



ESPN Thematic Report on Social Investment Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2015

Maja Gerovska Mitev
January – 2015



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate D — Europe 2020: Social Policies
Unit D.3 — Social Protection and Activation Systems

Contact: Valdis ZAGORSKIS

E-mail: Valdis.ZAGORSKIS@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

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Former Yugoslav Republic of
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Summary

The social investment approach is not easily visible in the social policies of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. What prevails is attracting foreign direct investment as a main tool for tackling the country's high unemployment and poverty rates.

Access to formal and non-formal early childhood education and care has been increasing in the last few years. But this trend is not accompanied by improvements in the child-teacher ratio in public preschool facilities, or visible progress in relation to the discrimination faced by disabled children, Roma children etc. Government resources for Early Childhood Development are merely distributed on the basis of the existence of a physical facility rather than people's needs. This leads to a clear anti-rural bias, and, almost by implication, an anti-poor and anti-minority bias.

There has been an increase in the number of benefits aimed at families, but their introduction was part of the policy for population growth, rather than support of parents' participation in the labour market.

Social and child protection benefits are becoming more means-tested and restricted, and analysis also shows that only 20% of the poorest children have access to child allowance.

Maternal/parental schemes are mainly used in the public sector and in a limited number of private companies. Keeping a job in smaller and medium sized companies often translates into no real or minimal maternity/parental leave.

There is a trend towards increasing the amount of social protection benefits (social assistance and pensions) not according to current prices but according to fixed amounts (i.e. 5% of the benefit basis). Such an approach indicates only clientelistic goals and does not translate into improved living standards for social protection beneficiaries.

Activation measures for the unemployed are given greater emphasis, and there have been a number of newly introduced schemes for the activation of social assistance beneficiaries. However, the success of these active measures is not easily achieved in conditions where there is a low supply of jobs and a high demand for them with increased competition, considering the high number of unemployed people with higher education.

Fiscal consolidation was undertaken by widening the range of incomes subject to social contributions. This was mainly undertaken to maintain the solvency of public social insurance funds (i.e. the Pension and Disability Fund and the Health Insurance Fund). But the introduction of new fees was not associated with new rights (paid leaves, pension rights, etc.), which provoked a series of public demonstrations and protests.

Lack of transparent, accessible and harmonized data on government spending on social protection prohibits a more systematic analysis of the effectiveness of social transfers and the implementation of the social investment perspective.

Overall, within the social policy agenda, what prevails in the country is a non-coherent, non-integrated approach among separate social policies, but also between social and economic policy. More worrying is that a set of new Laws introduced in the last year was adopted without a more in-depth analysis and without wider public debate. Such manner of creation and adoption of social policies further distorts public confidence and trust in the public social protection system.

1 Assessment of overall approach to social investment

The concept of social investment, understood as “policies that raise the human capital stock (through early childhood education and care, vocational training, education and lifelong learning) and flows (through policies supporting female and single-parent employment, active labour market policy and other activation policies, and policies aimed at facilitating access to the labour market across the life course)”¹ has not yet entered the policy arena in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This does not imply that policy measures that target human development or activation towards the labour market do not exist, but rather that they are not integrated and that their intended goal is not social investment per se, but serve mainly other purposes (i.e. population growth, etc.). In the press, the concept of social investment is often confused with corporate social responsibility. The concept of social investment in wider use is also frequently associated with the social gains derived from the governmental focus on supporting and encouraging foreign direct investments.

Key social challenges (high unemployment, high poverty rate) are mainly tackled through economic measures, e.g. activation, focusing on creating new jobs, increasing foreign direct investment, all of which are seen as the main drivers for economic growth and thus reduced unemployment and poverty rates. However, as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia belongs to the group of countries that have “jobless growth”, the sole emphasis on economic paradigms in tackling big social challenges is not enough.

Early childhood education and care has focused on opening new facilities, particularly in rural areas, in order to increase capacity. However, there are big issues with child-staff ratios and access by marginalized groups (Roma, people with disabilities), which are not yet seriously confronted by the current government.

Although there has been an increased focus on measures relating to active labour market and other activation policies, their overall impact is negligible, given that unemployment was still high at 29.0% in 2013². The limited funding of ALMP at 0.11% of GDP (in 2011) is probably amongst reasons for its low impact. Maximum labour market flexibility was far more evident than real activation of people. However, it is difficult to make activation policies work due to low job creation on the labour market and the existence of widespread undeclared work.

The need for fiscal consolidation was undertaken by widening the range of incomes subject to social contributions. Namely, to maintain the solvency of the public social insurance funds (i.e. Pension and Disability Fund and the Health Insurance Fund), all incomes from honoraria (or remuneration based on work for hire and author’s contracts) as of 1st of January 2015 are subject to social contributions. However, the introduction of the new fees is not associated with new rights (paid leaves, pension rights, etc.).

Overall, within the social policy agenda, what prevails in the country is a non-coherent, non-integrated approach within social policy, but also between social and economic policy. More worrying is that a set of new Laws introduced in the last year was adopted without more in-depth analysis and without wider public debate. Such manner of creation and adoption of social policies further distorts public confidence and trust in the public social protection system. Similarly, lack of transparent, accessible and harmonised data on government spending related to social protection prohibits a more systematic analysis of the effectiveness of social transfers and the implementation of the social investment perspective. Currently, there are no initiatives which would suggest an improvement in this area (i.e. no initiatives for undertaking of a new Census, no initiation of an ESPROSS system related to social transfers, etc.).

¹ Hemerijck, A. and Vandenbroucke, A. (2012), Social Investment and the Euro crisis: the necessity of a unifying social policy concept, *Intereconomics*, 4:12, pp. 200-206.

² State Statistical Office (2014) Labour Force Survey 2013, Skopje: State Statistical Office.

2 Assessment of specific policy areas and measures/instruments

2.1 Support for early childhood development

2.1.1 Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

According to the State Statistical Office, access to early childhood education and care has continued to increase in the last few years. Namely, the gross enrolment rate of children aged 0 to 6 in institutions for education and care for children has increased from 12.9% in the school year 2010/2011 to 14.8% in 2012/13³. This increase is a result of governmental measures supporting the opening of new kindergartens, particularly in smaller and rural municipalities, but it also reflects significant efforts from donor and civil society organizations (i.e. UNICEF), for the informal education and care of children. The new Law on Early Childhood Development (ECD) adopted in February 2013 introduced the possibility of diversified ECD services (not just kindergartens, but also public, private, and civil society ECD centres). This, as well as the support from UNICEF and many private donors, contributed to the increase in coverage of children aged 3 to 6 in ECD from 34% in 2013 to 40% in 2014⁴.

There is a lack of indicators relating to the quality of ECEC. The existing ones (Table 1 and 2) show an imbalance in child/staff ratios, as well as low gross rate enrolments. According to the available research, the system of early childhood education and care in the country is faced with many challenges. The underlying causes of unequal access include: costs, distance, the lack of appropriate accessible facilities, discriminatory attitudes and preferential practices that constrain enrolment opportunities. Children with disabilities, Roma and Albanian children face discrimination from other children and their parents when they enrol. This, among other things, contributes to low enrolment in ECE programmes among ethnic communities, i.e. only 4% among Roma children and 3% among ethnic Albanians⁵. According to the social status, the majority of children who attend kindergartens are from families where both parents are employed, whereas 25% of them are from families where one (21%) or both (4%) parents are unemployed. Out of all enrolled children, only 4% use the possibility of full or partial fee waiver⁶. The number of children who use fee waiver corresponds with the number of enrolled children with both parents unemployed. The fee waiver is granted on the basis of means testing, where the overall financial condition of the family is assessed.

According to some analysis⁷, government resources for ECD are merely distributed on the basis of the existence of a physical facility rather than on people's needs. This leads to a clear anti-rural bias, and, almost by implication, an anti-poor and anti-minority bias. The analysis suggests that this approach should be replaced by the use of a per client expenditure norm.

2.1.2 Family benefits

In the last few years there has been an increase in the number of benefits aimed at families, but their introduction was part of the policy for population growth, rather than the activation of parents or the improvement of living standards for families with children. Among the newer family benefits is the "parental allowance for a child", provided to the mother for the third born child in the family (paid for 10 years).

³ State Statistical Office (2014) Institutions For Care and Education of Children - Kindergartens, 2013, Skopje: State Statistical Office.

⁴ Unicef Press Release (2014) Government and UNICEF take annual stock of progress achieved for children, http://www.unicef.org/tfymacedonia/media_27093.html

⁵ UNICEF (2013) Leave No Child Behind Building Equity for Children, Country Report: Findings of a Situation Analysis of girls and boys, Skopje: UNICEF.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ van Ravens, J. (2010) Fair Play, Skopje: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Another novelty (since 2009) is a mother's right to financial assistance for the fourth born child, which is given as a "social pension" to mothers who are unemployed and do not have a pension when they turn 62. Both these benefits are much higher than "traditional" family benefits, such as child allowance, special child allowance, social financial assistance, etc. given through the child protection or social protection laws. For illustration, these new family benefits whose monthly amount is 8,000 MKD (€130) are twice as high as the special allowance and one-off compensation for the first-born child, and 4.5 times higher than the traditional child allowance. This implies that the goal of population growth is much better funded than the goal of investing in child protection and care, and indirectly the parents' labour market participation.

2.1.3 Parenting services

Apart from regular parental services provided by the Centres for Social Work (CSW), a novelty in this respect has been the opening of 11 regional counselling centres for families and marriage during 2013. Although the counselling these centres provide is free of charge, they lack adequate training and resources (human and financial) to assist with more targeted support related to new family risks (i.e. support for reconciliation of family/work balance, support for lone parents who are on low incomes, counselling for victims of family violence, etc.).

2.2 Supporting parents' labour market participation

2.2.1 Child Care

Attendance at public institutions for education and care for children carries a fee, unless a family's low income entitles them to a fee waiver. In 2015, it is expected that 2000 families will use this right⁸. This number represents 6.86% of all children enrolled in kindergartens (based on the latest number of children enrolled in kindergartens for 2013).

Apart from limited funding, there are also other challenges associated with the traditional child protection cash benefits (child allowance, special allowance and one-off compensation for the first-born child). For instance, child allowance is not integrated as a top-up for families that receive social financial assistance (minimum income). On the contrary, social financial assistance beneficiaries are not allowed to apply for child allowance. Greater selectivity and targeting is a continuing trend in child protection benefits, as out of five child protection benefits and rights, two are universal (lump sum financial aid for the first born, and parental allowance), while three are targeted (child allowance, special child allowance and participation). Also, UNICEF analysis⁹ of social and child protection benefits shows that child allowance has unusual targeting as only 20% of the beneficiaries are among the poorest. In addition, their estimates show that almost 14,000 households with children who are in the poorest quintile are eligible for social protection benefit (social financial assistance,) but not for children allowance (p.29, 2011). The inclination towards greater targeting might increase the risk of access to benefits by those most vulnerable, as there are greater costs involved in the procedure (application, required documentation, etc.) and more chances for lower take up of benefits.

2.2.2 Long-term care

The existing system of long-term care in the country consists of an institutionalized system of social and health care services provision, and some services provided at community level. The scope of service provision is specified in the Laws on Health Protection, on Health Insurance and on Social Protection. The existing legal provisions are covering long-term care protection in terms of service provision to elderly persons,

⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2014) Programme for child protection in 2015.

⁹ UNICEF (2013) Strengthening Social Protection for Children: Analysis and Recommendations for a more Equitable and Efficient Child Benefit System, Skopje: UNICEF.

persons with physical or mental disabilities and deprived populations in need of assistance in carrying out daily activities¹⁰.

The current system of long-term care is based on familialist model. For example, only 0.3% of the elderly population is housed in institutions¹¹. Palliative care, as well as home-based support and day care centres, is in the first stages of implementation. There are a growing number of private homes for the elderly, but these can only be afforded by those well-off. Despite the lack of more evidence based data in this respect, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are large numbers of informal carers, mostly spouses and adult children, as well as a wider pool of relatives. Also, the majority of the carers are believed to be women, contributing to the phenomenon of "welfare women". This in many respects prohibits more direct participation of women in the formal labour market, particularly among certain ethnic communities (Albanian women, Turkish women).

2.2.3 Maternal/parental leave schemes

Working women receive statutory maternity leave compensation for the duration of 9 months, or 12 months if they give birth to more than one child at a time. Maternity leave compensation is 100% of their wage, provided that they were previously employed for at least for six consecutive months, and that contributions for health insurance were regularly paid.

An incentive that supports women returning to the labour market is the provision which stipulates that if women return to work earlier they have the right to receive both their salary and 50% of the maternity leave compensation during the remaining period of their maternity leave. Data from the Health Insurance Fund shows that this right has only minimal uptake, as only 5% of all women on paid maternity leave have used it in 2013¹².

In addition to paid maternity leave there is the possibility to take unpaid parental leave (available to either parent) for three months, which may be used until the child is 3.

Taking into consideration the high level of undeclared work in the country, as well as the high unemployment, it may be assumed that the maternal leave scheme is fully used mainly in the public sector, and it is mostly in this sector that maternal leave provides important support for parental labour market participation.

2.3 Policy measures to address social and labour market exclusion

2.3.1 Unemployment benefits

Unemployment benefits are paid as part of the contributory social insurance (financial compensation in case of unemployment) and as part of the non-contributory tax financed social assistance (social financial assistance/minimum income). The former is paid only to those who have at least nine months of consecutive employment (and thus contributory record), and the benefit duration is 12 months. In practice, this benefit is paid only to those who have become unemployed as a result of redundancy and insolvency of their companies. Hence, those who have become unemployed as a result of mobbing, irregular wages or other reasons cannot acquire their statutory right. The number of beneficiaries of (contributory) financial compensation in case of unemployment is constantly decreasing. In December 2014 there were 13,193 beneficiaries, that is a decrease of almost 50% compared with four years earlier¹³. The

¹⁰ Dimitrievska, V. (2010) "The model of long-term care in R. Macedonia" in *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 5: 469-486.

¹¹ ASISP (2014) Country Document Update, Pensions, Health and Long-term Care, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

¹² Health Insurance Fund (2014) Annual Report 2013, Skopje: Health Insurance Fund.

¹³ Agency for Employment (2014) Review of registered unemployed persons

reduction of beneficiaries of unemployment compensation can be noted both in relation to the contributory and non-contributory social protection system. There is no publicly available analysis of the number of applicants and breakdown of successful and unsuccessful awards.

In both cases the reason for the decrease in beneficiaries may be linked to the rigid entitlement criteria for accessing benefits. In the case of contributory social insurance, the main issue is that only workers from previously state-owned companies who were made redundant are eligible for this unemployment compensation. Hence, as their number decreases throughout the years, so does the number of beneficiaries. On the other hand, criteria related to eligibility for social assistance (from the non-contributory social protection system) have also been tightened, which has involved the exchange of data concerning official application documentation between institutions. Hence, many previous cases of misuse of this benefit (due to falsification of these documents by the beneficiaries) have been reduced. Another important aspect which contributes to the low number of beneficiaries is the very low income ceiling, as a basis for income testing. These prevent many households, though they are at risk of poverty, to apply for this benefit.

2.3.2 Minimum income

Financial Social Assistance, which is a general non-contributory benefit, provides financial help for individuals or households who cannot provide for their basic needs at the minimum living standard. The amount of the social financial assistance is pretty low (€40 per month for an individual in 2014). It represents 11% of the average net salary paid in January 2014 (21,327 MKD; €345), 21.2% of the average paid pension in 2013 (11,565 MKD, €187.5) and 30.4% of the minimum wage in 2013 (8,050 MKD, €130.50). The amount of social financial assistance is also lower than the poverty threshold. In 2012 the poverty threshold (defined at 60% of median equalised income) was set at 67,200 MKD i.e. €1,086 (the annual income per adult equivalent). The amount of monthly social financial assistance (2,451 MKD or €40) for an individual in 2012 is therefore almost twice as low as the monthly poverty threshold (5,600 MKD or €90.58).

Such low levels of social financial assistance directly contribute to the increase in the number of people living below the poverty line¹⁴. In addition, the indexation of social assistance according to prices was changed when the Law on Social Protection was amended in 2014, and the adjustment was fixed at only 5% of the current basis of social assistance.

To support the inclusion into secondary education of children living in socially vulnerable families, a grant from the World Bank is used (conditional cash transfers) which provides a modest financial subsidy (1,000 MKD or 16.2 Euro monthly) to all high school students whose parents are social assistance beneficiaries, provided they regularly attend school.

As ESSPROS data is not available, one proxy indicator that may be taken into consideration is the World Bank calculation of public spending on social assistance as % of GDP¹⁵. According to this data, the country spends 1.1% of GDP on social assistance cash benefits. This is comparatively lower than in all the countries in the region which shared the same social protection system as FYR Macedonia until the 90s (Croatia 3.85% of GDP, Bosnia and Herzegovina 3.4%, Slovenia 2.3% and Serbia 2%).

Overall, the national minimum income scheme is not an adequate tool for tackling poverty; it supports dependency rather than exit to the labour market, and fares badly in relation to the concept of social investment.

<http://www.avrm.gov.mk/content/Statisticki%20podatoci/Noemvri%202014/Nevrabeteni112014.pdf>

¹⁴ European Commission (2014) European Minimum Income Network, Country Report Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Analysis of Minimum Income Schemes in EU Member States.

¹⁵ The World Bank (2012) Activation and Smart Safety Nets in FYR Macedonia: Constraints in Beneficiary Profile, Benefit Design and institutional Capacity, Western Balkans Activation Study Team, Skopje, The World Bank.

2.3.3 Active labour market policies

Policies and measures aimed at improving the employability of those furthest from the labour market are stipulated in the National Action Plan for Employment (the latest is for the period 2014-2015), and in the Operational Plan for Active Programmes and Measures for Employment (the latest is for 2014). The analysis of these measures, particularly in the Operational Plan, suggests several types of programmes: (i) self-employment; (ii) employment subventions; (iii) giving land for agricultural use to social assistance recipients; (iv) traineeship and trainings; and (vi) public works. Active programmes aimed at inclusive growth are focused on the following categories of people at risk: social assistance beneficiaries, children without parents and parental care, victims of family violence, homeless people, ex-drug users, parents of children on the streets, single parents, parents with more than four children, Roma, long-term unemployed and others. Although there is a large list of stipulated groups at risk, the actual numbers offered by the programmes do not ensure wide coverage. For example, only 100 unemployed from identified groups at risk may apply for subvention programmes compared to 500 positions offered for other unemployed. This inequality mainly results from the limited funding given for ALMP, but also from the targeting goal, which obviously prefers those where less resources are needed for activation, and those more capable of retaining the job (i.e. better qualified).

Success of these active measures is not easily achieved in conditions where there is a low supply of jobs and high demand with increased competition, taking into account the large number of unemployed people with higher education. According to the World Bank Report¹⁶, spending on active labour market programmes is low compared to regional standards. Although a spend of €30 per unemployed person is in line with other Western Balkan countries, it is still much lower than some of the new EU Member States (e.g. €95 in Bulgaria and €165 in Lithuania). In addition, low financing of active labour market measures (0.12% of GDP for active measures in 2010) and lack of follow up and evaluation further prevents their effective use.

2.3.4 Social Services

Apart from cash benefits, Social Work Centres provide range of services to people at risk. People who are in receipt of social assistance are provided with free health insurance, have the right to apply for social housing, and are included in activation measures. However, horizontal cooperation between relevant institutions (i.e. Social Work Centres, Centres for Employment, Health and Pension Insurance Funds, etc.) lacks a more coordinated approach, mostly because of the work overload of these institutions, but also because of the absence of a more general integrated approach to social service provision.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Appendix

Table 1: Coverage in institutions for care and education of children - kindergartens (gross rates)

	TOTAL				FEMALE		
	Age	Total children	Population at the same age (31.12 each year)	Gross rate	Total children	Population at the same age (31.12 each year)	Gross rate
2010/2011	From 0 to 6+	23 157	183 145	12.64	11 427	88 559	12.90
2011/2012		25 056	182 451	13.73	12 254	88 200	13.89
2012/2013		26 885	182 734	14.71	13 081	88 364	14.80

Source: State Statistical Office, 2014

Table 2: Children and employees in formal day care services (0 to 6+)

Total	Children	Employees	Nursing staff	Teaching staff	Other
2012	26885	3937	1524	1015	1398
2013	29113	4087	1600	1048	1439

Source: State Statistical Office, 2014 (footnote 2)

Table 3: At risk of poverty rate and severe material deprivation rate

	At risk of poverty rate		Severe material deprivation rate	
	Children 0-17	Total	Children 0-17	Total
2010	32.1	27.0	36.1	34.7
2011	32.8	26.8	42.0	40.3
2012	31.5	26.2	42.5	40.9

Source: State Statistical Office, 2014¹⁷

Table 4: Part time employment, Unemployment, and Persons not looking for job due to care of children

	Part time employment		Unemployed		Persons not looking for job	
	Total	Due to care of children/disabled	All	Due to care of children/disabled	All	Due to care for children
2013	31337	709	136828	639	711927	39796

Source: State Statistical Office, 2014¹⁸

¹⁷State Statistical Office (2014) News Release No. 4.1.14.95, Laeken Poverty Indicators in 2012.

¹⁸ State Statistical Office (2014) Labour Force Survey 2013, Skopje : State Statistical Office.

Table 5: Long-term unemployment

	% of long term unemployment					Long term unemployment rate				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total	81.9	83.3	82.6	82.1	82.5	26.3	26.7	25.9	25.5	23.9
Men	82.5	83.7	83.6	83.0	82.7	26.2	26.7	26.6	26.1	24.0
Women	80.8	82.7	81.0	80.7	82.2	26.5	26.7	24.9	24.5	23.8

Source: See footnote 14.

Table 6: Life-long learning

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
%	3.3	3.2	3.4	4.0	3.5

Source: See footnote 14.

Table 7: People aged 0-59 living in households with very low work intensity, by gender, 2010-2012

	2010	2011	2012
Total	24.5	20.0	19.9
Males	24.3	19.3	19.5
Females	24.6	20.8	20.3

Source: See footnote 13.

Table 8: Poverty rate by activity status

	2010			2011			2012		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Employed	9.4	10.3	8.0	10.2	11.2	8.5	11.1	11.9	9.8
Unemployed	50.1	56.4	41.5	48.7	57.1	37.3	46.5	52.7	37.9
Pensioners	14.0	17.2	10.5	13.0	17.5	6.4	14.1	19.4	5.0
Other inactive	34.6	31.1	35.4	34.8	26.8	36.6	33.0	26.6	34.3

Source: See footnote 13.

