



The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia introduces free day care for children from low-income single parents

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The Government of FYR Macedonia has introduced a fee-waiver for the costs of public day care (kindergartens) for low-income single parents. While this step contributes to the affordability of childcare, it also reinforces the trend towards providing childcare support only to certain categories of households.

Description

While the number of single parent families in the country is not so large (1.6% of all households with at least one child aged less than 18 years old in 2016), the evidence shows that they experience a high risk of poverty. According to the 2016 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (State Statistical Office, 2017), there was a significant increase in the at-risk-of-poverty rate among single parents with dependent children (i.e. children less than 18 years old or children aged 18-24 who are inactive and live with their parents) in the period 2014-2016: from 22.0% to 37.5%. Also, administrative data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy show 286 single parents (with children up to the age of 3) receiving permanent financial assistance, and 1895 additional beneficiaries of social financial assistance (with children above 3 years of age), who have an income below the poverty threshold of 6,880 denars (€111) per month.

After consideration of these trends, the Government, in March 2018, introduced a 100% fee-waiver for the costs of public day care (kindergartens) for single parents whose total income is below the country's minimum wage (12,000 denars or €195).

Before adoption of this regulation, fees could be waived, according to the conditions determined by the bylaws. These stated that "participation in the

cost of childcare can be provided to a child whose family income situation has deteriorated due to the consequences of a natural disaster (floods, earthquake, fire, etc.)". The minimum amount that could be waived was 30% and the maximum 100%.

The current price for full-time public child care, including two meals and snacks per day, is 1,490 denars monthly (€25). The cost is heavily subsidised by the state.

Outlook & commentary

The Governmental Work Programme (2017-2020) has indicated that "single parent families with incomes below the average wage will be supported for their costs related to use of public services (taxes, public transport, public day care)" (2017, p.10). This initial plan probably proved to be very costly, so in fact the support is only being provided to those single parents with incomes below the minimum wage.

According to a press statement from the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, this "represents a first step towards supporting care for the most vulnerable categories. A progressive payment formula is underway, which will increase the number of categories eligible for a full or partial fee-waiver" (Press Release, 2018).

Although it is important to waive fees for low-income single parent families,

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we should emphasise that this “category-based” approach to providing support leads not only to stigma among its beneficiaries, but also disregards the needs of other vulnerable groups, such as households with three and more dependent children. This “category-based” approach is also taken to the provision of financial assistance from social protection, creating a perception that social protection is not “rights-based” but “profile-based”.

In general, while this fee-waiver may ease the living costs of some single parents, from the perspective of the overall family budget, it will not significantly lower their living expenses. Thus, the sole impact of this measure, if not accompanied with comprehensive support (employment, activation, etc.) is not expected to make such families less vulnerable to poverty.

Further reading

Official Gazette No. 48/18.

Press release (2018):

<https://www.press24.mk/mila-carovska-od-ovaa-godina-kje-profunkcioniraat-mali-grupni-domovi-za-podobra-grizha-za>

Socijal Demokratski Sojuz na Makedonija (2017) Governmental Work Programme 2017-2020: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/Gis/Upload/PDF/Predlog%20Programa%20za%20rabota%20na%20ladata%202017-2020.pdf>

State Statistical Office (2017), “Survey on Income and Living Conditions – 2016”, Skopje: SSO.

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