



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

Venue: Meeting with physical presence in Ceremonial Hall of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia and via ZOOM link.

Date: 30.4.2025, Wednesday, 11:00 - 13:30

Meeting moderated by Ms. Ivana Popovska, MoES representative.

Meeting organized by Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), Ministry of Economy and Labour (MEL) and Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth (MSPDY), in coordination with Ministry for European Affairs (MEA)/ National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC).

Invited 169 representatives, 84 attendees were present (55 with physical presence and 29 with virtual presence).

Opening statement on implementation of Sector Policies and National Development Strategy 2024-2044

Ms. Popovska opened the meeting noting shared on the Draft Agenda with e-mail invitation, mentioned the purpose of the meeting to review the progress in sectors since previous SWG meeting and gave the floor to high-level representatives from relevant ministries.

Ms. Janevska, Minister of MoES, delivered a welcoming note and provided a brief introduction. She emphasized importance of strengthening fundamental pillars that uphold quality of educational process and promote scientific and research activity.

Specifically, Ms. Janevska identified following as major changes in fields of education and science:

- Government's priority is education and emphasis is placed on:
 - modernization of educational programs, single-shift teaching for students from first to ninth grade, training of teachers, career counsellors, infrastructure, reforms in higher education, drafting of legal solutions.
- Budget for education and science in 2025 is 620 million EUR, which is 100 million EUR more than previous year.
- Significant progress has been made in area of infrastructure, namely:
 - seven new schools have been built, 20 have been reconstructed;
 - new sports halls are being built and two student dormitories are being reconstructed. 32 million EUR have been allocated for the infrastructure;
 - through support within framework of programmes, two more Regional Centres for Vocational Education have been established, so that there are now a total of seven Regional Centres.
- Quality of teaching is gradually improving, with updated curricula. Starting from new school year, students will have textbooks for both foreign languages and other subjects.
- Higher-quality teaching is planned through introduction of single-shift work and optimization of school network.
- A total of 150 schools have adopted concept of single-shift work. Optimization process involves merging students from regional and central schools, which requires construction of 300 classrooms and 70 sanitary facilities, with a total investment of 8 million EUR.
- Investments have also been made in teaching staff, with salary increases of 12% for school staff, 14% for university professors, and 8% for administrative personnel.
- Oversight of higher education institutions is being strengthened, with intensive controls being conducted. As a result, 13 private scientific institutions and higher vocational schools have been closed due to non-compliance with legal requirements.
- Five legal frameworks have been adopted through inclusive processes, including Law on Secondary Education, Law on Adult Education, Law on Secondary Vocational Education, and National Qualifications Framework. Additionally, Law on Higher Education, Law on Scientific Research and Innovation, and Law on Agency for Quality in Higher Education are currently being prepared, with adoption planned by end of the year.
- MoES, in collaboration with Youth Organization, has enhanced youth standard by providing following:
 - Free public transportation for students, starting in January 2025, with an agreement concluded with Public Transport Company (JSP).
 - Expansion of subsidized meal programs.
 - Easing of criteria for accessing scholarships.
 - Digitalization of procedures for exercising student rights.
- MoES has announced a call for the allocation of 5.5 million EUR to Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU) for innovative and research projects, with an emphasis on investment in the future.

Mr. Limani, Minister of MSPDY, pointed out on main and strategic commitments of the Government for improving economic growth, improving living standard and providing a better and higher quality of life for every citizen. The



country's demography is unfavourable; and hence, he informed that the Ministry has begun a process of planning specific policies and measures aimed at demographic revitalization through provision of support for families, investments in preschool education, and improvement of living conditions.

In 2025, he highlighted on the continuation of work on strengthening social protection by adjusting social rights with living costs, thus increasing the support provided to 33,266 households. In compliance with the needs of most vulnerable categories of citizens and persons difficult to enter the labour market, he noted on plans for 2025 for amending of *Law on Social Protection* for purposes of defining a legal possibility for exercising entitlement to guaranteed financial assistance whilst participating in measures that encourage the activation of capable-of-work household members in labour market at same time, in which case there will be a reduction in amount of guaranteed minimum assistance by a certain percentage for a period of up to 12 months.

Further improvements in the availability of social services have been observed; precisely noting on 140 licensed social service providers for more than 5,000 beneficiaries, mostly elderly persons and persons with disabilities. An increase of around 20% in number of concluded administrative agreements has also been noted, meaning number of concluded agreements with licensed social service providers has amounted to 83 in 2025.

At the same time, he informed on a new integrated social protection information system, already being piloted in several centres and expected to improve quality and efficiency of social work.

Furthermore, he mentioned investments in early childhood development and child protection and as a result, capacities of kindergartens have increased. Moreover, he pointed that over 25 kindergartens would be opened by 2028, in order for every child to be included in preschool education. National Action Plan for the Rights of Children 2025–2029 is set to be adopted by the Government and he noted the work on introducing European Child Guarantee, which would require a significant strengthening of child protection system in order to provide an opportunity for every child to achieve its full potential throughout its life.

He emphasized that the youth are the country's future and according to data, 34.8% of young people are unemployed, and a large part of them are not involved in either education or training. He noted an as institutions, to create an environment in which youth can realize their potential here, in their homeland, without seeking opportunities abroad. He stressed his commitment as a Minister is to build an integrated youth policy that would unite all stakeholders. Such policy is Youth Guarantee, within framework of which three Ministries responsible for social and youth policy, education and labour actively cooperate to increase youth employability and inclusion.

By implementing Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030, he reaffirmed commitment to a society of equal opportunities. He noted that Budget for 2025 would provide approximately 69 million MKD for implementation of Strategy in areas of social protection, education, health, housing, and utility infrastructure, as well projects for inclusion of Roma children in preschool education and promotion of their social integration.

Gender equality policies are highlighted as key to true democratization of country, possible through inclusion of both men and women in social flows. He noted on continuation to make progress in gender-responsive budgeting by improving institutional mechanisms in Resource Centre for Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting, whereas over 500 people were trained on topics related to gender equality and non-discrimination.

He pointed out on 15.3% gender gap in employment, but through analysis, training and gender-responsive budgeting, activities are conducted to reduce a gap and provide equal opportunities. He emphasized that economic empowerment of women is not only a matter of equality, but also of development. He informed that a mid-term evaluation of Gender Equality Strategy was carried out as a starting point for preparation of second Action Plan for 2025–2027.

Activities for protection against gender-based violence were being intensified and in 2024, there were 1,834 victims recorded, most of whom were women and children. In order to address violence against women, drafting of National Strategy for Prevention and Protection from Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2026–2033 has begun.

At the end, he noted on challenges of the country faces and opportunities that need to be seized to ensure country's development. As important would be to create conditions for all people to realize their potential and result in success for all stakeholders, coordination and joint work would be a key. All Institutions (ministries, municipalities, civil society organizations and donors) must work together to deliver real and sustainable solutions for every citizen.

Ms. Kocavska, State Advisor in MEL, noted that the Ministry of Economy and Labour (MEL) participates for first time in this SWG following the Law on amendment and supplement of Law for organisation and work of state administration bodies. Activities related to working relations, employment, protection of workers during employment, material provision of temporary unemployed persons, wages and living standards are transferred to Labour Department in MEL since November 2024.

Due to employment, Operational Plan for Active Programmes and Measures for Employment and Services in Labour Market for 2025 is in Government's Procedure and would contain several programmes and measures for employment and services in labour market, implementation of youth guarantee of youth, activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, economy of care, support for creation of new jobs and green jobs and payment of youth allowance. She informed that an amount of grant funds of most attractive measure for employment for young persons under age of 29 would be 430,500 MKD or 7,000 EUR. As well, she added that financial support for establishment of a business by young persons aged of 29 would be 615,000 MKD or 10,000 EUR. This increased financial support is also compliant to the Governmental Programme for support of young persons and to avoid to leave the country. In regard to activation of unemployed persons,



especially those with a higher degree of education and who participate in largest percentage in total number of unemployed persons identified by ESA, they could have a possibility for learning foreign languages and basic IT skills due to improving their employability and labour market inclusion. She highlighted that the budget for active labour market measures for employment is increased for around 7 million EUR, compared to previous year, and would amount to 2,333,023,000,000 MKD (or more than 33 million EUR).

In relation to Action Plan for Youth Employment for 2023-2026, she informed that the preparation of a report for evaluation of results according to defined activities had been in final phase and working group would consider its results and propose activities for next period (2025-2026).

In relation to labour legislation and within framework of IPA support, she informed that a 42-month project should commence from May 2025 due to occupational safety and health at work in next period. Its main goal would be to contribute to implementation of a new law and practise in relation to respecting basic right of safe and healthy working environment for all workers. Project would have strategically structured interventions leading to change of legal and policy framework, organisational practises, share of knowledge and change in attitudes towards whole groups, and more to reduction of number of professional accidents, injuries and diseases. An emphasis would be placed on capacity building of relevant institutions and organisations (State Labour Inspectorate, MEL and National Council for Safety and Health at work, as well social partners). Thus, project would aim to create long-term outcomes after project closure.

She noted that in past period, national authorities had been working on preparation of a new law for employment and insurance in case of unemployment. New law would envisage reforms in ESA, increasing its role as an effective mediator between employees and employers, expanding agency's competences and responsibilities due to employment mediation, implementing package measures and services aimed at long-term unemployed, women, young people, people without qualifications and marginalised groups. New law is expected to be introduced by end of 2025.

Additionally, she informed that Ministry has also been working on amendments and supplements to Law on peaceful settlement of labour disputes. Its aim would be to reduce volume of court proceedings due to Labour Law, which would lead to a non-court settlement, i.e., a peaceful settlement of disputes before arbitration of arbitrator, before entering court proceedings.

In same way, Ministry would continue to work on Law on Labour Relations. A law is expected to be introduced, which would be modern and European, in accordance with all EU directives and practices on labour market. All new, non-standard forms of employment agreements would be introduced, i.e., work from home, work from afar and online work. There would be a new chapter in accordance with EU Directive for professional balance of parents with young children, i.e., introduction of chapter for family, motherhood and paternity leave.

An aim for reducing informal economy and reducing number of people who work in grey economy, Law on work engagement of individuals which is in parliamentary procedure would be introduced. With this law, it would be possible for all individuals who work part-time and seasonally to be work-engaged, but before they would lose their rights. Pensioners would be able to work without losing their pensions, i.e., without being work-engaged. As well, students would also be able to be work-engaged without losing their student rights and privileges and beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance included in this law should not lose their social assistance or their income.

Mr. Albu, Head of Cooperation in European Union Delegation (EUD), stressed the importance to discuss further reforms meant to make the society more resilient, more inclusive, more prosperous, equip citizens with knowledge and skills required in rapidly changing labour market, protect most vulnerable and offer equal opportunities to all. He noted on some positive developments and some past successful reforms on introducing guarantee minimum assistance, youth guarantee and new generation of social services.

He highlighted on excellent examples that a country could deliver political improvements and could soften shocks of global events on its territory. However, main outstanding task in sectors would remain to improve quality of education and addressing labour market challenges. Brain drain of young people, low labour participation, low human capital, skill mismatch and labour market exclusion would remain key constraints for inclusive growth in all of North Macedonia.

He pointed out that EU integration process and country-firming targets present a great opportunity. Accession process based on a concept of early integration and early alignment with EU standards would be good for country and Macedonian citizens. Adhering to unique EU social model based on sustainability, inclusion and equal opportunities and no one left behind principles provide guarantees for social rights of citizens.

More specifically about education facing numerous challenges, he highlighted that some progress was made in legislation adopting Law on Vocational Education and Training and Law on Adult Education. Concept for adult education and concept for post-secondary education followed.

He mentioned that it is planned not to adopt new draft Law on Secondary Education, but instead a number of amendments were introduced to existing law. He noted that it would be sufficient to ensure modernised and updated secondary legislation. He also mentioned that a full list of amendments and corresponding analysis of their impact would be prepared in coming weeks.

For all laws concerned, he stressed as important that bylaws are developed and adopted very fast for selective force. He emphasised that Law on Secondary Education and revised Law on Primary Education must be aligned with Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Being on EU path, North Macedonia has to be consistent and cannot compromise on basic principles of non-discrimination. He emphasised that EU encourages Government to take into account recommendations provided by EU experts in these areas.



As well, an encouragement was stressed to Government of North Macedonia to continue with a reform of inclusive education that started in 2023-2024 school year. First steps of reform on inclusivity in primary education were not easy, but introduction of special schools would be a challenge to fragile reform. Transformation of special schools into resource centres has been noted as a positive change. Nonetheless, all children with special needs should be enrolled in mainstream primary schools to guarantee interactions with peers and socialisation. Thus, they could follow a special curriculum and attend a resource centre when needed. At same time, schools, parents, teachers and children would need more support from local and central authorities to make inclusivity a reality.

When speaking about youngest, he noted that enrolment of children in preschool remains is very low. According to latest figures that EU had, less than 50% of children attend preschool when the target is 96%. In case of Roma children, figures have been significantly lower. He pointed on a critical moment to improve access and quality to early childhood education and care. Thus, he emphasized that reforms would allow better involvement, better inclusivity, better learning results in schools and a more prosperous society.

He pointed out on assurance that EU would continue to support transformation of education system and development of human capital within, first of all, and noted on new Growth Plan for Western Balkans with a separate chapter on human capital, entirely focused on education and human capital. Secondly, he informed about a holistic project for education system planned to be supported within IPA III programme.

Speaking about youth, he noted a solid strategic and legal framework already in place and a ministry responsible for a topic. He pointed out that youth policies need to be strengthened and there would be a need to implement new youth policy, national youth strategy, national strategy for youth mental health and regularly publish corresponding reports on strategies and corresponding action plans. As well, he pointed out as essential to adopt law on youth work officially recognising this activity. He informed that adequate funding for youth policy implementation had to be ensured. In area of youth employment, North Macedonia has been successfully implementing Youth Guarantee. Thus, he stressed encouragement to Government to allocate sufficient human resources and invest in capacity building of employment services and ESA staff for better outreach in youth and people from vulnerable groups.

In area of occupational safety and health, SLI has experienced challenges in recruiting additional inspectors. He noted that improvements would be needed, especially in OSH area, such as adoption of Action Plan for Safety and Health at Work 2025-2027 and new Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health 2026-2030.

Due to social dialogue, he emphasized that enforcement and adoption of collective agreements in private sector had remained weak. In addition, Law on Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes had not been implemented yet. He stressed that social partners need to be well represented in a functioning Economic and Social Council.

As mentioned also at Sector Monitoring Committee meeting a day before, he highlighted as critical to adopt several laws in order to expedite enforcement sector. He mentioned Law on Social Entrepreneurship, which had been in consultation with Government since December 2023, and need to finalise long-awaited renewal of Labour Relations Law.

He stressed that EU would further support an investment in improvement of labour market, employment of women and social policy with Operational Programme Human Capital 2024-2027. Programme could become a game-changer, removing barriers for labour market participation, especially for youth and women, creating incentives for labour market participation and improving quality of social services, particularly in underserved areas.

EU and projects funded stand ready to support North Macedonia in this demanding, but very necessary process. When speaking about social policy, he underlined importance to continue deinstitutionalization process. He recalled that EU supported preparation of National Deinstitutionalization Strategy and further, continued to support its implementation, through IPA II and IPA III.

Inclusion of Roma community is recognized among high priorities in national processes for EU. In January 2025, Minister without Portfolio, in charge of Strategy for integration and inclusion of Roma, was appointed to be National Coordinator and National Contact Point for Roma Inclusion in North Macedonia. He encouraged authorities to ensure sufficient resources for implementation of Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022-2030 by establishing a Department for Roma Inclusion within MSPDY and to use nine ministries to prepare Action Plans for implementation of National Strategy after 2025.

He thanked to all coalition partners involved in fruitful cooperation in this SWG and highlighted importance on hearing more about ongoing transformations in sectors.

At the end, he stressed that, as European Union, absolutely do believe that proper implementation of reforms would be beneficial for citizens of North Macedonia, to retain talents in country, to enable opportunities for study and for working, as well as to contribute to speed to economic growth.

Ms. Janevska, Minister of MoES, provided the following updates.

She emphasized that Law on Secondary Education cannot be delayed, and while several amendments have been submitted to change law, substantial revisions have been made to ensure its successful implementation. These changes are designed to align legislation with goals of Reform Agenda. Fight against discrimination is addressed in both laws, Law on Primary Education and Law on Secondary Education. While challenges in implementation remain, emphasis is placed on fight against discrimination.

She also informed on significant progress made in integrating students with disabilities through resource centres. Previous year, law was amended to establish Municipal Support Centres aimed at assisting children with disabilities, thus addressing issues faced by special schools and specialized programmes.



Ms. Popovska, MoES representative, followed up on speech by Minister and added that a detailed analysis has been made to amend Law, due to what amendments have been made and those amendments completely replace new Law on Secondary Education.

Mr. Bogojeski, Director of National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, noted on key actions and organizational changes for upcoming period planned to undergo:

- Adoption of a new law to enhance the promotion of import role and activities of National Agency.
- Increasing visibility for ERASMUS+ and European Solidarity Corpus, including an educational campaign and meetings with primary and secondary schools foreseen to be accredited. Campaign is planned to begin with town of Kočani, following tragic event, to help them obtain regular funding from these programmes. Initially, he pointed out on focus on less affluent municipalities to encourage their participation, as well media coverage would be planned.
- Completion of procedure for amending regulation for selecting external evaluators and launching a new call for applications.
- Addressing lack of legal regulation concerning accreditation and its withdrawal, as well those not accredited would have a right to appeal.
- Strengthening cooperation with MoES as National Authority, due to enhancing the correspondence with Ministry playing a key role in implementation of projects.
- Repurposing funds previously allocated for personal needs (such as travel) towards provision of support for talented students.
- Implementation of a new systematization in line with a functional analysis and investments in human resources.

Presentation of the activities of 2024-2027 Reform Agenda and IPA 2025-2027

Ms. Popovska, MoES representative, emphasized functional connection of two institutions, MoES and National Agency, with a focus on activities planned in 2025. Within MoES, five reforms are being monitored, which actually constitute 13 indicators, of which two would be covered.

As most important indicator, she pointed out on Indicator 3.1.1 which refer to strengthening vocational education system through increasing accessibility and improving quality of using dual education. In fact, it would imply professional engagement of all research bodies, thus including Vocational Education Centre and Bureau for the Development of Educational. As equally important for achieving greater progress, she informed that that several working groups have been formed.

First indicator for career counselling would involve 360 advisors through trainings by June 2027 and further, would have position of career counsellor. She informed that a register has also been formed distributed to colleagues in primary schools, thus all those who would need career counselling could be registered and determined on which the training level to attend. Part of training planned to be conducted online, and Association of Career Counsellors, which is fully behind this challenge, would also significantly provide a support in this process.

She also informed that working groups had already been formed in secondary schools and in upcoming days, they should begin to select the accredited service providers that would conduct such training. In regard to financial support for the implementation of trainings, she noted on the support by MF and Government.

She emphasized that the reform is consisted of several pillars, all of which related to vocational education, increasing number of companies involved in dual education, increasing number of students involved in education-through-work, as well as improving work and activities of new 2 regional centres already operating since 1 September 2024.

Second major part of Reform Agenda, especially reform process for 2025, are activities related to Indicator 3.1.5 related to improving efficiency through rationalization of primary school network, creating smart primary schools with IT tools and internet infrastructure equipped, and ensuring operability of schools by themselves.

She informed that in forthcoming weeks, several ministerial-level meetings are planned due to new budget planning and new methodology for financing secondary education would be discussed. She highlighted that all of these aspects would be also supported by Embassy of Swiss Federation, specifically by Helvetas office.

As second part of Reform Agenda for 2025, i.e. activities implementing under Indicator 3.1.5 are related to adoption of relevant legal documents due to provision of Internet Access in schools, and she informed on ongoing activities and a budget foreseen for its full implementation.

Mr. Frchkovski, Head of Unit in MEL, presented steps in regard to informal economy activities of MEL as a part of Reform Agenda. These activities are related to improved performance of labour market rates, including sector risks, with a focus on reconstruction, tourism and agriculture, reduction of administrative burden for businesses and improvement of overall environment for business sector.

Step 1 is related to number of inspections' risks identified by labour inspectorate increased by 20% compared to 2020-2023 period average, thus improving the inspections on principle of sectorial risk with a focus on construction, tourism and agriculture by June 2025.

Step 2 is related to number of inspections by labour inspectorate increased by 40% compared to 2020-2023 period average, thus inspections would be carried on principle of sectorial risk with a focus on construction, tourism and agriculture by December 2027.



Step 3 is related to number of non-formal employees from total number of employees as per State Statistical Office to be reduced by 20% till December 2025 and 40% till December 2027. Activity would include adoption of draft Law for regulation of work engagement of seasonal, occasional and temporary workers for certain activities, as well designing and deploying an upgrade of existing software of Public Revenue Office (PRO) and ESA for purposes of law implementation.

Step 5 would encompass set-up a guarantee mechanism to guarantee payment of employees outstanding claims resulting from contracts of employment or employment relationships upon termination of employment relationships due to bankruptcy and insolvency of their employer, by December 2026. Thus, political decision on scope of guarantee insurance, upper limit of benefit and length of reference and eligible period, contribution rate and fiscal implication over state budget would be needed to be done. Activity would encompass successful competition of social dialogue among social partners and civil society organizations reached by Economic and Social Council, finalisation and adoption of amendments of Law of Employment and Insurance against Unemployment, Law on Contributions from Mandatory Social Insurance, Law on Insolvency and relevant by-laws as basic legislative standard regulation. At the end, establishment of guarantee mechanism as an integral part of insurance against unemployment by December 2026. Due to this, institutional set up responsible for implementation of guarantee system would be ESA, PRO, MEL and members of Economic and Social Council, Chambers of Bankruptcy and Administrators. Thus, set-up of guarantee mechanism to guarantee payment of employees outstanding claims resulting from contracts of employment or employment relationships upon termination of employment relationships in case of insolvency of employer is planned to be done by December 2026. He informed that implementation of guarantee mechanism would be based on solidarity and compulsory application and non-return of collection of additional contributions and payments from guarantee mechanism during initial years of its implementation.

As final step 6, he informed on multisector activities required to be implemented due to informal economy, measured as percentage of GDP according World Bank indicators, to be reduced to 26% of GDP as a target until December 2027.

Ms. Kirkovski, Head of Department in MEA, emphasized on important processes envisaged with Reform Agenda for the country. She highlighted comprehensive steps planned within in the sectors of education and employment. She gave a general picture and highlighted that Republic of North Macedonia is first country to use pre-funding in an amount of 2.5 million EUR, thus she noted that first steps had been implemented and followed with a release of funds for an implementation of reforms foreseen by the end of 2024.

In regard to reporting to European Commission (EC), she informed that a report was submitted due to those activities conducted by the end of 2024 from first five steps envisaged in Reform Agenda and feedback is expected. Those activities were related to ensuring enforcement of legislation as a basis for further implementation of Reform Agenda. She also informed on an on-the-side visit planned by EC services due to assessing the level of implementation of five reforms which are in an amount to 17 million EUR.

She informed that next deadline for reporting on progress achieved within Reform Agenda would be end of June 2025 and relevant institutions strive to actually work hard to implement around 17 steps planned in an amount of 70 million EUR.

Thus, each report would require a narrative explanation to be provided with detailed information on conducting the steps and further plans for reforms yet to be implemented, as well provision of relevant documents that actually demonstrate an implementation of each step reported and indicator achieved. She noted that EC services are very strict in an assessment of cases whether reforms are implemented or not, and looking whether certain law or strategy has been adopted and whether certain activities have been implemented.

Discussion

Ms. Mandic, representative from CSO Resource Centar for parents of children with special needs, addressed an issue related to education sector and congratulated to national authorities on new model, whereas resource centres are reactivated. She noted that complete or absolute inclusion is not representative of parents of children with special needs.

As a representative of civil society association and of the interests of some of the parents, she transferred the message from their forums and her personal opinion as a parent of a child with disability, that absolute inclusion under such conditions is impossible. Her enquiry was related to career counselling in this regard.

Functionality and capacities of people with disabilities are limited. She noted on a content of the concept as unclear whether it would create personnel to work on career vision or in function of students' career prosperity. She informed that very few students as persons with special needs in high school are involved, as a consequence of previous oversights. Thus, she pointed out that it has to be clear that career counsellors should have pre-education in the work with persons with special needs. She emphasized that persons with disabilities have serious and atypical specifics and thus, a more individual approach would be required, so that to avoid a situation where persons with high education who do not have capacities on the field to work with these persons. She stressed that this aspect should not be formalised to the extent it is.

Ms. Janevska, Minister of MoES, emphasized that contacts are established with Associations of parents of children with disabilities, analyses were made on needs of children with various types of disabilities, whereby not only teachers, but also career counsellors is foreseen to receive additional training for better inclusion of these children in educational process. She pointed out that all actions are time-consuming, especially involving more than 20,000 participants, and requirement for ensuring available funds, so donors would be asked in to provide a support within the entire reform. She stressed that regardless of the dynamics, these activities would be implemented all.

Ms. Popovska, MOES representative, added that also activities on career counselling would be helpful. She informed that process had started with a support by European Training Foundation (ETF) and importance of career counselling had been



considered on higher level, as well mentioning the involvement of Association of Career Counsellors. She informed that activities and expert team have also been approved in schools and by their directors, as well pointing out that any constructive criticism or approach would be welcome.

Presentation of development support implemented by UN Agencies through UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as well as by bilateral donors and other development partners

Ms. Popovska, MES representative, gave short introduction to a third session due to presentations of work by development partners (UN agencies and Swiss Development Cooperation) in many years so far and their support in a large part of piloting or implementation of reforms. She noted that coordination and mutual accountability with relevant donors is also foreseen as important part in Growth Plan.

Ms. Miller, representative of UNICEF and UN Resident Country, provided short presentation on behalf of UN team in the country. UN agencies in the country has been implementing UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UN SDCF) that guides all of UN agencies for 2021-2025 period. Document was developed together with Government at the time and has had three broad outcomes (sustained and inclusive economic and social development, climate action, natural resource management and disaster risk reduction, and transparent and accountable democratic governance), which are aligned with Government's Reform Agenda, EU accession process and other relevant strategic documents.

With regard to financial resources underpinning UN work, she informed their provision by various donors and explained that UN works also in partnership with others. Top donors that contribute to work of UN and its agencies, had been namely EU, Government of North Macedonia itself, Switzerland and Sweden, among top four, and then, many others expressing gratefulness. She noted that UN SDCF 2021-2025 is in its final year of implementation, she highlighted that 98% of funding required has been mobilized to deliver the results planned, which amounted to \$173.9 million.

Looking specifically at two most relevant outcomes, first on inclusive prosperity, there have been secured \$4.1 million for 2025, and this area of work is implemented primarily by UNDP, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, IOM and UNFPA.

In area of employment and unemployment reduction, the efforts are centred on supporting government institutions in modernisation, increased resilience and enhanced competitiveness of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. The focus has been also on promoting green jobs, advancing family-friendly policies and supporting development of culture and creative industries. Support is provided by EU, Austrian Development Agency, GIZ and Government of North Macedonia.

In terms of enhancing skills and employability, especially for vulnerable groups, she informed that UN agencies have been working on in close collaboration with national institutions to deliver really tailored skills training. She recalled on implementation of youth guarantee, as important mechanism through which UN has been partnering with Government, and with joint efforts have been supporting young people, in particular Roma communities, women, persons with disabilities, refugees, and individuals seeking asylum. She mentioned a very strong focus on ‘Leave No One Behind’ agenda to ensure that these persons have skills needed and employment opportunities.

In terms of informality, UN Agencies have been working to improve labour inspection capacities and to reform occupational health and safety. She recalled on previous presentation from MEL about strengthening of occupational health and safety, as well as promoting freedom of association.

Further, she noted on second part of an outcome relate to quality services. She informed that 6 UN Agencies actively are engaged, including UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UN Women, IOM and UNHCR. There have been planned \$3.3 million in 2025 and Some of funding would be to health sector.

Within education sector, she outlined on working on supporting pre-school curricula and network, working on comprehensive environmental education and other curricula around health and well-being, mental health in particular in the schools, and most recently, support to MES in response to tragedy in Kočani due to mental health, guidance for teachers, support for students, etc. She highlighted importance that UN is able to support in such emergency situations, particularly through the education system. Work of this area has been supported by SIDA, World Bank, Government of UK, and USA.

In terms of protection, she noted on a number of activities ongoing. UN Agencies have been supporting national institutions to improve capacities, policies, and programmes to provide protection services for most vulnerable, including children and their families, those living in poverty, those at risk, be it violence or exclusion, and people on the move and refugees. UN Agencies are very active together with MSPDY, but also other state actors in terms of really strengthening protection of most vulnerable populations. These activities have been supported by EU, Governments of Austria and USA, and others donors.

When it comes to gender-based violence, another important area where UN Agencies has had a range of activities, it would continue to strengthen a support to Government in preventing and responding to gender-based violence, in line with its commitments under Istanbul Convention. Efforts would focus on ensuring sustainable capacity building of service providers to deliver a coordinated, multi-sectoral response that effectively protects and supports survivors, as well as awareness-raising and prevention among general population, including targeted interventions.

In regard to new cooperation framework, she informed that UN Agencies have been finalising new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF) for coming period 2026-2030. She noted that new SDCF would be aligned with Agenda 2030 and Global Sustainable Development Goals, but also in line and done in coordination with Government and its own Reform Agenda and its National Development Strategy 2024-20244, as well as priorities on road to EU accession. She highlighted four outcome areas planed for new SDCF, inclusive social and human development, sustainable



economic growth, climate and environment and rule of law and good governance, as a continuation of UN work in support of Government.

She noted that over next five years, UN Agencies would definitely across these areas be focussing on barriers that prevent women's access to labour market, including care, early childhood care for young children, to enable women to join labour market, enhancing multi-sectoral approaches to gender-based violence, and supporting implementation of reforms in education and social protection sectors, in line with EU accession process.

Ms. Popovska, MES representative, briefly mentioned on an opportunity to work jointly on preparation of new Educational Strategy with a technical support by UNICEF and UNDP, and with a financial support by GIZ, as well European Training Foundation (ETF) as a facilitator of the process.

Ms. Harari, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Switzerland, gave a short overview on activities supported by Swiss Development Cooperation in sectors of education and employment.

Under the employment area and mainly VET engagement, she informed that it falls under their second goal of cooperation programme, called as a domain on sustainable economic development. Its main overall objective is mainly to create a private sector engagement with decent employment opportunities, as well to contribute to green transition. She informed that this part of new cooperation programme would be launched in next two weeks and it would cover two aspects of business sector and growth and skills development.

She focused on major activities under skills development, which are related to education for employment project and future planned engagement on employment of youth, women, and other groups, as well as engagement of foreign labour force. Ongoing major engagement has been the E4E (‘Education for Employment’) project with its goal of creating a decent employment on secondary level education with a focus on collaboration with private sector. She highlighted the established successful collaboration and mentioned several examples visited with MES Minister to companies engaged in secondary education and providing training opportunities for students. This has been a running project and would continue until mid-2026, as it is in exit phase, so a final phase of another two years.

She emphasized that SDC as donor is keen to work with everybody to coordinate an engagement and to perceive how they could contribute to steps and achievements of Reform Agenda, especially to coordinate with all stakeholders and ensure to be aligned and contribute to Government's priorities.

In regard to next planned engagements, she informed that SDC has been in a phase of defining what and how to possibly contribute to a better employment of young people, women, and those that are inactive at labour market. She informed to go ahead and have an internal discussion, as well to engage with relevant stakeholders on what exactly are needs and how to collaborate with the institutions, but also with private sector, how to raise awareness of need to employ young people and creating more flexible working opportunities by private sector.

She also noted on frame of dialogue on migration and mentioned as a challenge in the country of labour force. There are many companies that are looking to engage people from other countries and engaging a foreign labour force is an option. She noted as important to look into the details and assess what really are interests and needs, and how could possibly contribute in this area. At the end, she highlighted the importance of alignment and complementarity to what other donors have been doing, as well expressing that SDC is open to engage in any bilateral or trilateral discussions on relevant topics presented.

Ms. Popovska, MES representative, summarized shortly on open donor discussion. She noted on activities of E4E project and potentially to plan additional activities for exit plan, as well an engagement of private companies. She highlighted as important as new laws are adopted, activities related to formal, informal and non-formal education and building capacities of companies and schools to be supported.

Conclusions

Ms. Janevska, Minister of MES, emphasized the importance of donor support and joint work for delivery of outcomes for the best interest of citizens. She also mentioned the support of World Bank in implementation of reforms in education for many years, especially with ongoing project intended for reforms in primary education in terms of optimisation of school network, new improvements that need to happen with schools themselves, other activities directly related to work of Bureau for Development of Education (BDO) and trainings for teachers.

Ms. Popovska (MES) summarized the conclusions related to:

- SWG reviewed priorities in sectors of education, employment and social policies, tackling the aspects relevant for different target groups.
- Next SWG meeting, as sixteenth, is scheduled to be held in November 2025, when the progress of priorities would be presented and discussed.

Annexes:

Annex 1	Agenda
Annex 2	Presentation of MOES, MEL, MSPDY, UN RCC and Embassy of Swiss Federation