



SECTOR "EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY"
Minutes of the X Meeting of the Sector Working Group (SWG)

Venue: ZOOM Meeting, hosted by Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA)/ NIPAC

Date: 16.3.2022, Wednesday, 10:00 - 13:40

Meeting moderated by Ms. Popovska, MES representative, and partly by Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative.

Invited 125 attendees, 89 attendees were present during online plenary meeting.

Introductory statements

Ms. Popovska, opened the meeting with a short introduction for the meeting's purpose and its agenda, as well giving a floor for introductory speeches by Ministers of Ministry for Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and Deputy Prime Minister responsible for European Affairs.

Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Ms. Trenchevska, pointed out huge challenges that our society is facing, as well as the fact to continue together with initiated efforts to recover the economy and improvement of social situation and in general, the living and working conditions for the citizens. She stressed the importance to reach a consensus on the changes that need to be made in the medium and long term, as well as to address current challenges, and through an inclusive process, dialogue and partnership to ensure the direction of joint efforts to meet national development and growth priorities. Social inclusion and development of human capital, the full support of people at risk and young people in the labor market enable accelerated and sustainable economic growth and development towards a better living standard. She highlighted that the labor of the worker is valued, especially in conditions of pandemic, energy crisis and inflationary pressures. The increase of the minimum and average wage and all measures and efforts that were taken in that direction is expected to have a direct impact on improving the living standard of citizens and stimulating economic activity, labor productivity and competition. At the same time, she stressed that the Government highly considers the living standards of the elderly persons, as the pensions have an exceptional impact on the overall poverty in the country. Faster, more inclusive and sustainable economic growth and recovery of as many vulnerable citizens as possible, investments in social protection are crucial, in order to activate vulnerable groups in the labor market. The high priority of human capital development through credible policies aimed at concrete and visible results could be jointly achieved. Reducing youth and long-term unemployment, improving working conditions, including occupational safety and health, combating poverty, availability and sustainability of quality social services and the deinstitutionalization process, social security for the elderly persons, investment in children, support for improved Roma integration, the promotion of gender equality, as well as the prevention and protection against discrimination and gender-based violence, she highlighted to remain as key sectoral segments as a need for support. At the end, she emphasized that the implementation of reforms to improve human capital imposes the need for strong coordination, dialogue and cooperation of relevant ministries, institutions, social partners, civil society organizations and development partners in order to achieve a high level of mutual accountability, optimal use of resources and achieving visible results for citizens.

Minister of Education and Science, Mr. Shaqiri, highlighted that the Ministry, together with the Government of North Macedonia, is implementing substantial reforms. The reforms are intended for pupils and students to focus on the topics that will be discussed in a sector group. There are representatives from two ministries from the European Delegation and Civil Society. He expressed he believes that this sector group is one of the most positive examples of cooperation between civil society organizations and state institutions regarding the implementation of policies that promote improvement in these domains, part of this process of extensive coordination and preparation to continue further. He mentioned that there is a new concept of primary education and there are changes in the implementation of teaching practice that introduced interactive teaching in the field of secondary education and with purpose to strengthen education and enable a greater brain for young people. Also, he informed that since March last year and during January 2022 visits were organized with the municipalities and the business community to detect the necessary things that need to be improved, also this is a plan for school year 2022 and 2023 companies to be included in the educational process of students focusing on the practical education and teaching. He greeted all the participants in the dialogue because they are important parts. There are large numbers of companies that are part of this process that are interested and involved in the practical training of students. In the context of a strengthened vocational education, he informed that from January 1, 2021, 3 regional centers for vocational education and training were established and officially started working, also contracts for reconstruction for two of them (Ohrid and Kumanovo) were signed, and in the upcoming period it is expected progress to be made in the public procurements related to RVETC in Tetovo. He emphasized that is planned to have further investments in higher education which are part of Ministry's agenda and increase the budget and focus on providing support for obtaining human resources in higher education and public scientific institutions by equipping these institutions with young scientific staff. Also, he pointed out that of high importance for the education is to strengthen the flexibility and adaptability of the whole process to the main trends and changes that are happening, and he is giving a lot of efforts to equip all these centers with modern technologies.

Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia responsible for European Affairs, Mr. Maricic, pointed out the tremendous importance of the sub-sectors in this SWG that contribute towards creation of new and



better jobs and thus, requires investments in education and science and mobilization of all relevant stakeholders as a pre-condition for better social standards for our citizens. Whole society depends on creation of skilled workers who will be able to answer the needs of labour market. He underlined the policy priorities in education, labour market and social policy are well aligned with EU Pillar on social rights and EU policies on fundamental rights, as well EU Gender Action Strategy. Government had shown a commitment for investing in overcoming the identified gaps all in accordance by EU legislation and standards. Another important momentum is the developed national strategies are addressing the EU enlargement policy requirements, in particular Western Balkan Strategy and Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkans supporting human capital development by promotion of employment opportunities (especially for youth), the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) and the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), as well the recommendations of the Annual EU Progress Report related to the Chapters 19, 26 and 28. Moving forward due to planning, he informed on the decision that the SWG on Roma Inclusion to be moved again in this SWG and sincerely believes that by this it will be provided a better environment to discuss social inclusion of Roma. He mentioned that by this day, new approach has been piloted as horizontal issue for all SWGs as most important mechanism for transparent and inclusive coordination for sector policy dialogue and donor coordination, including the IPA. This change has been introduced as looking back in past years and need for coordination with donor community, which become evident that sector-based approach should be further improved as it was more concentrated on IPA. With a purpose for enhancing policy dialogue through inclusive and transparent approach in sector policies, the focus of SWG meetings to be presentation and discussion of sector strategic priorities and a way forward for requiring donor assistance for the implementation of national priorities. As part of a new approach, he explained that the meetings will be co-chaired by respective ministers and NIPAC, whereas the Secretariat for European Affairs is committed to ensure proper information for SWG members (as well for wider public) by publishing 2022 Annual Calendar of meetings of all SWGs (as two cycles of meetings on plenary level in March/ April and September) and transparent publishing of relevant information on SEA web-site. When discussing donor coordination, he pointed out on ensuring complementarity of donor assistance in order to avoid overlapping and step forward is made with preparatory work for preparation of National Development Plan covering the period 2021-2041 as strategic framework. As well, NPAA and ERP have to be considered when prioritizing on strategic level. He underlined the importance for participation of civil society organizations in SWG meetings whereas the strategic planning is shared and discussed, as well to ensure feed-back for the ways how the implementation of priorities is feasible, effective and efficient, as well to ensure their commitment for implementing of some priorities on the ground. He stressed his believe that next stage will be to ensure implementation of well defined and agreed priorities regardless of the source of funding (national budget or donor assistance). He shared the information due to launching the programming process for IPA III 2023-2024 and the discussion of projects to be included will be done on technical level of SWG. Therefore, he encouraged the IPA Coordinators to organize further meetings on technical level by involving the donors and civil society organizations.

➤ Presentation of the main priorities and targets of the Ministry of Labour and social Policy in mid-term perspective

Ms. Slavkoska, IPA coordinator in MLSP, opened the session due to presentation of sector priorities in areas covered by MLSP as important for forthcoming 3-4 years and briefly introduced the presenters from MLSP for this session.

Mr. Docinski, Deputy Head of Department in MLSP, presented ongoing situation in the areas of labour law and social dialogue, employment with a focus on youth employment and occupational health and safety.

He stressed that social dialogue in previous period has been intensive and many topics and documents were discussed with social partners due to issues of economic and social sphere (such as instruction of measures for mitigating effects of Covid-19 pandemics, amendments on Labour Relations Law whereas Sundays has been introduced as non-working day for all workers with certain exception for few sectors derived from working processes and jointly agreed amendment on the Law on Minimum Wage). The MLSP priorities are to continue for further strengthening of the capacities of social partners, increasing the membership and promoting their influence, as well promotion of local partnership as important tool in order to improve the situation and address the challenges at local labour market. He also mentioned a need for reinforcing the bipartite social dialogue between workers and employers.

In the area of employment, focusing on youth employment, a whole set of different activities are ongoing in this area, such as implementation of Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures and other types of measures introduced to mitigate negative effects of Covid-19 pandemics. These activities are giving positive results from these interventions which could be observed through indicators derived from State Statistical Office (SSO). Latest published data from SSO for Q4 of 2021, unemployment rate was at historically lowest level, besides several disturbances at labour market caused by the crisis. He highlighted that many of the measures implemented have had significantly succeeded to mitigate the negative adverse effects. Youth Guarantee Scheme implemented since 2018 at whole territory was mentioned, whereas the positive results are evident. Youth unemployment rate for young people aged 15-29 was 39,2% in 2017, and the latest data is 28,3%, which is an experience of more than 10 p.p. decrease. Implementation of youth guarantee and other active labour market measures continue to be mid-term priorities, as well to strengthen the outreach activities as one of main pillars of YG under which the intention is through involvement of civil society organizations to achieve better reach and greater coverage. New Youth Guarantee Plan 2023-25 is under development and the country within the Western Balkan Initiatives is involved in YG implementation as a positive example.

The area of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is of great importance as crucial for ensuring better quality of jobs and



decent working conditions for workers. Main recent development in this area is recent adoption of OSH Strategy 2021-25, which is fully aligned with recently published EU OSH Framework. Focus in forthcoming period would be on effective implementation of strategy and action plan, which documents have been developed under intensive social dialogue and involvement of social partners. Priorities are related to continuous strengthening the capacities of all stakeholders on specific OSH topics, promotion and awareness raising on OSH and improvement of OSH system in the country due to collection of data and statistical reporting on work-related occupational accidents and diseases.

Mr. Tomsic, Special Advisor for social protection and social services in deinstitutionalization process in MLSP, pointed out special attention is put on activation process in the area of social protection and inclusion, with a final result in 2027, the percentage of persons at risk of poverty to be decrease on 18%, as exceptionally ambitious goal in conditions of Covid-19 pandemics, energy crisis and crisis encompassing whole continent. Beneficiaries of Guarantee Minimum Assistance (GMA) are 35.858 in total, which it is an increase of around 10.000 GMA beneficiaries before beginning of pandemics. Government has introduced a decree for easier entrance in social security scheme and access to social protection rights, in order to prevent the poverty risks. Exceptionally important, it is current amendment of Social Protection Law due to measure for monthly allowance of 1000 denars in next 3-months for GMA beneficiaries as prevention from energy price shocks and prices' increases of retail products. As well, an exceptional increase of beneficiaries of child allowances from 3724 children in 2018 to 28086 beneficiaries in 2021 could be noted.

In the area of activation, certain movements could be noted and individual activation plans have been prepared for 3300 GMA beneficiaries, from whom 1705 were involved in active labour market measures. Currently, new National Programme for Development of Social Protection 2022-2032 and it will determine directions for development of social protection. As well, he mentioned ongoing improvement of collaboration between local employment centres and social work centres and ongoing analysis which will assess the impact of active measures for improvement of GMA beneficiaries. He pointed out a crucial need for linkage with education sector, due to adoption of the Law for Adult Education where the validation process is defined due to confirmation of informal education of vulnerable groups in order for easier labour market entrance. ESA data shows that around 80.000 persons from 150.000 unemployed persons have incomplete primary education, which 40.000 persons have finalized primary education and thus, it is an obstacle for entrance at labour market of vulnerable persons and GMA beneficiaries.

In the area of development of social services and deinstitutionalization, the MLSP could notify significant results and 62 new licensed social providers encompassing 2700 beneficiaries. Ministry has concluded 7 contracts for collaboration with these providers and 3 centres for support of care families providing support for 327 families with 559 beneficiaries. New model for assessment of persons with disabilities has been introduced according the International Qualification of Functionalities, as well amended laws in the area of social and child protection, and the established Commission gives recommendations for further use of social services. Social services have been developed in 18 municipalities through WB project and the plan is this number to increase. As well, measures 7.2 and 7.3 from the Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Programmes and Measures for 2022 foresee support of municipalities for further develop and implement social services, which could ensure employments in care economy. Important to be mentioned, it is the foreseen system for monitoring and evaluation of provision of social services which requires proper quality assurance.

He stressed that deinstitutionalization process is still un-finalized and marks fast path. Special Institution in Demir Kapija has been transformed and 2 new housing units have been opened. He notified that 120 persons have been accommodated in this institution. Beneficiaries from one building has been completely re-settled in small group homes for supported living and plans are ongoing for transformation and further use of this building through other types of social services. He notified the mid-term review of Deinstitutionalization Strategy which is in final stage and based on it, new 3-year action plan (2022-24) has been prepared and support will be needed for its implementation due to functioning of current housing units and opening the new. Public Institution for Rehabilitation of Children and Youth in Skopje will be transferred through EU support and there is ongoing preparation of final design for reconstruction whereas social services will be further located and delivered. Ministry expects that adaptation of building will begin of 2023 and further-on, the content of social services to be further developed, which part requires a support for early intervention of children and persons with disabilities.

In the area of social entrepreneurship and current EU projects, relevant national strategy has been developed and there is ongoing preparation of regulatory framework which will be adopted in next period with prior public consultations. Ministry considers that further financial instruments will need to be developed and their implementation supported. Mid-term priorities in this regard are due to sustainability of social enterprises, creation of financial mechanisms and access to sources for their financing of establishment and functioning and future activities of opened resource centre has to be discussed, as well it future usage for social entrepreneurship.

Ms. Ramadani, Head of Department in MLSP, highlighted the support of World Bank in implementation of the Social Insurance Administration Project (SIAP) under which it is expected establishment of a Single Register of Insured Persons in Social Insurance in the medium term. She explained that through this registry all applications and deregistration of the insured persons in compulsory social insurance will be made, while all institutions of the system that currently maintain separate registers of insured persons will be connected to it and will be able to use unified data upon their needs and competencies. In the medium term, establishing a new model for employment of persons with disabilities is being done through the mentioned project. New model aims to encourage and help increase the employment of this category of persons in the open labour market. In the new concept, she elaborated that the focus will be on the needs of people with disabilities and the direction of support measures in order to meet these needs. The main emphasis will be on the professional



rehabilitation of people with disabilities.

One of the project components is dedicated to modernization of business processes in Pension and Disability Insurance Fund (PDIF). It is expected a comprehensive functional analysis of the PDIF to be prepared, in order to identify areas, paths and dynamics for institutional development. This will mean modernization of business processes, capacity building of information and communication technology (ICT), strengthening and training of human resources, as well as identifying the weaknesses of the functional review and the initiated reforms for establishment of the Central Register of Socially Insured Persons (SURS) and the Central Coordination Unit for Certification of Disabilities (CDCCU).

She highlighted the need for support in forthcoming period due to the improvement of management system of retirement homes, including the manner of audit and supervision of their operations which arises primarily from limited capacity of homes versus the large number of requests for housing, the long period of waiting list for housing, poor living conditions in homes, unprofitability of homes, etc. The support will be needed in the direction of introducing a new way of management through which the retirement homes will be cost-effective and self-sustaining and towards improving the living conditions of residents in retirement homes through reconstruction and renovation, as well provision of social services.

Ms. Ristevska, Head of Department in MLSP, reconvened on one of the highest priorities for investing in early childhood development of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia. The MLSP in past period worked intensively on the reform of child protection, in order to provide conditions for every child for better growth and development, and this thorough process will continue in forthcoming years.

Commencing from the principle that children have the right to quality preschool care, upbringing and education, the Government has committed in its mandate to increase the coverage of preschool children (aged 3-6) in care and education institutions by 50%. In that direction, the Ministry in cooperation with the municipalities is working on expanding the capacities for child protection and education. This goal is planned to be achieved with budget funds, as well as the funds provided by the World Bank project and IPA 2017 project. Despite all the efforts, she noted a need to increase and expand the capacity for coverage by another 40% by 2030 in order to reach the European criterion for 90% coverage of children at this age in some form of early education and development. In parallel with the investments in infrastructure, she noted the investments in improving the quality of preschool education mentioning the started reform with the support of UNICEF, World Bank, EU-IPA and all stakeholders by strengthening the professional competencies of educators and improving the quality of programmes in kindergartens.

She mentioned the mid-term priority goals for next period, which are due to increasing the coverage of children and ensuring equal access of all children to institutions for care and education of preschool age in order to get closer to the European target of 90% coverage of children in preschool institutions, and improving the quality of programmes in kindergartens, as well as expanding access to quality services for early childhood development, with special attention to children at social risk of financial insecurity, children with special needs and children from Roma families.

Ms. Grozdanova, State Advisor in MLSP, pointed out the issues of gender equality and non-discrimination are part of high priority agenda of GoRNM. As strive for the ministry, the motivation is to work continuously on achievement of the standards of EU and international organizations promoted in their conventions.

Gender equality and its promotion of women's rights for their participation in political, economic and public life are long-term objective of the country. She highlighted that this issue is and has to be further integrated in all policies and processes previously elaborated, as well by all ministries and institutions which are competent for policy creation and implementation. In this regard, she pointed out on adopted legal provisions and strategic documents, as well need for constant improvement of infrastructure for efficient implementation of the policies.

She noted the Law for prevention and protection from gender-based violence and domestic violence adopted by the Macedonian Assembly, which foresees efficient implementation of Convention of Council of Europe (i.e. Istanbul Convention). Thus, the system for support and assistance for victims of gender-based and domestic violence has been strengthened with establishment of 7 counselling centres for psychosocial support for perpetrators and the programme for psychosocial treatment has been prepared, as well trainings of trainers were realized for acting with women and children victims of domestic violence, with perpetrators and awareness raising of professional staff, on central and local level.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2021-26 has been adopted by Macedonian Government and this document is within parliamentary procedure for further adoption by Macedonian Parliament. Meanwhile, Resource Centre for gender-responsive creation of policies and budgeting has been opened and with this, the infrastructure has been advanced for efficient implementation of gender equality policies.

She mentioned the ongoing process of preparation of by-laws in regard to implementation of the Law for prevention and protection from gender-based violence and domestic violence. As well, the preparatory activities are ongoing for awareness raising campaign and trainings for gender-based violence and domestic violence. She noted that the Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-24 is under preparation aimed for effective implementation of Gender Equality Strategy.

New Law on Gender Equality and a compliance assessment are underway due to EU standards and with its adoption; the country will have a law which is in accordance with European standards. As well, there is ongoing an estimation of Gender Equality Index in cooperation with State Statistical Office (SSO).

As targets for achievement till 2024, she noted the establishment of database for gender-based violence and domestic violence as a basis for further creation of policy actions and programmes; development of services for support of victims, adoption of Law on Gender Equality and further preparation of by-laws, as well implementation of defined legal provisions;



and efficient functioning of Resource Centre for creation of gender-responsive policies and budgeting. Thus, the support will be needed for achievement of these targets, such as capacity building trainings for implementation of Law on Gender Equality, empowerment of status of rural women in cooperation with National Federation of Farmers through the opportunity to be amended the regulatory framework of registered individual women' farmers, gender mainstreaming in general policies in climate changes in different areas (such as waste treatment, transport, ecology, environment protection, etc.) and empowerment of women's status in this regard; creation and establishment of software solution of database for gender based violence and domestic violence, as well further multi-institutional cooperation and application.

She continued to elaborate on issues due to non-discrimination, in which area, the activities are ongoing in close cooperation with other relevant institutions and civil society organizations. Long-term priority is accomplishment of equal rights and creation of equal opportunities, and thus, non-discrimination of all citizens in all socio-economic spheres.

New Law for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination is adopted and the Commission has been formed pursuant to it in January 2021, as well the capacity of this commission has been strengthened with professional staff and premises. There are ongoing activities due to preparation of National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination 2022-26, which draft version is in final stage.

In regard to prevention and protection from harassment at work, new law is under preparation. As well, there are ongoing activities due to preparation of e-modules for training for gender-based discrimination.

As targets for achievement till 2024, she noted preparation and adoption of by-laws related to implementation of Law for prevention and protection from harassment at work; implementation of Action Plan for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-24, as well establishment and functioning of National Coordinative Body for Equality and Non-Discrimination; and continuous harmonization of national legislation for prevention and protection against discrimination. Thus, the support is required due to preparation of by-laws in regard to Law for prevention and protection against discrimination and Law for prevention and protection from harassment at work; continuous capacity building trainings and public awareness raising campaigns for prevention and protection from different forms of discrimination and legal/ institutional mechanisms.

Ms. Kamberi, Head of Department in MLSP, highlighted that Roma integration is one of mid-term priorities of GoRNM, as an obligation from EU Roma Integration Strategy and Poznan Declaration. In regard to advancement of Roma integration, several documents are adopted, such as Roma Integration Strategy 2022-30, National Action Plan for priority areas from this strategy, Law for the persons unregistered in registry books, Programme for transformation of undeclared work of Roma, National Action Plan for advancement of rights of Roma women and girls and feasibility studies due to social housing of Roma settlements. As well, several projects are ongoing that contribute for better Roma integration.

She noted mid-term priorities for improved inclusion of Roma children in re-school and primary education, sustainable functioning of Roma Information Centres, support of Roma returnees and their integration, including of Roma settlement in general and detailed urban plans and reconstruction of dwellings of Roma families, and implementation of tailor-made active labour market measures for Roma. In order to achieve greater Roma integration, the support is required due to implementation of national action plans in all priority areas from Roma Integration Strategy, implementation of activities from National Action Plan for advancement of rights of Roma women and girls, separate budget programme line for support Roma inclusion policies (according Poznan Declaration), continuation of IPA projects due to support of social housing based on recommendations from feasibility studies prepared with support of Roma Regional Council (RCC), and ensuring access to labour market for Roma through tailor-made programmes and measures.

Discussion among relevant stakeholders on how to support the sector priorities

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, opened the discussion session and added that the priorities have been arisen from relevant strategies (many adopted last year), whereas many donors are already providing their support or could provide further to achieve the priorities presented. She noted that sector discussion on priorities and potential support from donors, will be a good basis for further programming of activities and better coordination of donor assistance available.

Ms. Popovic, UNDP Project Manager on SDC Employment4All project, shortly noted the issue of professional rehabilitation on which UNDP has been working for almost 3-years based on blue-print document approved by MLSP and ESA. In regard to World Bank SIAP project, she stressed that better cooperation should be done on continuation of activities not covered by UNDP. Work-related centers for professional rehabilitation have been created and functional under UNDP project in Topansko Pole and Strumica for almost 3 and half years, whereas activities are ongoing for labour market activation of persons with disabilities. Several modalities have been tested and implemented in cooperation with ESA, as part of several OP measures.

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, informed that thematic meetings will follow in forthcoming period, if necessary on several topics, whereas many issues could be addressed and experience shared.

Mr. Aegerter, representative from Embassy of Swiss Federation, noted that this meeting and presentation given are good overview for further sector discussion and to provide a feed-back on the support. He noted that there are a lot of topics in short period to be presented and discussed, but this format is well thought. Several slides presented are closely linked to GMA support and reasons for its increase. He noted that maybe it was result of social reform since 2019 and before/after Covid-19 pandemics, which are two different topics, such as their dependency on social protection and further labour market activation. Also, he addressed second issue on improvement and modernization of ESA, because many of these topics are linked with ESA scope of work.



Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, explained the labour market activation of GMA beneficiaries is a challenge and after adoption of Social Protection Law, majority of measures have been undertaken. Thus, it has resulted with an increase of GMA beneficiaries and with UNDP/SDC support, it is initiated a preparation of analysis in order to assess the effects of all measures implemented within the reform, as it is currently defined. She elaborated that interventions from several projects were beneficial for implementation different segments of social reform. **Mr. Tomsic, MLSP representative**, added that the increase of GMA beneficiaries has been a result of Covid-19 pandemics and with Governmental Decree adopted, the easier access to GMA right was made available to those who had lost their jobs. As MLSP strategic objective, it is to strengthen the cooperation between local employment centers and social work centers, through adoption of by-laws in order to advance the preparation of individual activation plans for GMA beneficiaries and their labour market activation through appropriate active measures. Those measures are ones under 7.2 and 7.3 from OP targeting vulnerable groups in labour market and their potential involvement in care economy. This process is hard long-term process which requires low-skilled GMA beneficiaries to link with opportunities for advancement of their education through planned validation process of their informal knowledge and skills and/ or to obtain educational level through certain courses. System is complex and labour market inclusion requires the persons to have certain educational level. He explained that GMA support in ESA is linked to reforms in educational sector, such as vocational education and training and adult education.

Ms. Babusko, representative from UN Resident Country Coordinator, noted on well elaborated and concise presentations. She informed on the process of planning the priorities of all UN agencies and in the working week of this meeting, all plans should be approved. She noted that overall UN programme define 4 priorities, such as inclusive wellbeing (sustainable jobs and competitive companies) and basic services (covering education, social services and health). These planned have been prepared with involvement of around 70 participants from different institutions and this programme is implemented jointly with governmental institutions. In part of inclusive wellbeing, UN agencies will be working on creative, productive and competitive companies in real economy that further create qualitative jobs, as well through digitalization in real sector, building of skills among vulnerable groups, regulatory framework, formalization of undeclared work and sustainable and competitive rural economy. She also noted the UN priorities had been well reflected in MLSP priorities. On the issue addressed by SDC due to impact from Covid-19 pandemics towards GMA, there is not available reliable statistical data that would present concise overview of the impact and it is evident new crisis which should address how the social system and its safety net will address the adverse effects in next period. Thus, she highlighted that it should be considered how to react upon crisis and to protect the vulnerable groups.

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, confirmed that the institutions had been consulted while preparation of 2022 UN Agencies' plans.

Mr. Hudolin, Head of Cooperation in EUD, addressed positively this approach of presenting the strategic priorities to further access to financial resources. Many issues would be further discussed on technical meetings and this solid platform at highest level could be a starting point. He noted that content of the presentation of strategic priorities provided overview on what and when it is needed support in which area and further-on could be prioritized, even discussions to be divided in sub-sectors. He mentioned that EUD will start with IPA III programming for 2023-24 years and highlighted that it would be good to understand the strategic priority directions of the country. All the priorities presented are aligned and complemented with EU strategic priorities and it would be easy to recognize an opportunity for further EUD support.

Ms. Angeleska, civil society representative, mentioned the detailed presentation of MLSP strategic priorities. She elaborated that workshop was organized by Reactor and SOROS in January 2022 within the 'Civil Society Dialogue for EU' project in order to identify certain priorities from strategic documents whereas it could be better intervened in certain segments. Those challenges are due to employment, especially youth unemployment, there are not done differentiated data due to age group 15-29 which CSO considers as big, and proposed to be disaggregated in smaller age groups. She noted that it could not be real that someone aged 15-19 who are in regular education, could be employed. Thus, the age sub-groups for monitoring the employment and unemployment should be introduced, such as 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 age groups, whereas students are in secondary education in first group, in university education in second group and expected active job seekers in third group. Due to employment of persons with disabilities, she noted positive initiative to accelerate cooperation between local employment centers and social work centers, which also identified as weak point by civil society sector. There is a need people from different vulnerable groups further not to go door-by-door and their rights and services not be obtained. As well, the initiatives are welcomed due to professional rehabilitation and labour market access of persons with disabilities, establishment and functioning of professional body for assessment of their job capacities, international multi-functional assessment of capacities is used for primary education and this kind of assessment could ensure their further direction after obtained education to get potential employment. She mentioned that it would be good a centralized body to provide thorough disaggregation of different forms of vulnerabilities, which it is further linked to provision of different social services, even while going in pension and use of disability allowance. At the end, she expressed expectation the civil society organizations to be involved in meetings on technical level for planning of new IPA projects and mentioned their practical experience would be valuable, in regard to needs and challenges.

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, noted in regard to age differentiation of youth guarantee, that the data per achievement of targets are monitored already per three-age groups separately. She also proposed that this issue could be again raised while preparation of new Youth Action Plan.

Mr. Fugger, Social Attaché from Embassy of Republic of Austria, noted well presented priorities. He mentioned that Austria finances currently 14 projects in different areas, such as good examples of close cooperation between Austrian and



local organizations in order to provide certain services for supported employment for young people with certain disabilities and challenges in rural areas, as well with low earnings. These successful stories would be good to be part of regular system in the country. His recommendations were noted due to amending the legislation on employment. He mentioned several projects for access to social services through digitalization and mobile social workers, provision of services for victims of gender-based violence, establishment of a system in area of child development, social services for home care of elderly persons, accommodation of homeless persons (especially from Roma community). He highlighted good cooperation with MLSP and civil society organizations, which it will continue.

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, noted that the MLSP is familiar of projects supported by Austrian development assistance and find them valuable examples that contribute towards achievement of sector priorities.

➤ Presentation of the main priorities and targets of the Ministry of Education and Science in mid-term perspective

Ms. Ivanovska, Head of Sector MoES, has stated that the results and the strategic priorities in the field of primary education that the Ministry will be primarily focused are on a system level and they are stipulated in official documents. She mentioned that since 2019 there is a New Law on Primary Education that raised the expectations in primary education in terms of students' achievements but also in terms of inclusive education for all children. She also informed that all bylaws foreseen in the Law have been adopted in March 2021 as well as the concept for primary education based on OECD recommendations and National standards for students in primary education, based on the competencies that students should acquire at the end of primary education.

Additionally, she informed that new curricula for first and fourth grade, based on the National Standards for Primary Education, have been prepared and implemented since September 2021. Curricula have been prepared for the second and fifth grades too, which will be applied from September 2022, and a Guide for Free Elective Courses and examples of free optional curricula that schools should offer to students have been developed, also Training modules have been prepared and training have been delivered for all teachers who teaching in first and fourth grade from the academic year 2021/22. Further she mentioned that Program for improvement of the educational process in primary education has been adopted, which envisages for the academic year 2021/22 to prepare modern learning materials and other didactic materials appropriate for the age of the students and aligned with the curricula, learning materials have been prepared for first and fourth-grade students, according to the Concept for Primary Education, the learning materials for the fourth grade were digitized. All these learning materials are available on the e-library platform for online learning and for downloading on a local offline device. She also informed that based on analysis and direct and regular communication with schools and mayors, most schools procured smart boards, projectors, and smart TVs from the surplus block grants. The Ministry of Education and Science provided smart boards for about 20 schools that were not able to equip the classrooms where the first and fourth-grade students study on their own. For students who are not able to use digital materials on their electronic devices (computer, Smartphone, tablet), 10,000 tablets were purchased. For students from families from socially vulnerable categories, 4146 tablets were distributed in 174 schools. The distribution of the other tablets is planned for the next school year according to the data obtained from the MLSP for the students who are receiving the educational supplement.

The sector for primary education make a step forward in the implementation of Inclusiveness and interculturalism due to the fact that the Concept of inclusive education. She pointed out that all bylaws for implementation of inclusive education have been adopted, special schools have been transformed into primary schools with a resource centre, special classes from 23 primary schools have been transformed into learning support centres for students with disabilities, regionalization of primary schools with a resource centre has been done, the Work Guide for School Inclusive Teams has been revised, 500 educational assistants are provided for students who have a recommendation following the ICF (International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health).

She referred that there are still predictions related to the inclusive education with cross-sector cooperation with the MLSP, the age limit for personal assistance was decreased for children from 6 years old (amendments were made to the Law on Social Protection). Primary schools with a resource centre have been awarded funds of 2,500,000 MKD for the purchase of equipment, teaching aids, and assistive technology to support inclusive education, also the textbooks for 1st and 4th grade are adapted to the needs of students with disabilities, i.e. they are printed in Braille, adapted to audio format, and an audio reader has been developed that can read teaching materials in Macedonian and Albanian.

In addition, she referred that there are few projects that help us in the area of inclusion within IPA, and she mentioned that the IPA project "Be IN, be Inclusive, be „INCLUDED“, in the period September-December 2021, were awarded and paid scholarships to 463 children with disabilities enrolled in first and second grade in the school year 2021/22, a total of 38 trainers for educational assistants from primary schools with a resource centre were trained and all educational assistants were trained too. It should be mentioned that the Action Program of 2019 IPA2 will provide full vertical and horizontal accessibility of 14 educational institutions, of which 6 are primary schools that will receive full accessibility, 35 educational mediators have been hired in 26 municipalities in the country to increase the number of Roma children in primary education, reduce the number of children leaving school, within the Project "Regular classes: action for inclusion of Roma in primary education", scholarships were provided for 596 Roma students (from a total of 73 schools from 31 municipalities - including 7 municipalities in the city of Skopje), Grants are awarded each year for joint activities of primary schools, which contribute to the development and promotion of multiculturalism, interethnic integration and tolerance.

The priorities that we have in 2022 are Strategic, where the Ministry of Education and Science remains committed to the



strategic priorities, such as:

Quality and inclusive primary education that is in the best interest of the children and that enables each student to reach his or her full potential through, increasing the students' achievements in primary education by improving the content of primary education, also increasing student enrolment and improving inclusiveness and interethnic integration in primary education, improving learning conditions and student achievement, and the capacities of human resources in primary schools (initial and continuous trainings), increasing the effectiveness of the organization, financing and management of primary education, investing in and developing digital skills and critical thinking, improving the established system of career development of teachers and professional associates, based on the principle of merit and promoting the prevention and protection against violence and discrimination in the education system, non-discrimination, protection from violence, respect for diversity and inclusive education through: Continuous support of primary schools with resource centre and learning support centres for students with disabilities, comprehensive support system for inclusive education of students with disabilities (educational assistants, formation of an inclusive school team, inclusive team for each student), access to education for children who were not included in teaching (students over the age limit, students from marginalized areas), reduction of dropouts, awarding grants to schools for innovative projects to support students from vulnerable categories, students with learning difficulties, activities that contribute to respect for multiculturalism and for the development of intercultural dialogue / interaction and the promotion of interethnic integration, also implementation of the Guidelines for the procedure for reporting and protection of a student victim of any of the forms of violence, abuse and neglect, analysis and development of new curricula in primary education for the promotion of gender equality and protection against discrimination on any grounds, rewarding the best students and their teachers and covering the costs of participating in international competitions.

Another main priority for supporting teachers and professional associates in primary schools through career development, continuous professional training, and reducing administrative responsibilities in the school for teachers to be fully focused on students and the educational process. Established organizational structure for better management and governance of primary schools through the continuous professional development of principals, improvement of the self-evaluation system, and preparation of a Development Program and annual program by the schools.

Ms. Bishkoska, Head of Sector MES, started her presentation with the plans for secondary education, secondary vocational education, and adult education, saying that they are based on official documents from the education strategy 2018-2025, future plans are based on the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Science from 2022-2024 as well as the laws that regulate the activity in secondary education.

The plan, mission, and vision of MES are to provide quality education with a focus on inclusiveness, inclusion, and integration of students in education, creating an education that will be in the best interest of children and that will enable every student to reach their full potential. All implemented activities for a complete reform in secondary vocational education and training are implemented in accordance with the strategic plan and are supported by the European Union through the IPA instrument, World Bank, UNDP, Swiss Embassy (E4E) Regional Challenge Fund (German Development Bank).

Regarding the realized activities in 2021, a law on vocational education and training has been prepared with the support of UNDP, a conception has been prepared which is in the final phase, and training for teachers has been realized by BDE and CSOO. Based on the analysis of the professional staff, training was realized for the employees in the three regional centres, professional training for the teachers for certain qualifications, and introductory training for inclusive education in cooperation with UNDP, UNDP support in relation to the educational assistants engaged in secondary schools. Reconstruction of two regional centres has started, as the Minister said, a detailed specification for equipment for the regional centres has been prepared.

A novelty in the scholarship of students in secondary vocational education is the introduction of six new categories of scholarships in addition to talented child athletes in: electrical, agricultural, veterinary, catering, textile, leather, and construction professions. The monthly amount of the scholarship has been increased in order to stimulate the students to continue their professional education and it amounts to 3,500 denars. Seven vocational schools and companies received grants for equipment and infrastructure.

Mr. Aleksov, Deputy Head of Sector MoES, elaborated on Roman Communiqué (2020), Activities from the participation in the Monitoring Group of the Bologna Process, European Strategy for the University (2022), and the European approach to partial qualifications for lifelong learning and employability, European Qualifications Framework, Activities from the participation in the Working Group for higher education.

As proposed priorities he suggested:

- Improvement of teaching competencies, establishing policies, and building a system for quality and recognition of partial qualifications.
- System for evaluating the quality of scientific research activity
- Regulating open access policies
- Review and revise policies for the fundamental values of higher education
- Rearrangement of the system security for quality in higher education



Discussion among relevant stakeholders on how to support the sector priorities

Ms. Trpevska, State Secretary, MES, opened the discussion and thanked for the presentation which was comprehensive for all the ministries and members of the sector working group and linked to the good notes given by the Ministry of Education and Science, where they were following up what they were previously spoken on the following the priorities and maybe they need to think how to address in the future. She wanted to emphasize that within the Ministry of Education and Science during the years when they discussed what the priorities of IPA are where she announced that during the years she mentioned the problematic documents from the past years (2005-2006), so they introduced higher education as a priority, especially in scientific work. From the aspect of further collaboration, she mentioned that it might be good to consider giving some scientific spirit to the programming of IPA III, translated as support for excellence centers by law for higher education.

Ms. Ivanova – Reaktor, expressed gratitude that Reaktor got the opportunity to made research about the aspect of distance learning. They have conducted 3 studies that provided them with high-quality information that helped them with the further plan of the curricula. She mentioned the digitalization where is not needed to have everything in digital form but when the textbooks are digital she pointed out that is necessary to train the teachers in parallel. She referred that is not sufficient to train only the teachers who are already employed but the training needs to be extended in the University courses for the future teachers and this will be adequate way to prepared them even before graduation for the work with children with special needs, also to work on interactive teaching including digital teaching.

Ms. Popovska IPAC – MES, informed and followed up on the topic of digitalization and confirmed that the moment there is a common interest to focused on digitalization, but she mentioned that support is provided by one of the IPA projects called „Improving the Quality of the Education“ which will implement activities in the area of digitalization and it is expected that the project team and experts that has already started working to deepen these topics. However, she referred that the work will continue on adopting common standards regarding the needs for digital achievement of students, mainly with a focus on secondary education and in parallel with the activities in primary education.

Ms. Buleska – USAID, informed the forum that in 2021 a new five-year USAID project called YouThink has been launched which aims to increase media literacy and critical thinking skills among the youth in the country. They have already started working with the Ministry of Education and Science in the field of primary and secondary education to integrate media literacy and critical information engagement into the school curricula for all grades in primary education, while in higher education they will work directly with universities and faculties primarily focusing on future teachers, as well as young and future journalists. Non-formal education for youth and parents will also be provided. She offered to briefly present the planned activities in one of the future SWG meetings, as USAID will have increased engagement on this topic and thanked for the cooperation so far.

Ms. Prodanova EUD addressed and stated two things, about horizontal needs for strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Science in general because for pushing these important reforms you need the right people in the right places and asked for more details about this question. In the beginning, she mentioned that it's important that they will start with the programming of IPA 3 and that they consider it very inclusivity so she would like all participants to participate in the groups when they will start with a discussion. She referred on how to motivate the Ministry of Education and Science to think about how to strengthen their capacities because as she stated is not possible to make any reform without good technical staff and support. She explained and required to hear about what short-term priorities are and what midterm priorities are. She mentioned that there are other civil organizations, other donors as well as the MES and asked for their opinion and recommendations about projects and also how they are seeing these priorities.

Mr. Citarella EUD, noted that Ms. Popovska IPAC - MES has already mentioned a few things that he wanted to express by himself. He mentioned that they had heard many topics but that they need to discuss with the Ministry of Education and Science about what are the long-term strategic priorities and actions that they need to support with IPA programs. He mentioned that they have some ambiguities regarding the legislative process because as a European Union they focus on secondary education in North Macedonia so that they can be competitive in the labor market. He informed that there are two laws mentioned in the presentation, the law on higher education and the law on adult education that are very important for the implementation of these actions. He said that these laws are being finalized after they were returned to the government for finalization and his question was about what is happening with these laws and what their status is because they need them to implement the reforms.

Ms. Popovska IPAC - MES, added and underline the importance of the question that Mr. Citarella raised and that both agreed and that is needed to have a clear plan for these two important laws. She explained that she discussed with the cabinet who is relevant and present at this meeting and that maybe will be good to have some formal meeting after this discussion about these important documents so that they can know what is the status of these important documents.

Conclusions

Ms. Slavkoska, MLSP representative, elaborated the conclusions related to:

- Dissemination of information about the mid-term priorities and needs after the meeting and will be a starting point for further coordination.
- Lead ministries shall organize holding of thematic meetings on technical level with involvement of donor community and civil society organizations, on which to further elaborate the priorities and understand and agree



who is supporting what, as well where the needs should be addressed.

- Verbal invitation to members of SWG was noted to share information about the on-going and planned support around the presented national priorities.

In this regard, she informed that the information will be collected through a simple web-based tool for mapping the stakeholders from donor development community and interventions in the sectors. She announced that the link with instructions to the EESP platform will be provided in due time after the meeting. She referred to excel table prepared back in 2018, but that excel table is integrated in on-line platform for better monitoring of donor assistance and further planning and linking the potential interventions with strategic priorities. This platform has been developed through UNDP/SDC support and engagement of FINKI Faculty for data collection of projects, but this platform will not substitute the Central Donor Assistance Database (CDAD) managed by SEA/NIPAC due to tax and other duties exemption procedures defined with relevant by-law. Data entered in this platform due to basic information on projects implemented and planned will be linked to discussions from this SWG meeting and technical meetings.

- Next plenary meeting of this SWG will be tentatively organized in September 2022, when the draft text of new rulebook will be discussed; as well the ad-hoc meeting could be organized with prior notification.

Annexes:

Annex I	Agenda
Annex II	MLSP and MES presentations
Annex III	MLSP Policy Brief (English and Macedonian version)