



SECTOR “EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY”
Minutes of the XIV Plenary Meeting of the Sector Working Group (SWG)
in the areas of education, employment and social inclusion

Venue: Meeting with physical presence in hotel Alexander Palace

Date: 16.5.2024, Thursday, 10:00 - 12:00

Meeting moderated by Ms. Nadica Kostoska, Deputy Head of Department and IPA Coordinator, as MES representative, and Ms. Aleksandra Slavkoska, State Advisor and IPA Coordinator, as MLSP representative.

Invited 154 attendees, 51 attendees were present.

Opening statements

Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP) opened the meeting with a short introduction for the meeting’s purpose and its agenda, with a note that the meeting would be on technical level due to overall situation of ongoing elections in the country. She elaborated that discussion would be focused on review of the progress on main priorities and targets in the areas of employment and education policies, especially due to youth employment and their access on labour market. As defined in the draft agenda shared 10 days prior the meeting, several reminders on policy reforms were expected to be given since precious SWG meeting. She also informed on slight change of the draft agenda due to last topic foreseen for presentation of new Action Plan on Employment 2024-2027, which it would not be presented because of justified reasons for absence of the presenter. Although, she would be covered the main priorities of new action plan.

As one of important aspects of policies’ implementation done in previous six-month period, the Government of RNM adopted a special law for financial support of vulnerable groups of citizens in order to had a legal background to receive additional financial support to cope with energy and price crisis. Scope of target groups were the most vulnerable persons who receive special allowance, disability allowance, etc., as well the wider scope of pensioners with lower pension incomes.

In regard to amendments of regulatory framework and considering the re-election and election period, she explained that enactment of new laws and amendments on current laws were not done. Due to this by end of 2023, she highlighted that the MLSP had continued with preparation and consultations of Draft Law on Labour Relations and the governmental procedure had not been initiated for it. As well, the similar situation was ongoing with the Draft Law for Occupational Safety and Health.

She noted that the Draft Law on Social Enterprises had been prepared and undergone the consultation process, as well it had entered in governmental procedure, but the Government of RNM has not adopted.

Following the adoption of National Strategy for Formalization of Informal Economy 2023-2027, the draft Law on Work Engagement of Persons in Certain Sectors which it had also face same situation as previous one.

Few strategic documents had been prepared during previous period, such as new Action Plan on Employment 2024-2027 following the National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 and new Action Plan on OSH 2024-2025 following the OSH Strategy 2021-2025 had been prepared.

In December 2023, the Government of RNM had adopted the National Strategy for Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030 with an Action Plan 2023-2026 which follows the logic of the UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities and this strategic document should support the process for advancement of the situation of PwDs in ten priority areas.

Meanwhile, there are ongoing activities due to preparation of National Action Plan for Rights of a Child 2024-2028 which it would envision measures and activities for advancement of respecting the child’s rights in eight priority areas identified by the UN Convention on Rights of a Child.

Due to implementation of National Deinstitutionalization Strategy 2018-2027, main focus was transformation of Public Institute for Rehabilitation of Children and Youth – Skopje, whereas the reconstruction and equipping project supported by IPA II was ongoing and all the beneficiaries had been resettled in group homes for supported living. As well, the licensed providers of social services had increased to-up-to 119 and these processes had continued.

She had given a word to DEU representative give a statement on behalf of donor community and announced that MES representative would continue afterwards to present progress in education sector.

Mr. Alexandre Albu, Head of Section, Delegation of the European Union (DEU), welcome representatives from relevant stakeholders (ministries, institutions, donors, social partners and civil society organizations), to discuss regularly policies and plans of the Government in EESP sectors. EU had been closely following the developments in these policy areas and regular country reports had been prepared, as well guidance and support had been provided. Number of technical assistance projects had been tackling aspects of policies’ reforms.

European Union (EU) and North Macedonia (NM) had long-standing cooperation in EESP sector with main goals to support education system in country to become more resilient, inclusive and responsive labour market and social policies and to provide appropriate skills required by labour market. He highlighted certain positive actions in the past conducted by



the MLSP, which policy developments had been noted. The implementation of Youth Guarantee in the country had shown as positive example in Western Balkan, as well in EU members states, and he pointed out that the well progress could be highlighted. This example is a proof that the country is able to deliver political commitment and to try to re-solve issues of its citizens.

However, he pointed out on key challenges in these sectors, in particular, such as low labour participation, human capital and still miss-match of skills and labour market demand, and labour marker exclusion, which remain to be tackled in order to ensure inclusive growth.

He noted that the policy dialogue per sectors is important to be ongoing and to ensure relevant stakeholders to participate, as well to discuss solutions on policy level and to follow the latest policy plans of the Government and its institutions for improvement in these sectors.

He pointed out on 2022 PISA results that demonstrated that the country should make additional efforts to improve education system, to train qualified teachers and professionals to take more favour of contemporary practices of teaching and learning in order to provide further support in the demanding and detailed process.

As new EU social model is based and promotes sustainability and inclusion, equal opportunities no-one-left-behind principle, it provides guarantees for respecting the social rights of the citizens.

In a view of these aspects and in order to guide the reforms in EESP sector, he highlighted that as critical to adopt several draft laws, in particular draft laws in education area due to secondary education, VET and adult education. As well, he pointed out on other related draft laws on labour relations and social entrepreneurship, as well to ensure sustainability to provided IPA interventions. On top-of-that, he pointed out that the authorities should enhance further on the implementation of these legal acts.

The EU funded projects and programs planned should support the country further, especially that there are two large initiatives on which it had been working with relevant ministries. The one is IPA III Operational Program for Human Capital 2024-2027 expect soon to be adopted by EC services in Brussels in couple of months and its operationalization could begin this year. He noted that the program could become main changer at labour market in forthcoming years, especially due to labour market active participation of youth and women and improving the quality of social services, in particular in unprecedented areas. The second large initiative on which it had been working mostly with MES in past couple of months, it would apart Growth Plan for Western Balkan with a framework with a special attention to follow the needs of youth guarantee, such as skills mismatch, career guidance, dual education, vocational and educational training programs, new VET centres, validation of informal and non-formal education, adult education, and more aspects. He noted that all aspects noted form so-called ‘human capital’ of new Growth Plan, as being prepared and adopted soon, as ambitious initiative expected to deliver to all 6 countries of Western Balkan up to 6 billion EUR and it would depend on level of implementation per country. He made a parallel with the IPA II EU4Youth Program, which was Sector Budget Support, whereas the indicators and targets were set, and it would be similar to Growth Plan, if the targets would be achieved and better implementation conducted per country, the tranches foreseen would be paid.

At the end, he pointed on the need of active participation through the policy dialogue from different stakeholders in EESP sector.

Ms. Kostoska (MoES) expresses gratitude to the representatives from the EU for emphasizing the key elements for the importance of human capital. The main elements to strengthen the human capital in the country, only through investment in human capital can all the challenges that are found in the country be achieved. At today's meeting, on her part and on the part of the heads of the departments for primary and secondary education, the main achievements and realized activities that have been worked on in the past period will be presented. She referred to the three laws that have been the subject of discussion for a long time, that is, a new law on secondary education has been drafted, a new law on vocational education and training has been prepared and a new law on adult education has been drafted. The law on adult education was in parliamentary procedure for 3 years and was returned several times for refinement and improvement. The new laws on secondary education and vocational education were submitted to the assembly at the end of last year. Amendments to the law on textbooks in primary and secondary education are also in parliamentary procedure. In the past period, with the support and cooperation of the EU, and on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science, work was done on a new concept for post-secondary education. The Ministry recognized the value, especially in conditions of an energy crisis, that is, when it has to face a just transition, that is, readjustment to the conditions of climate change. Post-secondary education should be recognized in the part of formal education because it offers opportunities for students and adults, to prequalify for certain skills in a quick and efficient way. Also, what was important in terms of developing the country's human capital was the adoption of smart specialization, which happened in December 2023 and applies to the period 2024-2027 and has an accompanying two-year action plan. The main vision of the strategy is to encourage green and sustainable growth, integrating knowledge, innovation and technologies and creating high-value products and services that are competitive in both domestic and international markets. For this purpose, four priority domains are foreseen, namely smart agriculture and food, information and communication technology, electromechanical industry and sustainable materials and smart buildings. Also, within these four domains, energy for the future and tourism are recognized as horizontal domains.

Within the Strategy for Smart Specialization, 5 pillars for interventions are foreseen, focused on scientific excellence, innovative ecosystem, competitiveness, and green digital transformation as well as human capital and skills.



As a reminder, the speaker mentioned that the total number of the country's research capacity consists of 1,976 researchers, which the State Statistics Office has registered since 2022, and the country's total investment in research and development is approximately 0.38% of GDP. These funds are predominantly from the public sector, the government sector, and the higher education sector, and the share of the private sector is approximately 0.1% of GDP. These segments were taken into account during the creation of the human capital pillar within the framework of the reform agenda, that is, within the framework of the European Commission's instrument for the growth of the Western Balkans 2024-2027. Considering all the challenges that all the countries of Europe were facing, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization as well as the energy crisis as well and climate change, the focus is on mental health and well-being. For the first time in the OECD Pisa survey, 2018, indicators related to the mental health and well-being of students at the age of 15 were included. The research showed that the achievement of tasks and satisfaction with life are inversely proportional, that is, young people blame their achievement on their mental health. The Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with UNICEF analysed the gap between practices, capacities, and needs for the promotion of mental health, and the analysis showed that it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of teachers and professional associates based on well-designed and sustainable programs based on a holistic approach. Young people in our country are highly sensitive to social developments, regardless of whether it is a social, political, economic, health, or other type of crisis. Young people are sensitive and these changes are reflected in their life satisfaction.

The education, labour, and social and health sectors recognized this challenge, and therefore, in the joint global program of UNICEF and WHO, a national action plan for mental health, and social well-being of children and adolescents was formed and made.

The speaker referred to the reform agenda, and more specifically to the development of human capital, that is, in the area of education and skills. These reforms will be supported through the Western Balkans Growth Instrument 2024-2027. She enumerated the reforms for the educational system, improving the scope and quality of vocational education and training, improving the approach to the principle of learning through work and dual education, and the inclusion of the private sector is of great importance for this reform. Within the framework of this reform, the inclusion of a qualified career counsellor in primary and secondary schools is foreseen, in the new law also foresees the inclusion of such a position in schools. It is also foreseen to strengthen the regional centres for professional education and training, which should become leaders of innovation, cooperation with higher education, support of innovations, and smart specialization. Another reform within the reform agenda is increasing the participation of adults in education and improving the system for non-formal and informal learning. In cooperation with the EU project for youth, training is planned with the Regional Centres for the process of validation of non-formal and informal education with the support of the European Training Foundation, all to achieve indicator 4 where it is planned to open the system for validation of informal and informal learning for 6 qualifications. It is also planned to promote higher education within the framework of the reform agenda, where 90% of accredited institutions should have established functional systems for quality assurance. The next reform that is foreseen is the provision of an effective, coherent, and inclusive digital transformation in education, within the framework of the curricula for the promotion of digital skills in the country. The fifth reform is the establishment of smart primary schools with IT tools and internet infrastructure. The last reform within the framework of human capital under the area of education and skills is the optimization of the school network and the rationalization of resources intended for primary and secondary education.

This is a general overview of the activities that have been carried out in the past six months together with the sectors of labour and social and health before presenting the indicators that are being worked on in the sector budget support and giving a word to the colleague who leads the sector for basic education in the Ministry for education and science.

Ms. Sanja Jancheva, Head of Department for Primary Education in MoES, presented the work of the Ministry from November 2023 to this conference.

Referring to the quality of primary education, he mentioned the activities that the Ministry of Education and Culture undertakes with all the organs involved.

December 2023 - improvement of the network infrastructure was implemented in 40 elementary schools (installed network devices, switches, devices for network security, and devices for uninterrupted power supply), these activities continued in March 2024 when a new contract was signed for another 35 schools and the activities are planned to be completed by July 2024.

In February 2024 - Digitized and put into use the digital textbooks for the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. Installed on a stable Nastava.mk platform. This activity covered about 61,789 students.

In April 2024 - the curricula for the eighth grade were determined for all subjects according to the Concept for Basic Education, that is, 19 mandatory subjects were prepared.

In April 2024, contracts were signed with the World Bank for small renovations in 40 primary schools (renovation of toilets and access ramps in 4 schools)

Within the framework of the project of the World Bank, a revision of the framework of indicators for the quality of schools was made. The project produced guides and manuals for School Self-Evaluation, School Development Planning, and Grant Program Operational Manual.

So, 48 representatives from 11 pilot schools were trained on the new framework for integral evaluation. The process of implementing the self-evaluation of schools and development planning. Grant application and piloting of the entire process.



25 representatives from the pilot schools were trained to conduct training on self-evaluation and development planning for elementary schools.

As of April 2024, 504 participants from 252 elementary schools (from 6 regions) have been trained for the new framework for evaluating the quality of schools (directors and representatives of professional services), and in May, trainings are also planned for the Kumanovo region.

They were also trained on the role of the director in the optimization process of the school network (cooperation with UNICEF).

November 2023 – signed grant agreements for 11 primary schools with value around 10,000 EUR for the implementation of the activities from the revised development programs.

In the section on the training of teachers and professional associates, they mentioned several activities starting from November 2023 – training on the use of the TEACH tool for BRO advisers and educational inspectors, and also training for trainers for the certified advisers to train their colleagues,

As part of the World Bank project, 686 professional associates were trained in managing menstrual health and hygiene.

In 2024, preparations began for the implementation of the third cycle of accredited training for teachers and professional associates from primary schools.

The teachers and professional associates made a selection from the Catalogue of accredited training for a topic they need to follow.

The Bureau for the Development of Education concluded agreements with the accredited service providers and the training will be implemented in the period June-August 2024.

In the area of state testing, the State Examination Centre worked intensively and from October 2023, the State Examination Centre conducted the pre-test in the fifth grade within the state testing. In March and April 2024, the tasks were selected for the main testing in the fifth grade in mother tongue (Macedonian language and Albanian language) and mathematics (in Macedonian language and Albanian language), which will be conducted in June 2024 on a sample of about 3000 students. In October 2023, training was held for about 30 primary education teachers on the identification of achievement levels based on the results obtained from the third-grade test (2022). December 2023, the main report on the achievements of third-grade students in mother tongue (Macedonian language and Albanian language) and mathematics (in Macedonian language and Albanian language) was prepared and was presented to representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the Development Bureau of Education, the Pedagogical Service, the World Bank, the Office of the European Union in RSM and UNICEF, as well as in front of teachers from all levels of education. In the area of international testing section, in May 2024, the State Examination Centre implemented all planned activities for the large-scale international testing in which the Republic of North Macedonia participates (PISA, TIMSS, TALIS and PIRLS), according to the deadlines provided by the international organizations that organize the testing (OECD and IEA). In the period February - March 2024, the main study for TALIS 2024 was conducted on a sample of 200 principals and about 4000 teachers from 150 primary schools. Data cleaning is in progress.

Testing (April-May 2024) for the longitudinal TIMSS 2023 study on a sample of 4,600 fifth-grade students from 150 elementary schools is also underway. Data from the main trial for TIMSS 2023 (conducted April – May 2023) has been sent to the IEA where data analysis is ongoing. The initial activities for PIRLS 2026 are also underway, i.e. writing assignments for the newly selected texts that measure the ability to read with comprehension among students aged 9-10.

In December 2023 – March 2024, the initial report on the results of PISA 2022 was prepared and it was presented to representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Educational Inspectorate and the Bureau for Education Development. The preparation of the national report with detailed results on the achievements of students in PISA 2022 is also underway. Preparations are also underway for the trial testing for PISA 2025, which will be conducted in September - October 2025.

In the section on Promoting mental health in an educational context, the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Study (HBSC – Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Study) – from 2022 points to the fact that life satisfaction among young people is in a worrying decline with age, with a declining trend across three research cycles from 2014 to 2022, in the same direction as the gender and age differences observed in 2022. For this purpose, a National Action Plan for the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents, with cooperation between UNICEF and WHO is being prepared.

The focus is on the four pillars: Health, Education, Social services and Intersectoral horizontal cooperation.

Ms. Kostoska (MoES) highlighted the clear presentation and the data obtained for the creation of educational policies and gave the floor to her colleague from the Department for Secondary Education for the presentation of their data.

Ms. Sadete Ramadani Mora, Head of Unit for Secondary Education in MoES, referring to the mission of the Ministry of Education and Science, the colleague presented the activities of the Department for Secondary Education. The sector continuously works to improve the quality of education. Reforms in secondary vocational education were presented as the main priorities.

With the reforms in secondary vocational education, the number of enrolled students from 2020 to 2024 is constantly



increasing. The goal of the Ministry is to increase the number of students enrolled in vocational education.

Dual education is part of vocational education and is a priority of the Ministry of Education and Science. The experience of dual education is taken from developed countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland), with adaptation for our conditions and needs, defined in the new law on vocational education which is currently in parliamentary procedure.

Cooperation with companies where students perform work-based learning is increasing year by year. In the academic year 2020, cooperation was made with 16 companies, while for this academic year, cooperation was achieved with 560 companies.

In the dual classes in secondary vocational education, this school year, 32.6% of students are enrolled, who realize the practical teaching in these 560 companies. The goal of the Ministry of Education and Science is to increase the number of students enrolled in the first year of dual classes in secondary vocational education and for dual education to become a systematic and integral part of vocational education.

For the academic year 2024/2025, the Ministry of Education and Science, with a competition for enrolling students in secondary schools, announced an enrolment announcement for 29,117 students in 915 classes, of which 19,413 students in 625 classes are planned for vocational education. From this number, the number of 13,410 students in 430 classes on Macedonian language, 5,481 students in 177 classes on Albanian language, 497 students in 17 classes in the Turkish language of instruction, and 25 students in one class on Serbian language of instruction are foreseen.

The competition was prepared by a committee that was conducted on the proposals and requests from the municipalities and the analysis was made with the number of students who are finishing the ninth grade and based on that the analysis was made.

For the implementation of projects in secondary education, the sector implemented several projects, i.e. the 20/20/20 project, the Project for dual vocational education, the Project Increasing the attractiveness, inclusiveness, and relevance of VET and adult education (with the establishment of two new RCVET), Sectoral agreement for the implementation of "EU for Youth" reforms (three formed RCSEO), Project Improving the quality of education, Quality assurance for the work of coordinators for relations with companies, Project for green transformation - support for the implementation of a green agenda for the Western Balkans, Active involvement in Youth Guarantee, second chance, New formula for allocation of Block Grants in secondary education, Active involvement in activities that prevent any type of violence in secondary schools.

The representative of secondary education also shared that there are activities that are ongoing and she indicated the following plans: the new Law on Secondary Education, the new Law on Vocational Education and Training, the new Law on Adult Education, new by-laws, increased gender equality in the STEM system, career counselling system as well as inclusiveness, green transition, digitalization and micro qualifications.

Ms. Kostoska (MoES) noted that the interest in enrolling in secondary vocational education is due to the fact that the Ministry of Education and Science provides 1500 scholarships for first-year students worth 60,000,000 denars. Students who are enrolled in a dual class receive a monthly amount of MKD 3.500 for 9 months of the year. This support continues for all students in dual classes for each year of their education.

Presentation and discussion of Fourth Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education "EU for Youth"

Ms. Kostoska (MoES) presented the focus of today's 14th meeting of the Sectoral Working Group, regarding the analysis of the self-evaluation report within the EU Youth Project.

Concerning the three regional centres for vocational education and training, it was stated that all three are operational and fully functioning, and reconstruction projects are underway, for which technical specifications have also been drawn up, and the two new regional centres in Veles and Strumica are effective from January 2024. The Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the EU project for the growth of the Western Balkans, to establish 8 regional centers for vocational education and training, which will cover 9.25% of the total number of students in vocational education. Within the framework of the same EU project for youth, again after 2016, a study on tracking students (tracer system) was carried out, which included not only students from the 4th year of vocational education but also participants involved in the adult education process. 75 secondary vocational schools and 79 adult education providers were covered.

Regarding the part that refers to science and research, related to the financing of educational reforms, during 2023 3.58% of GDP was allocated to education, while the European level is 5%. According to the data from 2024, a decreasing trend is observed, and there is a need to create new funding formulas at all levels of education to ensure a more efficient use of available funds.

Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP) presented part of main indicators at labour market. Last year, national economy faced slow growth according the data from National Bank of RNM owed by many reasons caused from external factors, geo-political tensions, mistrust of business sector which resulted with decline of investments, etc., the education and employment policies had been implemented in such conditions.

But, main indicators at labour market shown certain improvements regardless of general situation, especially due to unemployment rates and employment rate for target group of aged 15-64 which noticed a slight positive increase. Although,



the employment rates of youth and adults (aged 15-64) notice a slight decline.

She highlighted in regard to unemployment rates, the general unemployment rate (15+) was 13.1% in 2023 and thus, the target foreseen in National Employment Strategy 2027 has been accomplished. But, youth unemployment rate noted a trend of decline and expected to be achieved during 2024. At the same time, long-term unemployment rate has decreased on 9.7% in 2023.

Important to be emphasized, the positive trends at labour market have been a result of employment policies implemented, especially Youth Guarantee. As well, she noted the demographic changes in the country. In the period 2019-2022, it is noticed a decline of labour force and thus, the number of employees has been decreased, as well of young employees. These trends had been also noticed from the data of Employment Service Agency (ESA), such as the youth employment rate noticed a decline on 18.2% in 2020 compared to 18.9% in 2022.

As other important aspect, she noted that the average gross salary since 2020 have shown accelerated increase and thus, the nominal gross salary has increased for 14.9% and average gross salary for 15.3%. Real growth has been in a slight decline, such as 5.1% for net salary and 5.4% for gross salary. An increase of salaries has been caused by several factors, such as structural reasons of labour force, several sectors have faced a shortage of labour force which resulted with an increase of labour price, an increase of minimum salary from last year resulting with adjustment of salaries in public administration and several multiple increases of salaries in public administration, as well 10% increase of salaries with general collective agreement in public sector.

She shortly noted several positive aspects achieved during 2023, which had been undertaken by MLSP in close cooperation with ESA and SLI:

- More than 12,000 unemployed persons were involved in active labour market measures and employment services in 2023, which was followed by an increase of funds for their realization.
- Around 23,000 youth unemployed persons were involved in implementation of Youth Guarantee and 43% of them have been employed or involved in active labour market measures and employment services in period of 4 months. Thus, the achievements of Youth Guarantee have been higher of target set of 30%.
- More than 24,000 job seekers had participated in employment services of ESA.
- New Youth Employment Action Plan 2023-2026 has been adopted in 2023 and thus, the implementation of Youth Guarantee has continued.
- As well, the financing of activation of Roma returnees and recipients of guarantee minimum assistance at labor market.
- Strengthening the capacities of State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) due to ways of internal planning of human capacities.
- New National Strategy for Formalization of Informal Economy 2023-2027 has been adopted, whereas the MLSP has been involved in part for formalization of undeclared work and previously mentioned draft Law on Work Engagement of Persons in Certain Sectors.

In regard to implementation of Youth Guarantee, she emphasized that 23,000 young unemployed persons had been involved in its activities. Generally, it is considered that this program given positive results, especially if the Youth in NEET rate has been monitored and since 2020, it has shown a decrease. National Employment Strategy 2027 and its related goal is foreseen to be decreased on 20%. In 2023, this rate was 23% and its decline since 2020 has been due to youth involvement in active labour market measures and employment services. Most of young persons involved in Youth Guarantee had been with secondary education.

In regard to high Youth in NEET rate and order to mobilize higher number of young persons, she noted as important aspect for achievement of positive results and decline of this rate was due to the involvement of youth civil society organization in their mobilization of around 6,000 young persons and around 2,700 young persons had been further included in ESA activities and registered in ESA.

At the end, she briefly gave a summary of Draft Action Plan on Employment 2024-2027 and noted that the most of indicators previously mentioned have measured the successfulness of the implementation of NES 2027, as well. In December, it had been conducted an assessment of implementation of Action Plan on Employment 2024-2027 with ILO support. The assessment identified a positive trend due to achievement of goals of employment related activities, but there was noted a slow increase compared to expectations. Part of indicators, especially those related to labour market, the positive progress was identified and it is expected that within the strategic period of NES 2027 would accomplish. Other indicators, it is noted that additional efforts should be put with variety of activities. She shortly informed that NES 2027 has three main priority policies (1. Improve the quality of education and training outcomes for all, 2. Enhance the role of economic and enterprise development policies in generating decent jobs and 3. Strengthen the inclusiveness of labour market policies). As a remark on previous action plan, she highlighted that the highest inconsistency was noted due the rate for vertical skills mismatch with labour market needs which had noted a decline, mainly due to shortage of labour force. As well, there is a need for additional activities for labour market inclusion of adults.

Thus, the recommendation in education priority area is to continue with reforms for greater inclusion of persons in education of youth and adults and advancement of the process for validation of non-formal and informal education. Further, it is recommended to invest in upgrading the information systems in education area. She highlighted that the draft action plan in education part has foreseen to include one additional activity due to gaining skills through dual education and to



monitor its effects.

In regard to priority area of employment policies for creation of decent jobs, the good progress had been noted and labor market indicators and its targets would remain same as valid and relevant for further monitoring, but the focus should be in ensuring better conditions for micro, small and medium enterprises to create more jobs, especially due to green transition activities, innovations and capacity building of their employees. As well, the recommendation is focused to continue for formalization of informal work.

In regard to priority area for inclusiveness of labour market policies, positive trends have been noted besides the demographic changes and actions undertaken, such as Youth Guarantee, activation of hard-to-activate persons at labour market, etc. Recommendations are focused on continuation with implementation of active labor market measures and employment services by ESA, as well new ones, and activities of SLI, which mean to strengthen the services for crucial labour market activation. Indicators and targets have not been changed, but more concrete and targeted activities have been defined.

As regard to implementation of Youth Guarantee, she highlighted the main indicator, such as the improvement of employment among young women and men, whereas the employment rate is monitored and target for 2024 defined is 32.8%. But, according the results of Labour Marker Survey, this target is seemed to be exceeded on 33.6%. Similar situation is due to sub-indicators focused on higher employment of young women and target was exceeded. At the end, she mentioned that last year, two more to eight indicators have been included in order to ensure higher absorption of funds on program level.

Ms. Kostoska (MoES) Regarding the indicator that refers to students who leave the educational process, early leavers, the indicator has been achieved. In communication with the State Statistics Office, the results for 2023 are also expected. It is recognized that there is a need for new skills among the target group between the ages of 18 and 24. Regarding the third indicator, which refers to the established RCSOO in the three regions, in the regional center "Kiro Burnaz" in Kumanovo, the activities related to reconstruction have been completely completed. For RCSOO in Ohrid "Vancho Pitosheski", the reconstruction is in progress. According to the latest report, about 72% of the construction has been completed, and the reconstruction is expected to be completed this summer.

For the reconstruction of RCSOO "Moshia Piade" in Tetovo, the ministry announced a call, there was an administrative procedure, then there was an appeal to the selected company, and the conclusion of the contract is expected during this period. It is a reconstruction that is expected to be completed within 14 months and to be completed in 2025. With the support of the EU Youth Project, tender files and technical specifications have been developed for the relevant qualifications that are covered in the three regional centres. So far, qualifications for a facade worker and a waiter have been developed, because with the new concept of regional centres, it is foreseen that one person will be fully dedicated to the education of adults. The systemic solutions are fully reflected in the new law on adult education, which has not yet been adopted. About indicator 5, which refers to the strengthening of human potential, the indicator has been achieved, that is, each of the employees has completed a certain type of training, and 35% of the employees have been trained to work with children and adults with special educational needs.

Inclusivity training was also conducted for the professional associates in RCVET. Regarding indicator 9, students who are enrolled in the 3 regional centres, 540 students are expected to have completed the first year within the 2023/2024 school year. This indicator has been achieved. In RCSOO "Kiro Burnaz", 190 students were initially planned, and more than 220 students have been enrolled. In RCSOO Ohrid, there is an increased interest in enrolling students and there is an increased number of enrolled students compared to previous years. For indicator number 10, which refers to learning through work, 1,200 students from RCSOO should have a certificate for realizing learning through work. There is an established practice of concluding agreements between the directors of RCSEO and the business community for the implementation of learning through work. Concerning this indicator, the Ministry provides scholarships for students enrolled in dual classes.

Mr. Goran Petkovski, Head of Unit for European Integration and Projects in Employment Service Agency (ESA), presented shortly progress in achievement of four indicators related to ESA activities. According the Contract for Sector Budget Support, only first indicator has been related with variable tranche and it was achieved in previous period. Next three indicators have been accomplished in next period.

First indicator is related to number of young persons involved and registered in ESA in 2023 and they had a successful and timely exit of YG, i.e., to be employed or been involved in some of active labour market measures and employment services. Target for 2023 was 40% successful exit and the achieved target was 38.5%, i.e., 3,812 young unemployed persons had successful and 4-month timely exit from YG. From this number, 3,407 persons have been employed in period after 4 months and around 50% are young women. 706 persons had been involved in some of active labour market measures and employment services and 53% are young women. According ESA administrative data on nationality from total number of exits from YG, 47.2% were Macedonians, 33.5% Albanians, 22.4% Roma, and other % from other nationalities.

He noted that foreseen 40% target has been almost accomplished with all efforts done by ESA and gave a comment based on monitoring framework of YG by European Employment Committee, this indicator measures the period and capacities of public employment services to succeed to include young persons in a 4-month period in labour market or in any of active labour market measures and employment services.

In this regard, he also mentioned the variety of measures and services and the ongoing Direct Grant "Labour Market



Activation of Vulnerable Groups” under which such measures and services have been co-financed to target vulnerable groups (women, recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance, young persons up to 29 of age, etc.).

He noted that if numbers of achieved targets by these projects for all three regions due to young persons involved in active labour market measures and employment services, the percentage of success is 42%. But, considering the principles of monitoring and avoiding double financing, this total number have not been presented.

Sixth indicator is related to number of young persons aged 29 registered in ESA for first time in three regions, as well registered in YG, 9,893 young persons had been included in YG, from whom 63% are young persons up to 24 of age and 59% were women. From total number of registered persons by nationality, 47.2% were Macedonians, 50% Albanians, 4.2% Roma and other % from other nationalities. He highlighted that this indicator had been achieved in previous years.

Seventh indicator is related to number of trained persons. Compared to previous years, online training for monitoring of YG was conducted with ILO support in May 2023 and more than 30 ESA representatives participated.

Eight indicator is related to number of reconstructed/ adapted / modernized local employment centres in three regions. ESA has continued with these activities, i.e., local employment centres have been reconstructed in Kumanovo, Tetovo, Kichevo, Gostivar, Makedonski Brod and Ohrid. In 2023, he informed that ESA has started with reconstruction of local employment centre in Struga and been finalized in February 2024.

Discussion among relevant stakeholders

Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP) summarized the presented progress for 2024 and noted that two indicators are expected to be accomplished in 2024, i.e., second and seventh indicator and the tranche would be in amount of more than 970,000 EUR. But, having in mind the expected lower rate of accomplishment, it could be expected around 860,000 EUR. She opened the discussion by inviting the participants to share their views due to employment policies, especially targeting the youth. She also explained that Draft Fourth Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education “EU for Youth” had been shared prior the meeting and after the review at this SWG through written procedure till 22 May, it would be submitted afterwards to European Commission for reporting and requesting the next tranche by end of May.

Ms. Kostoska (MES) noted that there are several challenges that are implemented with the technical support, it is about 2 indicators that are covered in the self-assessment report and they will be transferred further to be finalized with the technical support so that the project can be successfully completed. She expressed gratitude to the participants who led the presentations and also for the discussion, which was detailed and extensive.

Conclusions

Ms. Kostoska (MES) and Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP), summarized jointly the conclusions related to:

- SWG reviewed the progress presented in Draft Fourth Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education “EU for Youth” and comments through written procedure are expected till 22 May.
- Next SWG meeting, as fifth-teen, is scheduled to be held in November, when the priorities of new Government would be presented and discussed.

Annexes:

Annex 1	Draft Agenda
Annex 2	Presentation of 2023 Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education “EU for Youth”
Annex 2	MoES Presentation Primary Education
Annex 2	MoES Presentation Secondary Education
Annex 3	Fourth Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education “EU for Youth”