

POLICY PAPER

From idea to initiatives to reform the public social services in Macedonia

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1. Executive summary

The social protection system is of crucial importance to provide social security and welfare of the citizens in each social country. Subsequent to its independence, the Republic of Macedonia inherited a social protection system based on substantial centralization, in which the country imposed its dominant role as a protection provider, thus there was insignificant participation in the non-governmental, private and religious sectors in the activities from the social protection field.

Within this system, the social protection was mostly carried out through monetary transfers and benefits for citizens exposed to social risk. The social services like non-financial measures aiming to improve the social functioning of individuals and groups exposed to social risk, were insufficiently developed, and were reduced above all, to institutional forms of protection.

The social protection system of the Republic of Macedonia enables development of non-institutional protection for people in need of social services as well as people in social risk, to use the stated services, however, the process of decentralizing the social protection has not been finished yet, the decentralization of social services, particularly of non-institutional protection, i.e. developing social services locally is still an unresolved status in the Republic of Macedonia.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy as a leading institution which should provide and create conditions for developing social services i.e. services at local level along with the local self-government units have set a really extended deadline for these social services to start functioning locally.

The civil society sector so far has offered social services within its power and possibilities and required conditions imposed by the country and the local self-government, reducing it to project activities and according to non-stipulated protocols to carry out the minimum standards required as social service providers.

A service provider which offers quality and professional service is the one which follows certain standards and guarantees that the end user will be provided with social services in compliance with all standards. Development of staff licensing programs is also required regarding employees in the social services. In Macedonia there is only a developed licensing programs for nurses working with children, the Institute for Social Activities issues licenses to the staff in tertiary education working in public or private social protection institutions.

In order to overcome this obstacle it is essential to develop conditions for staff licensing and their prior education by already existing licensing education programs developed by the civil society sector, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Adult Education Center and the Vocational and Educational Training Centre.

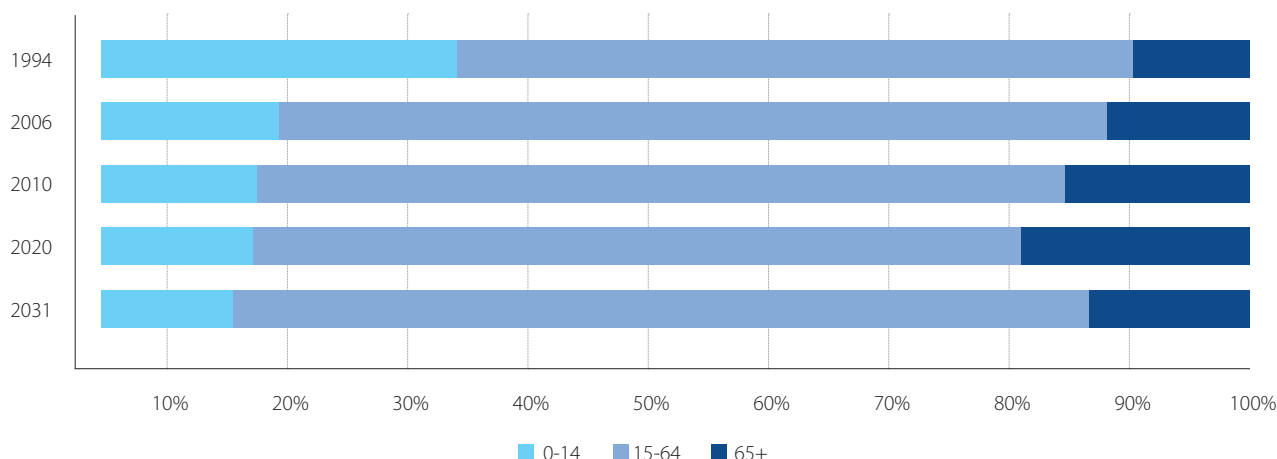
Other major problems in our country are the sustainability of these social services, lack of minimum standards for the social service providers as well as deficiency of local plans for improvement and development of social services.

The country does not allocate assets to support and develop the social services, the local self-government units have not projected budget funds for social services and service providers. The business sector is not sufficiently motivated to support social services although concerning social security; they have an opportunity to project financial assets.

Numerous national strategies exist like the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction, the National Strategy for the Elderly, the National Strategy on Demographic Ageing, the National Strategy on equalizing the rights of the disabled, in its frame aiming for social protection, yet, unfortunately, for the action plans and plans for conducting strategies the country has not allocated any budget assets, once again all work is reduced to project activities in certain areas in the civil society sector.

In the Republic of Macedonia there are many target groups that need any kind of help and support for normal functioning, including the elderly, the disabled, the homeless, single parents, victims of domestic violence, HIV positive people, (alcohol, drugs and other substances) addicts and former addicts now on treatment, in percentage in Macedonia there is 16, 6% old population, whereas there are 6,5 % people with disabilities, 30 % people who living in poverty and social exclusion, 258 people who living with HIV / AIDS, 236 street children, 45 homeless people and other categories of citizens who need some kind of social service, 34 504 family are welfare beneficiaries.

Figure 1: Structure of population by age groups, Macedonia: 2006-2030



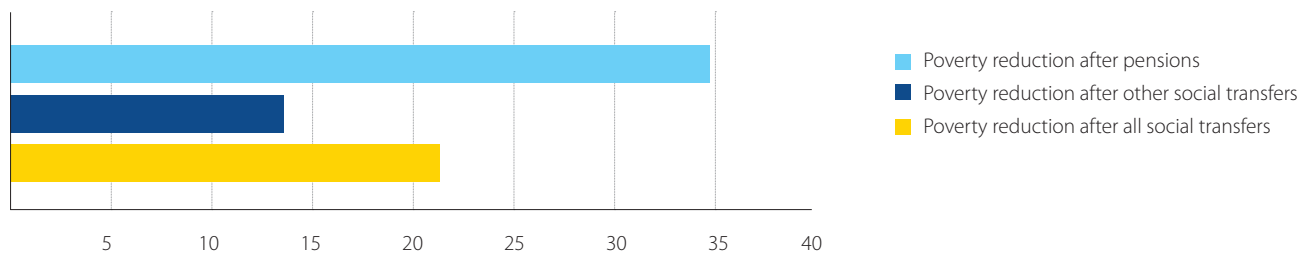
Source: State Statistical Office

Table 1: Poverty and social exclusion indicators, 2012-2014

Poverty and social exclusion indicators	2012	2013	2014
At-risk-of-poverty rate, % of population	26.2	24.2	22.1
Number of persons below at-risk-of-poverty threshold, in thousand persons	540.1	500.4	457.2
At-risk-of-poverty threshold of single-person household - annual equivalent income in denars	67,200	70,275	71,925
At-risk-of-poverty threshold of four-person household (2 adults and 2 children aged less than 14) - annual equivalent income in denars	141,120	147,578	151,043
At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers and before pensions, % of population	42.6	41.0	41.7
Inequality of income distribution, S80/S20, %	10.2	8.4	7.2
Inequality of income distribution, Gini coefficient, %	38.8	37.0	35.2

Source: State Statistical Office

Figure 2: Decrease of poverty (in %) as a result of social transfers



Source: Own calculation based on SILC Survey, State Statistical Office Republic of Macedonia (2014)

Table 2: Households beneficiaries of Social Financial Assistance, 2011-2012

Regions	Head of household (number of households)		Household members (together with household head)		Year
	Total	Women	Total	Women	
Total	36,991	8,410	153,385	68,050	2011
Vardar Region	2,654	542	7,706	3,569	
East Region	2,558	850	10,599	4,773	
Southwest Region	3,454	612	14,702	5,618	
Southeast Region	1,702	202	5,938	2,812	
Pelagonia Region	3,904	1,344	11,683	5,474	
Polog Region	8,952	1,278	32,470	15,931	
Northeast Region	4,688	797	20,695	8,693	
Skopje Region	9,079	2,785	49,592	21,180	
Total	33,717	7,219	133,539	64,574	2012
Vardar Region	2,397	589	6,817	3,266	
East Region	2,284	835	9,599	4,429	
Southwest Region	3,139	552	12,213	5,828	
Southeast Region	1,702	313	6,169	3,308	
Pelagonia Region	3,884	596	12,111	5,577	
Polog Region	7,679	1,128	26,906	13,266	
Northeast Region	4,191	731	18,195	7,772	
Skopje Region	8,441	2,475	41,529	18,128	

Source: State Statistical Office

Table 3: Height of social financial assistance for 2014

	Height of social financial assistance for 2014 100% in first two years	After two years 50%
Person	2,451 denari	1,223 denari
Family with 2 members	3,358 denari	1,679 denari
Family with 3 members	4,265 denari	2,133 denari
Family with 4 members	5,173 denari	2,586 denari
Family with 5 or more members	6,081 denari	3,040 denari

Source MLSP

2. Background

Social protection is an area that requires constant adjustment and adaptation, as the needs of users and to the actual capacity of the system and the state to administer these policies. The social protection system in the country despite its reform in the past faces certain obstacles and weaknesses that reflect the quality of care.

There exists the need to improve capacity for creating politics to efficient, effective, sustainable and transparent planning. Participation of relevant stakeholders in policy making should be further strengthened. The planning of measures and changes insufficiently based on previous evaluations, analyzes and research.

In terms of policy implementation, on the institutions, the key problem locate the position of the system that produces dominant performance by professional services (primarily Center for Social Work) who focuses only on the exercise of rights to assistance from social protection, and neglect of social services.

This findings and conclusions that indicates NGO Sector in Macedonia and many EU agencies in Macedonia (UNDP, UNICEF, BIM) who have made a detailed analysis of the existing law, detecting the same problems that we speak loudly and their analyzes are always taken for example.

At the very beginning we pointed to key problems in the process of decentralization and in the process for social services at the local level as the licensing process and the provision of minimum standards for providers of these services and very important is sustainability of these services.

Non-governmental sector also make efforts to involve the coordinating bodies in the creation of many national strategies and operational plans, but unfortunately despite the expertise that gives the NGO national strategies still remain written on paper with many recommendations but no detached budget for implementation by the State.

3. Analysis

It is considered that it is necessary to do networking and encourage all stakeholders on a local level. According to the previous experiences, the social services and their decentralization depend on the system set-up.

Decentralization cannot be achieved without inclusion of all stakeholders, both on a local self-government level and national level. There are unutilized capacities, not only in the NGO sector, but also within individuals who are available to the units of the local self government. The municipal administration sees them as a competition that threatens its positions, but they should be seen as people with experience in the field of social protection.

Decentralization does not depend so much on the fiscal implications as it depend on the different stakeholders. This also includes representatives of civil organizations and local self government. It is up to the NGO sector to impose its demands and it is up to the representatives of the local self-government to try to solve some of the NGO demands or meet some of the NGO needs in a dedicated manner.

The role of municipalities

In the field of possibilities for implementing social protection, the Law on Social Protection of 2009 provides that municipalities may establish social protection institutions (institutional and non-institutional services), except for social welfare centers - CSWs or institutions for the treatment of children with social problems. This means that municipalities can provide funding and become owners or providers. At the same time, each unit of local government can develop non-institutional forms of protection of citizen, centers for daily and temporary protection depending on the social needs of local citizens. Changes in the law also provide that the municipalities, the City of Skopje and the municipalities of the City of Skopje may organize social protection for its citizens. This can be achieved through preparation of development programs and other general acts of social protection for people with disabilities, victims of trafficking, orphans, children with disabilities, street children, children with educational problems, children of single parents, children at social risk, children who abuse drugs and elderly. The practical application of this provision means that each municipality should develop its own specific mechanisms to identify the needs of vulnerable population groups in their territory.

Licensing of providers

Licensing process in the field of social protection in Macedonia is lagging behind. Currently, MLSP issued licenses for the establishment and operation of institutions of social protection (for all but CSWs and institutions for children with educational and social problems and behavioral problems). The only reform initiative has been identified during the assessment and refers to the promotion of the licensing mechanisms. Law on Social Protection allows civic associations and individuals to engage in the provision of social services. The individual would have to obtain a license from the MLSP to be able to deliver social services. This was introduced to encourage self-employment among interested parties. However, since the legislation has not been introduced in practice.

As of NGOs, the reforms provide public funding for NGOs to carry out activities of social protection, through outsourcing and contracting with MLSP, based on pre-established criteria and procedures.

Right Funding MLSP to implement social protection programs are only those NGOs that are registered in the register of associations of citizens in the MLSP. In order to register, the NGO must fulfill the conditions laid down in the Act: to actively work in the field of social protection and social policy at least three years from the date of establishment; have performed at least three projects in the field of social protection or social policy; to have adequate work space and staff; have proof of economic and financial performance and has a certificate from the Public Revenue Office for paid taxes and other public charges.

Standardisation of social services

Currently, SWC and social protection institutions operate on the basis of norms and standards by 1981. The process of preparation of updated norms and standards is an ongoing responsibility of the Institute for Social Activities (ISA). ISA informs that currently preparing new standards in terms of the necessary staff and technical and infrastructural conditions in the SWC and social institutions. Those standards are crucial for the regulation, promotion and increasing the quality of social services in the country. In addition, other rules are available: rules on norms and standards for establishment and commencement of operations of institutions for social protection, regulations for day care centers for children with disabilities, street children and children who abuse drugs, and the Centers for persons victims of domestic violence.

Licensed providers of verified programs

Centre for Adult Education and the Ministry of Education Science a decision to verify education programs for adults, where participants after training and passing receive certificates acquired competencies.

Such programs can verify educational institutions, educational schools and NGOs.

Both institutions are guided by standards for the preparation of the program and space to perform the training. The biggest problem appears in technical procedures, which are also rather to simplify the verification process, they further complicated although the informal education of adult which should be simpler.

To overcome these problems requires enhanced dialogue that will bring together key actors at the local level on a table and jointly create local plans for development of social protection, or local plans for development of social services that are crucial to many target groups elderly, disabled, youth, children, the homeless and people with rare diseases and many others.

Necessary to establish a fund to support social services, support from the business sector and individual donors, facilitating the process of licensing programs to produce professional staff. It takes pressure groups that will always be ready to give their contribution to changes in the legislation if it is established that they had not been effective and efficient. Also the implementation of all measures to give results in national strategies need government to allocate a budget for their implementation.

4. Policy options

Solutions offered to bridge the gaps:

1. Strengthened dialogue between the civil society organisations and the local authorities, the Parliament, the ministries relevant in the field of social protection and social services development
 - » Organizing round tables in 8 regions in Macedonia with key actors on local level
 - » Public debates open to general public to express their need and solutions
 - » Formalizing intersectional cooperation
2. Improving the existing legal regulation
 - » Forming a working group to prepare proposals of amendments in the field of social protection by IRIS-MK and representatives of the relevant ministries and commissions in the Parliament
3. Establishing a mechanism for a more efficient policy planning and protection programmes (social services) both locally and nationally
 - » Detailed comprehensive analysis of the need of citizens at the local level in the area of social protection
 - » Develop of local development plans for social services at local level
4. Development of models and plans for financial sustainability and subsidies by the country and ZELS (Association of the Units of Local Self-government of the Republic of Macedonia)
 - » Opportunities and ways to subsidize and sustainability of social services
5. Greater inclusion of the vulnerable groups in Macedonia
 - » Inclusion of vulnerable groups of people in the process of policy making at local and national level
6. Mutual preparation of programmes and protocols for licencing and providing minimum standards to the social services providers
 - » General minimum standards with the possibility of upgrading them for the social providers
 - » Develop and facilitate the administrative process of educational programs for professional staff to work in social services
 - » Licensing of personnel who will work in the social services

5. Recommendations

Our recommendation leads to better access to social services of the vulnerable groups, developing social services locally as a public private partnership between the civil society sector and the local self-government or the civil society sector. The amendment proposals to the Law on social protection should in essence enable more flexible access to social services, defined means to carry out this type on non-institutional social protection, stipulated minimum standards guaranteeing quality services as well as prescribed standards for the providers of such type of social services in order to obtain licences.

Local authorities need to take more account of social protection issues in the design and funding of municipal services. With chronically insufficient resources they need to explore new ways to provide services to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local public services. One of those tools is more power to local authorities, with greater participation of the local community.

Alternatives services

Alternatively it suggested using NGOs to offer social services, but the capacity of existing NGOs to provide services have not been fully assessed. At the same time, there are still no training centers and bodies for licensing and supervision. Small municipalities, especially in rural areas, can share the resources together to offer services. However, this process has not yet started.

Campaigns enabling citizens to receive adequate information regarding the manner to use social services and the type of arising benefit they will have in the future.

Starting cooperation between public institutions and the civil society sector and equal partners and recognizing the civil society sector as a social services provider.

The policies and measures stipulated in the National Strategies should be implemented in reality, i.e. the country must allocate certain budget to conduct these strategies which will enable facilitation and active inclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens concerning providing and receiving quality and prompt services.

The last but not least recommendation, hence the most important one, refers to subsidizing these social services by the country, i.e. establishing a social fund in which both the country and the local self-government units will provide assets for this fund, intended for the social services providers.

6. Conclusion

The final conclusion of the above needs intensive sector cooperation to overcome the existing situation for the better and availability of social services to end users. The existing legal regulations should be extended and improved and simplified in order to get to the end product for which we stand, and that is better quality life of our target group.

Formation of the pressing group should contribute to this enhanced dialogue between NGOs and state institutions, the key policy makers. It is also very important inclusion or opening the process of participation of target group or vulnerable category of citizens in the process of policy making at local and national level

Facilitating conditions but at the same time meeting the standards by providers of social services but extremely important is the staff that will work in these social services must to be professional and have undergone and appropriate process of education and certification and also license to work with users of social services.

Due to this, IRIS-MK will contribute on the one hand to encourage a dialogue, and resolve the bitter problem between the public policy makers and the civil society as a key link in this process, also to recognise the enormous needs for social services functioning and the quality of provided services, on the other hand we will enable improvement of intersectoral cooperation.

Target groups:

- » All people who need such social services.

Key actors:

- » The civil society sector, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Finance, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, the local self-government units, the business sector, the Institute, the Institute for Social Activities and the Social Welfare Centres, the Ministry of Education and Science.

Literature

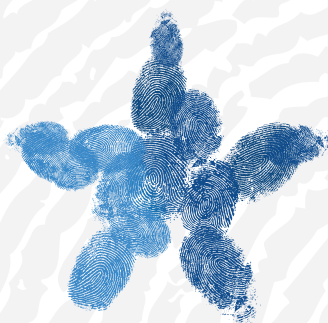
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- » **Rulebook for norms and standards for premises, equipment, expert staff and resources required for the establishment and commencement of operation of social care institution for the elderly**
<http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/pravilnicisocijalna/ПРАВИЛНИК%20ЗА%20НОРМАТИВИТЕ%20И%20СТАНДАРДИТЕ%20ЗА%20ПРОСТОР,%20ОПРЕМА,.pdf>
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<http://see-net.info/covgovmk/законска-рамка/>

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Responsible editor:
Aleksandra GLIGORVIĆ

Author:
Saško JOVANOVIĆ, Suzana NAJDOSKA GJORGIEVSKA



Contact us and keep in touch with our activities!

✉ iris@iris-see.eu

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