



# **SHADOW REPORT**

FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE  
7 AND ARTICLE 8  
FROM THE CONVENTION ON  
ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF  
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN  
THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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2023

**Article 7**

**States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:**

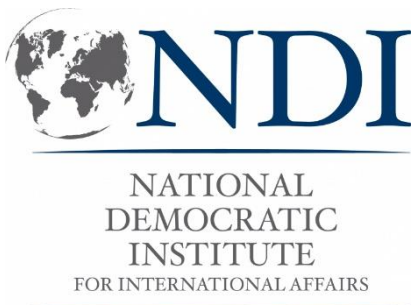
**(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;**

**(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;**

**(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.**

**Article 8**

**States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.**



**September 2023**

National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was established on 7 December 2010 by twenty CSOs that work on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The **mission** of the Network is to coordinate CSOs towards advancing policies and practices in combating violence against women and domestic violence. The Network aims at enhancing recognition of women's human rights and their promotion in the Republic of North Macedonia. The **vision** of the Network is to create a society free of violence, in which women can fully develop their potentials and actively participate in creating communities of equal opportunities through evidence-based advocacy. A significant part of our activities includes research and analysis, on the basis of which advocacy is carried out for issues related to violence against women and children. The achieved success of the Network is a result of the joint action of the members, as well as other partner-organizations at the national and regional level. We are part of the European Network Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE), a member of an informal network of 6 organizations from the Western Balkans and the Platform for Gender Equality and the Network for Protection from Discrimination. More information about our implemented activities and current projects can be found at: [www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk](http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This shadow report provides an overview of the implementation of Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. This report is regarding the seventh periodic report of the Republic of North Macedonia and provides information for the several issues.

### I. Overall Democratic Health of the Country

In North Macedonia, corruption remains a significant challenge. According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), North Macedonia ranks 85th out of 180 countries scoring 40 points out of 100. Despite minimal improvement, 2022 witnessed major corruption scandals. Confidence in the judiciary reduced to only 4%. Surveys indicate increased corruption pressure and involvement, while corruption is most perceived in the judicial system. Additionally, there are challenges in reporting and trust, especially mistrust in institutions which is a significant systematic shortcoming. The constitution guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of association, thought, expression, and political activity for each citizen. Regarding Government functioning and transparency, state institutions are obliged to work transparently, efficiently, and protect human rights. While the legal framework is generally supportive of citizen freedoms, implementation shortcomings persist. There are challenges in access to information, including delayed responses and lack of updates on institutional websites. Recent cases undermine democracy and rule of law. A Constitutional Court decision abolishing a provision on salary increases for elected officials raised questions about government priorities; Amendments to the Criminal Code reducing prison sentences for abuse of office without public debate or explanation raised concerns about democratic principles. These amendments pose risks to impunity for perpetrators of violence against women, potentially eroding trust in the justice and political systems. The shortened statute of limitations may deter reporting and accountability for crimes, particularly those involving officials in power.

### II. Women's Participation in Politics and Elections

The constitutional framework plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality. The Constitution guarantees the following: Article 9 of the Constitution ensures equality regardless of sex; Article 22 grants citizens over 18 the right to vote; while the Electoral Code lacks explicit anti-discrimination provisions, it ensures equal voting rights. The Legal Measures for Gender Equality include laws on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015 introduced a quota system for gender representation in candidate lists. However, there are challenges in implementing the quotas. Quotas aim for 40% female representation, but they aren't consistently met, especially in local elections and leadership positions. Despite increases in female representation in parliament and councils, women's participation remains lower without quotas. Regarding the National Gender Equality Index there are disparities, particularly in the participation of women as ministers in the government. Quotas have improved gender equality in parliament and municipal councils but have not met the 40% target in other public institutions.

### III. Women Legal Rights

National legislation guarantees equality between men and women, but actual practices, especially in rural areas, often exclude women from economic, social, and political events. Despite legal equality,

women in rural areas face additional cultural and social barriers, particularly among Roma women. The initial Gender Equality Strategy (2013-2020) lacked clear strategic direction, objectives, and performance measures. Implementation of the strategy was limited due to various factors such as lack of resources, administrative capacities, and coordination. New Gender Equality Strategy (2022-2027) focuses on integrating a gender perspective into policies, implementing gender-responsive budgeting, and considering intersectionality. It includes detailed objectives, expected outcomes, monitoring indicators, addressing previous shortcomings. Despite legislative progress, discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation remains a concern. Efforts to develop new laws for gender equality face opposition from religious groups and conservative organizations, leading to ongoing public debates and amendments to the draft law. Religious communities, including the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic community, oppose the new law on gender equality, citing concerns about traditional family values. Opposition also comes from organizations advocating for “family values” and against LGBTI rights, leading to protests and ongoing debates over the draft law.

Regarding Land and Property Rights, The Constitution unequivocally guarantees equal rights for both men and women to possess and manage property. Laws explicitly prohibit discrimination based on marital status, family status, and other factors concerning access to employment and property ownership. Despite these legal guarantees, societal factors—such as entrenched social norms, customs, and tradition—pose significant barriers to women’s property rights, particularly in rural areas. Startling statistics reveal that over 70% of property owners are men, underscoring a pronounced gender disparity in property ownership and inheritance. Women often encounter discrimination during property inheritance, primarily due to traditional and cultural norms prevalent in patriarchal societies. Moreover, legal mechanisms for property distribution upon divorce may inadequately recognize intangible assets, further disadvantaging women. Research emphasizes the intersectional lens of ethnicity and religion in property inheritance. Women from minority communities face similar challenges. Cultural expectations and traditions often exert pressure on women to relinquish their inheritance rights for the sake of family harmony. Rural women bear a disproportionate burden in terms of property ownership and decision-making related to land. Customary practices and deeply ingrained gender norms perpetuate women’s financial dependence and limit their involvement in land-related activities.

Regarding private businesses, The Constitution champions freedom of the market and entrepreneurship, with no direct limitations on women owning or creating private businesses. Policymakers actively encourage women’s participation in the private sector through initiatives like the “Program for Competitiveness, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship,” which provides financial support for women entrepreneurs. Gender disparities persist in terms of labor force participation, earnings, and entrepreneurship. A significant proportion of women of working age remain disengaged from the labor force, facing high economic inactivity and unemployment rates. Social barriers, such as unequal caregiving responsibilities and traditional attitudes, limit women’s roles and aspirations. The lack of information about rights and opportunities contributes to disparities in entrepreneurship between men and women.

Despite commitments to gender equality and ratification of international conventions like CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, women’s representation and participation in decision-making remain limited. Women hold only a small percentage of ministerial and mayoral positions, and they are underrepresented in executive and decision-making roles in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P) targets women because of their participation in public

and political life, ranging from sexist remarks and threats to physical attacks. Political parties lack fundamental protections against gender-based violence, including harassment, coercion, defamation, and physical or psychological violence, which can deter women's engagement in political and public life.

North Macedonia ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2017 and adopted a National Action Plan for its implementation in 2018, with a time frame of five years. The implementation of the NAP has faced challenges, including the lack of financial resources, slow processes, and insufficient sensitization and training for professionals working in social work centers and law enforcement agencies. Statistics from surveys indicate high rates of intimate partner violence and sexual harassment against women, with stereotypes about gender roles contributing to the prevalence of violence against women.

Traditional beliefs about the place and role of women and men in society hinder the progress of women in various spheres of private and public life. Men are often seen as dominant both in the home and in public life, while women are expected to prioritize household duties over personal and professional ambitions.

#### IV. Perception of Women in Politics and Public Sphere, including Violence against women in Politics

According to the survey, approximately 15.1% of respondents have acknowledged being victims of gender-based violence in politics. Psychological violence is the most common form (85.7%), followed by sexual violence (12.7%) and physical violence (6.3%). Psychological violence includes insults, workplace harassment, and threats, while sexual violence encompasses unwelcome jokes and comments. Other incidents involve vehicle vandalism and the spread of false information. Violence against women in politics occurs primarily in the workplace and on social media platforms. Political party premises also account for a significant portion of incidents. Perpetrators include members from other political parties, within their own party, unknown individuals, and even leadership figures. A significant number of respondents (60.3%) choose not to report the violence they face due to a lack of trust in institutional processes. Among those who do report, institutions often fail to take appropriate action. Only a small percentage of cases result in formal accusations or criminal reports. While the Criminal Code includes provisions against violence, there is no specific crime addressing violence against women in politics. Respondents highlight the lack of legal and media protection provided by political parties, leaving women unsupported and marginalized. Women in politics experience online sexual harassment, often perpetrated by men on social media platforms. The anonymity of online spaces emboldens perpetrators. Illiberal political actors strategically endorse online abuse against women leaders to suppress dissenting voices. Women in Politics face various forms of violence, including psychological, physical, and cyber violence. Perpetrators often belong to organized groups or individuals within political parties or rival factions. Cyber violence, such as harassment, hate speech, defamation, and threats on social media, is orchestrated by organized groups using multiple fake profiles.

## 1. Overall Democratic Health of the Country

According to the latest survey of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for North Macedonia<sup>1</sup> for 2022 is 6.10. North Macedonia was upgraded from “hybrid regimes” to “flawed democracies” in 2021. North Macedonia's score improves marginally, from 6.03 in 2021 to 6.10 in 2022<sup>2</sup>, owing to improvements in its civil liberties score, while its functioning of government score declines.

We cannot talk about a high democratic index of the country when a very high corruption index is noted. Namely, according to the latest survey of Transparency International<sup>3</sup>, the Republic of North Macedonia is ranked 85th out of 180 countries in the world with 40 points out of 100. *Although there is a minimal improvement according to the IPC<sup>4</sup>, year 2022 was marked by major corruption scandals. The judiciary and the rule of law were overshadowed by new scandalous features, and the first one is information shared by media that candidates passed a bar exam without meeting all the legally stipulated conditions and meeting all the criteria. This case remained unresolved to this date. Second, the dismissal of the current and election of new head of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption, as well as the resignation of the President of the Judicial Council, left doubt on the consistent application of the newly adopted laws by two institutions aimed at taking care of the integrity of the judiciary, which further reduced the confidence of citizens in the judiciary to only 4 per cent<sup>5</sup>.* According to the latest survey that was conducted on the perceptions of the population regarding corruption through the corruption monitoring system, the general conclusions are that there is an increase in corruption pressure and involvement in corruption. The prevalence of corruption in the judicial system remains the most perceived by citizens. 75% of the citizens gave the highest marks (for the prevalence of corruption in the courts, 71% for the prevalence of corruption in the prosecution and over 66% believe that corruption is prevalent in the Government and Customs. The public is not optimistic about the eradication of corruption. Regarding the prospects for the suppression of corruption, every third citizen (31%) believes that widespread corruption cannot be reduced, while 40% of citizens believe that corruption will always exist but can be reduced<sup>6</sup>. The problem of not reporting due to mistrust in the institutions persists and is the biggest systematic shortcoming that the Republic of North Macedonia needs to seriously address, even though citizens have the right to effective remedies in the communication with the state bodies and institutions in accordance with the Law on General Administrative Procedure, including in court proceedings.

The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia in Article 20 guarantees the fundamental civil and political rights of free association of citizens. Furthermore, article 110 clearly states that Constitutions protects the freedoms and rights of the individual and citizen relating to the freedom of

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<sup>1</sup> Table 2 page 9 overall democracy Index 2022 North Macedonia -Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2022 more information on this [link](#). *The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is then classified as one of four types of regime: “full democracy”, “flawed democracy”, “hybrid regime” or “authoritarian regime”.*

<sup>2</sup> Table 3 page 15 overall democracy index 2022 North Macedonia 2006-2022- Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index

<sup>3</sup> Page 2 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2022 more information on [link](#)

<sup>4</sup> IPC-Index Perception corruption 2022 more information on [link](#)

<sup>5</sup> Page 22-23 Statement of President of Transparency International in North Macedonia-Sladjana Taseva available only in Macedonian language more information on [link](#)

<sup>6</sup> MCIC Corruption Assessment Report available only in Macedonian language more at the following [link](#)

conviction, conscience, thought and public expression of thought, political association and activity as well as to the prohibition of discrimination among citizens on the ground of sex, race, religion or nation, social or political affiliation. These rights are freely enjoyed by citizens and are elaborated in more detail in a separate legal regulation depending on whether a political party or an association of citizens is formed. The State may intervene in their establishment only if there are principles and activities in their founding acts (Statute) which are contrary to the Constitution and the laws<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of an effective system of functioning of the State, where the separation of powers is the foundation of any democracy, there is no absolute power in our country. Additionally all state institutions on the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, including the Government with their ministries that are centralized and located in the capital Skopje, but have their regional departments throughout the territory, have an obligation to work in accordance with the Law on Government, where in Article 2 it is provided that its work shall be based on the fundamental principles of transparency, efficiency and protection of human freedoms and rights. All state institutions, units of local self-government as well as political parties that are financed by the State budget are obliged by the Law on Access to Public Information to give an answer to any citizen or business entity on issues that are within the scope of their work. **What should be emphasized is that both the Constitution as the highest legislative act and the laws that have been adopted in our country are good in the spirit of the freedom of the citizens, incorporating the fundamental values in society. The shortcomings in the implementation of all these legal solutions are the biggest problem we face.**

For example, in practice, when submitting a request for access to public information, there is great possibility to either not receive any response (even after a complaint is submitted to the Agency for Protection of the Right to Access to Public Information) or the legal deadline of 20 days for submitting the answer is not respected. Furthermore, most of the public institutions (including political parties) websites are not updated with most recent events, information is missing (especially related to finances – planned budgets and spendings) and are not user friendly, meaning a great amount of time must be dedicated for needed information to be found. For the purposes of this report, we sent 16 requests for access to public information to political parties<sup>8</sup> that are obliged by law to respond, but only 9 answered<sup>9</sup> of which some were with partial answers stating that they don't collect the data that was requested.

Regarding this there are two latest cases that undermine democratic values in Macedonia as well as the rule of law. Namely, in March 2023, the Constitutional Court abolished a provision of the Law on Salaries for salary ratios that allowed publicly elected officials to increase their salaries by 78 %. It also covers MPs, mayors, judges, and other elected and appointed officials who received a raise that will be paid from the budget of the Republic of North Macedonia. This decision raised the question about priorities of the government - in the middle of the economic, energy and health crisis, when the inflation rate from the last year 2022 to April 2023 alone increased by 13 per cent<sup>10</sup> and the citizens

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<sup>7</sup> example - when Bulgarian cultural center Ivan Mihaylov in Bitola was established, the State (Ministry of Justice) intervened because the name of the Center violated the national interests and feelings of the Macedonian people.

<sup>8</sup> All 16 political parties have representatives in Parliament and did receive funds from the State budget.

<sup>9</sup> Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM); New Social Democratic Party (NSDP); Citizens Option Macedonia (GROM); VMRO; Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA); Democratic Reconstruction of Macedonia (DOM); Levica; Alternativa; Serbian Party.

<sup>10</sup> According to a World Bank report, Macedonia has the highest inflation rate in 2023 for the last 25 years (since April last year alone, inflation has risen by 13%).

are living and sink in bigger poverty was raising the salaries of state officials a necessary step or just another abuse of position?!

Additional recent amendments to the Criminal Code, which were adopted in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia within a day, in which amendments reduced prison sentences for crimes **of abuse of office**, without any public debate or clear explanation to the citizens why at this moment they are so necessary and urgent, abusing the European flag for the adoption of laws in a shortened procedure, gives a clear signal that the democratic principle for consultative process and inclusion of citizens in developing/changing national legislation is not respected.. New changes to the Criminal Code pose risk to impunity for perpetrators of violence against women. These changes are related to shortening of the statute of limitation of sanctions for criminal acts done by official persons. The shortening of the statute of limitations could potentially lead to a situation where perpetrators of violence against women, especially those in positions of power, may not be held accountable for their actions if the crimes are not prosecuted. The shortened timeframe may also act as a barrier to reporting. Victims of violence, particularly those in the political sphere, may be hesitant to come forward due to fear of retaliation, stigma, or lack of trust in the justice system. This could be exacerbated by the shortened timeframe, as it puts additional pressure on victims to report the crimes quickly. These changes could potentially erode trust in the justice system and the political system more broadly. If perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions, it could reinforce the perception that those in power are above the law. If violence against women in politics is not adequately addressed, it could deter women from participating in politics, thereby undermining gender equality and the democratic process<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. *Women Participation in Politics and Elections*

This part presents evidence relating to the participation of women in politics and elections. It particularly aims to provide information on whether women can participate freely in politics and what are the laws that protect or limit that participation. It will also address the issue of women's quotas at any level of politics in the country and the factual situation in the country, i.e. how the national legislation is (not) being implemented in practice.

Article 9 of the country's 1991 [Constitution](#) provides equality of all citizens regardless of sex, race, skin color, national and social origins, political and religious beliefs, property and social status. According to Article 22 of the Constitution, every citizen over the age of 18 acquires the right to vote (same is regulated in the Electoral Code in article 6). The Electoral Code has no anti-discrimination provision in its text. The right to vote is equal, general, and immediate and is exercised in free elections by secret ballot. Article 8 of the Constitution shows the fundamental values of the constitutional order of the Republic of North Macedonia and provides that in the country everything is free unless it is prohibited by the Constitution or the law. Read together, these articles provide equal participation in politics and elections. The only constitutional restriction is provided for persons deprived of their legal capacity, both for men and women.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/new-amendments-in-north-macedonias-criminal-code-expand-protection-for-various-forms-of-violence-against-women>



Special protection provisions, including regarding the right to vote and to be elected, were introduced with the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. More specifically,

The 2015 amendments to the Electoral Code were adopted improving the legal solution for the participation of both genders in the candidate lists for members of the parliament and councilors. Namely, a quota of 40% participation on the party candidates lists for the less represented gender at parliamentary and local elections was introduced. That means that out of every three places on the list, at least one place is reserved for the less represented gender and additionally one more place on the list for each ten places. However, in reality, this quota does not always equate to women making up 40% of chosen MPs and councilors. For instance, only 15 of the 81 municipalities in the country had at least 40% female councilors after the local elections in 2017, while 31 municipalities had less than 30% female councilors. Based on information on elected councilors for 68 out of 81 municipalities as of the most recent local elections in October 2021, only 21 municipalities had more than 40% female councilors, and 18 had less than 30%. It is crucial to emphasize that, despite including a 40% quota for female representation among candidates in local elections, the Electoral Code lacks provisions to ensure equal participation of men and women in the leaders for these candidate lists nominated by electoral contestants. Same applies for mayor elections. Regarding mayor elections, in terms of gender representation, only two women mayors were elected in the 2021 local elections, and only six women were elected in 2017 to lead the 81 municipal self-government units and the city of Skopje. Since 2002, the proportion of female members of parliament and city councils has been steadily increasing. These patterns unmistakably show that women have only achieved greater representation in organizations where a gender quota has been implemented.

According to the National Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and State Statistical Office in the Republic of North Macedonia in cooperation with the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), in the sub-domain of Political power, the lowest gender gap exists in the indicator for participation of women in the Parliament, which is mainly due to the legally established quotas for election of members of the Parliament from the less represented gender in the Parliament. On the other hand, the largest gender gap in the sub-domain of Political power exists in the participation as ministers in the Government<sup>12</sup>, where women are represented in much smaller percentage compared to men.

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<sup>12</sup> Anex 1: Table with gender segregated data for ministerial positions.

	2017		2020		2022	
	W	M	W	M	W	M
<b>Prime minister</b>		1		1		1
<b>Deputy prime ministers</b>				4	1	3
<b>Ministers</b>	4	20	4	12	4	12
<b>Deputy ministers</b>	2	13	2	14	4	12

The indicators show that, if there were to be no quotas for participation of the less represented gender (the women) in the different domains of political power (for example: Government, Parliament, local government), the participation of women would be significantly smaller compared to men, i.e. the distribution of political power is disproportionately higher in favor of men.

The Index shows that, despite the fact that the use of a gender quota was found to have improved gender equality in the Parliament and in municipal councils, women's representation in other public institutions in the nation remained below the 40 percent target set by the Council of Europe's Recommendation Rec (2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.

The Electoral Code does not call for the holding of a new election if an MP's or municipal councilor's term is prematurely terminated; rather, the mandate is transferred to the contender who comes after them on the list. The next female candidate on the list will then become an MP or municipal councilor for the remainder of the term, as provided for by the Electoral Code, to maintain gender representation goals.

Since 2018, the Parliamentary Women's Club (PWC), which consists of female members of parliament and acts as an effective informal consultative body on the rights and representation of women in politics, advocated for better political representation of women at both central and local level. Namely, the PWC initiated a discussion on amendments to the Electoral Code which would provide for the introduction of a 50 percent gender quota. However, the proposed provision was not part of the amendments of the Electoral Code adopted in 2021.

The data was gathered by submitting Requests for free access to public information to 24 relevant state institutions within the legislative, executive, and judicial branch of government. 21 institutions,

fully or partially, responded to the request and sent the available data. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning have not responded to the request. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs forwarded the request to the Ministry of Justice and provided only partially relevant information. The data provides information for the past five years in the period between 2017 and 2022<sup>13</sup>. Before every section with statistical information there is a summary of the analyzed data.

### 3. Women's Legal Rights

In North Macedonia there is a considerable discrepancy between the national legislation, which guarantee complete equality between women and men, and the actual practices, especially in rural areas. The fact that the laws does not make any distinction between the legal capacity of men and women means that there are no legal limitations for women to own property, initiate court proceedings, obtain credits, etc. But, despite this, women are often excluded from economic, social, and political events. The life of women from rural areas is even more difficult than the lives of women in urban areas. Their exclusion from (or at the very least, unequal access to) decision-making structures, health services and economic opportunities increases their likelihood of exposure to violence. There are additional cultural and social barriers, especially among Roma women.

The initial Strategy for gender equality 2013-2020 did not have a well-defined strategic direction, objectives, or performance measures, nor did it include a framework for monitoring and evaluation. According to the Shadow report<sup>14</sup> the implementation of the Action Plan for this strategy was limited due to a lack of human and financial resources, limited capacities of the administration, lack of harmonization between the strategic and operational documents, lack of methodology for monitoring the implementation, weak inter-institutional coordination, as well as limited participation of the civil society sector due to material/financial conditions.

The new Gender Equality Strategy for 2022-2027 adopted in 2022 is based on three primary principles: integrating a gender perspective into main policies, implementing gender-responsive budgeting, and considering intersectionality. This updated strategy includes both broad and detailed objectives, expected outcomes, and monitoring indicators, which were missing from the previous one<sup>15</sup>.

The latest Shadow report (2022) points out that, the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 does not clearly identify structural discrimination even though it mentions the need for "*sensibilization of legal practitioners on gender equality issues due to the possibility for secondary victimization and discrimination of persons from vulnerable groups with whom they come in direct contact*". This symbolic approach clearly does not recognize the inherent nature of gender discrimination and stereotyping among legal practitioners in general and in the judiciary in specific<sup>16</sup>. To support this argument, the Report on the implementation of the Law for equal opportunities for Women and Men on central level (2019) argued that gender equality does not refer only to the binary division of gender,

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<sup>13</sup> Anex 2 - Number of women and men at high positions by ministry for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022

<sup>14</sup> Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy for 2018 and 2019, Reactor – research in action, 2021, available at [link](#)

<sup>15</sup> Women and Men in North Macedonia - a statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, UN Women, 2022, available at [link](#)

<sup>16</sup> Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in North Macedonia April 2022, available at [link](#)

its identification with biological sex, and includes the concept of gender transformability. Pointing out that the changes made to the law should not stop at their current level, but rather, should begin by prioritizing gender equality as the foundational principle for creating policies related to gender in the country<sup>17</sup>.

In 2020, the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination was adopted where gender identity and sexual orientation are included in the grounds of discrimination and the concept of intersectional discrimination is introduced into the national legislation. Still, the road of adjusting and incorporating international standards for Gender Equality and recommendations under *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, is an ongoing process.

Starting 2019 a working group for development of new law for gender equality was formed. The first draft was published by MLSP in 2023. From the beginning of the preparation, the Law had its opponents within the working group, and as a result almost 4 years were needed for the draft text to be published. After publishing, the law was faced with intense backlash by the Macedonian Orthodox Church<sup>18</sup> as well as the Islamic community<sup>19</sup>, the Municipality of Strumica<sup>20</sup> and citizens, supporters of these 3 entities. Namely, the religious community organized large protest the adoption of the law, on the basis that gender roles presented in the document are against the so called “family and tradition values”, disrupting the natural order of humanity and morals. This was additionally supported by several informal and formal organizations who support “family values” and “best interest of children”, standing strongly against LGBTI persons and trans-gender rights.<sup>21</sup> The draft law is still being amended and is the subject of ongoing public debates.

#### *Land and property*

According to Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, men and women are guaranteed equal rights to possess and manage property in North Macedonia. Rights as the principle of equal division for example are emphasized in the Law on inheritance<sup>22</sup>. To that addition, under the Law for Equal opportunities for Woman and Men, Article 3 states: *(6) In accordance with the principle of equal treatment in access to employment, discrimination is also prohibited based on marital status, family status, skin color, language, political or other conviction, activity in trade unions, nationality or social status, disability, age, property, social or other status.*

#### **Display Of Registered Property Rights Shown by Gender Divided By Year:**

Year	Men Owners	Women owners	Total	Men owners in percentage	Women owners in percentages
2019	1,365,319	525,95	1,891,275	72,19	27,81
2020 <sup>23</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2021	1,448,141	577,850	2,025,991	71,48	28,52
2022	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<sup>17</sup>Assessment report of the implementation of the law for equal opportunities between women and men on central level (available only on [Macedonian language](#))

<sup>18</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa (media source), Protest and statement by Macedonian Orthodox Church, 2023, available at [link](#)

<sup>19</sup> Meta.mk (media source), statement by Islamic community leader, 2023, available at [link](#)

<sup>20</sup> Sitel TV (media source), public debate in Strumica “The True Face of Gender”, available at [link](#)

<sup>21</sup> Преземи одговорност, Coalition for protection of children, [link](#)

<sup>22</sup> Official gazette of RM no: [47/1996](#) from 12.09.1996

<sup>23</sup> Note: State statistical office didn’t provide data for years 2020 and 2022

Therefore, seen through the prisms of legislation, as World Bank assessed under *their Women, Business and the Law 2022 (WBL2022)* section, North Macedonia has a perfect score with – 100 out of 100 for the indicator on Assets<sup>24</sup> out of eight indicators, and an overall score of 85 out of 100. While the legal framework may guarantee equal rights for men and women, societal factors such as social norms, customs, tradition, economic conditions, and education levels present significant barriers to improving women's status in this field. Statistics showed that more than 70% of property owners are men, and less than 30% are women. Women face discrimination in terms of access to ownership and property inheritance, which affects their economic stability and independence. The denial of property inheritance rights is a significant contributor to this issue and their economic marginalization. Research indicates that women are often excluded from the property inheritance process due to traditional and cultural norms, particularly in patriarchal societies, such as the Macedonian one where such customs have been in place for generations. The law permits heirs to be excluded from inheritance under special circumstances and allows for deviation from the usual inheritance procedures. This specific regulation of inheritance creates a potential for women to be marginalized in the process, and for positive legislation to be replaced with legal traditions. As CEDAW 2018 points out the concerns that land and title, ownership, and inheritance hurdles for rural women because of gender preconceptions and historic traditions of "family" land ownership with respect to men.

That becomes more explicit in the analysis of USAID Gender Analysis Report (2019)<sup>25</sup>, regarding Access to and Control over Assets and Resources:

- *Women's lack of asset ownership contributes to their economic marginalization.*
- *Women also experience discrimination in the inheritance of property.*
- *Rural women are empowered in their abilities to make joint decisions on loans though it is only because it is legally prescribed (that is, a husband cannot use an asset as collateral without the consent of his wife).*

CEDAW 2018, therefore gives recommendations focused on the need to:

- *Develop a strategy to ensure access for rural women to land titles and ownership and adopt measures to protect their security of land tenure, including through awareness-raising campaigns to challenge cultural and traditional patterns that prevent equal access to and control of land by women;*

**Inheritance law** begins with the concept of equality, stating that all citizens are equal in the process of inheritance. Article 130 of the constitution offers incentives for siblings who reside on their parent's

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<sup>24</sup>[Women, Business and the Law 2022 \(WBL2022\)](#):

Do men and women have equal ownership rights to immovable property?

Yes (Law on Ownership and Other Real Rights, Arts. 70-72 )

Do female and male surviving spouses have equal rights to inherit assets?

Yes (Law on Inheritance, Arts. 3 and 13)

Does the law grant spouse equal administrative authority over assets during marriage?

Yes (Law on Inheritance, Arts. 3 and 13)

Does the law provide for the valuation of nonmonetary contributions?

Yes (Law on Ownership and Other Real Rights, Arts. 66 and 75 )

<sup>25</sup> USAID Gender analysis report available at [link](#)

property to inherit it, while Article 128 grants the right to refuse inheritance to those who do not live on the property. In reality, daughters who are married and live away from their parents' property are typically expected to waive their inheritance rights. Specifically, as The Committee (CEDAW, 2018) has shared their concerns, that the absence of legal mechanisms that provide for the recognition of intangible assets, such as pensions and other work-related benefits, and future earning potential for the purposes of property distribution upon divorce in the State party's current legislation on property distribution upon divorce. Consequently, the transfer and inheritance of property within the family typically favor men. The Research on Women's Property Rights and Inheritance Rights in the Polog Region (2017) in North Macedonia, which focused on the social and the legal aspect of the gender inequality points out few important aspects:

- Important result from this survey is that the women's lack of involvement in family decision-making is the registration of property ownership: 68.7% of those reported that their property is registered under the name of their husband or father. With only 13% of families surveyed had property registered under a woman, and 7.7% reported joint ownership (page 12).
- About 42% of those surveyed did not inherit because, in their family, daughters were traditionally excluded from inheritance. Every 5th woman did not take an inheritance due to the fear of disturbing marital relations.

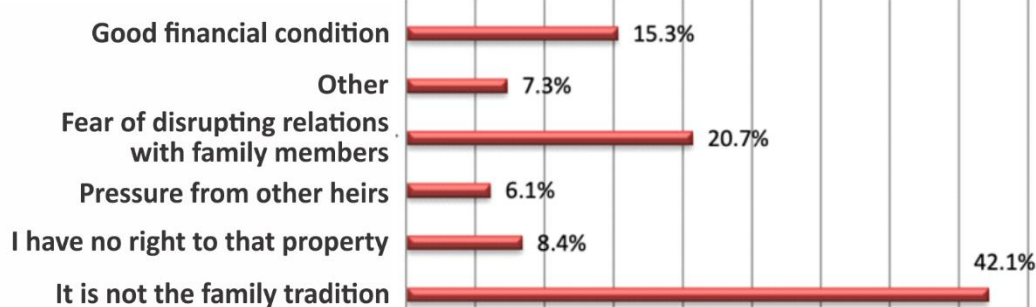
Specifically, this research opens a deeper need for continued analysis due to the intersectional perspective on the role of ethnicity and religion. The Polog region is considered to have a bigger representation of Albanian Community, and other minorities. The gender roles are commonality as a cross cultural factor of creating inequality regarding property inheritance and the non-inclusion of women and girls when it comes to both the Macedonian and Albanian community. What research shows is how those factors use different relaying on authority in tradition, religion or social norms. For example, Lindita Neziri and Abdulla Azizi in their research (2018), note that: "Female heirs are pressured to renounce their rights through family expectations and tradition, while legislation covering the inheritance issue lacks protective measures for persons who are forced to resign from their inheritance right"<sup>26</sup>. The researchers Neziri and Azizi, also detect from an intersectional perspective the role of the ethnicity and the religion<sup>27</sup> in the aspect of asset redistribution. In their survey, Albanian women shared their experiences, which show that 69% of them did not inherit property from their parent, and for the respondents (85%) tradition plays a decisive role in the division of family property between male and female heirs. Often women are expected to "willingly" give up their inheritance for the "sake of the well-being of the family relations". This again confirms the study from 2017 about Polog, presented below:

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<sup>26</sup> Between Law and Traditions: the Practice of (Non) Participation of Girls from the Albanian Community in Macedonia in the Family Property Inheritance (2018) available at [link](#)

<sup>27</sup> "The majority of the Albanian population is located in the western part of the country, namely the Polog region, where it is evident the parallel functioning of social and legal norms, in terms of inheritance (Memeti, 2017:4). According to Islam, have inheritance rights (Roald, 2001), while the Kanun advocates the opposite (Boman and Krasniqi, 2012:11) The Kanun is a set of traditional Albanian laws, developed by Lekë Dukagjini and composed of 12 books and 1,263 articles... The influence of tradition on inheritance issues is described in the marriage section of the Kanun, where only the sons are recognized as heirs and not the daughters."

## Reasons why I have not inherited



Source: Structured questionnaire within the framework of the project: "Economic empowerment of women in the Polog region through representation and promotion of their property rights"

Same as the USAID research, the "Between Law and Traditions: the Practice of (Non) Participation of Girls from the Albanian Community in Macedonia in the Family Property Inheritance (2018)" confirms the intersection of being rural women and having less access to inheritances and material stability through it. Although urban women heirs are thought to inherit in lower percentages compared to male heirs in the family, the inclusion of women heirs in inheritance is even lower in rural areas. In Macedonia there are approximately 39,000 women who are registered as individual farmers, and according to the latest data from the State Statistics Office, there are 175,000 agricultural holdings. And on a national level, the Gender Strategy (2022-2027) notes that, only 4% of women in rural areas own homes, 12% own land. Achieving gender equality requires effective incorporation of gender perspectives into all social flows, policies, and practices. According to custom and life experience, rural women are disadvantaged, monetarily dependent on their husbands, and overworked with household duties, farming, and caring for livestock. For example: Almost 50% of women landowners are not actively involved in the decision-making process for land-related activities, 90% of men landowners are<sup>28</sup>.

One positive example of a policy which supports access to private property is the program "Buy a house, buy an apartment" conducted by The Ministry of Finance. The measure subsidizes housing loans in accordance with the Law on Subsidizing Housing Loans from 2012, which regulates the conditions, method, and procedure for subsidizing housing loans. In the timeframe of 2017-2022 the number of women who solved the housing issue through the project was increasing each year, except in 2020 when it shows a decreasing trend<sup>29</sup>.

In conclusion, the law and the practices are different and still defined by social and gendered norms in which the expectations of inheritances are to still follow prioritizing men over women. Ethnicity and religion play a role; however, the inheritances disadvantages stand for all the women in North Macedonia.

<sup>28</sup> Nacka, M. Measuring Women's Empowerment in Agriculture with Survey-based and Experimental Economics Method. UN Women/Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, 2018. 66 Ibid. as quoted in USAID

<sup>29</sup> Final Report on Performance Audit Performed "Effectiveness Of The Measures Of The Government Of The Republic Of North Macedonia For Gender Equality And Appropriate Gender Budget Initiatives" 2022

### *Private business*

The Macedonian Constitution ensures social justice, economic well-being, and progress of personal and common life. Regarding the private sector, freedom of the market and entrepreneurship is guaranteed. According to the law there are not direct limitation to women owning and creating a private business. Additionally, there are also policies which attempt to encourage women's participation in the private sector. However, significant differences between genders exist in terms of participation in the labor force, earnings of workers, and the choice to initiate a business. Women in North Macedonia experience significant discrimination, as indicated by substantial and enduring disparities in employment and participation in the labor force. A considerable proportion (46%) of women who are of working age are not engaged in the labor force, whereas the corresponding percentage for men is 23.3%<sup>30</sup>.

Percentage wise, what the USAID Gender report notes is that the woman's share is of 27 percent of employment in senior and middle management<sup>31</sup>, while only 18 percent of individuals involved in entrepreneurial activities are women. North Macedonia has a high unemployment rate, and women in particular have a very low participation in the labor market, high economic inactivity and incompatibility between available and requested job profiles<sup>32</sup>.

In the analysis of the Effectiveness of the Gender Equality<sup>33</sup> (2022) the Ministry of Economy, with the "Program for Competitiveness, Innovation and Entrepreneurship", which provides sub-programs, each with several measures, there is a specific one that includes gender elements – that is financial support for women entrepreneurship. However, the numbers show that there is a decline in the interest in this subprogram and deeper analysis is needed for the underlying causes. Regarding the measure of female entrepreneurship, they point out that only enterprises owned and managed by women are applicable, and the analysis shows that the number of applications decreases from year to year.

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<sup>30</sup> As Reactor 2022 cited 1 Eurostat: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSA\\_ARGAN\\_\\_custom\\_1300916/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSA_ARGAN__custom_1300916/default/table?lang=en).

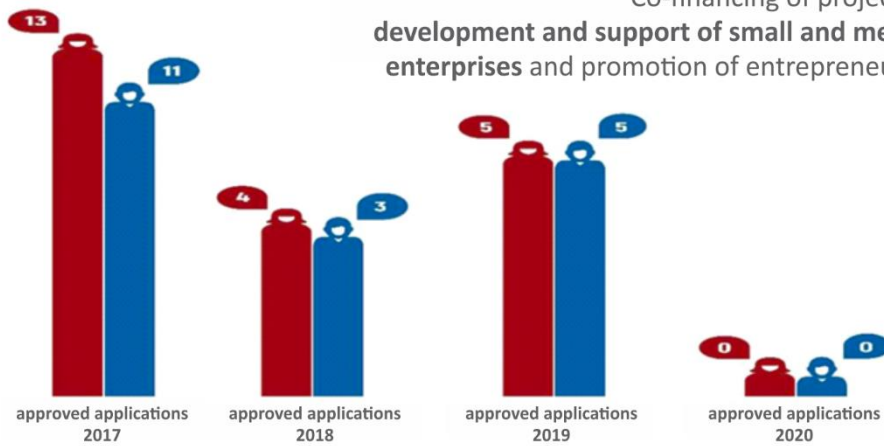
<sup>31</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report, Former Yugoslav Republic of North Macedonia, 2018 as cited in USAID Gender Report

<sup>32</sup> Women Entrepreneurs in North Macedonia: Perceptions and Obstacles, Stella Network 2020, available at [link](#)

<sup>33</sup> Final Report on Performance Audit Performed "Effectiveness Of The Measures Of The Government Of The Republic Of North Macedonia For Gender Equality And Appropriate Gender Budget Initiatives", 2022 available on the following [link](#)



Co-financing of projects for  
development and support of small and medium  
enterprises and promotion of entrepreneurship

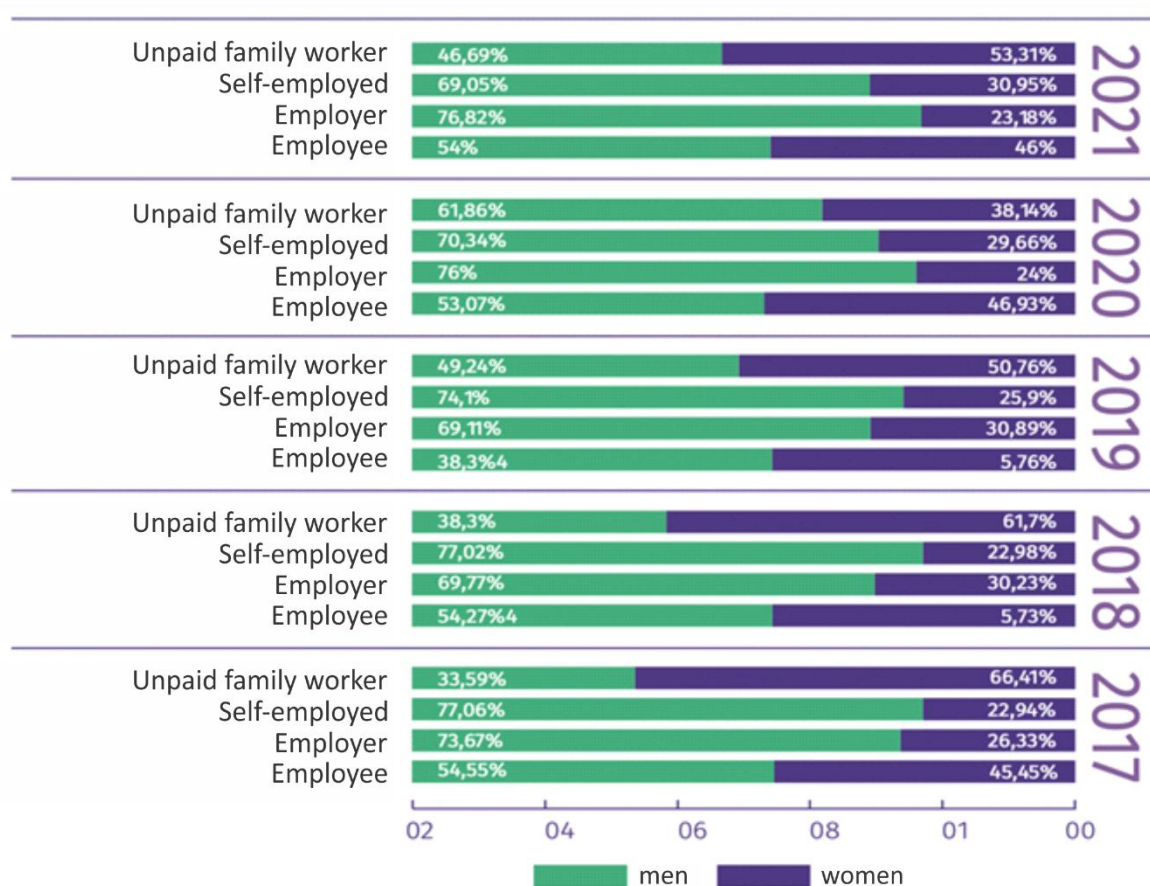


To address the diverse barriers that women in North Macedonia face when starting a business, an intersectional policy approach is necessary. Furthermore, the current conditions shows that an increase in direct financing available for women entrepreneurs or who want to start a business should become a bigger practice by the positive policy.

According to the study done by Stella Network (2022), women from urban areas appear as employers with a share of 23 to 30% (from almost a quarter to approximately one third) of the total number of employers, while that percentage among women from rural areas is significantly lower and ranges from 10 to 16% of the total number of employers<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> HANDBOOK for girls and women with necessary information on available support opportunities for self-employment or starting your own business, 2022, available on the following [link](#)

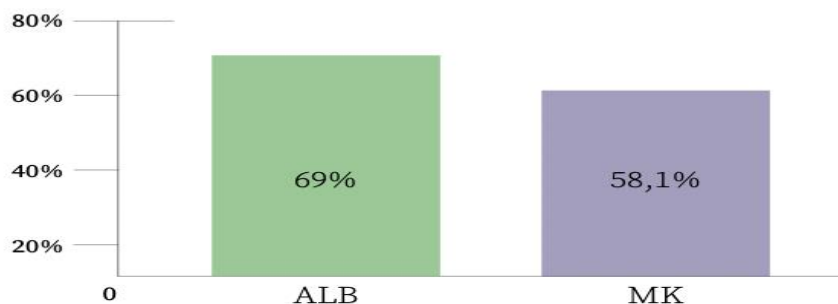


To begin with, women who are in the business sector encounter institutional and political obstacles. These include a considerable amount of mistrust towards the system and government institutions, inadequate knowledge about funding options, and discriminatory practices based on gender and/or race. The challenges faced by women in business and entrepreneurship include overcoming social stigmas, fear of failure, and balancing imposed gender norms about family life<sup>35</sup>. The women who were surveyed for “Women Entrepreneurs in North Macedonia: Perceptions and Obstacles”<sup>36</sup> highlighted social barriers as a major hurdle, notably the unequal burden of caregiving responsibilities on women, insufficient family support, and traditional attitudes that limit women's roles. These last two factors were identified as significant reasons why women don't pursue entrepreneurship. Lastly, financial impediments hinder women from launching their own businesses.

Aside from structural and systemic challenges, the aspect of how informed women are about policies which can support them turns out as an issue. Therefore, the question is not are women allowed to have private business, it is more do they know they have the same rights and opportunities? That is supported by the following statistics:

<sup>35</sup> HANDBOOK for girls and women with necessary information on available support opportunities for self-employment or starting your own business 2022

<sup>36</sup> Women Entrepreneurs in North Macedonia: Perceptions and Obstacles, 2022 available at [link](#)



*Percentage of respondents who were **not** familiar with the available governmental support*



*Percentage of respondents who did **not** use governmental financial assistance meant for the promotion of entrepreneurship*

### *Risks and threats for curbing women's human rights and civil liberties*

In Macedonian recent history, especially during the hybrid regime there were cases of invoking higher security threats to curb human rights and mobility of citizens. After 2017, the limitations of movement were introduced due to the COVID19 recommendation by WHO and Health officials of the country. In their extensive research, Reactor 2022<sup>37</sup>, notes the following: the Macedonian government did not demonstrate any evidence of using gender analysis to assess relief measures, and the report on the implementation of the initial four measures lacks data that is categorized by gender. The majority of government measures implemented during the pandemic, from the beginning until the end of July 2020, were gender neutral. According to Reactor, this means that they overlooked the existing disparities between men and women, ultimately preserving the current situation and perpetuating gender-based discrimination. While in their previous research they noted, most of the essential workers, and people working on the frontline were women<sup>38</sup>.

In relation to COVID, there was a prioritization of the Government to favor the companies and private business over the health and benefits of its citizens. For example, the Government gave 1.1 billion euros as a remedy to the private sector, without any intersectional approach or strategy, and still 14,829 workers, never got their paycheck. While from the beginning of the pandemic, i.e. from March 18 to December 18, 2021, the state inspectorate received 5,594 reports, of which 3,585 reports refer to non-compliance with the measures adopted by the Government in order to prevent and spread the virus and 2,009 reports refer to information of the citizens. "The most frequent reports are related to

<sup>37</sup> Gender based discrimination and labor rights in North Macedonia, available on [Macedonian language](#)

<sup>38</sup> Paid and unpaid work, gender based discrimination and labor rights during COVID 19, only available on [Macedonian language](#)

the basis of non-respect of the right to leave for a parent with a child up to 10 years of age, namely 623 reports, non-respect of the right to leave due to chronic illnesses 876 reports, non-respect of the right according to the Law on Labor Relations and the Law on Safety and health at work - 2086 reports" is stated in the reply from the State Labor Inspectorate<sup>39</sup>. More than 8,000 employees from the private sector requested legal assistance from the association "Glacen Textilec" due to violated rights from employment, and the largest percentage of them were from the sector for the production of textiles<sup>40</sup>, leather and shoes. While according to their reports and research, 5000 women lost their jobs during the pandemic.

The curbing of women's rights and civil liberties can be detected within context, when the policies and the urgent measures which were done ad hoc, lack the gender perspective and serve solely economic purposes rather than the social state and civil wellbeing.

### *Violence against women and the Istanbul Convention*

Women's participation in public and political life in North Macedonia has seen some progress, but there are still significant challenges. The country has made significant commitments to advance gender equality and has ratified international conventions such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. However, women's representation and participation in decision-making remain limited. For instance, out of 15 ministerial posts, women hold only 4, and out of 81 mayoral posts, women hold only 6. Women are also largely underrepresented in executive and decision-making positions in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as defense and police<sup>41</sup>.

VAW-P is a specific form of VAW that targets women because of their participation in public and political life. It includes a range of acts, from sexist remarks and threats to physical attacks<sup>42</sup>. In North Macedonia, political parties lack fundamental protections for women members, activists, and political representatives<sup>43</sup>. Party statutes or codes of conduct are silent on gender-based violence, including harassment, coercion, defamation, and physical or psychological violence. This violence can act as a significant obstacle and deterrent to women's engagement in political and public life.

Although, Republic of North Macedonia was among the first countries to sign (2011) the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and in December 2017, after a long period and strong pressure from civil society organizations, the Assembly ratified it, and entered into force in June 2018. The State, by ratifying the Convention, undertook obligation to take legislative and other measures to provide a legal, institutional, and organizational framework for the prevention of violence against women, the protection of victims of violence, and the punishment of perpetrators of violence. The National Action Plan for implementation of the IC was prepared and adopted in October 2018 with time framework of five years (2018 -2023). The NAP involved all relevant institutions, clearly stating their obligations and activities to be implemented within the set timeframe. National network was monitoring the

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/катастрофална-година-за-работничките-права/31022626.html>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=225365418997809>

<sup>41</sup> <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/north-macedonia>

<sup>42</sup> Preventing violence against women in politics, UN WOMEN available on following [link](#)

<sup>43</sup> Violence against women in political parties in North Macedonia, NDI available at following [link](#)

implementation of the NAP and prepared three progress reports, from which main conclusion is that except for some improvements in the legislation no other actual change happened and protection of victims is not secured. Main reason for this outcome was that the Government didn't allocate any financial resources for full and on-time implementation of the NAP and expected to receive donor support for all predicted activities. Furthermore, all the processes were happening very slowly since the Government never set a priority on this issue. The new law on prevention and protection against violence against women and domestic violence was adopted in January 2021, 3 years after the ratification and adoption of the NAP, and some of the bylaws are still not adopted, which leads to difficulties in the implementation. Need for continuous trainings professionals working in social work centers and police officers still exists. Further insufficient sensitization nor knowledge of the specifics of this matter, as well as what has been highlighted above in the context of distrust of institutions, contributes to the small number of reported cases of violence against women. According to OSCE led survey published in 2019<sup>44</sup>, in North Macedonia, almost half (45%) of women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (physical, sexual and/or psychological) since the age of 15, while almost one in three women (30%) have experienced sexual harassment. Statistics show that more than 80% of domestic violence victims are women. Multiple analyses and surveys in recent years have shown that stereotypical traditional beliefs about the place and role of women and men in the home and in society, which are an obstacle to the progress of women in almost all spheres of private and public life, still dominate in the country. Men are still seen as dominant in the home and in public life, while women are expected to put their own needs and ambitions on a personal and professional level and devote themselves above all to the household.

#### *4. Perception of Women in Politics and Public Sphere, including Violence against women in politics*

Violence against women in politics is a critical issue that demands attention and action. National network to end violence against women and domestic violence prepared a comprehensive online questionnaire that was distributed to women forums/unions within the political parties, for the purpose of writing this report, and that resulted with responses from 417 women. This summary highlights the key findings and sheds light on the prevalence and nature of violence experienced by women in the political sphere. It also addresses the lack of safeguarding measures and explores the response to reported incidents. Additionally, gender representation within political parties and their financial transparency are discussed.

**Prevalence and Forms of Violence:** Out of the respondents, 15.1% acknowledged being victims of gender-based violence in politics, with psychological violence being the most prevalent form (85.7%). Other forms reported included sexual violence (12.7%) and physical violence (6.3%). Psychological violence often manifested as insults, harassment in the workplace, and threats. Sexual violence included unwelcome jokes and comments. Incidents such as vehicle vandalism, preferential treatment for male candidates, and the spread of false information were also reported.

**Locations and Sources of Violence:** The workplace and social media were identified as the primary locations where violence against women in politics occurs (52.4% of respondents). Political party premises accounted for 20.6% of incidents. Perpetrators were identified as members from other

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<sup>44</sup> Wellbeing and safety of women, North Macedonia available at the following [link](#)

political parties (47.6%), within their own political party (28.6%), unknown individuals (27%), and the leadership of their political party (25.4%).

**Reporting and Institutional Response:** Surprisingly, 60.3% of respondents chose not to report the violence they faced, citing a lack of trust in institutional processes. Among those who reported, 28.6% approached their political party, while 15.9% lodged complaints with the Ministry of the Interior/Police. However, 38.1% of those who reported violence stated that the institutions failed to take appropriate action. Formal accusations and criminal reports were filed in only 6.3% of the reported cases. Temporary protective measures to address gender-based violence were requested in 1.6% of the cases, with positive outcomes observed in only 11.1% of those instances.

### **Legal Protection and Measures**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not maintain separate statistics or specific programs related to violence against women in politics. While the Criminal Code included provisions that incriminated violence against women, there was no crime specifically addressing violence against women in politics. In addition to the fact that our country holds legal responsibility for violence against women in politics, such violence is seldom recognized and reported. According to the findings of the NDI report on Violence against Women in Political Parties in North Macedonia<sup>45</sup>, the leadership of political parties should ensure legal and media protection for all members. However, respondents in the research pointed out that while political parties often provide legal advice and assistance in defamation cases, similar support for protection against violence is lacking. In many cases, women are left to deal with such situations privately or are marginalized and left unsupported.

Respondents in the research, who were members of political parties, believe that party regulations should explicitly address the prevention of violence against women. They unanimously agree that an effective fight against violence in politics requires synergy among all stakeholders and a certain level of political maturity.

With the increasing participation of women in politics and political processes in the country, the number of publicly expressed forms of hate speech and sexist attacks on women politicians has also increased. Sexism and sexist behavior are associated with violence against women and girls, with acts of “every day” sexism being part of the continuum of violence creating an atmosphere of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity, thus limiting the opportunities and freedom of women and girls, and in particular women involved in politics and in public life.

The disproportionate and often deliberate targeting of female politicians and activists has serious consequences for the democratic process. Nonetheless, the occurrence of online abuse and the dissemination of sexist narratives aimed at politically engaged women are not solely rooted in commonplace misogyny. They are further amplified by political figures and employed as a strategic political maneuver. Illiberal political actors frequently endorse and foster online abuse against women political leaders and activists with the explicit intention of suppressing dissenting voices and forcing feminist politicians to withdraw from the political sphere. In relation to this research and other NDI efforts for surpassing the gender gap directly in politics and media, NDI has taken a leading role in

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<sup>45</sup> Available at [link](#)

studying, defining, and raising awareness about the issue, recognizing the urgent danger posed by gendered disinformation to democratic systems globally.

The female party members who took part in the qualitative research on **NDI-led research on violence against women in politics** <sup>46</sup> also discussed their experiences of online sexual harassment. They said that it was becoming increasingly common to be harassed by men on social media platforms, especially by younger men, who the women believed were looking for sex. They expressed the belief that being online emboldened men to say things that they would not say in person.

In relation to the Perception of Women in Politics and Public Sphere and how women politics are treated online, the **political activists** who participated in the NDI-led research<sup>47</sup> (2020) confirmed that several of them had, while carrying out their political party functions, experienced or witnessed common forms of violence against women, including psychological violence, threats and coercion, or physical violence.

“The specific incidents of violence reported in the interviews and focus groups reveal that VAW in North Macedonian politics ranges from psychological to physical violence. These incidents include: dissemination of intimate or personal details and images on social media, later picked up and further shared by online news platforms, defamation by creating photo-montages and publishing them on impersonating profiles on social media (Facebook and Instagram), physical confrontation (shoving), bullying, harassment of close family members including, physical following, verbal in-person and social media threats, bullying in the workplace as a result of political/party affiliation or public stance, online and offline hate speech, insults labelling a woman’s political participation as an immoral practice, discriminatory treatment on the part of the mass media: calling into question their personal life, their sexual behavior, their physical appearance, their attire. “

In terms of the **perpetrators**, NDI’s led research<sup>48</sup> relied on the interviews and surveys has detected there is a pattern of similarities in the variety of those responsible for exercising violence against women politicians such as: Men from the same political party with conflicting ideologies, Men from rival political parties protecting party interests, higher-ranking members of the same political party, internal or external party activist clusters exercising violence from webs of fake social media profiles, men and women from a rival party in supervisory roles in the workplace.

A prominent perception about the perpetrators was that in cyber violence (harassment, hate speech, defamation, and threats on social media), perpetrators were often organized groups of party activists or supporters campaigning from several fake profiles (in two instances, the respondents estimated this number to be approximately 70 profiles).

These reports suggest the development of a cybergang mentality. The impact is amplified by the speed and breadth of information dissemination. In relation to that, specific cases of targeted violence and technology- facilities gender violence has been complementing the already existing political violence towards women in politics. Some on them during the time of 2017-2022 are: sexist and

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<sup>46</sup> Violence against women in political parties in North Macedonia – Assessment report available on following [link](#)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

disinformation<sup>49</sup> campaign<sup>50</sup> against Monika Zajkova (Leader of LDP), and targeted attacks on wellbeing and personality to Slavjanka Petrovska (Macedonian politician who has been the Minister of Defense of North Macedonia since January 2022) are selected as special cases where the role of the online media played a role in amplifying the political violence, however those are not the only cases happening.

Case: Monika Zajkova in her case she summarized that: *“Through false accusations against me, the party whose headquarters is in illegal construction and is still a symbol of crime, i.e. it protects the criminal structures that set our country back decades, tries to slander all the progressive structures that are doing everything for this country to finally move forward to offer our youth and our citizens a more beautiful and promising future. They started with misogynistic campaigns against us women, through their bots they attacked and insulted us on a sexist basis, and now they continue with statements in order to protect their own ranks.”*2022<sup>51</sup>

**Case** Slavjanka Petrovska<sup>52</sup>: The MP of VMRO-DPMNE Dragan Kovacki accused Defense Minister Slavjanka Petrovska, attacking her psychological stability and her mental health and with that the capability to lead the ministry. While his attacks on the minister with disinformation did not received too much media coverage, this statement made by him has encouraged a wave of cyber bullying, and disinformation<sup>53</sup>. Some accusations were denied or under investigation, while for two of them, Petrovska will sue MP Kovacki for defamation. Former army staff and current MP Kovacki accused Petrovska of hiding a luxury hacienda, but Petrovska denies it and plans to sue Kovacki.

**Case:** Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova - A case from North Macedonia exemplifies the contrasting treatment of women involved in politics, highlighting the arbitrary nature of gender-based violence (GBV) against women politicians. In the context of the 2019 election, two women candidates faced shame and harassment, with one criticized for being too old and the other for being too young. When Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, a university professor and lawyer, entered the election race, she immediately faced derogatory comments on social media. She was referred to as an old-fashioned "granny" who should remain at home to care for her numerous grandchildren instead of engaging in politics<sup>54</sup>.

**Case:** Nina Angelovska: Upon Nina Angelovska's appointment as the head of the Ministry of Finance, the media promptly criticized her based on her age and physical appearance. While one individual faced scrutiny for being considered too old for the presidency, Angelovska was deemed too young to lead the Ministry of Finance. Sexist remarks and comments were not limited to the general public but were also made by fellow politicians.

These cases, as well as the overall treatment, shows that, women find themselves in a constant and uneven struggle for equal opportunities and better participation in political and electoral processes. Their position is further aggravated by the emphasis on gender stereotypes and often disparaging

<sup>49</sup> <https://civilmedia.mk/zloupotrebena-logoto-na-fokus-za-shirene-seksizam-i-dezinformatsii-kon-zajkova/> - 2023

<sup>50</sup> <https://mia.mk/story/zajkova-lazhните-напади-од-вмродпмне-кон-мене-зборуваат-за-нивната-очајност-за-политички-поени> - 2022

<sup>51</sup> <https://mia.mk/story/zajkova-lazhните-напади-од-вмродпмне-кон-мене-зборуваат-за-нивната-очајност-за-политички-поени>

<sup>52</sup> <https://vistinomer.mk/kontraspin-prashanjeto-na-kovachki-za-razreshuvanje-na-ministerkata-petrovska-e-spin/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://civilmedia.mk/dali-kovachki-so-napadite-kon-ministerkata-petrovska-raboti-za-treta-agenda/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://lossi36.com/2021/03/10/female-politicians-in-north-macedonia-powerful-public-figures-or-victims-of-sexism/>



representations in traditional and online media, which directly undermine the goal of gender equality and greater participation of women in politics. In North Macedonia, the rise in women's political participation appears to be followed by an increase in violent reactions to their presence and involvement in politics. Women in politics are perceived as a danger to historically male-dominated political dominance.

The report on North Macedonia prepared by the EC Directorate General for Good Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations in 2021 contained the following conclusion about the frequency of online harassment directed at women, especially those who are present in public life:

“Gender stereotypes are still present, and women in public life are especially susceptible to attacks through social media. The two "Javna soba" (Public room) cases, in which explicit photos and private information of girls and women were shared on an online platform, caused public concern and civil protests against the authorities' failure to take timely action and showed that there are gaps in the legal framework.”

Disinformation and misinformation campaigns can reinforce harmful gender stereotypes about women as being less competent, less ambitious, or less capable of taking on leadership roles. This may discourage women from running for political office or make it more difficult for them to be taken seriously if they do. The same report mentions the Venice Commission and the Directorate of information society<sup>55</sup>:

The last point regarding how digital violence and misinformation impact the democratic process, presents a key aspect that the treatment towards women in politics, does not solely rely on gender stereotypes, as much as it also has direct relation with reproducing hierarchy and subordination of women. The way that digital space is used as a tool to keep women from power, shows how comprehensive should the actions to change that be, in relation to targeting every aspect of society.

According to these candidates interview in report on North Macedonia prepared by the EC Directorate General for Good Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations in 2021, it is difficult for men to hand over power to women or to accept women in superior positions above them in the hierarchy. Furthermore, the female participants believed that men believe they have ceded a significant portion of their power to women, so when women ascend to higher positions, men place greater expectations and demands on women to justify those positions. The OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission noted in its final report on the local elections in October 2021 that "due to the lack of clear regulations for campaigning on social networks and effective moderation by parties and candidates for comments on their social media pages networks, numerous candidates, often women, were subjected to abusive language."<sup>56</sup>

By shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward women in leadership roles, disinformation or misinformation can have a significant impact on gender equality in politics. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including undermining women politicians' credibility and competence:

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<sup>55</sup> As quoted in report on North Macedonia prepared by the EC Directorate General for Good Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations in 2021: Joint report of the Venice Commission and of the Directorate of information society and action against crime of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) on the Use of digital technologies and elections, CDL-AD (2019)016, paragraph 37. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)016-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)016-e)

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/3/514666.pdf>

Disinformation and misinformation campaigns seek to discredit or smear women politicians by making false accusations or spreading rumors. They also have the potential to undermine hard-won rights and protections for women and marginalized communities by promoting agendas that are opposed to feminist values or gender equality. These narratives can take the form of promoting anti-feminist or anti-gender equality agenda and can have negative impacts on the progress made towards achieving equality and justice.

For the purposes of writing the Shadow report, National Network conducted online survey for the perception of women in politics are women essential for maintaining democratic process, and the beneficial role of women enrolled in economy. The survey was open starting from 3rd of March until 31st of March 2023. The online questionnaire was completed by 516 people, from whom 92% were women.

On the question, '*Do you think it is important for women to be involved in political processes in the State?*', 94% agree on its importance, to which 70% acknowledge the difficulties women face when entering politics. To that end, 18% answered with maybe, and 7.9% think that women do not have a hard time entering politics. When asked how you will describe the involvement of women in politics, 84.7% answered that they are *They are not involved enough*, and on the contrary 7.9% thinks they are involved enough. For the key aspect which is confirmed by many theories and research - women as an integral part of the development and maintaining of the democratic processes, 73.3% thought that women contributing to it. However, 8.3% said they *do not think* women contribute, with 17.1% stating *maybe they do*. 47.7% from the responses, are aware that unfortunately women are not substantially included as a key voice in political parties' decision-making processes. While 20% think they are included, the rest of the numbers 20.7% think maybe that is the case, with 11 % remaining undecided. 78.9% consider that the participation of women in the private sector (business, entrepreneurship, labor relations) contributes to the improvement of the economy.

The participants of the survey overall were aware about the disproportionate possibilities for women in politics and the different forms of gender-based violence along with technologically facilitated violence. With 90 % stating that digital (online) violence can play a role in the perception of women who are politically active. The people who answered the survey were familiar with the different forms of violence against women who are active in politics, such as: hate speech (in traditional media, political debates and party meetings, etc.); digital violence (disinformation, online trolling, bullying ); insults and slanders; harassment, physical and/or sexual violence; blackmail and/or coercion. 70% of the people were aware that women who are politically active are exposed to violence.

NDI in their report: Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide<sup>57</sup> identifies three main objectives of gendered disinformation: preventing women from engaging in politics, influencing public perceptions of women's political participation, and altering party policies or political outcomes. In essence, the ultimate goal is to undermine women's ability to participate freely and equally in politics, thereby harming the inclusive and resilient nature of democracy. In order to help protect women from gender-based abuse in online content and communications, improvements in the regulation of online content during elections should be taken into account. To add, what gender theories are suggesting on addressing the abuse in the digital space the usage of

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<sup>57</sup> Available at [link](#)

NDI's guide on How to Address Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation<sup>58</sup> emphasize that women are reclaiming certain words and phrases commonly associated with online violence against women and girls (VAW-P). They also stress the importance of considering intersectionality and involving local experts in identifying and addressing gendered disinformation. The reports urge policymakers to collaborate with women to develop solutions that foster positive, empowering, and fair online spaces.

#### 5. *Role of the political parties in promoting women's participation in politics*

For the purposes of this report, we sent 16 requests for access to public information to political parties that have their representatives in the Parliament and received answers from only 9 of which some were with partial answers stating that they don't collect the data that was requested.

**Gender Representation in Political Parties:** Gender statistics within political parties varied significantly. The DOM party stood out with a higher representation of women in its executive board (60% women, 40% men). VMRO-DPMNE had approximately 35,000 women out of its 80,000 members. The Left party had low representation, with only one woman out of seven members in its leadership. Similar imbalances were observed in other parties. GROM has a male majority of 65% and a female minority of 35%, while the Socialist Party of Macedonia has 17,850 male members and 15,850 female members. The party of the Turks has 6,000 male members and 4,000 female members, like the Democratic Party of the Serbs, where slightly over 40% of the members are women. The DPA party has almost 50% fewer women than men, with 1,075 male members and 489 female members. Alternative and VMRO-Narodna party do not have data available as they are in the registration process. NSDP does not maintain accurate statistics on the total number of members, but out of a total of 90 central board members, 24 are women. In the executive board, consisting of 23 members, 7 are women.

**Political Parties' Measures and Initiatives:** The political party currently in power, SDSM, ensures equal financial distribution between male and female candidates. Although there is no specific funding allocated to the Women's Forum, President Jovana Trenchevska states that they have not encountered any difficulties in financing its activities thus far. To promote inclusivity and fairness in candidate selection, SDSM has implemented a 50% quota for both women and men in all elections, except for mayoral elections. The party aims to introduce internal party regulations soon, targeting a minimum of 30% female mayoral candidates. Additionally, the party maintains double list holders, consisting of one woman and one man.

All candidates undergo a selection process through a public call, outlining the criteria and qualifications they must meet. In cases of threats and violence during the candidate selection process, Article 22 of the Party's Code of Ethics specifies sanctions and accountability for the perpetrators.

On the other hand, the opposition party VMRO DPMNE conducts preliminary elections for deputies, nominating one woman and one man. Lists for smaller municipalities include two women and two men. The Women's Union has the autonomy to nominate councilors as they see fit.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid

During the nomination lobbying, male candidates often make comments that undermine women's qualifications, responsibility, morality, and so on.

While the candidate nomination process is transparent, women at the local level, particularly in smaller municipalities, often face stigmatization and lobbying efforts to eliminate their candidacy in favor of male candidates. Statistics support this observation, with only five female presidents of municipal commissions out of a total of 78.

The President of the Union affirms that they employ various mechanisms and strategies to ensure gender balance. For instance, they lobby for the president of a committee to be placed second on the list to secure a councilor position. In the process of electing female mayors, they advocate for list holders to also become council presidents at the municipal level. The Union also advocates for increasing the percentage of women in the executive committee from 28% to 32%, considering the current level insufficient.

Despite instances of hate speech and psychological harassment against female candidates during the nomination process, no proceedings have been initiated before the Court of Honor, although such an option exists within the party. Special security measures for female and male candidates are not in place, and the party lacks mechanisms to monitor its promotion of gender equality.

The Women's Forum within DOM, the only political party with more women than men in the executive board, has full independence to nominate female candidates. They propose allocating a portion of the funds from the state budget, provided to political parties, for women's organizations within the parties.

The president of DOM is a woman, and one of the four deputy ministers in the country is a member of DOM. Candidate nominations within the party adhere to the Electoral Code's requirement of a minimum 40% female candidates. Although the party strives to promote gender balance, it lacks formal mechanisms to monitor progress. The president of the Women's Forum also serves as a member of the party's Executive Board, facilitating women's involvement in decision-making. The party primarily strengthens women's active participation in politics through collaborations with non-governmental organizations.

None of the political parties have implemented a special internal document or act to address the protection of women from violence.

**Financial Transparency:** The Transparency Index of Political Parties revealed very low results for financial transparency, with 21 out of 23 parties scoring below half of the total points. Only three parties published their annual financial reports, indicating a lack of transparency in party finances. Most parties lacked separate funds for supporting women's organizations within their ranks.

According to the 2022 analysis by FOOM, eight parties have published their annual financial reports for 2018, 2019, and 2020. Six parties have partially published information, including only one or two reports out of the three years, while nine parties have not published any annual financial reports. The same analysis for 2022 indicates that half of the political parties (11) have not published annual financial accounts. Among the 23 parties with functioning websites, only three parties (BESA, DS, and SS) have published accounts.

## Recommendations

### Actions to undertake towards increasing the Democratic health of the country

1. We strongly encourage local and national government bodies, legislators, and policy makers such as: Parliament, Government, MPs to enable active participation of citizens in decision-making processes when adopting /laws/policies on local and national level using already established and functional ENER<sup>59</sup> platform;
2. All local and national institutions (national government, local self-government, parliament, ministries, state agencies, political parties) need to ensure availability of public documents (annual budgets, financial and narrative reports, programs, etc.). Updating the web pages must be done on a regular basis to ensure availability of newest changes of documents, legislation, human resources, persons in charge so as information about committee members on local and national level;
3. Ministry of Justice and Government to propose measures on regulation of penal policies for abuse of office and amend the Criminal code;
4. The Parliament and Election Commission propose changes in the Electoral code for adoption of open candidate lists.

### Actions for achieving greater participation of women in politics and elections

1. Prepare amendments for the Election code for increasing gender quota to 50% for MPs and local counselors, and introducing gender quota for leaders of candidate lists and mayor nominations.
2. Consider possibilities for regulation of gender quota for ministerial positions, when forming Government;
3. Ministry of Information, Society and Administration to make a priority the preparation of amendments of the Law on employees in the public sector to abolish the “employment balancer” to ensure placing the right people in the right positions (abolition of nationality as a criteria for employment);
4. Government and donors to support WCSO for empowerment and encouragement for women for active participation in politics and elections (free academis for women leaders, raising awareness campaigns for importance of women involvement in politics etc).

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<sup>59</sup> Electronic national register of regulations of the Republic of North Macedonia, [link](#)

## Priorities for improving the Women legal rights

1. Urgent adoption of new Law for gender equality;
2. Government and donor organizations to support WCSO efforts to educate women about their legal rights, with focus on Law for inheritance;
3. Ministry of economy in close cooperation with Government and Agency for employment to develop and adopt program for economic empowerment of women (including all possibilities such as: start-ups, subsidized employment, trainings for improving professional skills etc) which will address and considerate specific needs of marginalized women. Furthermore, analysis of business needs in different planning regions should be done to identify which business can prosper locally and can be led by women.
4. Ministry of Justice and Government in consultation with WCSOs to propose amendments to the Free legal aid Law for expansion of services for marginalized women and women victims of gender based and domestic violence aimed at enabling free legal aid for divorce and inheritance procedures.
5. To improve infrastructure and kindergartens, and other services from the social area, with the aim of enabling women to have bigger employability and better job positions.

## Violence against women

1. Strongly recommend forming of independent Expert Body that will be responsible for alignment of the national legislation and practices with the recommendations and obligations of the Istanbul Convention, CEDAW and other relevant international documents;
2. Government and relevant ministries/institutions to allocate funds within their budgets for on-time implementation of the activities related to improving the national legislation and system of protection from GBV and DV. It is necessary allocated funds to be separated from the overall budget and be visible to enable monitoring of the costs associated with this issue;
3. The Government in coordination with the Ministry of labor and social policy to allocate enough funds for all types of specialized services for help and support of victims of GBV and DV, and ensure that services run by WCSO are sustainable;
4. To consider a priority forming a working group with representatives from WCSO and relevant institutions, to prepare amendments on the Criminal Code which will include forced marriage and psychological violence as separate crimes, ex officio prosecution of bodily injury committed in the context of domestic violence; violence towards women in politics to be recognized as aggravating circumstance and higher punishment for perpetrators to be predicted.

## Action for prevention and combating Violence Against Women in Politics

1. Encourage political parties to develop and adopt programs and policies for combating violence against women in politics as internal documents. These programs/policies should include actions for prevention like awareness raising campaigns and actions for dealing with VAW-P like specific reporting procedures, legal support and psychosocial support for women victims.
2. Encourage developing and adoption of programs and policies for combating violence against women at the Parliamentarian and Governmental level. These programs should be developed through close cooperation with WCSO, and funds should be allocated for on time and full implementation.
3. Ministry of justice to prepare amendments for the Law for financing of political parties aimed to including separate article for allocating funds for women unions/forums within political parties.
4. Agency for Audio and Audiovisual media together with Association of journalist in close cooperation with WCSOs to work on media education and involvement. Media should be educated and sensitized on gender issues and gender aspects of social and political issues when reporting and covering news.