorded cases of using free PAP tests, as well as recorded cases of regular medical examinations of women, the Health Center notified us that they could not provide that type of data because it was kept by family doctors and the Clinical Hospital Stip.

The PHI Health Center Debar notified us that they are unable to provide the figures regarding utilization of health services by women divided by patient’s age and ethnicity. They also informed us that they do not have a specialist consultative service or a gynecologist, and therefore they have no answer to any of the questions listed in our request. Information in the media⁷⁸ indicates that there is only one

78 <http://www.libertas.mk/debar-reka-i-tsentar-zhupa-ostanaa-so-samo-eden-ginekolog/>

private gynecologist visiting the gynecology department and the women from the neighboring rural municipalities, and for child delivery, they are sent to Struga or, for more serious cases, to Skopje.

The PHI Health Center Kocani reported that, within the center, there is a patronage service consisting of 7 patronage nurses that cover the target municipalities. At the same time, stated that due to lack of a database and lack of a gynecological exam room, neither gynecological-obstetric nor gynecologists are able to respond to our questions.

The PHI Health Center Ohrid reported that they have 10 patronage nurses on the staff, but that they do not have gynecologists because they are dealing with primary healthcare. They explained that cannot provide the requested information, which could be found at the Center for Public Health Ohrid.

The PHI Health Center Radovis notified us that, even though their center has a maternity department, they do not have a gynecologist on the staff as a result of the privatization of gynecologists. They informed us that the regular medical examinations of women from this municipality are performed by the family gynecologists so that the health center does not keep detailed information. Also, this health center reported that they have employed 5 patronage nurses.

From the information received through interviewing women of different ethnic backgrounds, with varying degrees of education and with different economic status in the target regions, the following data related to their healthcare were obtained:

In the Polog Region, most women have health insurance, but the primary beneficiary depends on the working status of women, regardless of education. Those women who do not work are mostly insured either through the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of Macedonia (ESARM) or through another family member (father for the unmarried, husband for the married), while women who are employed are mostly insured through the companies they work for.

One of the respondents from the Roma ethnic community pointed out that due to the complexity of the procedure for obtaining health insurance through the ESARM, that is, the need for monthly reporting, she decided that it was more costly for her if she is removed from the records of active jobseekers because she would seek private healthcare when necessary. She noted that due to mistrust towards state health institutions and their attitude towards the Roma community, health services are used exclusively in private institutions. In her words, «I seek treatment in private health centers, of course, if you suffer from a serious illness, you will go to a private clinic if you want good treatment because, in the public institutions, the Roma are very discriminated against.”

The information we received indicates that the awareness for regular use of health services is at a very low level, even among highly educated women. Healthcare services from the family doctors are used rarely almost by all women – only when extremely necessary. Unfortunately, in some of the smaller settlements, there is no family doctor, so women should go to the bigger towns, which exposes them to additional financial expenses, more time and additional engagements. Similar is

the situation with the use of secondary health services (gynecological and dental services). According to the information obtained, it can be concluded that women from this region, regardless of their ethnicity and level of education, rarely take the free gynecological tests, although several of them noted that they are regularly informed by their family doctors about the need to have a Pap test.

Part of the problem identified by the respondents themselves is the lack of a gynecologist in rural areas, i.e., their remote locations, due to which women from rural areas have to travel to the nearest city for use of gynecological services (in this region, Tetovo or Gostivar). This is often a problem, considering there is no well-organized public transport, and the use of taxi services is too expensive for them. At the same time, they pointed out that they do not trust the state healthcare institutions completely, which is why they sometimes decide to go to larger private gynecological institutions (most often in Skopje) or go to a doctor who knows them on a personal basis, most often when they already have a problem.

Women with primary education in the Southwestern Region are generally very poorly informed about free gynecological exams and pap tests they are entitled to in accordance with the Early Detection Program for Malignant Diseases. They express strong distrust in the health system, and one of the respondents was categorical and demanded that her statement is quoted as follows: «Everyone is corrupt in healthcare, with the exception of a small part of the medical staff”. In addition, these women might also be avoiding these services, especially women who do not yet have children, because of the stigmatization of the environment – they are considered “immoral” women if they use gynecological services before pregnancy (which means they would be “dishonored”).

Women who have already given birth do not face such a heated condemnation from the environment. It seems that the changes to the Law on Abortion of 2013 do not concern them at all and, consequently, they are not very informed about the issue because, in their view, the rule for termination of pregnancy is the same as always, i.e. it is considered “allowed” if the woman has already given birth to three children. It should also be noted that the women in this region do not recognize the difference between legal and illegal abortion. Namely, all respondents considered that an abortion carried out in a private practice by a specialist doctor, at the (usual) price of 500 euros and without mandatory counseling and other restrictions provided for in the Abortion Act is legal, as opposed to the “illegal” one, which would be performed at home, by unqualified practitioners. In contrast, the respondents with secondary and higher education had a solid knowledge of the possibilities for using health insurance and regularly use medical preventive examinations.

Respondents from the Eastern Region, regardless of their education, reported that they have health insurance, they are familiar with the possibilities offered by the insurance, regularly go to medical examinations in the place of residence, and if necessary, in the nearby town. At the same time, they pointed out that they rarely use regular gynecological services.

Generally, it can be concluded that regardless of ethnicity, level of education, economic status, and place of residence, women do not use preventive health services, especially gynecological services and pap tests. The lack of a gynecologist in

their own community is a serious obstacle to the availability of gynecological health services because this forces women to spend additional resources (time, finances, etc.) that they cannot always afford, especially for preventive examinations and if they do not have a more serious health problem. From the information received through conducting focus groups with representatives of non-governmental organizations from the target regions working in the areas covered by this document, the following data on health protection of women were obtained:

Focus group participant in the Polog Region believe that women there do not generally use regular gynecological services, nor do they have regular Pap tests. According to them, education is of great importance, especially in remote rural villages, where direct contact with a gynecologist who would explain the importance of regular medical examinations and Pap tests are crucial for prevention of uterine cancer since it has been noted that, after such visits, the number of women who visit the gynecologist increases. They emphasized that, unfortunately, the health center and the patronage service in Tetovo do not have adequate coverage of the entire region and do not perform their function properly, because they do not follow women through pregnancy, bearing in mind the conditions in which those women live. Representatives of Roma organizations explained as follows: "Women often turn to us when they have been poorly treated by gynecologists, especially those who do not have personal documents because when you do not have the necessary documentation, you cannot enjoy any rights". According to them, not all women who have had a bad experience with a doctor ask for help. Due to living in a patriarchal family and generally poor treatment that these women face on an everyday basis, for some of them, this is still a taboo topic. As they pointed out, "sometimes we provide direct help, and sometimes we refer them, and yet we think that this is a systemic problem of the state and it should find a solution to provide equal rights for all citizens".

Regarding the termination of pregnancy, the representatives of the organizations that participated in the focus group were unanimous that this issue is still a taboo topic in this region. Most often, abortions are done in private gynecological clinics for a price of 500 euros, with the same doctors working both clinically and privately, but the interventions are usually carried out privately in order to protect women's identity.

The focus group participants from the Southeastern region agreed that the educational debates on raising awareness and informing the population about the importance of regular medical controls and examinations are essential for the encouraging regular visit to a gynecologist. According to them, there is no awareness, even among the young population, that the gynecological examination is like any other health examination and that it is better to prevent problems from occurring than to wait for the development of a disease and symptoms. A focus group participant from Gevgelija noted that, even now with the existence of a mobile gynecologist's clinic, there is a great lack of interest among women for examinations. However, a major problem presents the small number of gynecologists who have filled their patient quota and cannot receive other patients, and the rest must go to private clinics. As one of the participants pointed out, "in Strumica three gynecologists are not enough for the entire population, and there must be twice as much, at least six gynecologists are needed in order to ensure effectiveness and equal conditions for all".

The focus group participants agree that in this region, most abortions are performed legally, there is an elevated awareness of the problems and complications that can arise due to unprofessional termination of pregnancy. But according to them, there is still no adequate discretion for this procedure, especially in smaller places, and some of the girls even feel like they are being prosecuted and have to defend themselves when they explain to the gynecologist why they want to end their pregnancy. The feeling of shame and the stigma that follow girls who decide to visit a gynecologist regularly in small areas are, unfortunately, very strong. For fear of being exposed to gossip and rumors, they decide to take unprofessional measures and use “home medicines” that could seriously impair their health. Or, as a representative from Radovis pointed out, “I am talking about young people, who do not discuss sexual and reproductive health; it is more acceptable for them to be pregnant at the age of 16 and get married than to abort or consider using condoms, especially in such small areas”. They emphasized the importance of education for sexually transmitted diseases, for both parents and children, of adapting the approach to target groups according to the specificity of the places, and of employing peer educators who would easily open some topics and reach out to the end users. At the same time, they pointed out the problem of unavailability of cheap contraceptives that would prevent unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, or, as one of the participants explained, “three condoms cost 100 denars, and when I was in high school, I had 30 denars to buy something to eat, so how can a high school student spend 100 denars on condoms?”

ΔThe focus group participants from the Eastern Region consider that the biggest problem is the poorly equipped health centers with no appliances or materials, as well as the insufficient training of the staff, especially in public health, due to the demographic trend of skilled young people who leave the country to work abroad. At the same time, they indicated that there is a tendency for not replacing retired medical personnel by new staff left, which leaves residents of these regions without secondary care. This especially concerns women who give birth because they do not receive the necessary perinatal care and treatment. They claimed that almost every medical intervention has to be repeated due to the incompetence of the staff and the inadequate appliances. According to the participants, despite the free gynecological examinations, gynecologist often charge a certain lump sum and irregularly report the results of the tests, especially when the results are negative.

The focus group participants from the Southwestern Region are quite satisfied with the health services they receive and particularly with the function of the patronage service. In fact, they showed the highest level of satisfaction for the coverage and the quality of public health services. Considering the situation from the received information from the central and local institutions, the interviews conducted with women from the rural areas, as well as the focus groups made by NGO representatives, we believe that it is necessary to create policies and measures that are adaptable to the needs and problems of women from the rural areas in order to enable greater use of health services by these women, which will directly increase the quality of their lives.

In the process of collecting and categorizing data, especially regarding the age of female beneficiaries of certain services, the State Statistical Office as well as other relevant institutions should set two different categories in terms of age limit: one

category from 15 to 18 years of age, and another from 18 and older, in order to have accurate information on minors and adults. The Ministry of Health should introduce a system for registering the beneficiaries of services, which will be divided according to their place of residence in order to conduct an appropriate analysis and understand the fact situation with the utilization of health services by rural women. The Ministry of Health should prepare an analysis of how health services are (not) accessible to rural women. The Ministry of Health will introduce a system of coordination and linking health centers, public health centers, general hospitals and gynecologists, both private and state. Family gynecologists, both private and state, should be obliged to regularly provide appropriate data for the use of services, divided by age and place of residence to the Ministry of Health. The number of mobile gynecological clinics which would visit the outermost rural areas should be increased as to provide consultations, examinations and services to as many rural women as possible. The Ministry of Health should develop a program to improve access to health services for rural women with specific and systematically elaborated activities. ESARM should facilitate the procedure for providing health insurance for unemployed persons, especially women from rural areas, in order to fully utilize the right to health insurance covered by the state through the Ministry of Health.

CHILD MARRIAGES

The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia in Article 42 stipulates that: “The Republic particularly protects mothers, children and minors”⁷⁹. The Law on Child Protection stipulates in the first article that “the protection of children is an organized activity based on the rights of children, as well as the rights and obligations of the parents for family-planning and the state and the units of the local self-government for conducting a humane population policy”⁸⁰. The same Law regulates that a person is considered a child until reaching the age of 18. Furthermore, the Law on Family stipulates in Article 16, paragraph 1 that “a person who has not reached 18 years of age, cannot marry”⁸¹, but immediately in the next paragraph of the same article, it is stated that “The competent court, in a non-suit procedure, shall allow a person who has reached 16 years of age to marry, if it has established that the person has reached the required physical and mental maturity for the exercise of the rights and duties which come with a marriage, and upon previously obtained opinion of a Medical Institution and provided professional help at the Centre for Social Work”⁸². The Family Law does not regulate in any article the establishment of extramarital communities, and therefore no institution keeps records of how many such communities in which one or both partners are minors exist. Article 197, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code regulates extramarital life with a child: “An adult who lives in an extra-marital community with a juvenile who has reached the age of fourteen years, but not the age of sixteen, shall be punished with imprisonment of three months to three years”⁸³, and at the same time, paragraph 2 stipulates that “The punishment from item 1 shall apply also to a parent, adoptive parent, or guardian, who allows a juvenile who has reached the age of fourteen but not yet sixteen years, to live in an extra-marital community with another, or who induces him/her to this”⁸⁴. Unfortunately, the lack of specificity of this Code allows for illegal marriages between an older juvenile* and an adult. The lack of regulations for extramarital communities prevents state institutions from acting in the best interests of the child – not allowing such communities to be formed or providing appropriate sanctions. This phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of a certain part of the population, but at the same time, is often found in other ethnic communities living in the Republic of Macedonia, not only violates human rights but also affects girls’ quality of life.

Although the data obtained from the State Statistical Office⁸⁵ indicate that the average marrying age for women in the past three years is 26 to 27, some studies show that there are, in fact, cases of child marriages in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in rural areas. According to the data obtained from the field research conducted in the

79 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, available at: <https://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/UstavnaRmizmeni.pdf> English translation available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4dcc.html>

80 Law on Child Protection, consolidated text, “Official Gazette of RM” No. 23/13; No. 12/14; No. 44/14; No. 144/14; No. 10/15; No. 25/15 and No. 150/15, available at <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/>

81 Law on Family, Consolidated text, “Official Gazette of RM” No. 153/2014, available at: <http://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Zakon-za-semejstvoto-20-10-2014-prechisten-tekst.pdf>

82 Ibid.

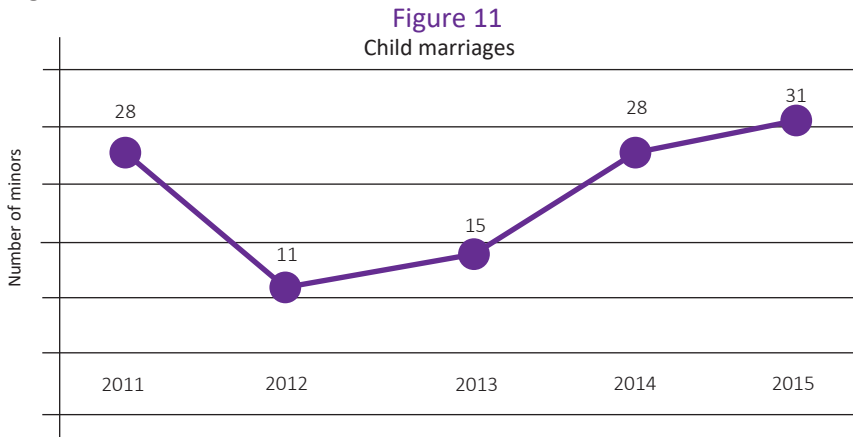
83 Criminal Code, consolidated text, “Official Gazette of RM” No. «No. 80/99, No. 4/02, No. 43/03, No. 19/04, No. 81/05, No. 60/06, No. 73 / 06, No. 7/08, No. 139/08, No. 114/09, No. 51/11, No. 135/11, No. 185/11, No. 142/12, No. 166/12, No. 55/13, No. 82/13, No. 14/14, No. 27/14, No. 28/14, No. 115/14 and No. 132/14, available at: <http://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Krivichen-zakonik-integralen-prechisten-tekst.pdf> English translation available at: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/unpan/unpan016120.pdf>

84 Ibid.

*In accordance with the Law on Juvenile Justice, “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 87/07; No. 103/08; No. 160/08; 145/10, “an older juvenile at risk is a person who at the time of commitment of the act which according to the law is determined as a criminal act or offence, is of the age of sixteen years, and is under the age of eighteen”. (English translation available at: <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/17951> Accessed on 07.04.2018)

85 http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/en/MakStat/MakStat__PoloviStat/125_PoloviStatistiki_en.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?xid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef

Roma settlement Trizla 2 in Prilep, within the “Citizens in the Assembly: Legislative Human Rights Initiatives” project, this phenomenon has become more common. The data indicates the following: “... In 2011, 28 minors entered a marital union, in 2012 the number was 11, in 2013, the number increased to 15, and in 2014, the number increased to 28. In 2015, the number is the largest (31 minors), 27 of whom are female and 4 are male”⁸⁶. Figure 11 given below shows that, after a certain decline in 2012 and 2013, the following years noted an increase in the number of child marriages.



This research shows that a total number of 122 marital unions, in which at least one of the spouses was a minor, were formed in the period from 2011 to 2016, and thus “67% were unions between minors and 37% were unions where young girls were married to adult men aged 18 to 40”⁸⁷.

The data obtained from the “‘Gray Area’ between Tradition and the Rights of Children” research, conducted by the Roma Organization for Multicultural Affirmation – Roma SOS, show that different institutions possess different data on the same problem – child marriages. According to the research, “Because of this noncompliance, and probably weak or non-existent cooperation among institutions on this issue, after receiving the data it cannot be concluded what the total number is, and whether all recorded cases have received all necessary information and support i.e. have exercised all their rights through these institutions of the system”⁸⁸. That this problem has a gender aspect is also evident in the fact that, out of 49 marriages concluded during the period from 2011 to 2014, where one spouse is aged 16 to 18 and the other one is an adult, only 2 minors were male, while the remaining 47 were female⁸⁹.

In order to obtain specific statistics on how many formal and informal communities in which one or both partners are minor have been registered in the past three years, a request for access to public records was sent to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. In their response⁹⁰, they stated that according to the report of the Public

86 Child Marriages - From Love To Gross Violation Of Human Rights, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Skopje 2016, p. 16 Available (in Macedonian) at: <http://medium.edu.mk/attach/ROMA-preview2.pdf>

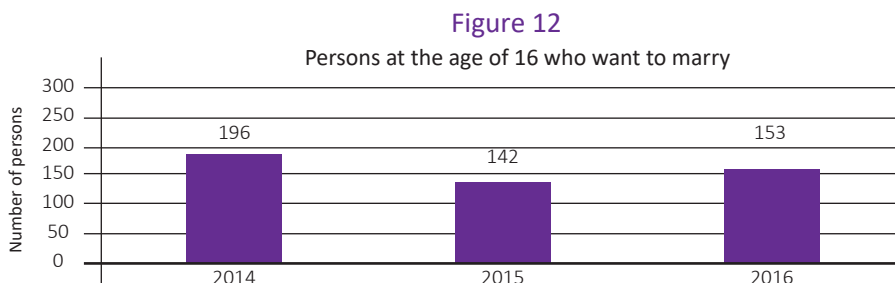
87 Ibid., p. 15.

88 “Grey Area’ Between Tradition and Children’s Rights”, Roma Organization for Multicultural Affirmation - Roma SOS, Prilep, 2016, p. 15, available at: http://romasosprilep.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Roma-SOS_Sivata-zona_ANG_002.pdf.

89 Ibid.

90 Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Response to Request No. 14-463/8 of 05.08.2017.

Institution for Social Activities prepared on the basis of the data provided by 30 social work centers in the Lirikus database, the number of 16-year-old minors who wanted to marry and turned to Centers for Social Work, as can be seen from Chart 12, decreased in 2015, but, unfortunately, there is an increase in 2016, especially considering that the submitted data refer to the period until 31.07.2016.



Unfortunately, the MLSP informed us that they do not have information about the number of extramarital unions in which the bride is a minor. Lack of legal regulation as well as a system for collecting and registering this type of data leaves room for a gray area in which children's and women's rights are being violated.

For the purpose of obtaining specific statistics from the target regions, requests for access to public records were sent to 6 social work centers for the needs of the survey, and we only received 3 responses.

The CSW Tetovo notified us that, in the last three years, there are no registered formal requests for marriage in which the bride is a minor in the target municipalities. The CSW Kocani reported that in the last three years there have not been registered cases of formal marriage, with parental consent, and in which the bride is a minor in the municipality of Zrnovci. The only such marriage is registered in the municipality of Cusinovo – Oblesovo in 2015, with the bride at the age of 17, and she is from the Macedonian ethnic community.

The CSW Ohrid informed us that there are 2 recorded cases of formal marriage with parental consent in which the bride was a minor in the municipality of Debarca in 2015, with the brides at the age of 17 and from the Macedonian ethnic community. In order to obtain qualitative data that would provide insight into the perception of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) of child marriages, a set of questions on this topic were included in the interview conducted with the Ministry's representative. In her responses, she pointed out that the MLSP is making efforts to reduce the number of child marriages, that is, the Ministry is considering implementing amendments to the legislation in order to increase the age limit when a minor can marry or, in some cases, eliminate parts of legislation that give an opportunity to conclude such a marriage. The Ministry believes that the various programs led by domestic institutions and assisted by foreign donors contributed to raising awareness among young people, who increasingly prefer to get educated and to marry later in life. According to them, this phenomenon is mostly found in the Roma community, although the number of child marriages has been decreasing recently, i.e. the marriage age limit is increasing. Regarding the issue of "buying"

brides, the Ministry believes that this issue falls into the category of human trafficking. However, in some communities, like the Roma, there are cultural and traditional customs according to which there is a certain financial guarantee that the girl will be given to the one that she is meant for. However, as the representative from the Ministry informed, more recently, people with lower education and with financial problems require funds from the bridegroom's family in the number of costs for the wedding itself.

In order to investigate whether there are cases in the Republic of Macedonia which involve the purchase of underage brides, the interviewees were asked a set of questions that encompass this issue as well. From the information received through interviewing women of different ethnic backgrounds, with varying degrees of education and with different economic status in the target regions, the following data were obtained on this topic:

For the interviewees from the Polog Region, regardless of the level of education and ethnicity, the average age of marriage varies from 21 to 25 years of age, all of whom said that they married for love. Almost all of the respondents noted that they were registered at the Registry of Marriage, except one respondent, who pointed out that, in search of better economic opportunities for living outside the country, she is living in an extramarital union. "We are not registered because I hope my husband will get married abroad, will obtain documents, and then he will take me with him. The children carry their father's surname, and he is stated on their birth certificate". None of the respondents was underage when she became a mother for the first time, and at the same time, none of them has had an abortion after the adoption of the current Law on Termination of Pregnancy.

According to the respondents, the average age of marriage for women in the Polog Region ranges from 18 to 25, while for men from 28 to 29. One of the respondents thinks that, lately, there is a trend of decreasing the age of conceiving among girls, or, as she noted: "I see photos with pregnant high school graduates both from Tetovo and Brvenica, maybe they have turned 18, but they surely were not 18 when they got pregnant". At the same time, some of the respondents consider that for rural girls it is a benefit to find a boy from an urban environment since they would have better employment opportunities and the more beautiful life. As a result, they easily enter into more serious relationships, even younger.

Most respondents, regardless of their ethnicity and level of education, indicated that they were familiar with the existence of cases of child marriages in certain environments, and the most vulnerable were the girls from the Roma and the Albanian ethnic community. The respondents from the Roma and Albanian ethnic communities confirmed that they are familiar with cases, mainly in smaller and more remote rural areas, and above all, as a result of bad family and economic conditions. According to these respondents, there are 3 categories of juvenile brides: in the first one, there are underage brides aged 14-15 who live in unregistered, extramarital unions; the second one is of those who marry after obtaining a consent from a parent at the age of 16, and in the third one is of those who leave their family and marry as runaway brides.

All of the respondents recognize this phenomenon as extremely negative, condemning such marriages and seeing that girls are unprepared for entering a marriage and for “the obligations that come with a marriage” and that “children are not ready to have children of their own”. As one respondent summed it up nicely, “It makes me feel so sad, a minor girl is still a child, physically – she has the body is a child, her mind is childish, and she will face problems that will inevitably come across childishly. In a way, her personality is still in the process of building, and it may even be built badly because of it. She might turn into an angry person because the age limit is not for nothing as she needs to mature”. According to the respondents, this phenomenon usually results in a disagreement between spouses, who end up unhappy and dissatisfied in this relationship, which can often become violent.

Almost all of the respondents, regardless of the degree of education and ethnicity, said they were familiar with cases of “bought” brides but still tried to “protect” their settlement, always emphasizing that this was happening in the neighboring villages. According to them, the “bought” brides are mostly from Albania, and the reason why certain people decide to marry in this way is that girls from their settlements go to cities for education or marriage, and in both cases, they do not return to their birthplace. None of the respondents could confirm with certainty that these brides were bought, that is, that money was paid for their arrival in the new community.

However, they pointed out that in all such cases, the brides are reportedly adult women, while men are mostly at an age which people in rural areas consider to be above marrying age (over 35), with a lower level of education and without any social life or widowers. Regarding the reasons why women from Albania agree on this type of arranged marriages, the respondents pointed out that in smaller towns in Albania, where these women mostly come from, girls older than 20 who are not married are perceived as problematic, and the whole environment encourages them to marry, if necessary, with the help of matchmakers in another country. The respondents claim that these women fit well in the environment, are diligent and take good care of the household. They perceive them as good mothers, but they still feel that these are not happy marriages because they are not based on love. The environment and the community accepted them well, with attempts to even help them adapt to the new environment. Some of them said that there were still cases when the purchased brides were leaving the new family because they were dissatisfied with their life.

Respondents with primary education from the Southwestern Region found that, nowadays, girls marry later in life (at the age of 25), usually because of their inability to find regular employment. However, one respondent stated that she heard about unregistered child marriages in the neighboring settlements, but did not have any specifics on the case because, as she said, “this is kept secret, people are very ignorant there”. The interviewees from Centar Zupa pointed to the existing, although somewhat less common, the practice of “selling” girls to boys from the village even at the age of 10 – marriages that are then often child marriages and end up unhappily due to the young age of the spouses. The respondents with secondary and high education felt that many of the girls in their environment marry very young and some were even minors, but they could not state a specific case. All respondents, regardless of the level of education, felt that marrying early has lasting consequences on the woman’s life because a minor is not capable of dealing with all the challenges that come with married life.

The respondents pointed out that, in their region, there are cases of brides who come from Albania, but there was no evidence that they had been “bought”. According to them, the reason for “buying” brides from another country is because most of the local girls, in the struggle for better life, get married in the cities, so there are many unmarried men in rural areas. Respondents consider that these women are good mothers and housewives, they fit in the environment and have great respect for the family. They seem happy in their marriages, but there are cases when such marriages end up with divorce.

Respondents from the Eastern Region, regardless of the level of education, stated that they remained in their municipalities because, according to them, they got married relatively early (20-22 years). They think that, nowadays, the couples in their municipalities generally get married older, after 23 years of age, unlike in the past, when the girls from both the Roma and the Macedonian ethnic community were getting married at 15-16 years of age, which was, according to them, a result of the patriarchal environment and limited freedom of movement of the girls. One of the respondents noted that she recalls a case, 20 years ago, when a girl got pregnant while still in primary school and, with the permission of her parents, she got married. Another respondent indicated that she had a friend who got married at the age of 16 due to problems in the family; she got divorced, and now only 18, she is already in her second marriage. As she noted, “underage girls are not mature enough to act reasonably as to be able to grasp the disadvantages of early marriage”. All respondents were of the unanimous opinion that child marriages have a negative effect on the quality of girls’ lives, because the moment they enter into it, they are not even aware of the obligations ahead.

The respondents noted that there are many brides from Albania in this region, but they cannot say with certainty that they had been “bought”. As one of the respondents pointed out, “My brother is married to a girl from Albania, they met by chance and married for love”. The respondents noted that the reason for this occurrence is that girls continuously move away from the villages. And in this region as well as in the other, it was confirmed that these women successfully fit in the environment and are perceived as good housewives and mothers, and at the same time, they are well received and respected by the environment in which they live and by the families. According to the respondents, the men are mostly “older” (at the age of 40 or older) or, as the respondent who has a personal example in the family pointed out. “My brother was getting older, he turned 34 and he needed a woman who would help him with the work on the agricultural land”.

All things considered, it can be concluded that regardless of the ethnicity, level of education, economic status, and place of residence, all respondents believe that child marriages have an extremely negative impact on the girls’ quality of life, especially because they are not ready for the challenges of marital life, which can result in violent relationships. Problems may also arise as a result of underage pregnancy and childbearing by mothers who are children themselves. Regarding the issue of “bought” brides, all respondents agree that these women are, without exception, adults and, usually, the age limit between the partners is not great. All of the examples pointed out that these brides come from Albania, and they easily fit into the environment, and both the community and family treat them with respect.

From the information received through establishing focus groups with representatives of non-governmental organizations from the target regions, working in the areas covered by this document, the following data on this topic were obtained:

The focus group participants from the Polog Region consider child marriages to be more common among the Roma population in this region, where there were also cases of girls from the seventh-eighth grade who abandoned their education, established extramarital unions and soon became mothers. According to them, some unions are registered with the parental consent, while others are not. Representatives of the Albanian organizations pointed out that this phenomenon in the past was more common in the Albanian community, but that it is not as common today. However, they specified one case of a girl who became a mother at the age of 16, but since she was not allowed to register a formal marriage, the child has her last name.

Regarding the issue of “purchased” brides, the representatives of the organizations reported that there are such cases of brides coming from Albania, and they are usually aged between 35 and 40, while their husbands are mostly over 45. One of the participants said: “I know a lot of people from here, from the region, who simply do not have any other choice, they know that there is such a possibility, but that does not mean that they pay money for the women, that they buy them ...”. They pointed out that in many cases, they are also widows who are older and do not want to live on their own, and because, as they say: «here, the widows do not usually get re-married, they used to get re-married in the past since they did not have any financial support, and now, they work on their own, so they rarely get re-marries”, and consequently, widowers are forced to look for brides from other countries.

The focus group participants from the Southeastern Region pointed out that, in that region, underage girls usually enter in extramarital unions, after which they leave school and, when they turn 16, register a formal marital union with parental consent. One of the participants pointed out the following: “I went to primary school in Murtino, there was a girl who got pregnant at 14, and that was it, I’m talking about the Turkish population”. Another participant, who works in the education sector and teaches classes in which the majority of students are from the Turkish ethnic community, believes that nowadays there is more free access to information, so it was surprising when parents of a girl from the Macedonian ethnic community informed her that the girl will get married at the age of 16 (second year high school). The participant explained: “The parents came and said that it was a good thing she was getting married because he (the groom) was from a rich family, and I, as her class teacher, was left speechless.” However, she emphasized, part of the blame should also be taken by the educational institutions, because in trying to protect families from complicated procedures and financial damages, they accept the newly emerged situations, rather than informing the other institutions about the case.

Regarding the issue of “buying” brides, the representatives of the organizations that participated in the focus group stated that they are familiar with the cases when brides from Albania are paid up to 3000 euros, and the mediator for the whole procedure is a person from Prilep. According to them, this is a “legal and well-organized crime”, and if there are any “problems” with the bride, she can be replaced by another one or, as one of the participants pointed out, she had witnessed a moment when the mediator had told the “bridegroom”: “Well, all right then, I will take her

away, and I will bring you another one for the money you paid". However, each case involves adult women, and usually, the age difference between spouses ranges from 10 to 12 years. The respondents pointed out that these women, almost without exception, are well received from the environment and the community, and adjust to it easily.

According to the focus group participants from the Eastern Region, child marriages are very rare and almost eradicated, although they sometimes occur among older teenagers, mostly with peers, due to unplanned pregnancy. In their experiences, such marriages are almost always dysfunctional because young people are not ready for the challenges of marital life, especially for parenting.

The focus group participants from the Southwestern Region pointed out that in some areas where Roma live, child marriages are almost eradicated, although in recent years, there have been several registered cases. Otherwise, they believe that such marriages are incidental, as a result of unplanned pregnancy and, most often, between peers, so they think that this is not a worrying trend.

The focus group participants from the Eastern and Southwestern region share the opinion with the participants from other focus groups regarding the "brides bought" from Albania. They stated that the women who come from there usually come because of the substandard living conditions in the place of origin (without water supply and sewerage, and sometimes even without electricity), so moving to a new place of living is an opportunity for improving the quality of life.

As a result, these women are willing to do housework quickly and skillfully, and they easily master the language, which makes them easily fit into the environment. However, the position they are in, given that they have very few known people in the country and cannot seek immediate help or support, makes them very vulnerable and at risk, i.e. dependent on the goodwill of the bridegroom/husband and his family.

Considering the situation through the information received from the central and local institutions, the conducted interviews with women from the rural areas, as well as the focus groups made up of representatives from the NGOs, we believe that it is necessary to create policies and measures that will be directly aimed at reduction of the number of child marriages in order to improve girls' quality of life, as well as measures that will discourage "buying" brides from other countries.

Legislation in the Republic of Macedonia needs to be further specified, especially in terms of introducing sanctions for adults who are in extramarital unions with older juveniles. At the same time, a system for registering extramarital unions, especially those in which one or both partners are minors, must be introduced by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. In order to reduce formally registered child marriages, amendments to the legislation are also needed in order to increase the age limit for entering into marriage, as well as continuing education of parents and children about the harmful consequences that may arise as a result of such marriages. In order to reduce cases of "buying" brides from other countries, it is necessary to introduce sanctions for people who mediate these procedures, as well as to discourage from entering such a marriage.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

According to a UN Women research on rural women⁹¹, they account for one-quarter of the world's population. Rural women are leaders, producers, entrepreneurs and service providers, and their contribution is vital to the well-being of families, communities and economies, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. They are a large part of the agricultural workforce as they produce most of the foods grown, especially in subsistence agriculture, and perform most of the unpaid work in rural areas.

The main social problems that affect women in rural areas are poverty and poor living standards. Rural women are generally unemployed because, the work they do, whether it involves domestic obligations or agricultural/livestock work, usually does not generate income, and at the same time, they are unable to exercise certain rights. This problem was also felt by the European Union, both in the Member States and in some of the non-member countries, and in this context, in one of the reports of the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, it recommends that the countries establish clear legal provisions on the situation of assisting spouses, as well as recognizing the right to maternity leave and maternity benefits, including the autonomous rights of social protection as to help the spouses of self-employed workers⁹².

Unfortunately, due to certain prevailing issues in rural areas, such as unemployment, poverty, poor infrastructural connections with cities and inaccessibility to basic education, health and social services, as well as the persistence of the traditional patriarchal mentality that imposes stereotypical gender roles for women and men, while limiting women's influence both in the private and public life, women in rural areas face major challenges in exercising their rights in the area of social protection. Article 2 of the Law on Social Protection states that "social protection is a system of measures, activities and policies to prevent and overcome the basic social risks to which the citizen is exposed throughout life, to reduce poverty and social exclusion and to strengthen his/her capacity for protection"⁹³. Social protection is a matter of public interest, which is carried out through a set of measures that provide vulnerable categories of citizens with social prevention, non-institutional and institutional protection, as well as financial assistance from social protection. Article 9 of the same Law stipulates that "apart from the measures for social protection of the citizens regulated by this Law, the care of the Republic for prevention of occurrence of social risk is also realized by taking measures in the tax policy, employment, scholarship policy, housing, protection of the family, healthcare, upbringing and education, and in other areas in accordance with the Law"⁹⁴. The Law on Social Protection prohibits any kind of discrimination on various grounds, including gender, in the process of exercising the rights to social protection. One of the measures for social protection is social prevention, which should enable prevention of social risk, or early detection and

91 Rural Women, Their Contributions and Challenges, to Be Highlighted at UN Commission on the Status of Women, - February 23, 2012

92 „Rural women in Europe“ - Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Rapporteur: Ms Carmen Quintanilla Barba, Spain, EPP/CD - p.17

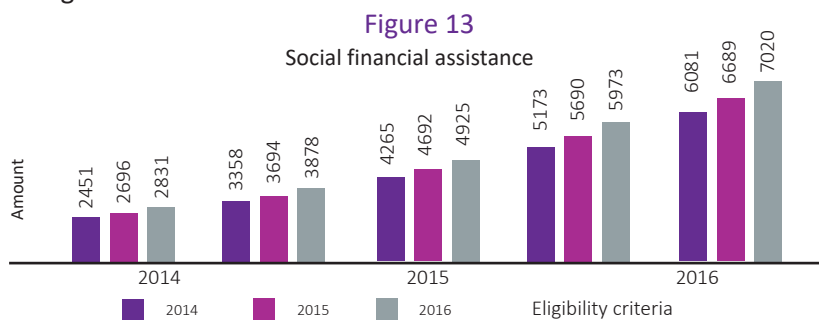
93 Закон за социјална заштita – Консолидиран текст „Службен весник на Република Македонија“ бр. 79/09, бр. 36/11, бр. 51/11, бр. 166/12, бр. 15/13, бр. 79/13, бр. 164/13, бр.187/13, бр. 38/14, бр. 44/14, бр.116/14, бр. 180/14, бр. 33/15, бр. 72/15, бр. 104/15, бр. 150/15, достапен на: <http://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Zakon-za-socijalna-zastita.pdf>

94 Ibid.

treatment of the same, in order to overcome or lessen the harmful consequences of that risk. This measure is implemented through activities related to raising awareness among citizens, especially those from vulnerable groups, education, counseling and providing appropriate assistance in accordance with specific needs. Non-institutional protection, which is realized through the social protection centers, includes a set of measures that enable overcoming certain problematic situations and risks of different target groups, while institutional protection implies the right to qualify for work-production activity and the right to accommodation in a social care institution. The Law on Social Protection regulates the manner of acquiring the right to financial assistance from social protection. Article 45, paragraph 1 of the Law stipulates as follows: “The right to social financial assistance is enjoyed by a person capable of work and household*, materially insecure and which, according to other regulations, cannot provide means for existence”⁹⁵. The holder of this right can only be an unemployed person who is actively seeking employment in accordance with the Law on Employment and Insurance Case of Unemployment⁹⁶, materially insecure* and who, according to other regulations, cannot provide means for existence. Article 47, paragraph 3 of the Law on Social Protection stipulates that: “the amount of the social financial assistance referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall be adjusted to the increase of the living costs for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office in January for the current year and shall represent the minimum basis for the amount of social financial assistance for the next year”⁹⁷.

In order to obtain specific statistics that would show rural women’s utilization of the rights and services from social protection, a request for access to public records was sent to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP).

If you look at the data given in Figure 13, which relate to the amount of social assistance in the past three years, it can be noted that it has increased in all categories for obtaining social financial assistance*.



* In accordance with the Law, the household represents a community of family members and other relatives, among which there is no legal obligation for mutual support, who jointly contribute, manage and consume.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment - Consolidated text, available at: <http://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Zakon-za-vrabotuvaneto-i-osiguruvane-vo-sluchaj-na-nevrabotenostPrechisten-tekst-25-07-2014.pdf>

* According to the Law, a materially insecure person is considered a person and a household that generates income on all bases lower than the amount of social financial assistance, determined by this Law and who does not own property and property rights from which he/she can be supported.

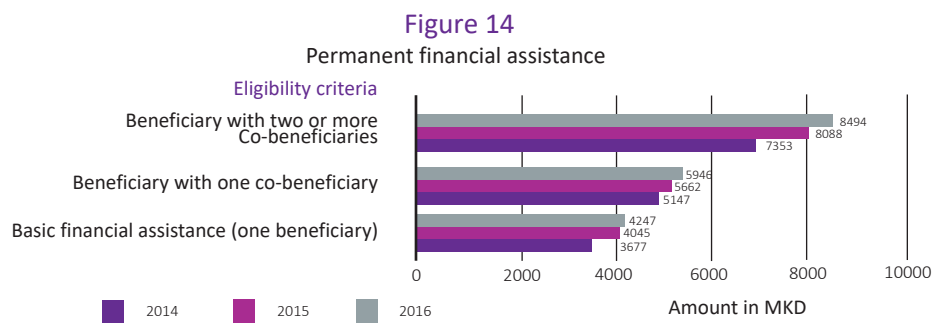
⁹⁷ Law on Social Protection - Consolidated text "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 79/09, No. 36/11, No. 51/11, No. 166/12, No. 15/13, No. 79/13, No. 164/13, No. 187 / 13, No. 38/14, No. 44/14, No. 116 / 14, No. 180/14, No. 33/15, No. 72/15, No. 104/15, No. 150/15, available at: <http://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Zakon-za-socijalna-zastita.pdf>.

* Eligibility criteria for social financial assistance are as follows: 1 - a person; 2 - family or household with two members; 3 -family or household with three members; family and household with four members; 5 - family and household with five or more members.

According to the Law on Social Protection, the holder of the right to social financial assistance is determined by the centers for social protection and he/she should confirm the monthly income for himself/herself and all members of the household in order to exercise this right.

Article 57 of this Law stipulates that “The right to permanent financial assistance is enjoyed by a person who is incapable of work and materially insecure*, who cannot provide funds for his/her existence on the basis of other regulations”⁹⁸. The inability to work, according to the Law, arises from certain health-, age- or socially- related conditions. The holder of this right is the person who is incapable of work, as well as another family member, as a co-beneficiary of assistance, also incapable of work, or a child up to the age of 18, or up to 26 years, if he/she is on regular schooling. According to the Law, the amount of this right is compatible with the increase in the cost of living for the previous year, same as the amount of social assistance.

If we look at the data obtained from the MLSP given in Figure 14, referring to the amount of permanent financial assistance in the past three years, we notice an increase in the amount in all categories for the acquisition of permanent financial assistance.



According to Article 38 of the Law on Child Protection, “A parental allowance shall be granted to a mother for her third child born alive”⁹⁹. In order to exercise this right, the mother has to be a citizen of the Republic of Macedonia, have a permanent place of residence in the country in the last 3 years before submitting the application, be the primary caregiver, that is, to have all parental rights over them, they should be regularly vaccinated and enrolled in the mandatory education system, and at the same time, she should have had regular health checks and examinations during pregnancy. In cases where the mother is not alive, she left the child, or for justified reasons* is prevented from taking immediate care of the child, the right may be exercised by the father or the guardian instead of the mother, provided that the above conditions are met. The amount of the parental allowance for a third child, according to the law, is in line with the increase in the cost of living for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office in January for the current year.

* According to the Law, a materially insecure person is a person who has no income or whose income per family member is less than MKD 5.000, in accordance with the increase in the cost of living for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office in January for the current year, and who does not own property and property rights from which he/she can be supported.
98 bid.

99 Law on Child Protection, Consolidated text, “Official Gazette of RM” No. 23/13; No. 12/14; No. 44/14; No. 144/14; No. 10/15; No. 25/15 and No. 150/15, available at <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/>

* According to the Law, justified reasons are considered long-term continuous hospital treatment of the mother, seriously impaired maternal health, study visit, education and specialization of the mother, as well as the deprived working ability of the mother.

According to the Law on Social Protection, Article 70, “the right to financial assistance shall be granted to a mother who has a fourth child born alive since 1 January 2009”¹⁰⁰, and in order to be able to exercise this right, the mother is obligated to take care of children until they are 18 years of age, not to be deprived of the parental right over any of the children, to be unemployed and not to use the right to a pension after 62 years of age. According to Article 9, paragraph 2 of the Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Child Protection, “the alignment of amount of parental allowance for a child, from 2010 on, will be done in accordance with the increase in the cost of living for the previous year, published by the State Statistical Office in January for the current year”¹⁰¹.

In order to establish how many of the mothers from the target regions use these benefits, official data from the MLSP was requested. Regarding the number of cases of requested and/or approved allowances for the third and fourth child, the MLSP informed us that, in the past three years, there have been a total of 23,855 mothers who are beneficiaries of the parental allowance for a third child, i.e. 837 mothers who are beneficiaries of the parental allowance for the fourth child on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The number of mothers who are beneficiaries of this right from the target regions is a total of 1,925 mothers who receive parental allowance for a third child, i.e. 54 who receive allowance for a fourth child. The detailed presentation divided by municipalities from the target regions is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

CSW/target municipality	Parental allowance for a third child	Parental allowance for a fourth child
CSW Ohrid / Debarca	29	/
CSW Debar / Centar Zupa	140	6
CSW Makedonski Brod / Plasnica	104	4
CSW Tetovo / Bvenica	188	5
CSW Tetovo / Jegunovce	103	4
CSW Tetovo / Tearce	256	2
CSW Gostivar / Vrapciste	200	8
CSW Strumica / Novo Selo	68	3
CSW Radovis / Radovis	477	10
CSW Radovis / Konce	57	2
CSW Valandovo / Valandovo	129	2
CSW Stip / Karbinci	85	5
CSW Kocani / Zrnovci	20	/
CSW Kocani / Cesinovo – Oblesevo	39	/
CSW Delcevo / Delcevo	120	3

100 Law on Social Protection – consolidated text, “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 79/09, No. 36/11, No. 51/11, No. 166/12, No. 15/13, No. 79/13, No. 164/13, No. 187 / 13, No. 38/14, No. 44/14, No. 116 / 14, No. 180/14, No. 33/15, No. 72/15, No. 104/15, No. 150/15, Available at: <http://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Zakon-za-socijalna-zastita.pdf>

101 Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Child Protection, “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 156/09, available at: <http://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/8816D57FCA81034AB22F688B6319BD6D.pdf>

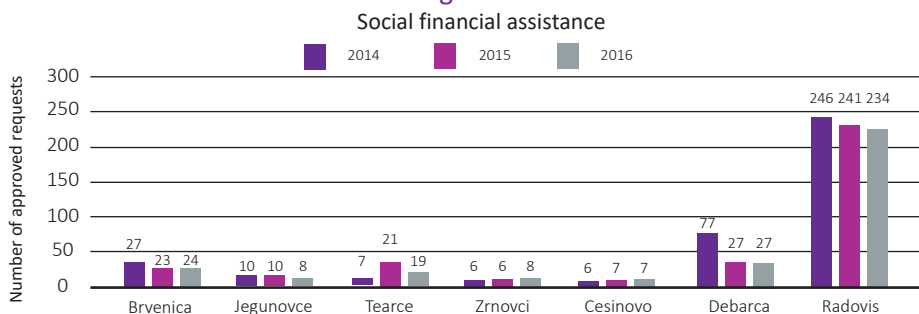
In order to obtain certain qualitative data that could provide insight into the perception of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) in reference to rural women' utilization of the rights arising from social protection, the interview we conducted with the Ministry's representative included a set of questions regarding this topic. She noted that, since 2006, the number of social protection centers (CSW) has increased from 24 to 30 – as it is to date on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia – in order to be more accessible to the citizens. According to her, the cultural traditions and patriarchal perceptions of the communities dictate how many people will turn to the CSW for the purpose of realizing a certain right. In more traditional communities, men turn to the centers more often than women. As she pointed out, “according to the analysis of gender budgeting of 2008-2009, in most cases, men are the primary beneficiaries of social assistance. Now, I believe that there have been some changes, and the number of women has increased. Especially for the right to an allowance of 1000 denars for high school students where the mother must be the beneficiary”. In terms of social services, women from rural areas usually use: the right to social protection, third party care, third child allowance, one-time assistance, financial support for high school students, and in particular, those services where the woman is required to be a beneficiary of the right.

For the purpose of obtaining accurate statistics from the target regions, for the purposes of the research, requests for access to public records were sent to 6 centers for social work, out of which 4 provided us the necessary data.

Regarding the number of cases of requested and/or approved financial assistance from social protection by women divided by age and ethnicity, the CSW Tetovo notified us that, in the past 3 years, they have approved a total of 149 requests for social financial assistance to women from the municipalities of Brvenica, Jegunovce and Tearce, with a greater number of beneficiaries belonging to the Macedonian ethnic community, a total of 85, while a smaller number from the Albanian ethnic community, 64, and they are women between the ages of 24 and over 65. From the CSW Kocani reported that, in the past 3 years, they have approved a total of 20 requests for social financial assistance to women from the municipality of Zrnovci and the same number of requests to women from the municipality of Cesinovo-Oblesevo, where all the beneficiaries are from the Macedonian ethnic community and at the age of 40-63.

The CSW Ohrid informed us that, in the past 3 years, they have approved a total of 131 requests for social financial assistance to women from the Municipality of Debarca, with the youngest user of this right being only 24 years old, while the oldest one is 95. Out of the total number of requests, 125 were submitted by members of the Macedonian ethnic community, while 6 by members of the Albanian community. The CSW Radovis reported that, in the past 3 years, they have approved a total of 721 requests for social financial assistance to women, with the largest number of beneficiaries belonging to the Macedonian ethnic community – a total of 619, while 92 are members of the Turkish ethnic community and a smaller number – 3, are members of the Vlach and 7 of the Serbian ethnic community. The age of the beneficiaries ranges from 26 to over 75. The cases of approved social assistance in the target region, divided by years and municipalities is given below in Figure 15.

Figure 15



From the information we acquired by interviewing women from the target regions of different ethnic backgrounds, with varying degrees of education and with different economic status, the following data related to their social protection were obtained: Respondents from the Polog Region are generally familiar with the opportunities offered by the state for using social assistance and protection, but most often do not use them because those families in need of this kind of help are in a difficult financial situation and cannot afford the necessary funds to provide the required documents, and even the financial assistance they are entitled to is considered very small. As one of the respondents pointed out: “the help they provide is very small, the documents you need to file cost more than the help you will receive”. At the same time, for most of them, the procedure for collecting various documents is complicated, especially if involves multiple trips to the town of the center for social work or to Skopje, as it is an additional expense to their already small family budgets.

As another respondent told us: “When my husband was operated in Skopje, we paid for the operation and we should have been reimbursed by social security, but that has not happened yet. They asked me back to go to Skopje several times and each time they required new documents, and now I will not go anymore, because going to Skopje costs money”. According to the respondents’ answers, it was found that in most cases these women use a parental allowance for a third child, as well as compensations for assistance and care for an ill family member, while in a smaller number of cases – social assistance.

The conducted interviews in the Southwestern region, in the settlements in the Municipality of Debarca that are considered as poorer rural areas, showed that most of the interviewed women do not use any social assistance. One of the respondents who lived with her family in the nearby town many years ago noted: “I used to get social help and then it was revoked because I came here to the countryside. My husband did not work; in the village, they thought I had livestock, I had cows, I had land, I worked on my land, but the land was not mine, it belonged to my parents”. Her impression was that the social assistance was abolished unjustly.

Another female respondent who was a beneficiary of social assistance for many years, also shared her negative experience because she receives an amount that is too low for basic living needs, or as she said: “I started receiving it many years ago when I was unemployed, but you could not live on that amount.” Some of the respondents in this region are beneficiaries of allowance for a third or fourth child, claiming this is the main reason why they had a third/fourth child. Some of them stated that, due to their low education and poor qualifications, they have applied as

inactive in ESARM and are being supported by their husbands who are migrants and spend most of the year working abroad.

Respondents from the Eastern Region were partially familiar with the social protection rights they are entitled to and with the opportunities for social assistance. One respondent, whose husband passed away too soon, pointed out the following: “I’m really disappointed that the children could not get scholarships. I tried, but they did not get it. The reason they were rejected was because I get social pension and it exceeds the financial minimum”. These respondents were better acquainted with the parental allowance for the third and fourth child, as well as with the child allowance – an assistance received by most of them.

In order to promote social prevention and to familiarize the citizens of the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia with the social assistance benefits, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has implemented the project “Open days for social protection in rural areas”¹⁰². The main goal of this project was to bring social protection and social work closer to the residents of rural areas, prevention and early detection of social risk exposure, as well as timely intervention by the social work centers. The project was implemented in three phases: first phase, from September to November 2013, second phase, in the course of 2014 from February to June, and the third phase, from September to December 2014. According to the data from the MLSP, the three phases involving various informative activities covered a total of 1827 settlements (on the official web page of the MLSP, there are no data on which municipalities specifically were covered by the project) and over 10,000 citizens. However, none of our respondents were aware that representatives of this institution conducted any activities in their places of residence.

Regarding the problem of domestic violence and its reporting rate to the centers for social work by rural women, the Ministry believes that, due to cultural clutches, traditional values, fear of uncertainty, and shame, women rarely decide to report, and if the case is not reported, it will not be registered. The average age limit for those who report is from 18 to 46 years old. According to reports in the ministry, in 2015 there were 289 domestic violence victims from rural areas, 284 victims in 2016, while in 2017 – 166 victims. Regarding the types of reported violence, the Ministry informs that there is psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and economic abuse. However, they claim the following: “There is a problem here, we keep records of the cases reported at the CSW, and the Mol has different figures, i.e. the cases which are reported to the police. There are also those who report to both institutions. Mol must act upon each reported case, and the numbers of cases are different. It’s mostly a matter of confidence in different institutions for solving the problem”. According to them, the communication between CSW and the Ministry of Interior is satisfactory, but problems arise in situations where the victims change their mind and terminate the initiated procedure, and in such cases, it is impossible to expect any results. The Ministry believes that after ratification of the Istanbul Convention*, a large part of the problems will be overcome, such as the one that occurs due to the removal of the victims (most often women and children) from the home, and thus removing the abuser.

102 More details are available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/otvoreni-denovi-na-socijalna-zashtita-vo-ruralnisredini.nsp>

* Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Istanbul, 2011, available in Macedonian at: <https://rm.coe.int/168046253a>, in English at: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>. At the time of the interview, the Convention was not ratified yet.

At a session held on 22.12.2017, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the Draft Law on Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

According to the Ministry’s information, at the moment, there are only 4 Regional Shelters for victims of domestic violence, which are organizational units of the CSW – MLSP, one shelter and one crisis center for 24/48 accommodation, managed by non-governmental organization and financially supported by MLSP. According to the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, in the “Mapping support services for victims of violence against women in the Republic of Macedonia” study for advancing the system of protection and overcoming the challenges related to domestic violence, among other recommendations, there is also the one for “opening specialized shelters for women – victims of violence, available in each region, with one place for every 10,000 inhabitants; or if the shelters are part of a social strategy for intervention, there should room available for one family in 10,000 women”¹⁰³. A better illustration of the current situation with the existing services for victims is given below in Image 3.



The Ministry believes that domestic violence affects poorly the lives of victims in general, but also of those around them, of close family, children, and neighbors. According to them, every woman should receive adequate protection. They stressed that NGO assistance to victims is sometimes crucial, they work on different projects with organizations, even one SOS victim line, established by the National Council for Gender Equality* (NSRF) has been transferred to competence of MLSP. According to the interviewed representative, from 2004 onwards, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy undertakes specific measures and activities for prevention and protection against domestic violence. A legal framework, by-laws, a protocol for cooperation, and a national strategy have been developed; there are also standards for treatment and specialized services, counseling centers, shelters, crisis centers, and a National Coordinative Body against Domestic Violence has also been established. She informed us that, in the following period, the system of prevention and protection against domestic violence will be promoted in accordance with the ratified Convention of the Council of Europe – the Istanbul Convention.

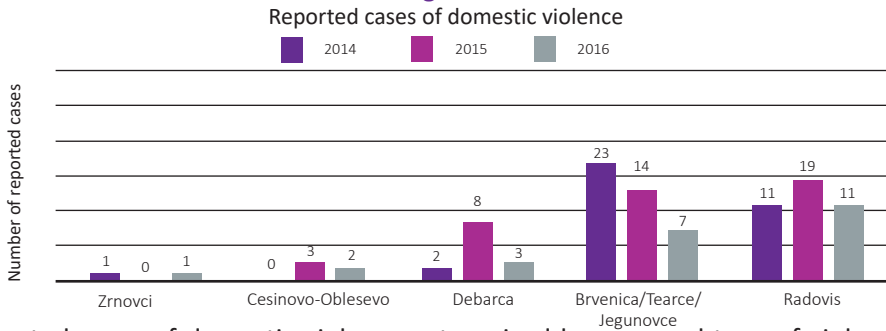
103 “Mapping of services available for women victims of violence in the Republic of Macedonia”, National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence - A voice against violence, Skopje, 2016, p. 34, available at: : [http:// www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapiran-e-na-servisi_final.pdf](http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapiran-e-na-servisi_final.pdf)

* Available at: http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/12801210_755402404599520_60379744674071756_n.jpg

* Further information is available on: <http://www.sozm.org.mk/>

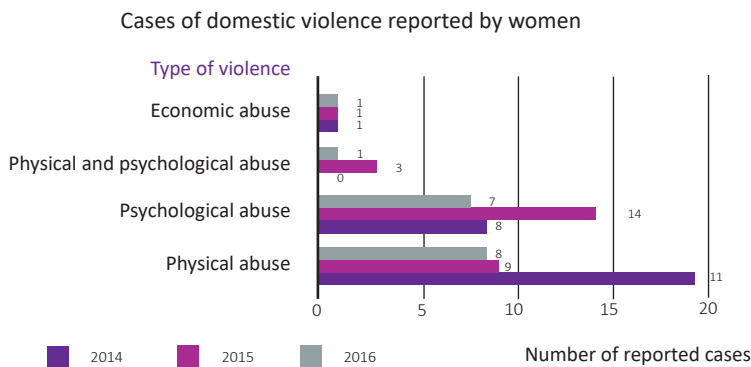
The information received upon the request for access to public records, submitted to a total of 6 centers for social work covering the target regions, a total of 4 centers provided us with relevant data. Regarding the number of domestic violence cases reported by women, divided by type of abuse, age and ethnicity, the CSW Tetovo informed us that, in the past 3 years, there have been a total of 44 reports of domestic violence in the target rural municipalities, of which the majority of cases in 2014 involve physical abuse, while those in 2015 – psychological abuse. In terms of the ethnicity of the victims, the women are from the Macedonian, Albanian and Roma ethnic communities. The CSW Kocani reported that, in the municipality of Zrnovci in the past 3 years, there have been 2 reports of domestic violence, while from the municipality of Cesinovo-Oblesevo – 5 reported cases. All women who reported acts of violence from the above municipalities are from the Macedonian ethnic community, while their age ranges from 28 to 45. The CSW Ohrid notified us that, from the municipality of Debarca, a total of 13 women submitted reports of domestic violence in the last 3 years, of which 12 are from the Macedonian and 1 is from the Albanian ethnic community, all aged 17 to 49. The CSW Radovis informed us that, in the past 3 years, a total of 41 women filed reports of domestic violence, of which 36 from the Macedonian, 1 from the Albanian and 4 from the Turkish ethnic community. The age of the victims ranges from 30 to over 65. Reported cases of domestic violence, divided by years and target municipalities, are graphically presented in Figure 16, which indicates that the highest number of reported cases in the target municipalities is in the Polog Region in 2014.

Figure 16



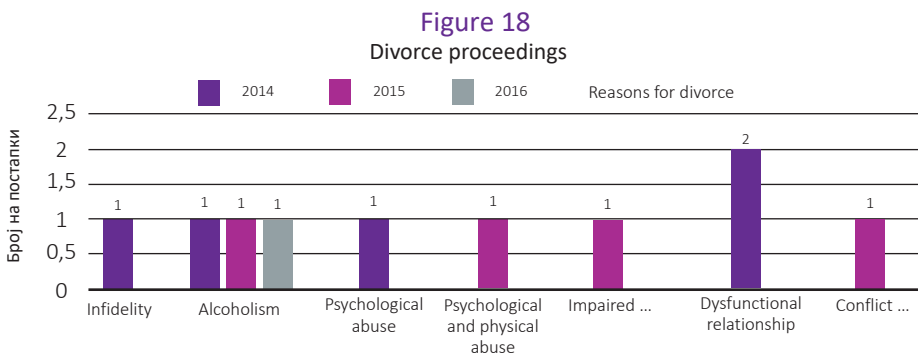
Reported cases of domestic violence categorized by year and type of violence are given in Figure 17 (reported cases in the CSW Radovis are not included because data on the type of violence were not provided in their correspondence), from which it can be seen that the largest number of cases of physical abuse have been reported in 2014, while on psychological abuse – in 2015.

Figure 17



Regarding the number of divorce procedures initiated by women, categorized by reasons for divorce, age and ethnicity of the woman, the Center for Social Work Tetovo informed us that, in 2014, a total of 10 requests were submitted by women in the target municipalities, 3 from Macedonian women and 7 Albanian women, a total of 6 divorce claims were submitted in 2015, of which 5 from Albanian and 1 from a Macedonian woman, and in 2016, a total of 3 divorce claims were filed, all from Macedonian women. The CSW Kocani reported that a total of 3 divorce procedures were filed in the municipality of Zrnovci and 4 in the municipality of Ceginovo- Oblesevo, all of them belonging to the Macedonian ethnic community, aged 23 to 45. The CSW Ohrid they notified us that, in the last 3 years, a total of 3 divorce procedures were filed in the municipality of Debarca by women from the Macedonian ethnic community, aged 31 to 42. The CSW Radovis reported that, in the past 3 years, a total of 22 divorce procedures have been filed, 16 of which are from members of the Macedonian ethnic community, while 6 are from members of the Turkish ethnic community.

Regarding the reasons for the initiation of divorce proceedings, according to the data given in Figure 18, it can be concluded that the largest number of couples were divorced in 2014 due to dysfunctional relationships. Data on the reasons for divorce are not given for the target municipalities of the Polog Region, as well as from the municipality of Radovis, because they are not listed in the answer to the request sent by the CSW Tetovo and the CSW Radovis.



Regarding the problem of domestic violence, the respondents from the Polog Region generally stated that they have heard about such cases in their surroundings, but not in their extended family. Most of them consider that they can recognize domestic violence, but after a detailed conversation, it became evident that domestic violence is, in most cases, equated with physical abuse. An exception to this perception was noticed among women who have a university degree or are involved in the activities of citizen associations, who claimed they were able to recognize psychological abuse. The respondents from the Albanian ethnic community pointed out that, in their community, there is a great number of cases when the violence is committed by other women in the family, such as sisters-in-law and the mothers-in-law.

All respondents emphasized that the environment is not trying to help the victims since it is considered a family's private thing, and that all misunderstandings should be resolved within the family. At the same time, they believe that most of the cases are not reported due to the lack of confidence in the police or disbelief that they will take action to resolve the case. Almost all of the respondents, regardless of

their ethnicity, talked about different types of domestic violence cases which had happened in their surroundings. One of the respondents said that “Some time ago, here in Vrapciste, a husband killed his wife with an ax. She had tried to seek help, but there was no reaction from the police, and nobody wanted to interfere with such quarrels. Being a member in a political party is very important here, and in this case, the man was from the family of a senior official of VMRO-DPMNE, so to this day, we do not know if he went to prison”. The respondents stated that a number of cases remain unprocessed because women – the victims themselves – withdraw the complaints, fearing that if the public finds out that they are being abused, their situation would worsen and they would face condemnation from the community. One of the respondents revealed the following: “I know a woman who tried to solve the problem on her own, because when she reported it, she ended up in a worse situation than before, so women do not report”. Women from this region pointed out that, in terms of freedom of movement, women, especially from the Albanian ethnic community, live with many restrictions, and even if they have the husband’s permission to move around alone, they still face the disapproval of the community.

The respondents from the Southwestern Region generally stated that they know how to recognize domestic violence. One of the respondents shared a case of violence in which the girl did not report it to the competent authorities. As she explained, “She thinks he (her husband) loves her and that he will change over time, and she is afraid of being condemned by the community, and that after that, she will not be able to find a new boyfriend.” Another respondent stated the following: “Men do make us suffer sometimes”. Psychological abuse, as a type of violence, is minimized and normalized, and if it does not transform into physical abuse, or even if it does not bring the victim to a life-threatening state, it is not perceived as something particularly traumatic or unusual among the respondents. All respondents were unanimous that, even if they learned of such a case, they would not report it to the competent authorities, because this would bring disgrace to the family, which is why it is kept secret in all such cases.

In contrast, the answers of the respondents from the Eastern Region varied depending on the place of residence, age and level of education.

The older respondents from one municipality, with primary and secondary education, stated that they can hardly recognize domestic violence because families tend to hide such situations, while women are silent and have to endure. In contrast, the younger respondents who are students informed us that they were familiar with the case of a violent boy who physically attacked his girlfriend many times, and in some cases, her sister and mother. According to them, all the cases were reported to the police, but the perpetrator was never detained or, as they said, “What good is reporting when no one does anything to stop him? He is from “an important” family, and now he is free”. The respondents from the other municipality also introduced us to specific cases where, due to untimely reporting and improper reactions by authorities, the case of domestic violence ended tragically. One of the respondents pointed out an example in the village of a woman who reported the case of violence, but unfortunately, she did not receive any help from the institutions. Apart from the everyday abuse, the husband did not allow his wife to work, so after 20 years of suffering of all types of violence, the woman killed her husband in self-defense, and she is currently serving a prison sentence. In the specific case, both the woman and man were highly educated, which shows that abused women are not always the

uneducated ones, and because they are afraid for their lives, they do not leave their husbands. Another female respondent gave an example from another village where prolonged domestic violence resulted in the murder of a woman, a husband and a son. One of the respondents from the same settlement stated that she recognizes domestic violence, but claimed she was not familiar with the said cases, although it was almost impossible not to hear about the murders that the other respondents talked about. This indicates that some of the women are still not ready to speak openly on this topic. The slow or inadequate response of the authorities for resolving reported cases of violence against women causes distrust in the system, and because of fear for their own life and fear of condemnation by the community in which they live, they often decide to remain silent. Unfortunately, the community does not always recognize a victim of domestic violence, and very often, they consider this a private matter, which is why they decide not to interfere.

The focus group participants from the Polog Region pointed out that, in their opinion, the big problem is that there is no shelter for victims of domestic violence in this region. As they stated, after reporting the abuser to the police and the CSW, the victims are usually sent from the institutions to the non-governmental organizations who are trying to provide free legal aid, but unfortunately, they have nowhere to place them. They informed us that, each month, 5-6 women turn to them for consultations and counseling, and some of them even before officially reporting the abuse to the competent authorities. One of the participants shared that, in many cases, the victims go to their parents' homes after reporting the abuse, and if they cannot stay there long, they return to live with the perpetrators, since they have no finances and are economically dependent on their husbands. As one participant pointed out, "She did report him many times, but she couldn't run away from him. Once she came to my home with her eyeglasses on and would not take them off, and when she took the glasses off, her eyes were black". The participants stated that education and raising public awareness on this issue are of great importance, and they distribute information brochures on public events in the villages. However, what they are trying to achieve is the municipality, the Center for Social Work and the business community to open a shelter where victims can be safely placed until they find a long-term solution.

Most of the focus group participants from the Southeastern Region were women from NGOs and had experience in working with this issue, primarily in offering free legal aid, counseling, encouragement, education and the like. They were of the unanimous opinion that there is a stigma surrounding this issue, especially in the smaller communities where everyone knows each other. At the same time, rural women do not trust the authorities – they are afraid of being forced to wander through institutional labyrinths only to end up with their abuser. Regarding the types of violence recognized by women in this region, a large part of the participants believe that physical abuse prevails, and domestic violence is considered only what is happening at home, between a man and a woman, while gender-based violence, and especially what happens between partners, is almost unrecognized and not perceived as domestic violence. Or, as one of the respondents said: "A girl, 4th year in high school, says that her boyfriend beat her up in front of the whole school, and she says 'it's my fault, because he bought me a phone and I did not answer him, and that's why he bought it for me...' She is convinced that this cannot be domestic violence because they are not a family. Therefore, I think that we need to inform

the youth much more on these issues”. At the same time, some of the participants felt that a shelter for victims of domestic violence should be a safe house, whose location will be known only to people working on this issue. According to them, it is unimaginable for representatives of institutions to take pictures and promote the opening of the shelter publicly. Another problem that the participants pointed out is the poor and insufficiently prompt responsiveness of the institutions when a woman from a rural area reports violence, or as one participant pointed out, “The victim barely found a way and gathered the courage to report the abuse, and they must not let her wait, or refer her to other places, and not to provide assistance and support, or to identify the violence, for example, as a ‘love problem’”.

Considering the situation through the received information from the central and local institutions, the interviews with women from the rural areas, as well as the focus groups made up of representatives from the NGOs, we believe it is necessary to create policies and measures that will influence the raising of the awareness among the citizens for the problem of domestic violence, which will lead to a direct reduction in the number of cases of domestic violence and the improvement of the quality of life of women in rural areas.

For that purpose, it is necessary to establish a functional system of coordination between the MoI and the CSW in reference to reporting and taking measures on cases of domestic violence, including the production of consistent statistics. It is necessary to establish a system for monitoring the actions of all institutions that have the authority to react in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence or any gender-based violence in order to respond promptly and impose appropriate sanctions if the prescribed protocols of conduct in such cases are not followed. It is of utmost importance to provide additional education and sensitization of the officers who make initial contacts with the victims, such as police officers, officers employed in the centers for social work, and healthcare workers in relation to the treatment of victims in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence or any gender-based violence. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the role of coordinators for equal opportunities in the ministries as well as in the local self-government by introducing measures for assessing the sectors, which would enable greater actualization of this issue and a coordinated approach toward its resolution. In order to encourage women to speak openly on these topics, they need to be actualized them in order to find appropriate solutions. It is also necessary to encourage local leaders who will be motivated to stay in their communities and work on raising awareness on this issue. It is of great importance to organize a campaign in the rural areas for raising awareness of the rights, opportunities and the need to establish gender equality for both men and women.

YORUK WOMEN

Introduction

As part of the research, the project team also investigated the challenges faced by a subgroup of rural women identified as particularly vulnerable. It is a group of women of the Turkish ethnic community – Yoruks (Yörüks), who mostly live in the southeastern part of Macedonia in the municipalities of Karbinci and Radovis. They are descendants of nomadic peoples of Turkmen origin who emigrated from the steppes of Central Asia to Anatolia, and from there, in several waves, settled in the eastern parts of the Balkans and even in Macedonia, where they live to this day, isolated from the city congestion, and thus preserving their authenticity. The exact number of women belonging to this ethnic community is unknown because, according to the census, they are considered as people of Turkish nationality. They speak with a specific type of a Turkish dialect, which is often unknown and incomprehensible to speakers of the standard Turkish language.

The basic characteristic of this ethnic group is its isolation from and non-integration with the rest of the Macedonian society. In fact, even in the country itself, by the members of other ethnic groups, especially the majority, the Yoruks are perceived as an exotic tribe, living according to their own customs and traditions. However, a look under the surface reveals that the differences are not as great as they appear, that the strong patriarchal traditions existing in these communities are merely a more rudimentary form of patriarchy which is found in other rural as well as urban areas. General perceptions of the life of Yoruk women mainly focus on their anthropological and ethnic peculiarities, without critically observing the failure of the state to offer opportunities for the integration and prosperity of this ethnic group. Media reduces them to a “silent” (because of the lack of knowledge of the Macedonian language) group of curious, but very obedient and submissive women “skilled” (in cookery), dressed in cheerful, vivid, traditional garments. The lack of publicly available services further reinforces and emphasizes their isolation, and the poor and often substandard conditions they live in exposes women who are traditionally tied to privacy and have the minimal education to an extremely high risk of economic, physical and sexual abuse.

One major obstacle for more efficient integration of these women in society is their inability to speak the Macedonian language. Given the low level of education and the insufficient possibilities in their education for studying the Macedonian language, they remain cut off from the institutions that are obliged to provide them with opportunities and protection. As the doctor in the village says, “20 years ago, after they set up satellite antennas, they don’t follow any Macedonian media – they think they live somewhere in a village in Turkey. They know nothing about Macedonia, nor are they interested in Macedonia. If you were to ask them, they probably do not know who the prime minister, nor who the president is”.

Among other things, when it comes to exercising women’s right, it can be stated that the state and judicial apparatus, with their mechanisms for sanctioning family and sexual, or gender-based violence, are almost completely non-functional, and dealing with such crimes is left to the usual rules of the community, which almost exclusively works to protect the “honor of the family” and at the expense of the woman, or, in most cases, the young girl.

In the framework of the research, 17 in-depth interviews and a few more short conversations were conducted with rural women from the villages Radanje and Kalauzlija – municipality of Karbinci, and Ali Koc – Municipality of Radovis.

The isolation of the community and its exclusion from contemporary social trends was an aggravating factor in gaining access to this community, since almost all the contacts that the Yoruks have with the world outside their villages are through their husbands or other male family members. After contact was established, due to the language barrier, it was crucial for the research team to conduct interviews with a local woman, as well as to conduct interviews in a safe space as to allow women to speak freely and without pressure in order to avoid socially desirable responses.

The research left us with the impression that the lower villages from the municipality of Karbinci are more integrated in the modern society because women have a certain degree of economic independence. This comes from the possibility to work in the textile factories in Stip, to which they have organized transport from the village, with a van. However, according to our research, those women who decide, or receive a family permit for this kind of employment, are a minority, and quite often, do not have control over the income they receive.

When they talk about themselves, there is an impression that they are unaware of the violations of their basic human rights that occur on daily basis, such as right to free movement or right to independent choices.

Education

All interviewees (17) from this ethnic community have completed elementary education, and the majority (13) have abandoned their education after 4th grade. All women responded positively about education, saying it was “a really great thing” and everyone believed that it would provide them a better starting position in life and allow them easier access to economic independence. However, these statements contradict the data which indicates that most of the girls from Ali Koc and the neighboring villages do not continue their education after the fourth grade. The main reason for this pointed out by the respondents is that, in the village, despite a large number of children (around 90), education is possible up to the 4th grade. A particular problem arises from the fact that the children from the different grades, only have one lesson per week for studying the Macedonian language, which greatly contributes to the isolation of the whole community, and especially to girls, who usually do not get the chance to continue their education outside the village, and are left without the basic communication tool required outside their community. However, it seems that poor access to the higher grades of primary education (Ali Koch is at an altitude of 800 meters, and in the winter the road to Radovis is often covered with snow) is not the only reason for the early abandonment of education among the Yoruks.

As the local family medicine specialist informed us, the concept of “honor” of the family, which involves the sexual innocence of the daughters in the family, still plays a key role in the social order in that community. As a result, girls are usually not allowed a greater movement without supervision, which could potentially lead to a situation that would jeopardize their morale. This concern is even more intensified

with cases of deviant behavior, in which adult men (20-30 years old) use various forms of coercion and intimidation, including new social networks, to seduce 13 or 14-year-old girls from the school in Radovis and to abuse them sexually. Despite filing reports with the police and initiating investigations with the prosecuting authorities, these cases end up in a way that, the girl, being considered “dishonored” and no longer able to marry, which is her main function in the community, she is “given” as a bride to the abuser, after the family of the abuser pays the tariff for the bride, which is around 4000 euros.

Of course, this unsanctioned practice cannot be used as a reason for the lack of the poor education of girls, as one of the female respondents told us how her own 30-year-old daughter, who was never enrolled at school (the mother has a chronic illness, and thus she decided that her oldest daughter will not go to school so that she can help her at home), was lured away from her home by peers, and grabbed in their yard by an adult man who took her to his home and raped her. Parents managed to bring her home with the help of the police, but after a few days, they “gave” her back as a bride for the abuser because she was already “dishonored”. The doctor confirmed that she referred the victim to a specialist and she is under continuous therapy with antidepressants prescribed by a specialist.

One of the girls (17 years old) we interviewed was in high school (mechanical engineering course), and her younger sister, who wanted to become a doctor, was preparing to start high school. Most of the girls who successfully enroll in high school or continue with a college education, find jobs in urban areas and move out of the village.

Healthcare

The situation in the two villages in which we conducted the interviews is rather different. The main reason for this is the fact that there is no standard health clinic in Radanje, so except for one, all the women we interviewed are not medically insured, but choose to pay the public health services and have very low awareness regarding the recommended regular examinations.

On the other hand, in Ali Koc there is a functional clinic with a nurse and a doctor – specialist in family medicine, which, besides taking care of the health of her patients, also helps with the administrative obligations of the insured, so all the interviewed women and a girl in Ali Koc was medically insured, and those with a chronic illness were beneficiaries of permanent financial assistance due to a rare illness, with the help of the doctor. In addition, they perform the necessary regular gynecological examinations every year with the help of the doctor who directs them to Stip and makes sure they enjoy all the healthcare rights they are entitled to as insurance beneficiaries, including the right to terminate the pregnancy.

The example of the doctor's influence in this environment shows the importance of the existence of a leader in patriarchal settings, which could be a good example of how education and economic independence lead to a better quality of life for the woman but are also very useful for the community.

Social protection

Unfortunately, the interviewees were not very familiar with the rights to social protection and the ways in which they could use them. The elderly do not use any social assistance and feel particularly vulnerable because they do not have any pension in old age, they depend on the children and feel like a burden to them. Their main responsibility is the raising of children and the maintenance of the home, and if they have any additional time, they are engaged in tobacco production, which is, actually, the main economic branch in the village. However, most of the younger women receive a parental allowance for the third and fourth child and state that they often decide to have more children because of this stimulating measure.

Women, even when they are in charge of the distribution of the family budget and they have the money, are not allowed to spend them as they choose to, and according to the unwritten rules, they are not allowed to go shopping alone in the village shop.

Given their position of complete economic dependence and, moreover, the inability to speak Macedonian, they do not have access to the institutions, and male family members serve as a link between them and the state, so in situations when they are threatened by them, it is impossible to report them. In addition, there is a serious lack of recognition of the phenomenon of domestic violence as a negative phenomenon. In fact, the very language used to describe domestic violence shows the extent to which abuse has been normalized and accepted by women, or male members of the family, because they describe the use of violence against women as “(in that house) they argue very often”, which semantically distributes the blame for the disagreement and normalizes the violence as if it were a verbal quarrel. An elderly widow said: “Let them beat us, as long as they are alive and well”, in an attempt to explain that their life would be harder without a husband. The only young woman (30) who spoke openly at the interview said that violence was a regular occurrence and that it seriously affects the quality of their lives: “Do not let them fool you, 99% of us women here are beaten by men, only 1% are not”. Unfortunately, according to the statement of this female respondent, even in cases when violence is unbearable and the woman decides to report him to the police, the answer she receives from the prosecution authorities is that «this is a family issue”, that “they should calm down”, and that she should “stop provoking her husband”. They had only one example of a case in which domestic violence was sanctioned by the police, and when the abuser was forced to pay a fine of 500 euros and was told that if he repeated the act, he would go to jail. Also, we were told about only one divorce case, after which the woman along with her children was accepted to go back to her family.

Domestic violence also exists in the form of “disciplining” daughters when they do not “behave decently”. Another recent case is known, in which one of the girls from the upper grades of elementary school was filmed with a camera in an “indecent” act with a peer in an abandoned house, after which the footage was uploaded on the Internet. The girl was subjected to violence by the family, and since the peer refused to marry her, the whole family was forced to move to Turkey because of the embarrassment from this incident.

All interviewed women identify that their life is much easier than the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, but this is due to the modern appliances that make their work easier, not because of the emancipation or the greater supply of services by the state.

Upon being asked what the state could do for them, most women responded that textile factories should be opened in their vicinity, so they could work and achieve economic independence, and yet remain under the supervision of the family and the community. They also consider that a kindergarten – a preschool institution for children would be of great importance because they would have a place to leave the children while they deal with economically viable activities.

Child marriages

Child marriages are not unusual for this environment and they happen quite often, and according to our respondents, they are more frequent in recent years, so girls often decide to “run away” with boys at a very early age. The reason for this may be the attempt to avoid an agreed marriage, although all interviewed women have confirmed that, nowadays, they marry after they choose their own spouse.

Although not perceived as desirable, underage brides in this environment, however, are not considered a major deviation, since girls who abandon education after 4th grade do not have some great prospects for finding a job outside the home. In fact, unlike other rural regions where child marriages are perceived as taboo, here respondents spoke quite openly on the topic.

Two interviewees were married before they turned 18, and one of them already has a pregnant 16-year-old daughter-in-law, married with the permission of the parents, but they also talked about several current cases of girls married at the age of 13 or 14.

It is no doubt that the Yoruk women are isolated, but according to the obtained research information, this is as much the result of their ignorance and unwillingness to accept the contemporary social trends as it is the result of the system shortcomings and the society order in general. To improve the quality of life and the position of these women, it is necessary for the state to find ways to bring these women closer to the main social trends, as well as to enable the protection of constitutionally guaranteed rights without depriving these women of their distinctiveness and authenticity.

Case study 1

CS-L. is a twenty-four-year-old girl from the village of Brostica, the municipality of Centar Zupa, a Macedonian Muslim woman, a defectology graduate, who works in Zupa as a high school teacher.

Born in a large family with few sisters and one brother, S. decided, despite the great pressure of the environment, to continue education and become a graduate defectologist, and then to return to the native village where some of her sisters live in, disregarding the possibility of moving abroad.

S. actively fights prejudices and the traditional perceptions of women's role in her community. Since an early age, she decided to continue education so that she can help children and people with disabilities in their integration into the community. She finished elementary education in her native village and secondary school in the city of Skopje with exceptional results and then continued to study in Skopje at the Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation, where she graduated and acquired the title of a Defectology Graduate (Special education teacher). At the moment, she does not work according to her degree, that is, she works as a professor, but she expects and hopes that this will soon change.

Traditionally, girls in Brostica are rarely allowed to go to secondary school, partly because they do not have a high school in the village, so they have to travel to Zupa for school (15 km) or Debar for vocational education, but mostly because they are not expected to have any professional life and earn money, but instead, to care for the home and other family members. In fact, women's economic independence is not usually seen as desirable, but as a threat to the traditional role of a man as a family earner who has a monopoly of the finances, and hence on making all family decisions.

S. is aware of discrimination against girls in her environment who are not allowed to attend secondary school after completing primary education, and she is trying to influence the community through her positive example, although she is often confronted with rejection. Through her personal example, she tries to motivate girls to take advantage of the opportunities provided to them and realize their dreams, although there is not much community support.

Nevertheless, in her community, S. is considered an exceptional person and the women and men from the village respect and accept her authority, but during schooling, and sometimes even today, she faced gossip about her free will and especially about her studies and stay in Skopje. She openly talked about how every medical or even dental examination of the girls in this village is interpreted as an abortion and evidence of an immoral relationship (out of wedlock) among unmarried women or selfishness in women who are married. At the same time, her economic independence and higher education seem intimidating to others in the community, so she does not see how she could find a partner or establish a family in that area.

She believes that her parents, who are responsible for her success and high self-confidence, did not try to restrict her at any moment and encouraged her to fulfill

her dreams. She openly claims that her mother is one of the few women in the village who is not forced to seek permission from the husband or the husband's parents regarding her freedom of movement. However, she also explicitly states that her parents decided to have more children until they have a son since only male children are expected to continue their family lineage. S. is one of the few women in the village who sometimes enters the village cafe, which according to an unwritten rule, is considered an inadequate environment for women.

S. is an example of how in certain regions of the country only exceptionally talented and rebellious girls and women can get the opportunity to exercise their rights to education and healthcare, and that it is often accompanied by certain consequences regarding their social integration in the home environment.

Case study 2

K.T. is a woman at the age of 30-40 from the village of Radanje, municipality of Karbinci, from the Turkish ethnic group – Yoruks. She has completed elementary education at the primary “Straso Pindzur” Primary School in the village of Karbinci. However, she did not continue with education because the nearest high school is in Stip, so traveling to school each day was a burden for her family. Her two brothers, unlike her, have completed not only secondary but also high education.

K.T. is employed and is the only one in the family that receives regular income throughout the year. She is relatively satisfied with the conditions at the workplace and with her working rights, since she does not work overtime, has weeks off work and a regular salary. On the other hand, she thinks that the minimum wage she receives is insufficient and that a salary of 20,000 denars would be appropriate for the work she does. K.T. she is very proud of earning her living, a fact that, besides material security, also provides her with respect in the eyes of the family and the community. It also gives her certain freedom of movement in Stip without supervision from the family and the community.

However, one gets the impression that K. does not manage the money she earns independently because she could not state the number of her transactional account, that is, she had to ask her brother about her bank details. It is also symptomatic that, at the second arranged meeting, K. did not appear and did not answer the phone calls during that day, while the next day, she informed us that she did not have the phone with her, and then we failed to arrange the next meeting.

Given that she has a good command of the Macedonian language, unlike most other older women in the village, she has easier access to social and health services, which she rarely uses, mainly due to the traditional mistrust in the institutions of the system by this ethnic group, and largely because of the lack of a habit to use the rights and benefits of these types of care (social and healthcare) from which the members of this ethnic group are almost entirely excluded, in spite of the fact that they are a vulnerable group. However, from the interviews we made with several underage girls from the village, we gained the impression that, among the younger generations, there is a clear tendency and desire to continue education and qualify for a certain profession.

According to her answers, K.T. does not feel discriminated against in her environment and believes that the life for women of her generation is much easier compared to the lives of their mothers, mostly because agricultural work and livestock (which she believes is extremely difficult and strenuous) are not their only option for material existence. Despite that, one gets the impression that K. gave socially acceptable answers to questions related to topics that are still considered taboo in our society, especially in rural areas and marginalized communities (family and sexual violence, divorce and guardianship of children, gynecological examinations). She was not allowed to sit with us on a table without permission from a male family member, and told us that the custom of buying brides in their region has been eradicated, although later we learned from a direct source that, only a few months ago, 4000 euros were paid for a bride from the Radovich village Kodjalia.

Unfortunately, the moment we established a better communication with her and when the burning problems of women in this environment began to slowly come out from beneath the surface, our communication abruptly ended and we were no longer able to reach her.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research showed that, nowadays, the life of rural women in various settings is different in comparison to the one in the past due to social changes resulting from the democratization of society, as well as women's aspiration towards equality and globalization. However, in order to achieve full gender equality for the rural woman in society, they need greater economic autonomy and independence, as well as greater representation in the political life. The patriarchal matrix and the traditional division of male and female gender roles, particularly in the home and family, still pose great obstacles, especially to women in rural areas. Women in rural areas have very little opportunities for social life, since most often, coffee shops or cafes are a "forbidden place" for women, and other entertainment facilities do not even exist. The distance from the larger cities, as well as the lack of well-organized public transport, pose additional obstacles to their socialization in public spaces, and as a result, the only option they have are the interactions in their homes. These women consider that the state should make additional efforts to build kindergartens, schools, and clinics that will make their lives easier. Furthermore, the adoption of financial assistance policies could stimulate the development of rural regions. They appreciate the existence of civil society organizations, especially the local ones, as powerful factors in the environment, because they have the ability to reach out to women.

As a result of the above, the general conclusion of the research is that the legislation in the Republic of Macedonia, provides the opportunities for development of women in rural areas to a certain extent, but there is a strong need for full implementation of the existing regulations and by-laws. In one part, it is necessary to amend them, primarily in terms of:

- Obliging all schools to keep sex-disaggregated statistics;
- Providing adequate access to education for women in rural areas;
- Simplifying the ESARM procedure for obtaining health insurance for unemployed persons;
- Encouraging gynecologists to work in rural areas;
- Providing additional social protection measures for women in rural areas;
- Clarifying legislation and introducing sanctions for adults who are in extramarital community with older minors;
- Introducing amendments to the legislation in terms of increasing the marrying age limit;
- Establishing a fund for the support of women in rural areas whose finances will be allocated to civil associations for pre-submitted projects and with strict evaluation indicators;

In order to overcome existing problems and improve the situation of women in rural areas, the research team proposes introducing draft measures in the following areas:

Education:

- Introducing changes to the curriculum in primary schools in order to implement courses and textbooks that will break gender stereotypes;
- Implementing comprehensive sex education in primary and secondary schools and/or a greater number of workshops that would be held by peer educators in schools;
- Ensuring consistent implementation of the provisions for free transport to and from schools, introducing sanctions for the municipalities that fail to implement them;
- Creating and conducting programs for further training and retraining for women in rural areas, as well as enabling conditions for “distance learning”;
- Implementing the procedure for sanctioning of parents that encourage the termination of compulsory education for their children;
- Increasing the number of Macedonian language classes in primary schools in the villages where Yoruks live;
- Opening institutions for preschool children in rural municipalities, or proposing measures for the care of children by trained women from the community, supported by local self-government;

Healthcare

- Re-purposing and equipping unused institutional facilities in rural places for medical practices;
- Implementing a balanced territorial distribution of gynecological practices;
- Implementing measures to encourage gynecologists to work in rural areas (higher capitation, subsidies for medical equipment, etc.);
- Introducing a system of record keeping in the Ministry of Health according to the place of residence of the beneficiaries;
- Introducing a system of record-keeping in which the age limit for collecting and categorizing data will be divided into two categories: one, from 15 to 18 years; and the two, from 18 and older; in order to have accurate information whether the data refers to minors or adults;
- Analysis of health programs and their utilization (success rate) based on the place of residence of the beneficiaries;
- Introducing a system of coordination and connecting private health centers, public health centers and general hospitals;
- Mandatory informing of the Ministry of Health by the local health centers that have maternity clinics and keeping statistics for cases of childbirth, as well as cases of spontaneous or deliberate termination of pregnancy in underage girls;
- Cheaper contraceptives (placing oral contraceptives for women and men on the positive list);
- Employing mobile gynecological clinics that will visit the outermost rural areas and will provide consultations, examinations and services to as many rural women as possible.

Child marriages:

- Introducing a system for keeping records of extramarital unions, particularly of those in which one or both partners are underage;
- Continuous education of both parents and children about the harmful consequences that may arise as a result of child marriage;
- Imposing sanctions on people who mediate in the process of “buying” brides from other countries;
- Discouraging people from entering into such a marriage;

Social protection:

- Sensitizing the employees at the social work centers or introducing sanctions on employees upon complaints from citizens in order to correct the initial contact of the citizens with these institutions, as well as to increase the citizens’ trust in their competence;
- Changing the criteria for categorization and management of statistical data (age groups of 15 to 18 years, territorial distribution, etc.);
- Employing mobile clerks (office workers) of ESARM that will enable access to the services at locations that are more easily accessible for women from rural areas;
- Establishing a functional system for coordination of MoI and CSW regarding reporting and treatment of cases of domestic violence, including consolidated statistics;
- Establishing a system for monitoring the actions of all institutions that have the authority to act in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence or any gender-based violence, in order to respond promptly and imposing appropriate sanctions when they fail to act according to the prescribed protocols of conduct in such cases;
- Additional education and sensitization of the officers/clerks who make initial contacts with victims, such as police officers, clerks employed at the centers for social work, and healthcare workers, regarding the treatment of victims in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence or any other type of gender-based violence.

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