



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

Venue: Hybrid meeting with physical presence in hotel Alexander Palace and ZOOM platform, hosted by Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)

Date: 18.5.2023, Thursday, 10:00 - 14:40

Meeting moderated by Ms. Trenkoska, MLSP representative.

Invited 135 attendees, 88 attendees were present during physical and online meeting.

First session

Opening statements

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP) in the role of moderator, opened the meeting with a short introduction for the meeting’s purpose and its agenda. She mentioned thematic priorities planned to be presented and discussion sessions (on employment and jobs creation, youth employment, social dialogue, financing of social entrepreneurship, social policy/ inclusion, social services, child protection and Roma integration), as well the importance of having feed-back by donors and sharing information on different projects and constrains.

Opening statements were done by Ms. Jovanka Trenchevska, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Mr. Jeton Shaqiri, Minister of Education and Science and Mr. Ferruccio Bogo, First Counsellor and Deputy Head of Section European Integration, Political, Press and Information, Delegation of the European Union.

Ms. Trenchevska, Minister of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), welcomed all those present at the 12th SWG plenary meeting. She noted on the enormous challenges, reforms and the accession process of the Republic of North Macedonia to European Union and efforts aimed at reviving national economy from recent pandemic and still-ongoing energy and price-related crisis.

As a crucial importance, she pointed out reaching a consensus over the reforms being carried out and changes needed to be made in medium and long term, as well as to tackle current challenges, through an inclusive process, dialogue and partnership with relevant stakeholders, thereby ensuring that the joint efforts aimed at fulfilling the priorities relating to national growth and development. Additionally, she noted that human capital development through different approaches and opportunities, including support for young people in labour market, social inclusion and full support provided to persons exposed to social risk enable accelerated and sustainable economic growth and development towards a better living standard. The areas making up the core of national policies and legislation must envisage equal opportunities, labour market access, and fair working conditions and inclusiveness, all of which would be aimed at creating a fair and sustainable economy and improving the living standard of citizens, especially most vulnerable categories thereof, thus striving to completely eradicate the poverty.

Ms. Trenchevska informed about the new Law on Labour Relations, developed through a broad process of participation of and consultation with all relevant entities, would aim to advance legal framework for protection of workers' rights and to harmonize it with the European Union directives and the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. In fact, key novelties of this law are new forms of employment contracts, establishment of transparent and predictable working conditions and creation of decent jobs, equal opportunities for workers with family responsibilities, introduction of paternity and parental leave and so on.

Effective functioning of social dialogue at all levels, youth employment policies, youth guarantee, employment of Roma, long-term unemployed and low-skilled persons and persons with disabilities are priority goals of labour market policies for next period.

Furthermore, social economy could offer excellent potential for social integration, activation of vulnerable groups of citizens and jobs creation. New Draft Law on Social Enterprises would regulate definition of social enterprises, basic characteristics of social enterprises, legal recognition and creation of a register of social enterprises, establishment of a structure for continuous services of education, counseling and financial support for development of social enterprises.

The reforms in social protection and inclusion area, especially redesigned social assistance and recently introduced guaranteed minimum assistance for citizens who do not have enough means of subsistence, established system of licensing of social service providers with more than 80 licensed social service providers, deinstitutionalization process and decentralization of social policies, investments in child protection and ensuring greater accessibility in preschool education and care, are priority goals aimed to improve situation and create opportunities for a prosperous life for all citizens.

High priority of human capital development could be achieved through credible sectoral policies aimed at concrete and visible results, which, needless to say, had to be jointly implemented and supported, said Ms. Trenchevska.

Mr. Shaqiri, Minister of Education and Science (MES), welcomed all those present at the 12th SWG plenary meeting and he noted that one of the key challenges for the Republic of North Macedonia is the strengthening of human capital for



inclusive economic development, and in that context, the quality of the educational system is the basis for meeting this challenge. He presented the reform processes which are underway in the national education system, however bigger investments still need to be made in order to improve learning outcomes and build a safe environment for every student and participant in the educational process. Regarding the legislation, the Ministry of Education and Science has harmonized texts for the new laws, the Law on Adult Education and the Law on Vocational Education and Training, based on the opinions of competent institutions. Regarding the Law on Secondary Education, the procedure of harmonizing the final version of the text of the Law with other institutions is ongoing. The goal is to organize inclusive education, democratic participation of students, the work of the Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training, as well as learning for sustainable development in separate chapters. In addition, the European Framework of Skills for Sustainable Lifelong Learning and the recommendations for the Learning Council for Environmental Sustainability will be taken as a common basis in the process of developing a new Concept for Secondary Education. The recent unfortunate event in a school in neighboring Serbia still has a strong response in our country; support in these situations is important for both students and adults. All this confirmed the fact that the well-being of students and a safe environment for development are a prerequisite for achieving good school results. The work of professional services should be the core of building a climate of support in schools. In the past few months, the Ministry of Education and Science has been working on the professional development of professional associates. With the Bureau for Development of Education, a Program for psychosocial help and support in primary and secondary schools was developed to strengthen the capacities of professional associates to work with students to improve their mental health and provide psychosocial support. Around 700 primary and secondary school mental health professionals have been trained in this programme and are part of communities of exchange and peer support. The network of professional collaborators will take a leading role at the school level in dealing with the challenges of this period. Mental health and the well-being of children should be part of reforms at any educational level. In the new Law on secondary education, the principle of the well-being of students is highlighted. Fundamental reform has been launched in secondary vocational education to form young people who are ready to meet the demands of the labor market. Part of the changes undertaken with the establishment of Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Science aimed at innovation culture at the regional and national levels. The aspirations of the Ministry of Education and Science are aimed at providing: A higher level of autonomy to the Regional Vocational Education and Training Centers with the aim of greater flexibility and quick reaction to new skills, quick return to work of adults, and quick entry into the labor market of young people, etc. • Building close partnerships with employers from both the public and private sectors; Modulating vocational education programs and expanding them with higher levels of qualifications. Developing a credit transfer system. Promoting excellence in VET. All these priorities are identified in the Concept for the establishment of Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training, adopted in April 2022; in that direction, the Concept for the secondary education of adults was also adopted. Currently, the Department of Secondary Education, in cooperation with the three Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training (RCSOO), is working on the final verification of the technical specifications for the procurement of equipment. The purchase of equipment for Kiro Burnaz RCSO and Vancho Pitoshevski RCSO is worth 85 million denars. In addition, the purchase of IT equipment and equipment for RCSOO Moshka Pijade is planned at a value of 220 million denars. Regarding the legislation, the Ministry of Education and Science has harmonized texts for the new laws, the Law on Adult Education and the Law on Vocational Education and Training, based on the opinions of competent institutions. Regarding the Law on Secondary Education, the procedure of harmonizing the final version of the text of the Law with other institutions is ongoing. The goal is to organize inclusive education, democratic participation of students, the work of the Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training, as well as learning for sustainable development in separate chapters. In addition, the European Framework of Skills for Sustainable Lifelong Learning and the recommendations for the Learning Council for Environmental Sustainability will be taken as a common basis in the process of developing a new Concept for Secondary Education. The importance of the exchange of information was seen within the framework of the social dialogue that the Ministry of Education and Science conducts with the business community, professional schools, and local governments. That is, through the "Study smart, work professionally" campaign, which has been continuously implemented for the past three years, local needs for certain professional profiles are identified, which are already part of the enrollment policy for secondary vocational schools. It was in cooperation with the business community that the value of the Concept of dual education was confirmed. In the academic year 2021/2022, 1486 students were enrolled in the dual model of education in 46 schools in cooperation with 220 companies, while in the current academic year 2022/2023, 2763 were enrolled—students in 61 schools in cooperation with 450 companies. For the first time, the new Law on Secondary Education defines career counseling and career counselor as a separate category. The establishment of Career Centers is planned. Only in such a way, that is, with the systematic introduction of career counselors, the expected results can be obtained for the correct guidance of students when choosing a future career and by the supply and demand of the labor market. The system for monitoring high school graduates after completing formal education has already been created – the Tracer System. Data will be collected directly from students after they graduate, as well as from employers. It is placed on a special portal, anketi.mon.gov.mk, at which every high school graduate will be able to access simply by logging in, providing introductory information about themselves and their secondary vocational education, and then filling out three questionnaires. The process is of great importance because the collected data will be the basis for creating future educational policies in the area of secondary vocational education.

Mr. Ferruccio Bogo, First Counsellor and Deputy Head of Section European Integration, Political, Press and Information, Delegation of European Union (EUD), highlighted that North Macedonia entered into new stage of EU integration, at the same time as challenge and opportunity. He noted that process would be opportunity as based on concept of early integration and early alignment with EU standards should include unique social model, based on sustainability,



equal opportunities and no one left behind principles. North Macedonia have had a progress on its path. Guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA), Youth Guarantee (YG) and new generation of Social Services would be excellent example that country could deliver on its political commitment. Challenge would be that an accession would require new dynamics in reforms, such as conversions with EU levels of income, labour productivity and skills. Priority should remain on labour market challenge, including low labor participation, skills mismatch and labor market exclusion.

He highlighted that EU would continue to support North Macedonia financially, but also throw transfer of successful practices and knowledge from EU member states. He conveyed his gratitude and appreciation that MLSP for engaging the development of four-year Sectoral Operational Programme (SOP) and establishment of Managing Authority (MA) which would take main responsibilities for successful implementation of EU funds. This SOP could become a game changer, removing barriers to labour market participation (especially for youth and women) and improving quality of social services.

Mr. Bogo also encouraged MES to engage with EU Delegation and Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA) in developing robust Programme for strengthening human capital and providing Macedonian youth with the opportunity to acquire quality skills. Multilateral dialogue evolving authorities, donors, partners and civil society, should be one of tools to support reform process. He noted as important during the meeting should be to review the way on coordination and balance of political and technical discussions. According to him, SWG should be central to improving capacities of national authorities to coordinate, monitor and communicate on reforms. He highlighted that the EU Delegation proposes to all partners to reflect on a new organization of SWG’s. These were EUD’s proposals:

1. Focus technical discussion on subsector and specific challenges in expert groups meetings. Technical meeting would take place more regularly and would prepare plenary meetings, to be held twice per year. This would enhance ownership of line ministries and at the same time would provide more space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which some time tent to be more proactive in expert groups than in plenary sessions.
2. Engage better donors and international partners, taking full advantage of resources and expertise. This would involve raising role of key donors in organizing and conducting SWG’s. The SUPRAE experts would remain in charge of technical aspects, providing support to ministries and donors.
3. Increase ownership of SEA to ensure that Sector Reforms would be hand in hand with EU negotiations agenda.
4. Encourage participation of CSOs in technical and plenary meetings, by ensuring regular information with resource center and cooperation with CSOs.
5. Introduce and publish online regular calendar of SWGs.

At the end, he noted that jointly to reflect on these proposals in coming months and discuss on next meeting.

➤ Presentation of Third Self-Assessment Report for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education “EU for Youth”

Ms. Slavkoska, IPA Coordinator and State Advisor for European Integration and International Cooperation in MLSP, referred to more important things done in last year about labour market and employment policies. As stated in the Progress Report, she noted progress in terms of National Employment Strategy, but also the Revised Employment and Social Reform Programme completed with implementation in 2022. Plan for Implementation of Youth Guarantee has been implemented and new one adopted, as well as Annual Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures. On general issues in 2022, she mentioned shocks of non-economic nature, which are reflected upon labour market. Economy dropped, also uncertainty occurred about the companies’ employees, but the economy also dealt with energy crisis and price crisis which was highest in last ten years. Regardless on it, the analysis has shown that situation in labor market, if considered through key indicators, have marked certain improvements and generally the mark could be to manage to achieve strategic targets defined in r ESRP for 2022, said Ms. Slavkoska. As she mentioned, main indicators, for an example, employment rate which last year reached 47.3 %, then employment rate of young people which also marked an increase of 34.4% in 2022, all those improved in 2022 compared to 2021. In terms of age group 26 to 62, all the indicators were also improved, and she noted achievement of targets defined in rESRP.

Youth unemployment rate has decreased, but starting from the pandemic, rate of inactive population has increased and an aim of measures and programmes to them. Also, various activities were implemented as beneficial which should encourage population to come back in labour market.

In parallel with an improvement of situation in labour market, she noted also positive movements due to salaries. As an example, the average salary has reached 32 thousand MKD last year. It was not decreased during the pandemic due to several facts: subsidies given (as one of Governmental measures), thus the unemployment rate had not decreased, there was a deficiency of skilled workers, informed Ms. Slavkoska. Also, it was a result of the growth of certain sectors, such as IT sector and a growth of minimum salary. Minimum salary in March reached a high 18 thousand MKD, as a significant increase compared to the previous period and affected average salary, as well.

Ms. Slavkoska mentioned several inputs and measures implemented in the employment sector. MLSP continued with implementation of Active Labour Market Measures (ALMMs), whereas over 18 thousand unemployed persons benefited from the activities of Employment Service Agency (ESA), and almost half of them were women. Then, there was an increase in trend of ALMMs as a commitment defined in the National Employment Strategy, which through more than 30 thousand young persons and other vulnerable groups received an assistance and support for employment.



She noted that Youth Guarantee (YG) has been also successfully implemented for around 20 thousand young people enrolled in YG and according to data, 43% of young people registered had received training and was offered an employment within 4 months. YG was implemented adequately. Majority of people who had participated in YG were women and as positive outcome has been that they found an employment. Also, she pointed out on other issues such as continuation of preparation of New Labour Relations Law.

A significant progress could be noted due to strengthening of national services and continuation of social dialogue. In terms of policies implementation, a certain increase of collective agreements at branch level has been increased. Gender gap on labor market has marked certain decrease. In addition to preparation of New Labour Relations Law, a Programme that aloud or enabled social security of women was implemented. As well, the continuation and extension of capacities for preschool education and care has contributed to increase of participation of women in labour market. MLSP implemented different approaches that aimed activation of Roma people, beneficiaries of Guaranteed Minimum Assistance (GMA and a process of preparation of solution for certain categories of informal employees has been under preparation, so that they would become a part of formal economy and to get access to insurance, summarized Ms. Slavkoska. New Law on Social Entrepreneurship would provide opportunities for these people to establish enterprises.

NEET rate among young people 15-29 in North Macedonia has recorded permanent and systematic decline. In 2022, an improvement could be noted, but a fact is evident more than 73 thousand young people are still not part of education nor employment or training (NEET) and YG would come in. Last year, an increase of youth by 4% could be noted as part of YG, but an increase also might be noted of persons who have successfully managed to leave YG, found a job, continued their education, etc. Due to educational structure, most of participants in YG have had secondary education than primary education, smaller number were with tertiary education. Last year, field activities continued which were stopped due to pandemic. In April 2023, New Implementation Plan for YG was adopted, which in terms of its structure and type is totally harmonized with EC recommendations. Its estimated budget is about 55.7 million EUR. Around 90 % of YG budget would be provided by the Budget of country and its remaining part would be donated by other donors. YG plan has envisaged very ambitious reforms both in terms of vocational education and training and adult education, also in LM part. Other novelties are enhasement of tracking and monitoring of entire process and harmonization with EC requirements and in same time, high accent on quality of employment system should be put, types of contracts should be signed etc.

High emphasize has been also put on partnership, not only that MLSP should be harmonizing and leading the process, but all other stakeholders should take ownership that have important role in terms of its implementation. She briefly presented indicators. First general indicator was employment of young women and men and in 2022, it was measured on 34.4% and target planned in the programme has been overachieved. A good progress and overachievement of target for employment rate of women aged 25 to 29 years, but that was not a case for number of women aged 15 to 24, which have been lagging behind target.

Ms. Kostoska, IPA Coordinator and Deputy Head of Department for European Integration in MES, referred that the policies are based on Education Strategy 2018-2025 for which regular reports for its` implementations are prepared on annual basis. Additionally, the MoES works on the new legislation (Law on Secondary Education, Law on VET and the Law on Adult Education). Currently 3 Concepts – (Concept of primary education, Development Concept for the establishment of a Regional VET Centre and the Concept for secondary education of adults are used for leading the educational reforms. Sectoral approach for preparation of the new Youth Strategy 2023-2027 started with opening of the public debate in October 2022. The reforms that are ongoing are: new funding formulas in primary and secondary education in order to have better rationalization of the network of schools, Inclusive education and digitalization. For the Quality education a new reform was started with the introduction of the National Testing. The State Examination Center trained more than 4000 teachers for achieving better results on national and international tests. The Ministry of Education and Science is currently implementing reforms in secondary vocational education aimed at the mismatch between the skills acquired in the educational process and the skills required in the labor market. This gap leads to high unemployment among young people and hinders the competitiveness of the economy.

In the past years, the Ministry of Education and Science, in an intensive dialogue with companies, chambers of commerce, and local governments, discovering the need for opening new educational profiles and classes in schools and improving the practical training of students. Through the campaign "Study smart, work professionally" in the past years, the necessary profiles at the local level have been accurately determined and enabled the opening of new professional profiles that are required on the market by companies and promote the dual model of education. In the academic year 2021/2022, after a large number of activities carried out in the direction of promoting secondary vocational education and connecting the business sector with secondary vocational schools, 1486 students are enrolled in the dual model of education in 46 schools in cooperation with 220 companies, while in the academic year 2022/2023, the number has increased, and 2763 students are enrolled in 61 schools in cooperation with 450 companies. Regarding the improving the learning environment and the quality of vocational education and training at the moment we have 3 Regional Centers for Vocational Education and Training, and reconstructions are ongoing, in Kumanovo and Ohrid the processes are in final stage, additionally it was prepared tenders for supply of equipment for all 3 RVET Centers. In the school year 2021/2022 altogether 400 students were enrolled in the 1st year of study in all VET programmes in the 3 RVETCs, and in the school`s year 2022/2023 – 476 students were enrolled in the 1st year of study in all VET programmes in the three RVETCs. Significant progress was made in boosting VET education at secondary level. The rate of student`s participation in the VET system is marked by a constant increase: 64% in 2021. Compared to 62,1% in 2020 and 61,8% in 2019. During the next two school years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 the growth of students` enrollment in secondary VET at state level remains stable respectively 67% and 69%.



Continuous monitoring of students' achievements during and after completion of their education is introduced with piloting of the Tracer study. The tracer system was established as a web-based platform for communication with graduates. Each VET&AE graduate should easily register to the system placed on official web of the MoES. Implementation of the Tracer system covers all 75 VET schools and 79 AE providers countrywide, and the targeted population is approximately 11000 graduates from 2022/2023 cohort. The quality of the VET was strengthened by trained 350 VET teachers for the realization of new modularly designed VET curricula, additionally 180 teachers and professional associates were trained as career counsellors and 130 teachers trained for Inclusive Education. In 2022, 1310 scholarships were awarded to students in dual education, 167 to students completing a 3-year VET and 274 to students studying professions - electrical engineering, construction and geodesy, catering and tourism, agriculture and veterinary, machinery, and textile and leather. So far, 360 occupational standards and 110 competency-based qualification standards are adopted and tailored to the needs of the labour market. Situation with the Construction works in the RVETC in Kumanovo is 90% completed and 50% completed in RVETC Ohrid; Lifelong learning participation of 2.7% although a slight improvement over 2021 is still significantly below the 4% target. The new Law on Adult Education envisages establishing the system for Validation of the Non – Formal and Informal Learning. In 2022, public spending on education and training amounted to 3.71 % of GDP which is below the EU-level (5%) and below peer-country averages.

Furthermore **Ms. Biljana Zhivkovska, Head of the Department for Public Relations, Communication and International Cooperation in Employment Service Agency (ESA)**, presented YG Programme which focuses on 3 regions and 3 target groups. She was presenting indicators followed by ESA.

Regarding indicator 2 – percentage of YG participants who successfully completed YG Programme. 3744 was noted as total number, from which 1781 (858 women) were Macedonian, 1694 (855 women) were Albanian, 78 (31 women) were Roma, 110 (48) were Turkish and 81 (3 women) were other nationalities. Annual target for 2022 was at least 25% of young people in NEET registered to be under the YG scheme in target regions.

Regarding indicator 6 – number of participants (disaggregated by sex) registered in YG 2022 annual target was 3500 young people enrolled in YG in targeted regions. Total number was 8215 who were unemployed, of which 4089 were women. 3174 (1533) were Macedonian, 4235 (2170) were Albanian, 321 (146) were Roma, 313 (156) were Turkish and 172 (84) were others nationalities. 56 % have completed secondary education, 19,5 % have completed high education and according to nationality, 38.6 % were Macedonian, 51.5 % were Albanian and 3.9% were Roma population and remaining percentage were Turkish and other nationalities.

Regarding indicator 7 - number of YG staff trained, sex disaggregated, she noted that ESA held 6 full day online training for counsellors in local employment centers in charge of YG in December 2022. 2022 annual target was set on 20 ESA employees involved in YG implementation in target regions to receive at least 6 full-time training days and result was 23 trained ESA employees. Training programmes followed TNA and focused on delivering new, as well upgrade of previous competences.

Regarding indicator 8, accordance with financial agreement, it is due to improving physical capacities of ESA centers modernized and upgraded (in the target regions: Kumanovo, Tetovo, Ohrid, Makedonski Brod, Gostivar and Kicevo).

Ms. Slavkoska (MSLP) pointed out although efforts had been made to achieve target of indicator 2, target was not achieved in accordance with previous plan. Thus, it was proposed to foresee new target for indicator 2 which should monitor the YG success. A new annual target 4 was proposed in line with new YG Implementation Plan 2023-2026, i.e for 2023 is set on 35%. In 2022, a commitment was set that a success rate of 35% in 3 target groups would be achieved and by retrieving all the funds. At the end of May, a request to European Commission (EC) is planned to be submitted according to the amended Annual Programme and to request an amount of 3,5 million EUR. All targets were achieved and an opportunity is made to use total amount of funds planned for 2022.

Discussion among relevant stakeholders

Mr. Fugger (Social Attaché from Embassy of Republic of Austria) expressed his view on an extensive information regarding targets defined and achieved due to implementation of Sector Reform Contract. He emphasized the situation of leaving the country by young people, in which context he raised an issue due to unemployment rate and having any analysis on impact caused by it, as well having exact numbers.

Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP) responded no extensive analyses have been done, but she noted as familiar that it certainly would have an impact on total workforce, including young people. As a fact of YG programme is to attract them, also with other measures implemented for a greater number of young people to stay in country. However, it would depend not only on labor market policy, but also on economic policy and other factors. A more extensive analysis of the topic would have to be done in future. She expressed her opinion that if there would be a success in preventing outflow, because a trend is evident among countries in region as a natural migration movement.

Ms. Bozhanova (TA SRPC project) added that the issue is very complex with a lot of circumstances and facts behind it. In order to analyze, she noted a need to engage a lot of resources, time and methodologies. She recalled what already MES mentioned in report that this year a tracking system was established in all VET schools, also all adult education providers working on YG, as a good step, exactly to track, to follow the pathway of graduates. If MES would manage successfully the maintenance of such system, because pilot stage has been ongoing and first results would come by in end of 2023. Maybe in beginning of next year, participation and graduates of persons tracked would be on voluntary bases, a need is evident to



really to put efforts to maintain it successfully, to make attractive and to convince schools, providers and teachers, and more importantly young people. Then, much reliable answer would be received on this issue. Otherwise, analyses would rely on some information which are partial and un-confirmed by end users. Her advice was to put attention on this issue in the future, because it would provide additional information and improve picture for policy makers.

Mr. Ondrus (TA SRPC project) added to the issue that number could be roughly calculated impact of number of young people who have left country. The question could be what a single number would present. According to him, it might be unimportant. He reflected that number of those who left the country is less due to working conditions, labor market development and quality of education in country. Labor mobility is a natural issue visible in all EU countries, as well globally. As important, it is a focus on entire mobility, to consider not just number of young people who left the country, but also to monitor how many people would return to the country and after what time they would. Only leaving the country, it might have generally a positive impact, especially for young people who study and work abroad. So, if an intention is to somehow assess what is really going on labor market and how development, modernization and improvement of quality of education system. Influence of labor mobility would be important to look into comprehensive mobility of workers and to assess how many people and how long time would spend out of the country, how many people return later, what new experience and skills could gain abroad to take back, if they would come back to the country. So, Mr. Ondrus agreed with Mr. Harald that is interesting number and it is the issue which should be somehow assess, but he just noted to avoid one-way view, but to look on labor mobility.

Second session

Presentation of the main priorities and targets of actions proposed under IPA III 2024-2027 Sector Operational Programme “EU for Jobs and Opportunities”

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP) opened the second session noting its purpose due to presentation of key priorities foreseen of proposed interventions within the IPA III programming period 2024-2027 in the areas of employment and social policy, so called Sector Operational Programme “Jobs and Opportunities” (SOP). The preparation process of SOP has started since February/ March 2023 and it has been done through 4 stages. The sector analysis has been started by defining the key state of affairs and areas under which the interventions will be targeted. Next stage is to elaboration of intervention logic of those areas of support are foreseen to support national strategic and legislative framework, which it also envisages the pipeline list of potential projects for funding and noting the risks and assumptions that might occur. Third stage of preparation of SOP encompassed defining the methodology of implementation arrangements of the projects for further signature of Financing Agreement and the SOP will be its integral part as an annex. The last stage will be defining of monitoring and reporting, evaluation, audit and verifications arrangements.

She mentioned the Working Group within the MLSP is composed due to preparation of SOP, as well technical assistance is provided by the SUPRAE project. Overall, the projects planned under IPA III SOP will be aimed at targeting the priorities defined in relevant EU strategic framework, as well utmost they will support the national strategic policies defined in several documents and some aspects of implementation of regulatory framework in these areas.

She briefly elaborated the SOP logic of interventions that will be aimed at promotion of equal opportunities, access to employment and provision of quality of social protection for all citizens of the country. SOP will be directed towards 2 areas of support for employment and labour mobility for enhancing the employment and employability of youth, women and vulnerable groups, as one, and social inclusion and reduction of poverty, as second. First outcome will intend to ensure enhanced employment of young people (15-29) through reinforced YG implementation and improved capacities of ESA, improved employment of vulnerable groups in LM through ALMMPs and boosted establishment, development and functioning of social and micro-enterprises for higher employability and (self)employment among vulnerable groups. Second outcome will be focused with its activities on ensuring supported development and sustainability of high-quality, affordable, and accessible social care services and improved social inclusion through the advancement of living conditions for Roma people.

Ms. Slavkoska (MLSP) gave a clarification the first and biggest part of SOP will be enhanced support of Youth Guarantee implementation and she mentioned that the colleagues planned to present this intervention were on regional event organized by ILO in Tirana whereas the experiences on YG implementation were shared. First step for proposing the action was defining the key challenges through sector analysis. She reiterated from previous session that there are a lot of young people aged 15-29 falling under NEET and their inclusion in LM has to be reinforced. The analysis conducted has shown that the YG is successful from the aspects of reducing the youth unemployment, but it is not so successful in regard to activation of those out of LM. New YG plan is aimed to re-activate those young persons who are not a part of LM. The idea is to support the YG plan through IPA III SOP, as well additional support will be ensured in regard to improvement of capacities of ESA.

Moreover, the scope of ALMMs is required to be increased. In terms of activities identified as a support for YG, it could be roughly divided in 3 interventions.

First, it is the implementation of outreach activities for youth by offering a line of support for LM inclusion, i. e. strengthening the field work activities, and youth CSOs are mainly involved in the field activities for reaching the young people and inclusion in YG. More specifically, the plan is to enrich the field activities by planning additional inclusion of services that in a way pair the young people prior their inclusion in YG which it is basically registering in ESA. Outreach activities and their more intensified implementation through psychosocial support and mentoring upon till the point of their



registering in ESA. In order the outreach activities to be implemented, the trainings are planned for youth workers that they could implement a uniform methodology in field work and better monitor their work. Additional activities would be funded in regard to awareness raising, communication and information dissemination, organization of joint events with partners who work on YG implementation, such as social partners and youth CSOs.

Second type of activities follow the structure of YG plan and basically, those are activities for preparing the youth for employment and ensuring the offers, as well funding the target ALMMs that extend the scope of financing. Some ALMMs are funded by state budget and experience show when there is additional funding from IPA or other donors it makes a difference for achievement of greater outcome. Thus, youth could get better offer and some services are planned to be financed based on employers' needs according the YG plan. Additionally, the short motivational trainings are planned to be organized on different types of tailor-made activities by ESA in order to strengthen the skills necessary to enter LM.

Third component planned is due to strengthening the monitoring system and it would apply to activities basically for strengthening the capacities of ESA for successful YG implementation. The intention is through the outreach programme to have more unique field work by particular introducing the option for electronic pre-registration of all young persons that would be identified via field activities. Meaning to intervene in IT system of ESA and restricting and improvement of processes and method of work of ESA when working with young people are required to be supported, as well strengthening the profiling due to work and providing different type of support whereas the comprehensive support is needed. In this regard different training for ESA employees would be conducted, as well harmonizing the ESA and other institutions due to European Qualification System for jobs and skills.

These activities are part of current YG Implementation Plan and theoretically of the new plan after 2026. This area of support of IPA III SOP has envisaged to absorb most of the funds with an initial estimate of 22 million EUR (roughly 90% for YG), from which 18.7 million EUR from IPA co-financing and the remaining amount would be national co-financing. The implementation period would be longer.

Ms. Ivanovski (MLSP) elaborated the intervention in regard to support for employment of most vulnerable categories of persons at LM and social entrepreneurship. In the context of socio-economic development, she mentioned as most relevant stimulants for transformation process of the country towards more inclusive and sustainable equal economy and society, especially in regard to development of smart and circular economy. In order to build the national eco-system for development of social enterprises, the National Strategy for Development of Social Enterprises 2021-2027 was enacted in August 2021, accompanied by the 3-year action plan. With the technical support of IPA project for support of social entrepreneurship in the past 3 years and consultation process, a draft Law for Social Enterprises has been prepared, as well the National Center for Support of Social Enterprises has been established in state premises designed as an incubator for existing and new SEs.

The development of SEs is not recent in the country and it has been discussed for almost a decade. In last few years, the noticeable results could be noted. Although the interventions have been implemented, the social entrepreneurship is in its early stage. In this regard, the proposed interventions for IPA III SOP is towards further development and growth of SEs and to address the challenges faced due to employment of persons from vulnerable categories. As well, the support would be directed towards implementation of legal and strategic framework for SEs, which meant to improve their monitoring, ensuring access to financing so new SEs might be created and existing SEs could be sustainable, encouraging social innovations for increasing the employability and jobs creation for those vulnerable groups in less favorable position at LM.

Second segment for provision of a support for SEs is due to jobs creation and offering the tailor-made ALMMs that could ensure LM activation of vulnerable groups, such as beneficiaries of Guarantee Minimum Assistance (GMA), long-term unemployed persons, women and other vulnerable groups in unfavorable position in LM.

Third segment would be referring to the functioning of National Center for Support of Social Enterprises, which so far had been project supported and various activities had been conducted (workshops, trainings, counselling, mentorships, organization of promotional events and national and regional fairs). Further support would be needed for this center in order to address the challenges that SEs do face, as well it has played a significant role in building the capacities.

Additionally, she noted that the provisions of Law on Public Procurements due to reserved clauses and agreements for provision of goods and services by SEs should be further promoted and SEs should be seen as serious procurement partners by national and local administration.

Another significant element for a support, also as a challenge identified, she highlighted a set-up of system to monitor the implementation of strategic and legislative framework for SEs, data collection system in order to implement research and analysis and to measure the social impact and participation of SEs in national economy in terms of jobs creation and GDP.

Mr. Tomsic (MLSP) continued with the elaborations in regards to development of social services and deinstitutionalization as part of the social reforms' agenda. As the National DI Strategy has been adopted in 2018 and around 70% of its planned activities have been conducted and significant results achieved. 55 small group homes accommodate persons and children with disabilities in supporting living. 108 persons need to be accommodated in forthcoming period. The activities planned are in regard to further deinstitutionalization and avoiding of institutionalization, as well transformation of facilities of previous institutions in order to provide contemporary and tailor-made social services for the groups and their families in the community. As one of the activities foreseen is related to establishment of a center for children with inappropriate and problematic behavior. In this regard, the support for transformation of 3 public institutions is envisaged through reconstruction and equipping, such as the Public Institution for children and youth with behavior problem “25 May” in



Skopje, the Public Institution for rehabilitation in Banja BANSKO (with around 40 persons with physical disability who have to be re-settled) and Special Public Institution in Demir Kapija (with 2 buildings, the one to be reconstructed into center for social services in community, whereas around 60 persons with physical and mental disabilities live and should be re-settled, and the second for home for elderly persons for provision of suitable care services). He noted that there is the cooperation with local-self-government units should be strengthened in regards to the re-settlement of persons with complex health situation.

Thus, these residential buildings would be transformed into regional centers for provision of different scope of social care services. He noted that the social service of supported living in the community has been financed in large by national budget and there would be a need to ensure more suitable modality in order to ensure the re-settled persons to live continuously in the community. As well, he mentioned that the un-utilized state land plots could be used for building of small homes for supported living and accompanied with the provision of social services in the community the persons settled in them would be most suitably enhanced their quality of life, as well involved in the process of labour related rehabilitation.

As important issue on shorter and longer period, he mentioned there should be enhanced services that provided support to those persons with disabilities who live with their biological families and the services for home care and assisted living are more required to ensure an assistance for these families. The requirement has become more an emerging issue for children with psychological problems and autism throughout the country, whereas the number of identified cases has been increasing.

Lastly, he pointed out that the continuous support of licensed providers of social services is required. There are more than 80 licensed providers of different social services, as well this number is constantly increasing, and their sustainability and equal qualitative provision of social services to beneficiaries must be ensured throughout the country. As well, the continuously investment in capacity building of monitoring system of social services provisions is needed in order to ensure best quality provisions to be applied, at national and local level.

Ms. Ristovska (MLSP) introduced the past and future activities in the area of child’s protection and challenges in the early child development and care (ECDC), noting that the children are biggest resource in the country. Investing in ECDC is the highest priority of the country. MLSP has been intensively working on the reform in the past several years in order to enable equal conditions and access for each child for ECDC. All the activities are based on the principles that each child must have high quality pre-school education and care. The Government within its mandate has an objective to increase the coverage of children for 50% in total in pre-school facilities and the intensified collaboration of municipalities has been ongoing to ensure accomplishment of this objective. Also, the intention has been to approach near to the EU target of 95% of coverage of children aged 0-6 in ECDC. The funding has been ensured for the investments besides from national budget, but also development loan from World Bank (WB) and IPA funding.

Additionally, she emphasized that the investments have also been targeting capacity building activities for provision of higher quality of ECDC, done through training of staff employed in kindergartens. Practically and scientifically, it has been proven that the investments in professional and career development of the kindergarten staff bring long-lasting benefits in order to have proper early child development and education. These segments have to be also accompanied with modernization of systematical set-up and upgrading of professional and career development of staff.

The reform of pre-school human capacities was initiated by the UNICEF and partly supported for preparation of the document for professional and career development of kindergarten staff. This initiative has continued with ongoing IPA 2017 project whereas the general objective is due to improvement of quality of pre-school education and care. Its 3 components have been focused on modernization of professional and career development of staff, revision of entire process of re-licensing of staff in pre-school education institutions and enhancing the role of parents in ECDC.

She also noted on the investment component for (re)construction of pre-school education facilities funded by WB project. The Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) module, as a measurement methodology, has been introduced by another UNICEF, the intention is to establish a system for measurement of benefits for the children in pre-school education and care and achievement of ECDC.

There have been prepared drafts for amending the initial educational programme for kindergarten staff at university level, which it would significantly advance the professional background of future kindergarten staff. In regard for financing of the pre-school education system, the activities have been conducted in regard to setting a formula for financing of pre-school education and care and the intention is to modify the share of parents’ payment of remuneration in such a way those with smaller income to pay less compared to those with higher income.

In regard to IPA III SOP activities proposed, she elaborated that it would be necessary to continue and upgrade with the results delivered in previous projects, especially those related to professional and career development. In order the ECDC system to be closer to EU processes, the intention is to support the process that would ensure accomplishment of relevant Fourth SDG and its targets till 2030 in this regard by ensuring all female and male children have equal access to ECDC as their preparation for their primary education. Additionally, she pointed out on the necessity for greater involvement of parents for higher quality of ECDC and overall development of each child. In the due diligence, the MLSP has a long-term priority to address these challenges for investments in all professional profiles in ECDC system that do have an influence for development and education and each child. She highlighted that the capacities of all donors, relevant institutions and CSOs should be streamlined in order to accomplish greater mutual outcomes.

Ms. Kamberi (MLSP) elaborated the Governmental and MLSP efforts in regard to Roma Integration. North Macedonia has



joined the Roma Decade Initiative since 2004 and First Roma Inclusion Strategy 2005-2015 had been implemented. Thus, the policy has been demonstrated to reduce the gap among Roma and non-Roma population and ensure their inclusion in societal spheres. Since the first strategy, Roma CSOs has been involved in creation and implementation of Roma related policies and actions. Second Roma Strategy 2015-2020 had followed and Third Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022-2030 has been enacted. In the current strategy, 3 areas have been included (besides education, employment, health and housing), such as anti-gypsism, persons without personal documentation and Roma culture. Additionally, she pointed out on the adopted first National Action Plan for Promotion of Implementation of Human Rights of Roma Women and Girls and related to it, the regional conference would be organized with the Council of Europe support in November 2023.

In regard to implementation of National Strategy, the National Action Plans in priority areas have been prepared and planned to be adopted by end of May.

She pointed out the actions undertaking due to Roma integration and most important projects targeting Roma inclusion. The project for inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education and care has had a significant impact with its implementation since 2006 through the cooperation with Roma Education Fund (REF) and local self-government units. This project has ensured around 400 children yearly to be included in ECDC and they had not attended the segregated groups. Since 2021, the Government has decided to systematically resolve this issue by obliging the municipalities through its councils to decide Roma children to be included free of charge in kindergartens and the block payments to municipalities have been ensured in this regard. In the schooling year 2022-2023, the support by REF had ended and the parental inclusion has been missed as important component. She hoped that by September, the donor support would be found to ensure continuation of these activities. This project has important impact because it has helped the children to enrol in higher percentage in primary and secondary education, as well tertiary education. Thus, North Macedonia has been an example of successful inclusion of Roma in all educational level as a prerequisite for further LM activation and inclusion. Just to her note, around 150 Roma have been working in public institutions.

The Roma Centres, as project has been completely supported by MLSP, as a modality for inclusion of Roma in LM and implemented since 2021 with the financial support from the national budget. 8 out of 16 Roma informers have been already employed in Social Work Centres (SWCs) and it is expected the employments of 8 remaining to be finalized by the end of 2023.

In regard to Roma activation in LM and transformation of Roma employment from informal to formal economy, it is linked to Poznan Declaration and EU Green Agenda. Thus, the cooperation would be needed in order to support successful formalization of grey to regular Roma employments.

She elaborated on the Law on Persons without Personal Documentation, which has been an example in the WB region. This legal act initially allows the persons without IDs to be included in the registry books. On this aspect, the Roma CSOs have been reporting of around 5000 unregistered persons. The mobile teams visited the Roma settlements and has identified that around 700 persons did not have personal documentation issued by the registry of births. In order to resolve this issue and the legislation had not stipulated such provisions, the special law was prepared for these persons and it has been allowed their registration with a temporary certificate as an ID document of 13-digit number. In such a way, the exercise of part of fundamental rights has been ensured in the areas of education, employment, health care and social protection. The implementation process has been very intensive and the obstacles have occurred in regard to identification of these special number for which the preparation of amendments in the legislation would be done in coming period.

Social mapping was implemented in 14 municipalities in 2019 and it has been provided data on several priority areas in regard to Roma population. The intention would be the social mapping exercise to be repeated at least on every 3 years and to have undated data due to Roma population in priority areas in 14 municipalities. She noted that social mapping is similar to census and its aim is more towards Roma community.

Housing aspects had been covered by IPA II through two grant schemes of around 4.5 million EUR. As important, she highlighted those preparatory activities are essential for legalization of social houses of Roma population. Besides provision of legalization of certain number of Roma houses, the set of social services was also provided for the beneficiaries involved.

She highlighted that the aspects of social housing of Roma population and ensuring access to basic infrastructure are core for improvement of everyday life of Roma. In this regard, 5.5 million EUR is foreseen to be allocated for investments in social housing, communal infrastructure and reconstruction of Roma dwellings, as well support for implementation of NAPs. She mentioned that the integrated approach has an essential importance for advancement of living standard of Roma and the Roma CSOs have been playing important role in any process that have been initiated by the MLSP.

Discussion among relevant stakeholders

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP) opened the discussion part referring to the presentations given by MLSP representatives in regard to programming of IPA III funds and ensuring the greater added value. She briefly noted that the IPA III SOP 2024-2027 would be implemented through an accredited structure, whereas the MLSP is planned to be Managing Authority, the role of NIPAC should remain in SEA and the CFCD in MF would be responsible for contracting and financing aspects. In accordance with the accreditation requirements of IPA III Implementing Regulation, it is planned the ESA to be gradually Implementing Body for Policy Management (IBPM). She also invited the donor community active in these sectors to share their plans and initiatives in order to ensure complementary of development assistance.

Mr. Fugger (Social Attaché from Embassy of Republic of Austria) noted on the interesting and ambitious IPA III



programme. He informed that the Austrian Aid supported 14 bilateral projects during 2022 and different challenges had been identified by working with beneficiaries. Some of them had been recommended to be addressed due to implementation of IPA III SOP. In regard to YG, the project was supported for piloting the supported employment services for youth and training effect could be noticed having positive influence on their employability. He proposed more targeted approach would be useful to be applied for next period by foreseen indicators, such as at least 30% of youth who have not finished primary education and at least 30% of youth who have not finished secondary education.

Several projects supported activities due to beneficiaries of social benefits, whereas as challenges was identified a waiting time for receiving unemployment benefits for 3 months and other 3 to be able to apply for GMA. He proposed 3-months waiting time which encompass administrative procedure and (non)confirmation, should be shortened. Meaning, social beneficiaries after they become unemployed could receive any social benefits after 6 months. He highlighted this would directly leading them to poverty line and not receiving any money, as an impact of late support by social system. Additionally, they are forced to work in shadow economy in order to ensure an existence for their families. His proposal was that 3-month waiting period to be abolished in unemployment benefit and GMA benefit system and it would have an impact on poverty alleviation in the country. Thus, measure due to improving the access to social benefits might be added as an action in SOP.

He informed for a project due to exchange of experience in child protection. In all most all countries, abuse and violence against children is happening. Advisory and counselling services for safety of children are necessary and it is important to establish preventive and advisory services for families at risk. As well, most vulnerable groups of children, as street children, support safe centers and emergency service, should be encompassed. Thus, child protection measures should be considered for the children at risk.

Another project implemented shown that over-debt has been an issue in the country, especially in a situation of prices' increase. He proposed a debt-counselling services would be beneficial to be established and made functional, which it is directly linked to directive on EU level in regard to individual insolvency. He noted on the obligation for this kind of services to be put in place during the EU accession process and at least the day of becoming EU member state.

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP) noted on proposals given which would be considered while reviewing the actions proposed, as well on information sharing due to projects supported by Austrian development assistance and implemented throughout the country.

Ms. Svetlana Ristovska Antic (Organizations of Employers of Macedonia - ORM) recalled on the presentation of MES Minister which mentioned cooperation with employers. She noted that career counselling might be done during the educational process through cooperation with employers' organization. However, she underlined on this cooperation and need for enhancing social dialogue should be at highest possible level. Employers should be always involved in bodies which draft the laws and due to policy making aimed to improve education and employment policies. Those legal acts would be Law on vocational education, Law on adult education and Law on higher education, in which bodies the employers' organization unfortunately have not been involved.

As second point, she noted on the importance of YG and mentioned the participation of employers' organization, which resulted in positive impact overall. She also agreed that ALMMPs should be more diversified.

Having in mind that ORM is partner in bi-partied and triparted social dialogue, she pointed out on the priority support needed for such an action to be strengthen through Economic and Social Council (ESC). As 6 local ESCs have been established, they have contributed at local level due to local policies in employment and social area.

She recalled on EDU representative note for having effective social dialogue, she highlighted on the urgent need for further enhancing of social dialogue, as a continuation of previous projects implemented by International Labour Organization (ILO). Positive cooperation and tailor-made activities were implemented with employers' organization under these projects which it has been evident through active participation of ORM in ESC. Activities, such as support for preparation of analysis during Covid-19 crisis due to employers' status and capacity building activities, ensured their visibility to be increased. Thus, social dialogue has been strengthened and noted on a necessity for greater support under IPA III.

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP) informed that on a presentation planned at the end of second session under which other actions for support prioritized and proposed for funding under IPA III would be presented, whereas a social dialogue has been identified as most needed.

Mr. Slobodan Trendafilov (Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia - FTUM) was encouraged by the presentation of MLSP Minister and discussion by Ms. Antic (ORM) in regard to the issue that young people have been leaving the country. He pointed out that a lot of support would be needed in forthcoming period due to enhanced social dialogue at all levels agreeing and implementation of collective agreements. Having in mind that new Labour Relations Law is expected to be enacted beginning of a-year-after and it would contain strict provisions, many issues due to collective bargaining would rise. This issue was also noted as a recommendation derived from previous two projects implemented by ILO.

In this regard, he emphasized that those projects ensured governmental institutions and social partners to sit on one table and jointly discuss on policy issues important for the country. New project implemented by ILO would only enhance the social dialogue and bring positive experience and impact, especially due to collective bargaining and collective agreements. He noted that IPA III support would be needed in forthcoming period as a third stage, especially from the side of FTUM would further strengthen its capacities for involvement in effective social dialogue and could ensure labour rights are further enhanced.



Ms. Patricia Di Giovanni (UNICEF permanent representative) expressed her positive view on presentations and discussions. UNICEF was mentioned in many areas and she contributed in several areas, especially due to support of pre-schools and optimization initiative for budgeting in pre-school education system expected to be applied by MLSP.

Recalling on issue of foster parents and street children, she mentioned the foster support campaign launched with MLSP recently in order to expand this measure throughout the country. She noted that not only recruitments of foster parents, but also provisions of services for them, in particular if children with disabilities would be fostered and challenges that might be experienced.

Due to Roma community, she informed on the partnership with MLSP to contribute with most appropriate action and noted on interesting action planned for social housing.

In terms of legislation for child protection, she noted that several legal acts still have not gone through the parliamentary procedures for their adoption. Thus, she highlighted on a need for speeding-up the related processes and such legislation related to child well-being in the areas of education, health and justice for children could not wait.

UNICEF has been working quite extensively with municipalities, whereas young people could not be involved just as participants and they should be involved in meaningful way in programmes affecting them. She emphasized that such involvement would strengthen the feeling of belonging in the country and investment to their paths and challenges. Municipalities as forefront should be seen on the aspects how they contribute to child policies.

Finally, she noted that all areas presented require multi-sectoral approach as having complex aspects and certainly, Government and its institutions put efforts in those areas. At the end, she informed that UNICEF would promote Child Guarantee support, which it is not different from YG. Child Guarantee has been about addressing most marginalized children and support should be tailored through multi-sectoral approaches by the system. As a model, it has been replicated in several EU member countries.

Ms. Aneta Damjanovska (Swiss Development Cooperation - SDC) noted that SDC has been active with its support in economic areas for quite a long period and the support is foreseen to continue. SDC support has been pin-pointed to two objectives for improving the jobs opportunities and growth of private companies. SDC would continue to collaborate with MLSP and private sector, especially due to dual education and training, upskilling and re-skilling. In the past, focus was on unemployability and current focus has been on upskilling of youth in order to enable them for their better career development. She informed that SDC has been actively supporting part of activities of YG at its beginning, as well supporting youth and vulnerable categories with a special focus on Roma and PwDs through UNDP programme.

As key recommendation from its work with beneficiaries of GMA and revisions of social protection system for better and targeted transfers, she noted that opportunities should be widened for their improved entry at labour market. Most of GMA beneficiaries would like to stay as beneficiaries because of secure GMA remuneration, and if they lose the right, they easily enter into grey economy, whereas working as seasonal workers.

Furthermore, she informed that SDC has planned on employment among youth, as main target group, and expecting the results from sensor analysis, whereas the findings shown that a large number of brain drain has been happening among the youth. Their activities would be focused on the prevention and they have been in draft stage of preparation of the programme in order to tackle youth who would plan to enter the brain-drain flow, thus decreasing their numbers and perceive the reasons for this flow. SDC finding would go in the direction of creating better employment opportunities for youth. She informed that this project is in its early stage of development, as well the SDC strategy would last up to the end of 2024. Afterwards new development strategy 2025-2029 should be prepared, whereas it is expected youth to remain as target group not only in economic sectors, but also in other sectors (democratic governance and environment sector).

Mr. Tomsic (MLSP) recalled on previous points and highlighted that LM activation of GMA beneficiaries is serious challenge. Most of GMA beneficiaries have not finished even primary education which has been an obstacle for their LM activation. An analysis has been done on the necessities of jobs among 1000 companies, structure of GMA beneficiaries in order to further support them with training and education and in forthcoming period, the intention would be approach to companies with an interest to support these target groups and to be involved in their LM activation. As well, the upskilling and reskilling system for finishing their education should ensure opportunities to be finalized primary and secondary education, as a second chance. Thus, these related draft laws should be enacted by Macedonian Parliament as soon as possible by ensuring these opportunities to be available for these target groups.

As well, draft Law on Social Enterprises would ensure improved conditions for their LM integration and provision of assistance for persons in need, as well to come out of informal economy. The aim of new project would be creation of conditions in which to avoid GMA beneficiaries to be long-term dependent on this benefit and to support them to come out of vicious cycle of poverty. By providing such conditions and using ‘second chance’, GMA beneficiaries might become active labour market force and certain number of them are young persons. Additionally, to avoid dropping up from education, activities should be tailored to avoid cases of unfinished education of these beneficiaries.

Mr. Tomsic thanked the UNICEF representative and their support in regard to ECDC and noted that the MLSP would plan to prepare a space for introduction of Child Guarantee, as well to draft necessary action plan. As well, Strategy on Protection of Children’s Rights has been foreseen to be prepared to complement the relevant UN Convention of Rights of a Child and to transpose the experience from EU member states that have been implementing such guarantee.

Ms. Ljubica Gerasimova (Secretariat for European Affairs - SEA) informed on important priorities for programming of IPA support is facilitation and maintaining the sector dialogue, as well some organizational aspects are covered. She



concluded that SWG has been achieving one of most important goals through collecting recommendations and comments, i. e. implementing a dialogue of all key stakeholders.

Nevertheless, her message was to inform the SWG members that the process in terms of preparation and finalization of SOP for Jobs and Opportunities is part of programming cycle which commenced in first half of 2022. Basic guidelines regarding scope were received and first information due to SOP preparation was received from EC services due to SOP financial coverage at the end 2022. Presentation of priority areas for IPA III support clearly have shown a process of sector dialogue supported them.

She informed that 40 million EUR has been available as EU/ IPA support, which should present up to 85% of overall financial frame for this SOP, and at least 15% of national co-financing should be planned by the state budget. All actions planned would bring an added value to the sectors encompassed with the SOP.

Action Fiche tailoring the main areas of support under IPA III 2024-2027 SOP was send to EC services end of March. Since then, the SOP has been in an active preparatory process. She noted that the content of SOP is almost the same as presentation of actions done during the meeting. Presentations gave us the information roughly on priority actions proposed which would be further developed as interventions within SOP document, as wide scope document. However, the deadline for its finalization and completed all its sections is end of June. This deadline also would start once the response on relevant assessment would be gained from EC services on their review of Action Fiche for this SOP. Response is expected in following days and relevance assessment would show how much these priorities are aligned with national strategic documents and those for EU Enlargement Strategy, as well relevant international and regional strategic documents and linked to reforms envisioned in mid-term period.

Mr. Frchkovski (MLSP) noted on YG action proposed for forthcoming period, in the parts of early intervention and its field activities, in order to ensure high quality offer through ALMMPSs provided by ESA. However, he highlighted that any type of additional support would be welcome. Provision of qualitative services for young people through its improved organization and delivery could bring added value on LM. In terms of ALMMPSs, he mentioned that second chance programme has been implemented from the end of 2022 and pathways for proper interventions have been considering for young people. A large number of registered persons have had minimum primary education and missing graduation on their secondary education. Opportunities for their upgrading of educational background should be widen, especially early intervention activities on field which have been supported by SDC. He highlighted that these kinds of activities require enhanced support in forthcoming period. YG Implementation Plan 2023-2026 has foreseen variety of activities to be implemented by CSOs, considering the opportunities for different approaches to involve the youth, such as offering services to assist local employment centers, provision of soft services (motivational, psychosocial and counselling services). He added that there is a need to train youth field workers and to engage more of them while working with youth in NEET. If the support would be ensured to these aspects, third stage should be implementation of ALMMPSs and additional activities in this aspect would be needed to ensure wider scope through this SOP.

Presentation of IPA III Action Plans for 2024 and beyond

Mr. Trenkoska (MLSP) gave a presentation on priorities financed under other IPA III Action Documents for the programming period 2024 and onwards, in regard to further support of gender-based (GBV) and domestic violence (DV), Roma integration and social dialogue.

In regard to GBV against women and DV, she noted that North Macedonia has made a significant effort to address it. Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted in January 2021, which provides a comprehensive framework for preventing, protecting and responding to such cases. However, further steps are needed to implement operational procedures. Adopted Action Plan for implementation of Istanbul Convention in 2018 has defined key activities and institutions to incorporate provisions of Istanbul Convention into national legislation. Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 has included gender-based violence as a specific target. Also, Social Protection Law since 2019 provides framework for establishment and operation of specialized services. Priority action planned would focus on provision of additional support to activities supported through IPA 2022 Action Document "EU for Health, Social Protection and Gender Equality" by contributing further to provision of improved services for protection of victims of GBV and DV and strengthened inter-institutional cooperation at national and local level. Part of support planned would be targeted through several grants to further improve response to cases of GBV and DV. Action would support specialized and other social services such as shelters from domestic violence and human trafficking, providing immediate protection from danger for victims of abuse and their children/ families, as well as a full range of services for psychological support, counselling, employment and legal services. As well, activities are planned to be accompanied by field activities, raising awareness and encouraging cooperation between institutions in direction of violence prevention, health facilities, schools, municipalities and civil society organizations of the community. By this, it would be ensured sustainability and improvement of existing social services, as well as design and establishment of new ones, to implement a full range of services available to victims and perpetrators of GBV and DV.

The strengthened inter-institutional cooperation at the national and local level for GBV and DV would also be supported through the establishment of legal and methodological bases for further establishment of a database for the collection and management of data base, as well as definition of an architecture and an optimal model for collection and exchange of data between institutions, definition and development of business processes based on roles of relevant institutions following principles and concepts of personal data protection. Furthermore, activities would include development of technical



specifications for software to support existing registry and/ or IT system interface and preparation of technical specifications for the necessary equipment in relevant institutions.

In the regard to Roma housing support, she mentioned that Roma community in North Macedonia is most vulnerable group and majority face social and institutional obstacles. Community constitutes 2.52% of overall population and still faces discrimination in everyday life. A large part of Roma community has faced some of most inadequate housing conditions in country, living in poorly developed neighbourhoods with poorly constructed housing units that often lack formal legalization under urban-spatial and construction legislation. Overcrowding is widespread, with many Roma families living in homes that provide less than a few square meters per person. Situation has resulted in a negative perception of Roma for majority of non-Roma population, leading to discrimination in various areas and a lower quality of life. Additionally, these conditions have contributed to lower school attendance, lower employment rates, shorter life expectancy, higher mortality rates, increased migration, and greater participation in informal economy. Planned action would contribute to ensuring Roma's right to legal housing. Such as, development of urban-spatial plans for at least 3 municipalities with a high concentration of Roma population and complete technical documentation for future investments of IPA assistance for urbanization of Roma settlements in accordance with adopted urban-spatial plans would be supported, as well as support for legalization of a certain number of homes of Roma families. Action would prepare future investments of IPA assistance in urbanization of Roma settlements.

In regard to social dialogue and local employment partnerships, she recalled on medium-term priorities presented at plenary meetings during previous year, MLSP has envisaged further support for social dialogue as needed due to implementation of new legislation on labour market and strategic priorities defined in national employment strategy. As potential activity for support through IPA III, further strengthening of social dialogue and expansion of local employment partnerships throughout country has been identified. Previous EU and ILO support for social dialogue, mainly at national level, laid the foundations for participation of national authorities, trade unions and employers' organizations in social dialogue. Based on MLSP's assessments, challenge in forthcoming period would be to address low membership of trade unions and employers' organizations in many economic sectors, as well as limited ability to address working conditions and needs of businesses through collective bargaining and other forms. of social dialogue. In that direction, following activities would require particular importance for support: strengthening tripartite consultative structures and enlarging/deepening their activities, investing in bipartite social dialogue in private sector for its improved functioning, support of social partners to strengthen implementation of collective agreements, supporting trade unions and employers' organizations, as well as building capacities and skills of ESC members and its secretariat in relevant technical areas, in order to have active partners in relevant processes of creating and implementing policies and within EU accession process, promotion of local partnerships for employment, as a tool for improving state of local labour market, implementation of Law on amicable labor disputes, from a practical point of view for implementation of collective labour disputes, and its adaptation, upgrading and further promotion so that it would become more widely known and used by workers and employers, and promotion of human resources development in enterprises in order to increase adaptability of workers and to strengthen competitiveness of employers.

Ms. Kostoska (MES) gave a presentation on priorities financed under other IPA III Action Documents for the programming period 2024 and onwards, in regard to education and wellbeing of students, as the quality on all levels of the educational system is the basis for solid development of human capital. Under the IPA 3 so far several actions were elaborated as continuation of activities for Improving of access and inclusion of vulnerable people in education system, such as: Policy advise and TA to MES for monitoring, analysing and preparation of selected measures for ensuring safe and inclusive school environment in line with the country's Educational Strategy and the EU principle for inclusive education in safe school environment, Capacity building for school staff working with children from Roma origin and children with disabilities on inclusive education, Putting in place measures to monitor, analyse and respond to safety incidents at school involving abuse and discrimination and deteriorating mental health context in terms of improving inclusive education, Piloting of educational modules and training programs for teachers, professional associates, school management, and parents to improve children's inclusiveness in education process, Adaptation of 20 educational establishments to needs of students with disabilities, Implementation of a scholarship scheme to strengthen motivation for school participation of Roma children and children with disabilities.

And as complementing the priorities outlined in the Strategy for Education 2018-2025 as priorities in the following period are interventions for safe school environment, mental health and wellbeing in primary and secondary schools, Increasing Gender Equality in STEM at all levels, strengthening the Career Counselling System, introducing two new Regional Vocational Education and Training Centres, establishing Roma educational mediators in secondary education, optimization of the school network in primary and secondary education and providing increased budget for Educational reforms.

Conclusions

Ms. Trenkoska (MLSP), summarized the conclusions related to:

- Recommendations noted by EUD due to functioning of SWG to be further discussed and addressed, when feasible.
- Third Self-Assessment Report for 2022 in regard to implementation of IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education 'EU for Youth' was reviewed by SWG.
- Actions presented and proposals discussed during SWG plenary meeting to be further considered in regard to IPA



III programming, especially those due to Youth Guarantee in its different stages and focus to be on biggest financial coverage under IPA III SOP and enabling complementarity with other development partners in the country (bilateral and multi-lateral donors).

- As highlighted by social partners and high-level officials, an action for enhanced support of social dialogue and collective bargaining is required urgently, if possibly as direct award to international organization financed under IPA III SOP or another IPA programme.

Annexes:

Annex 1	Agenda
Annex 2	MLSP and MES presentation from I session on Third Self-Assessment Report for 2022 for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education ‘EU for Youth’
Annex 3	MLSP presentation from II session on IPA III 2024-2027 Sector Operational Programme ‘EU for Jobs and Opportunities’
Annex 4	MLSP and MES presentation from II session on IPA III Action Plans for 2024 and beyond
Annex 5	Third Self-Assessment Report for 2022 for IPA 2019 Sector Reform Contract for Employment and Education ‘EU for Youth’