



NORTH MACEDONIA

COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT

May 2024

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	The statistical office of the European Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
GEI	Gender Equality Index
GEGI	Gender Employment Gap Index
HCI	Human Capital Index
ILOEST	ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections Database
ILOSTAT	International Labor Organization Statistics
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LFP	Labor Force Participation
LITS	Life in Transition Survey
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SSO	State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UIS	Institute for Statistics
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

Promoting gender equality and increasing women’s participation in the economy are vital for North Macedonia’s development. Actively involving and fully utilizing the diverse skills of the population, especially those currently not in the workforce, is key to reducing poverty and achieving equitable wealth distribution. Despite progress in institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks for gender equality over the past decade, implementation still faces significant challenges. While the gender gap has narrowed in sectors like health and education, persistent disparities remain in economic opportunities, unpaid household responsibilities, property rights, political engagement, and leadership roles.

This Country Gender Assessment offers empirical evidence and analysis on gender equality in North Macedonia, following the framework proposed by the World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development (WDR 2012). The report examines recent progress and ongoing challenges across three dimensions: Endowments, Economic opportunities, and Voice and Agency. Drawing from various data sources, including health, education, labor market dynamics, and gender-based violence indicators, the analysis provides insights into the country’s gender issues. Using data primarily from the WDI, 2021 Labor Force Surveys (LFS), 2023 Life in Transition Survey, and other sources, the report highlights significant gender disparities in human capital and access to economic opportunities.¹ The highlights can be summarized as follows:

- North Macedonia stands to gain significant economic advantages from closing gender gaps, as indicated by the value of 19.7 of the Gender Equality Gain Index (GEGI), identifying the potential rise in long-run GDP per capita from equalizing employment rates between genders.
- While women in North Macedonia have generally attained higher levels of education than men, particularly in higher education, academic performance for both genders remains below the OECD average, ranking among the lowest in the PISA survey. Gender segregation within educational fields remains a significant challenge.
- Gender disparities persist in economic opportunities, with women’s participation in the labor force significantly trailing behind that of men. Women are

¹ This note focuses on gender disparities specifically hindering the well-being and economic welfare of women in North Macedonia. However, gender gaps can arise in the outcomes and opportunities enjoyed by females and males across several dimensions. (WDR 2012). In many instances, men—rather than women—may suffer as a result of gender disparities. Regardless of whether these inequalities create disadvantages for men or for women, gender equality matters intrinsically, as well as instrumentally, to foster economic efficiency and development outcomes (WDR 2012).

more likely to work part-time, and the majority of caregiving responsibilities fall on them, impacting their career advancement and workforce participation, especially as institutional care options are underutilized.

- A phenomenon known as the “motherhood penalty” is observable in North Macedonia. Young women often transition from school to inactivity upon family formation, contrasting with young men who typically see decreased inactivity rates and increased employment. This divergence in employment rates between genders becomes pronounced during family formation.

Promoting gender equality in North Macedonia offers substantial opportunities. Apart from being inherently fair, advancing gender equality is essential for fostering inclusive growth and reducing poverty. Improving women’s economic prospects, access to resources, and empowerment is critical for addressing key policy challenges in North Macedonia, including boosting labor productivity, stimulating private sector development, and enhancing resilience.

The structure of the report is as follows. Section 2 delves into the legal and institutional framework. Section 3 assesses gender equality from the perspective of human endowments. Section 4 discusses progress and challenges in economic opportunities. Section 5 focuses on issues related to voice and agency.

2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Despite notable improvements in North Macedonia’s legislative and policy framework for gender equality over the past decade, challenges persist in implementation, in part due to limited human and financial resources at both central and local levels.

Overall, North Macedonia has made progress in its legislative framework for gender equality, scoring 85.0 out of 100 in 2023 on the World Bank’s Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) index.² This marks an improvement from 1975 (Figure 1). However, compared to the EU-27 average, North Macedonia has progressed at a

² The WBL 1.0. index assesses how laws and regulations impact women’s economic opportunities across various areas, including Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension. The score is calculated by taking the average of each index, with 100 being the highest possible score. The index is based on the analysis of the domestic laws and regulations, updated to October 2023.

slower pace, and it ranks among the countries with the lowest WBL index in the Western Balkans, alongside BiH and Montenegro.

While North Macedonia performs well in certain areas such as freedom of movement (Mobility Indicator), laws affecting women's decisions to work (Workplace Indicator), constraints related to marriage (Marriage Indicator), constraints on women starting and running a business (Entrepreneurship Indicator), and gender differences in property and inheritance (Assets Indicator), there is room for improvement in laws affecting women's work after having children (Parenthood Indicator), laws affecting women's pay (Pay Indicator), and laws affecting the size of a woman's pension (Pensions Indicator) (Figure 2).

According to the new Women, Business, and the Law legal frameworks index (WBL 2.0),³ women in North Macedonia have 80 percent of the legal rights of men. This update provides a deeper insight into the legal underpinnings of gender equality, revealing a notable decrease in North Macedonia's scores compared to the previous WBL 1.0 index (Figure 3). Key areas such as women's pay, pension, and entrepreneurship support lag significantly behind.

The policy framework on gender equality is primarily driven by the new Strategy for Gender Equality 2022 – 2027, adopted in July 2022. This strategy has three main goals: i) establishing an effective and efficient system for the advancement of gender equality in the country on central and local levels; ii) improving women's position in private and public life, with a specific focus on the labor market, agriculture, political participation, healthcare, education, peace, culture, and sport; and iii) eliminating gender stereotypes and promoting a culture of nonviolence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender, and gender identity, with a specific focus on elimination of gender-based violence and gender stereotypes and sexism).⁴

³ The new WBL 2.0. index includes two additional indicators – Safety and Childcare – and new and revised questions under the original WBL indicators. The analysis continues to be based on domestic laws and regulations. The new Safety indicator expands the measurement legislation on violence against women. Previously, WBL 1.0. addressed only two forms of violence: sexual harassment in employment (under Workplace indicator) and domestic violence (under Marriage indicator). The new Safety indicator now covers two additional forms of violence against women: child marriage and femicide. The new Childcare indicator assesses childcare services offered in center-based settings to children from birth to two years and 11 months.

⁴ Official Gazette, No. 170, 2020

Figure 1. WBL 1.0. Index (1975-2023)

Source: World Bank: Women, Business, and the Law, 2024

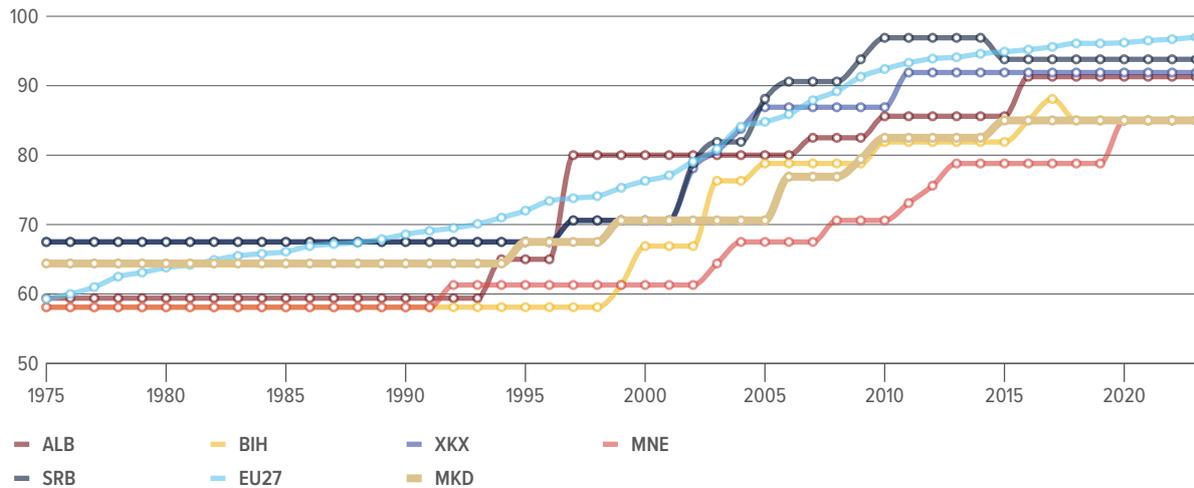
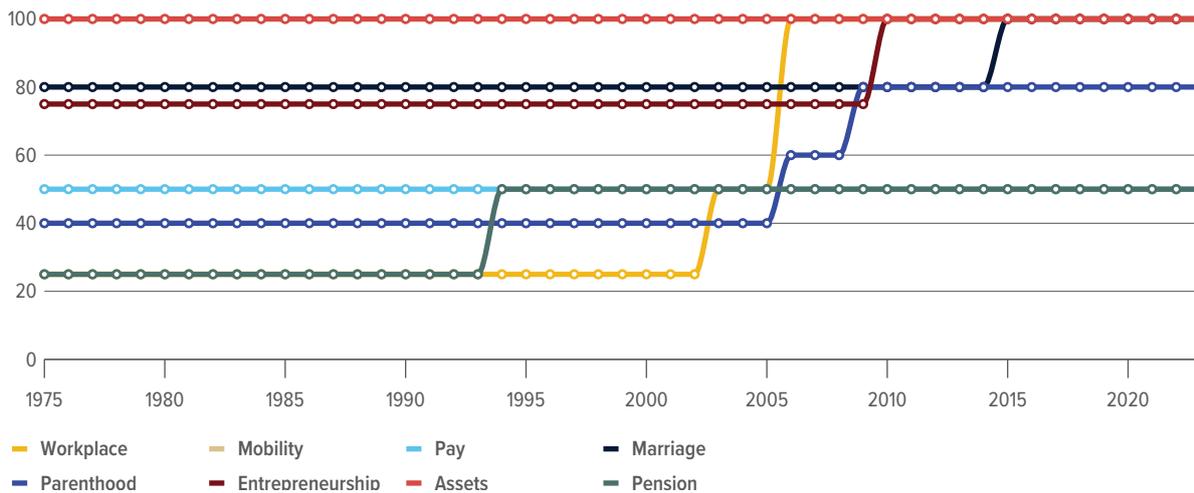
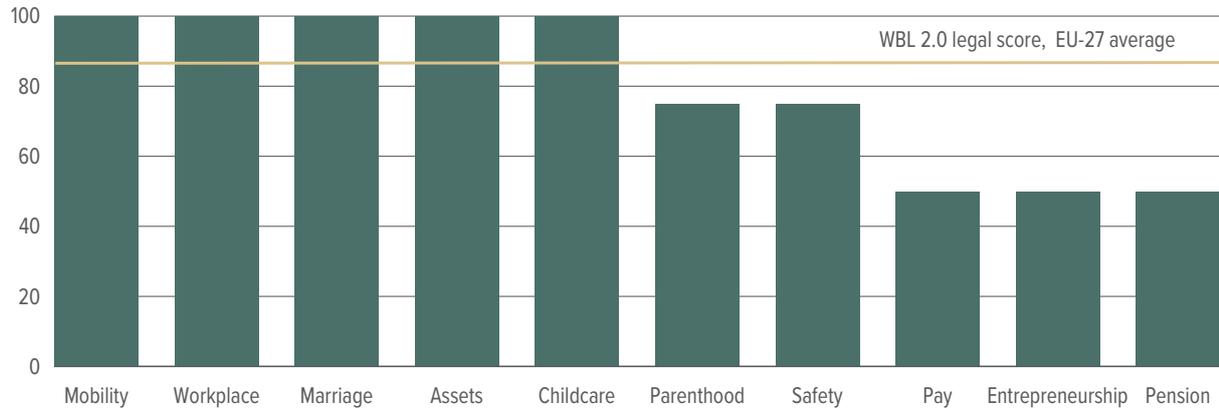
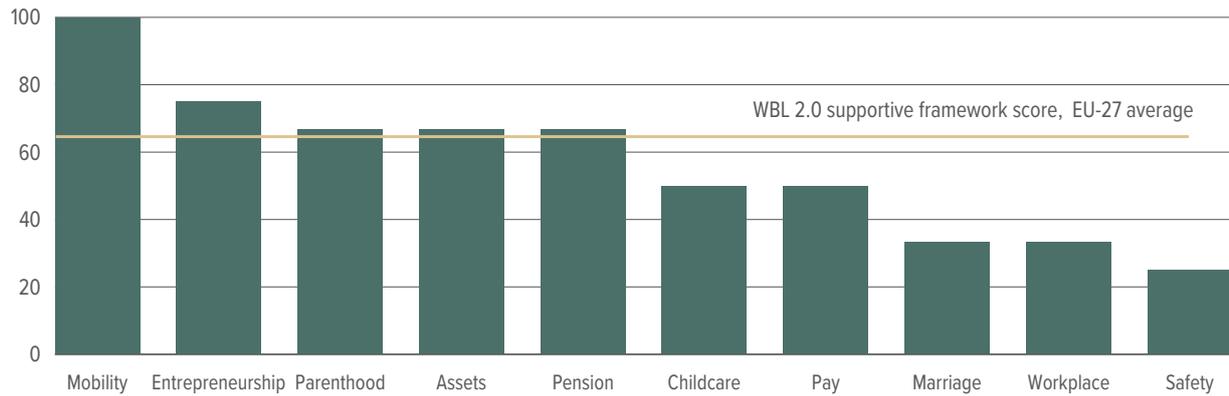


Figure 2. WBL 1.0. Score by Indices (1975-2023)

Source: World Bank: Women, Business, and the Law, 2024



Even with equal laws in place, achieving women's rights and opportunities still faces significant challenges due to inadequate implementation and weak enforcement. WBL 2.0. supportive framework assesses the disparity between laws in theory and their application in practice (*de jure vs de facto*). It encompasses various instruments designed to facilitate the implementation of laws, including national policies, plans and programs, services, budgets, special procedures, and sanctions for noncompliance with certain standards. Data for North Macedonia reveal that the supportive frameworks needed to ensure the implementation of laws could be strengthened across almost all the indicators. In particular, supportive frameworks could be more robust in critical areas such as the legal frameworks governing the provision of childcare (Childcare Indicator), protection in the workplace against discrimination and sexual harassment (the Workplace indicator), and property and inheritance law (Assets Indicator) (Figure 4).

Figure 3. WBL 2.0. Legal Score by Indices (2023)*Source: World Bank: Women, Business, and the Law, 2024***Figure 4. WBL 2.0. Supportive Frameworks Score (2023)***Source: World Bank: Women, Business, and the Law, 2024*

SPOTLIGHT 1 – Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is an approach to budgeting that seeks to promote gender equality by ensuring that public policies and expenditures are designed and implemented in ways that consider the different needs and priorities of women and men. It is an important tool to improve the transparency, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public expenditure.

GRB brings into focus issues that are frequently overlooked within budget analysis and decision-making. These issues include the role that unpaid work plays in economic and social outcomes, especially the unequal distribution of and responsibility for unpaid work that is placed on women, and the extent to which women can voice their needs and participate in decision-making on budgets. GRB not only assists governments in innovating when it comes to the resources for financing the SDGs but also allows them to track allocations for gender equality and to assess the extent to which they are making this information publicly available and transparent.

The Republic of North Macedonia has made significant efforts to advance gender equality and to integrate GRB into national planning and policymaking. Since 2014, the methodology of GRB has been implemented by central government institutions in accordance with the provisions set forth under the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2012) and the budget circular. The latter continues uninterruptedly to stipulate gender-specific obligations. In 2019 gender-specific provisions and guidelines for central level budget users were included in the Government's Strategic Planning Methodology, while the budget circular for local self-government units obliges municipalities to allocate resources for advancing gender equality at the local level. The Republic of North Macedonia moved forward with several new improvements related to GRB during 2021, namely the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2022–2027) and the new Organic Budget Law, which was approved in 2022 by the Assembly and includes gender equality as a key principle.

Source: UN Women

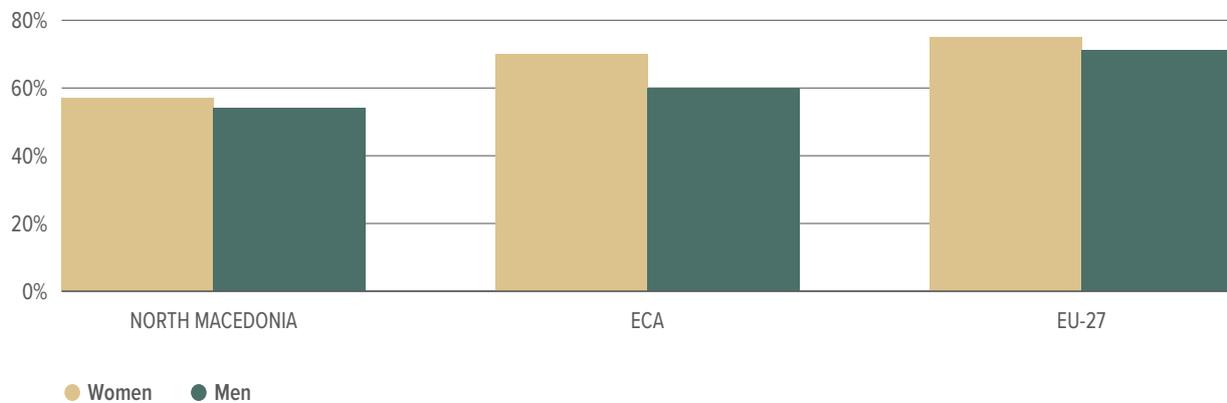
3. ENDOWMENTS

North Macedonia has made strides in improving health outcomes, including life expectancy and infant mortality rates. However, certain public health aspects still lag behind those of comparable countries. Despite significant educational gains for women, including a reversal of the gender gap in enrollment, men are now trailing in educational attainment. Gender segregation persists in educational fields, exacerbating disparities.

The 2020 Human Capital Index⁵ underscores these challenges, revealing that a girl born in North Macedonia today is expected to achieve only 57 percent of her potential productivity due to limitations in education and health, while a boy is projected to reach 54 percent. These figures fall below regional and EU averages (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Human Capital Index (2020)

Source: World Bank, 2020.



3.1 HEALTH

Life expectancy has been steadily increasing since 2000. However, there is still room for improvement as North Macedonia's life expectancy at birth was lower for both men and women compared to the EU-27 average. In 2020, women on average have a higher life expectancy at birth compared to men (76.77 years for

⁵ Source: World Bank (2020). The HCI calculates the contributions of health and education to worker productivity. The final index score ranges from zero to one and measures the productivity as a future worker of child born today relative to the benchmark of full health and complete education.

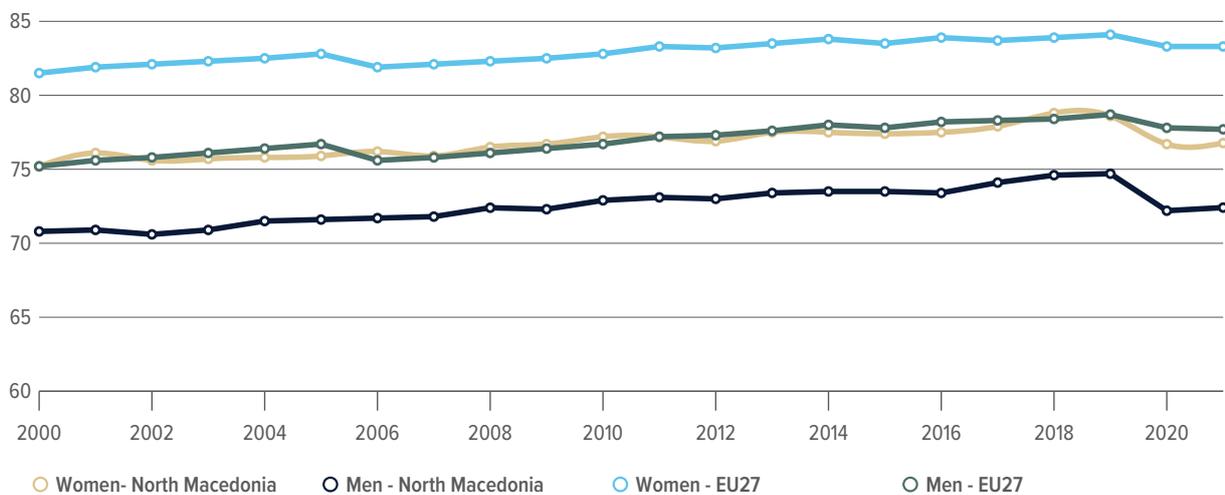
women and 72.41 years for men (Figure 6). Over the period, the gender gap in life expectancy has remained stable (around 4.5 years on average). The average life expectancy is still below the EU average. North Macedonia has the second lowest life expectancy among Western Balkans, only followed by Serbia, although the lowest gender gap.

Recent surveys show that the antenatal care for pregnant women as well as the post-natal care for mothers and newborns differ noticeably in rural and urban areas as well among women from different ethnic backgrounds. In 2018-2019, 95.7 percent of the women aged 15-49 years with a live birth in the past two years had at least four antenatal care visits, while 81.1 percent had at least eight visits (the WHO recommended minimum for antenatal visits).⁶

Owing to these advancements, the maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) has declined from 12 in 2000 to 3 in 2020 (Figure 7), below the EU average. Compared to the countries in the Western Balkan region, North Macedonia has the second lowest maternal mortality ratio, after Montenegro.⁷

Figure 6. Life Expectancy at Birth by Gender (years), (2000-2021)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: Eurostat: Demographic Statistics. Accessed: January 11, 2024

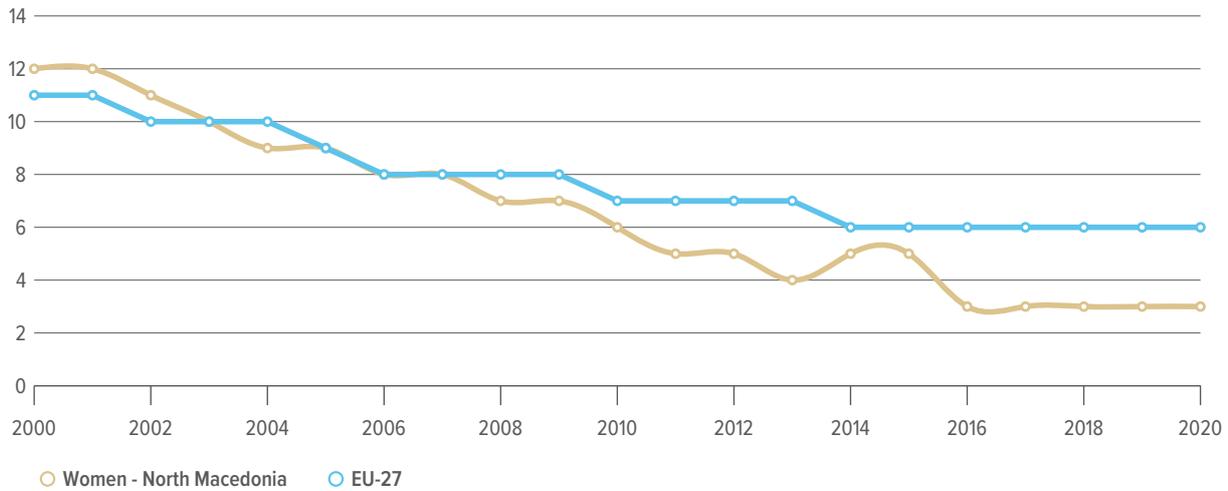


6 UNICEF and SSO (2020)

7 National policy framework addressing the health of mothers and infants included the National Strategy for Safe Motherhood for 2010-2015 (unrenewed) and the Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health for 2011-2020 (unrenewed), as well as the National Safe Motherhood Committee (established 2010) and the National Perinatal Mortality Audit Working Group established by the Ministry of health in 2019, as an institutional response to the negative infant mortality rate trends in the 2010s (SSO, 2022; UNICEF, 2019).

Figure 7. Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births) (2000-2020)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and UNDESA/Population Division, World Health Organization, 2023. Accessed: January 11, 2024.



Infant mortality rates have significantly decreased over the past two decades for both genders, leading to a decrease in the gender gap (Figure 8).⁸ However, the country's infant mortality rate is still above the EU average and has the second highest infant mortality rate in the region of Western Balkans after Albania.

In 1985, the male-to-female sex ratio at birth began to rise, peaking in 1990 at 1.09, up from 1.07. By 2021, North Macedonia's sex ratio at birth reached 108 boys per 100 girls, notably surpassing the natural upper limit of 104 to 107 boys per 100 girls as established by Chahnazarian in 1988. This trend reflects a rise in son preference, fueled by declining fertility rates and the availability of fetal sex-revealing technology in a society where son preference is prevalent.⁹

Regarding health conditions related to unhealthy behaviors, North Macedonia faces challenges. Obesity prevalence is increasing for both genders, with the gender gap narrowing in recent years. As of 2016, the prevalence of obesity was 22.1 percent for women and 22.6 percent for men (Figure 9). Similarly, in 2020, men exhibited a higher tobacco use rate, with a prevalence of 37.3 percent compared to 8.7 percent among women.¹⁰

⁸ While infant mortality continues to be more prevalent among boys than girls, this might be in line with sex differences in genetic and biological conditions, with boys being biologically weaker and more susceptible to diseases or premature death.

⁹ See also Guilamoto and Duthe' (2013) and Duthe' et al (2012).

¹⁰ Source: World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Accessed: January 11, 2024.

Figure 8. Infant Mortality Rate by Sex (per 1,000 births) (2000-2021)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: Estimates developed by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNICEF, WHO, World Bank, UN DESA Population Division) at www.childmortality.org. Accessed: January 11, 2024.

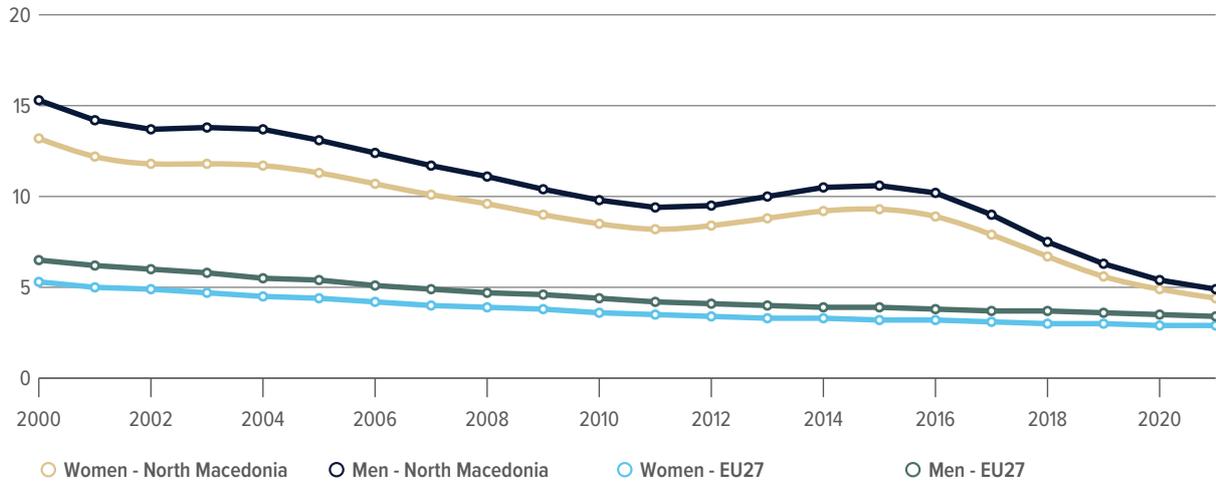


Figure 9. Prevalence of Obesity (percent of population 18 years old and over) (2000-2016)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: World Health Organization (WHO): Global Health Observatory Data Repository. Accessed: January 11, 2024.

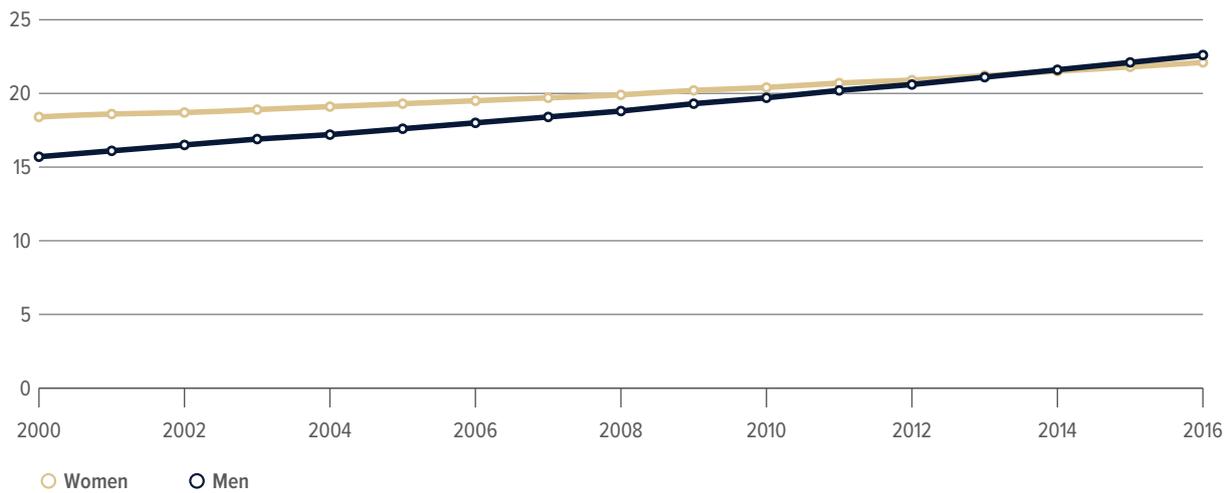


Figure 10. Adolescent Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15 – 19) (2000-2021)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects. Accessed: January 11, 2024

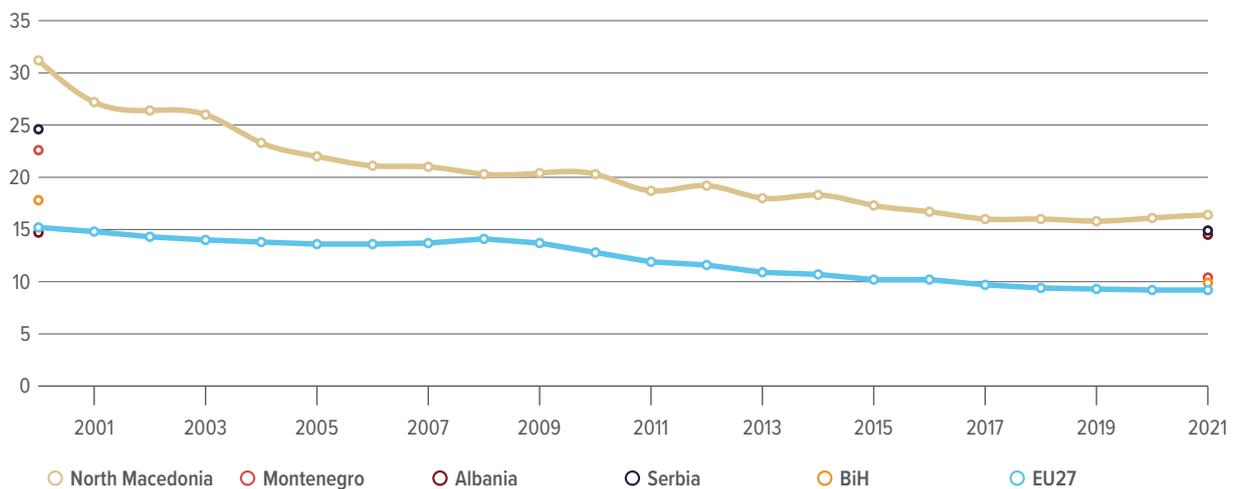
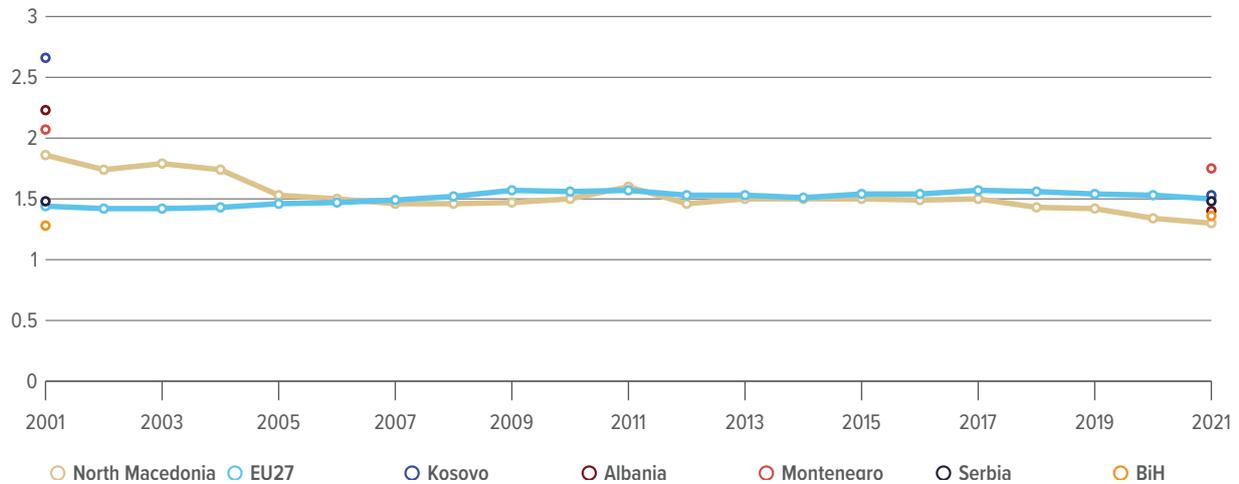


Figure 11. Fertility Rate (births per woman) (2001-2021)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: Eurostat: Demographic Statistics. Accessed: January 11, 2024.



The adolescent fertility rate has notably decreased over the past two decades, although it remains higher than the EU-27 average. North Macedonia, like other Western Balkan countries, has seen a decline in adolescent fertility rates (Figure 10), with 16.4 percent of teenage girls between 15 and 19 years old giving birth in 2021, compared to 9.2 percent in the EU-27. Despite improvements in education and reproductive health awareness, North Macedonia still has the highest proportion of pregnant teenagers in the Western Balkans.

Similarly, the fertility rate for the general population has persistently decreased below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman, dropping to 1.30 in 2021. This decline mirrors trends in the EU but is now lower than the EU average of 1.50 births per woman. North Macedonia has the lowest fertility level, compared to other Western Balkan countries, indicating a need to address factors influencing family planning decisions (Figure 11).¹¹

With increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility rates, there is a growing need for care for the aging population, which predominantly falls on women due to prevalent gender roles. The correlation between women's labor force participation and fertility rates highlights the importance of policies supporting work-life balance, such as public childcare, parental leave benefits, and flexible work arrangements. Additionally, addressing declining marriage rates requires challenging social norms and gender role expectations to align with modern aspirations and ideals.

¹¹ The observed decrease in the fertility rate in 2020, the lowest fertility rate since the country's independence can be attributed to some extent to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the population in the country (SSO, 2022).

3.2 EDUCATION

The enrolment rates for primary and secondary education indicate a narrowing gender gap. By 2020, girls had achieved parity in primary school, were closing the gap with boys in secondary school, and held an advantage in pre-primary school settings. (Figure 12). The most significant gender gap is observed in tertiary education, where women dominate with a gross enrollment rate of 50.6 percent in 2020, compared to men at 35.9 percent (Figure 13). Despite this, North Macedonia ranks fifth in the Western Balkans in terms of tertiary enrollment rates for women.

Figure 12. Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrollment Rates by Education Level (2000-2021)

Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS. Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Note: The gender parity index for gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education is the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in public and private schools at each level. Accessed: January 11, 2024

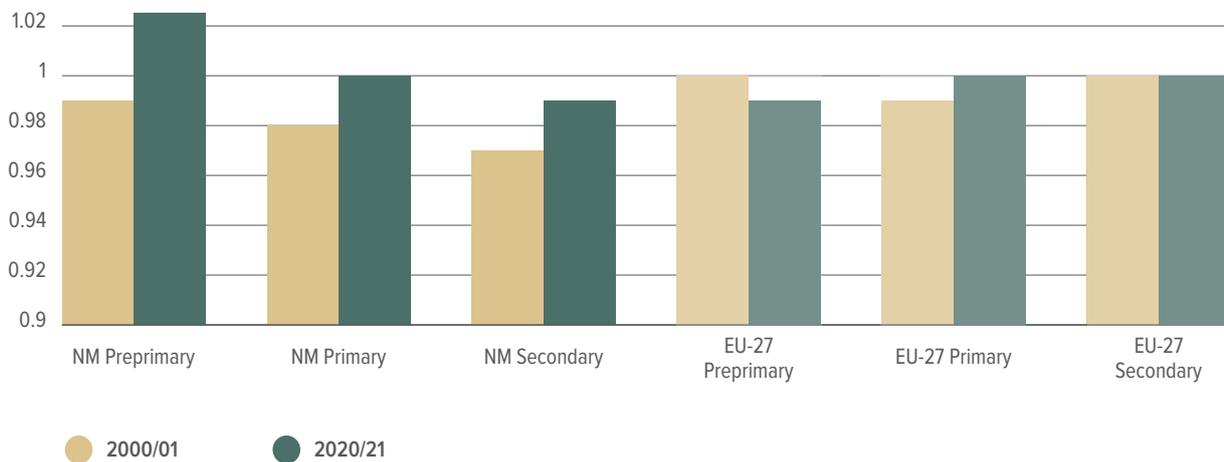
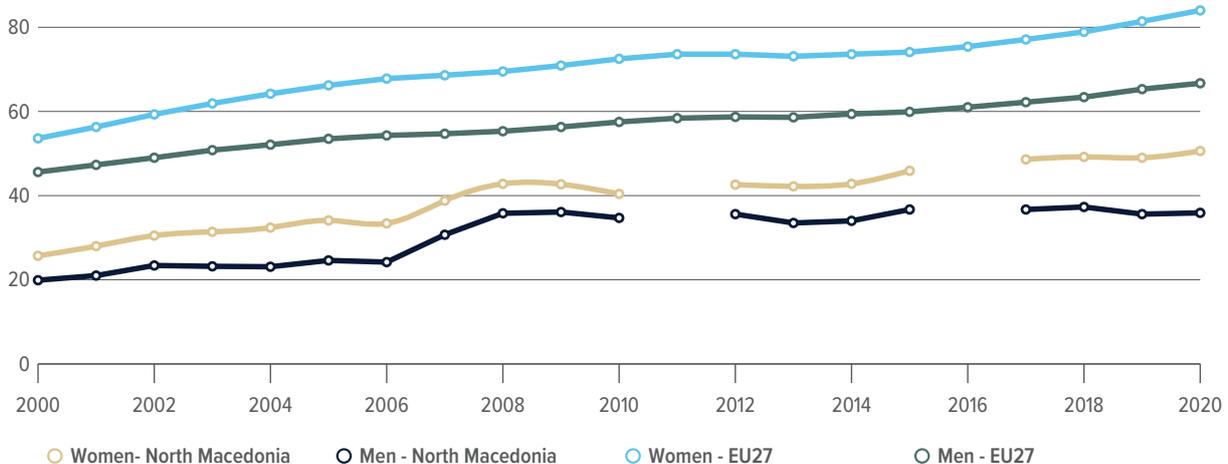


Figure 13. Gross Enrollment Rates in Tertiary Education (2000-2020)

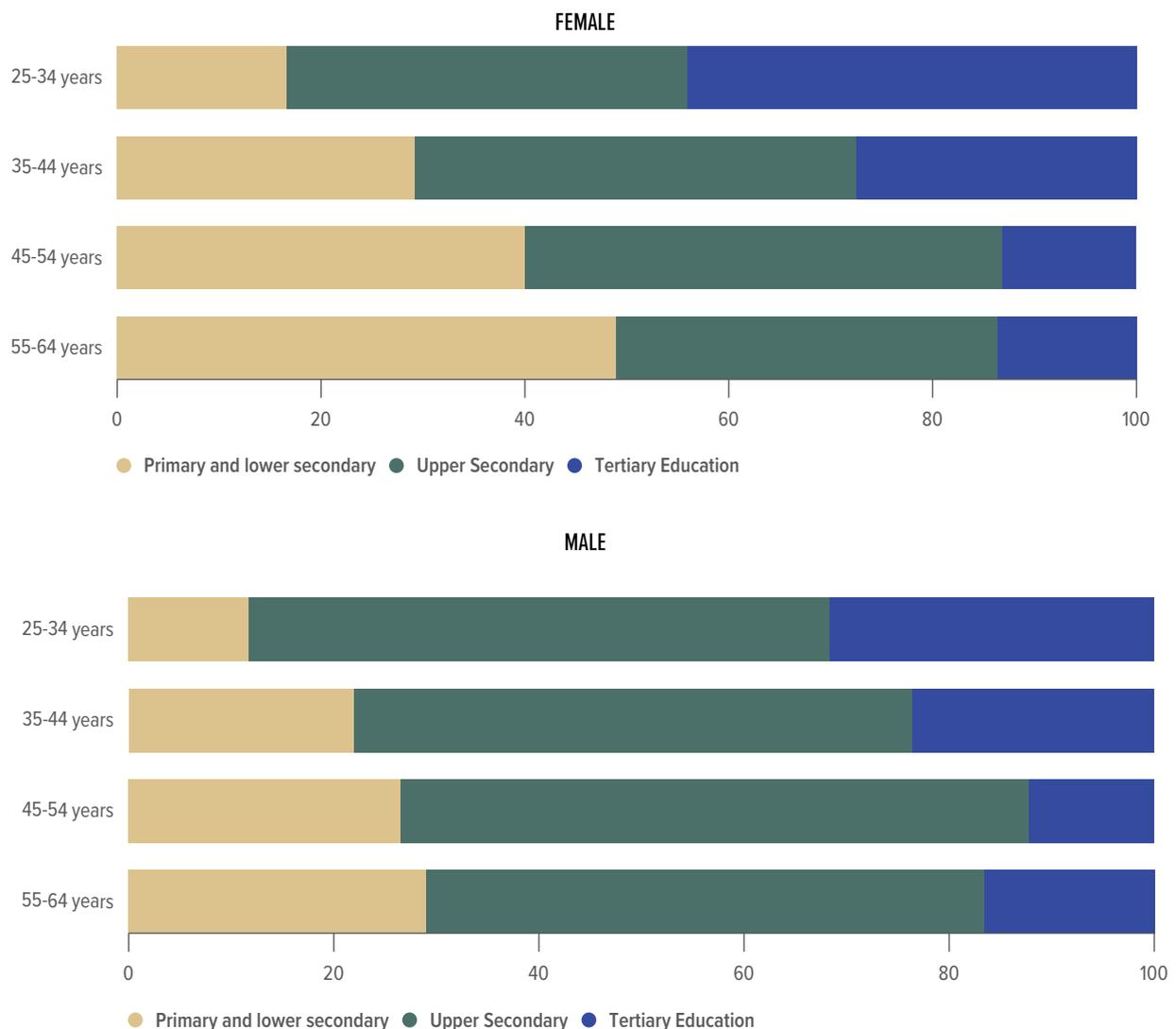
Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS. Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Accessed: January 11, 2024.



On average, women in North Macedonia achieve higher rates of educational attainment than men. In 2020, 25.1 percent of women between 25 and 64 years had attained tertiary education, compared to 21.4 percent of men in the same age group. This gender gap in educational attainment is more pronounced in younger age groups (Figure 14). For those aged 25 to 34, 44.1 percent of women had attained tertiary education, while the figure for men was 31.6 percent. However, as age increases, the gender gap shifts, with men in the 55 to 64 age group slightly outpacing women in tertiary education attainment (16.6 percent for men compared to 13.6 percent for women).

Figure 14. Educational Attainment by Age-group (2020)

Source: Eurostat; ISCED levels for primary education include less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2), secondary education includes upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4), and tertiary education (levels 5 to 8). INSTAT, LFS 2018-2020

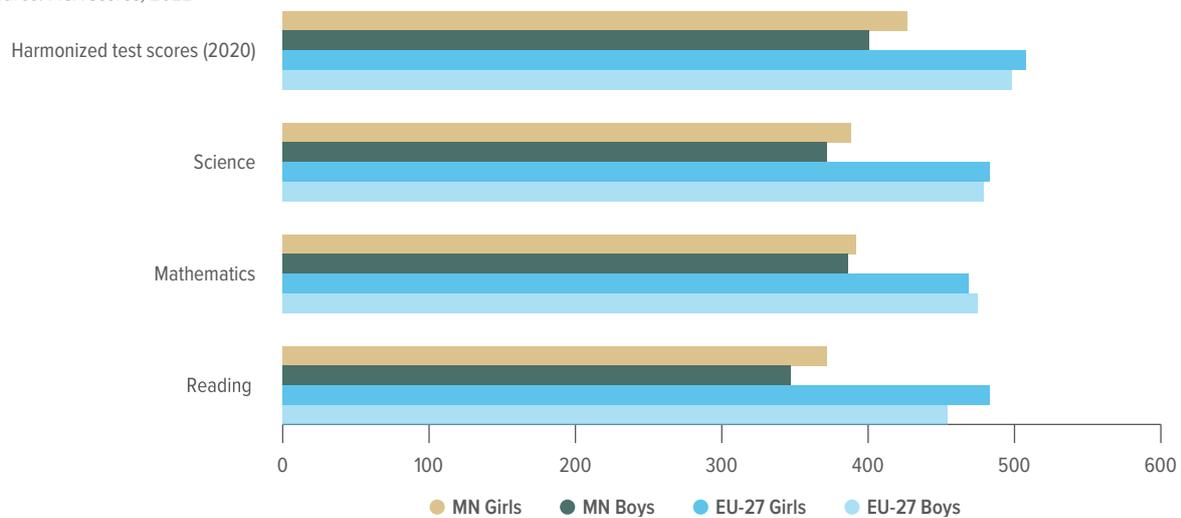


While there have been notable advancements in education for women in North Macedonia, the country still lags behind its counterparts in the Western Balkans and the European Union in terms of educational attainment. Compared to the EU-27, North Macedonia has lower levels of tertiary educational attainment for both men and women in the 25-64 age group. However, this trend is changing among younger generations. Additionally, when compared to other Western Balkan countries, North Macedonia has lower tertiary educational attainment levels for women compared to Serbia and lower levels for both men and women compared to Montenegro.

Girls consistently outperform boys in school, as demonstrated by the PISA scores in 2022. The results indicate that girls surpass boys in reading, mathematics, and science. Overall, there is a 27-point gap between 15-year-old girls and boys, with the largest gap seen in reading scores (25 points), followed by science (16 points) and mathematics (6 points). However, both girls and boys in North Macedonia report lower results compared to EU countries. (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Student Performance 15 Years: Harmonized Test and PISA scores (2022)

Source: PISA scores, 2022



Despite the noted progress in tertiary education, fewer women in North Macedonia enroll and graduate in STEM fields. Women are still more likely to pursue degrees in education, humanities, and social sciences, while men tend to opt for fields such as information and communication technologies and engineering,¹² which offer higher earnings and growth prospects. However, the gender gap in STEM enrollment has been gradually narrowing in recent years as more women choose STEM fields for their future careers. Positive measures, such as awareness campaigns and scholarships for women in STEM, may have contributed to these changes (MLSP, 2022). Yet, by 2020, only 11 percent of women enrolled in tertiary

12 STEM fields - science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

education were in STEM fields, compared to 22 percent of men.¹³ This gender gap persists even at the tertiary education level, with 9 percent of women graduating in STEM fields in 2020, compared to 11 percent of men.

Digital skills show small gender gaps. Younger women have more basic or above basic overall digital skills compared to young men. The gender gap favors women across all age groups, with the largest gap of 12.0 percentage points in the age group 16-24 years (Table 1). Digital skills increase with the level of education for both sexes, and the gender gap gets reversed for the highly educated (6 percentage points favoring women with high formal education). However, North Macedonia still falls behind the EU-27 average and other countries in the region such as Serbia and Montenegro.

Table 1. Individuals Who Have Basic or Above Basic Overall Digital Skills (percent, by sex, age group, and level of education) (2019)

Source: Eurostat. Accessed: January 11, 2024.

	NORTH MACEDONIA		EU-27	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
AGE-GROUPS				
16-24 years old	58	70	79.5	82
25-54 years old	34	35	64.3	62
55-74 years old	8	7	38.2	26
LEVEL OF EDUCATION				
Low formal education	13	9	35.6	27
Medium formal education	30	31	55.6	53
High formal education	62	68	86	82

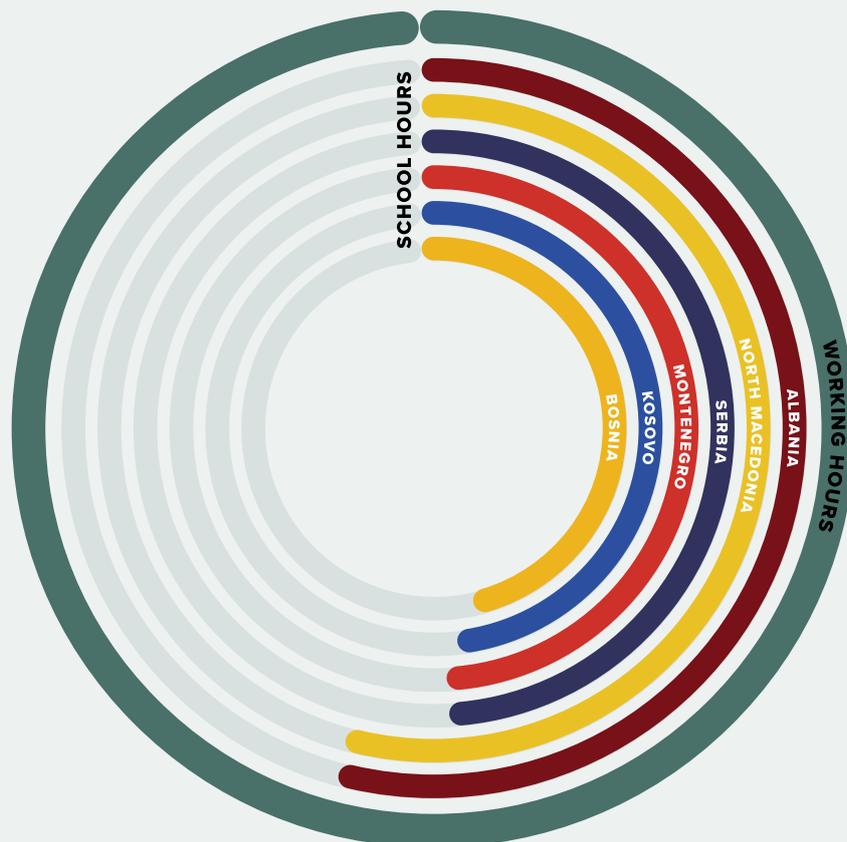
13 Author's calculations based on INSTAT educational statistics, 2020-2021

SPOTLIGHT 2 - School Hours

Parents of young children face the daunting task of juggling childcare responsibilities with earning an income. The scarcity of childcare facilities exacerbates this challenge, leaving parents with few options, such as relying on untrained caregivers, reducing work hours, or even quitting their jobs altogether. This issue extends beyond early childhood care; even when children reach primary school age, parents continue to grapple with the balance between work and childcare due to school hours and breaks. This struggle is amplified for single parents or households where both parents work full-time.

Analyzing school calendars in the Western Balkans reveals that children spend only half the working hours of a full-time employee in school annually. This underscores the necessity for accessible and affordable preschool and afterschool care. The lack thereof not only impedes parents' ability to work but also forces them into difficult decisions regarding their children's care quality.

Thus, the shortage of accessible and affordable preschool and afterschool care can have a profound impact on parents and families. It can limit parents' ability to return to work or force them to make difficult choices about the quality of care their children receive.



4. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Despite women's dominance in tertiary education, lower fertility rates, and longer life expectancy, these advancements have not been reflected in improved economic opportunities. North Macedonia still grapples with challenges like the wage gap, gender disparity in labor force participation rates, and significant occupational segregation. In 2022, the Gender Equality Gain Index (GEGI),¹⁴ which measures the potential increase in long-run GDP per capita from equalizing employment rates between genders, was 19.7 percent, highlighting the substantial economic and social benefits that would result from narrowing the gender employment gap.

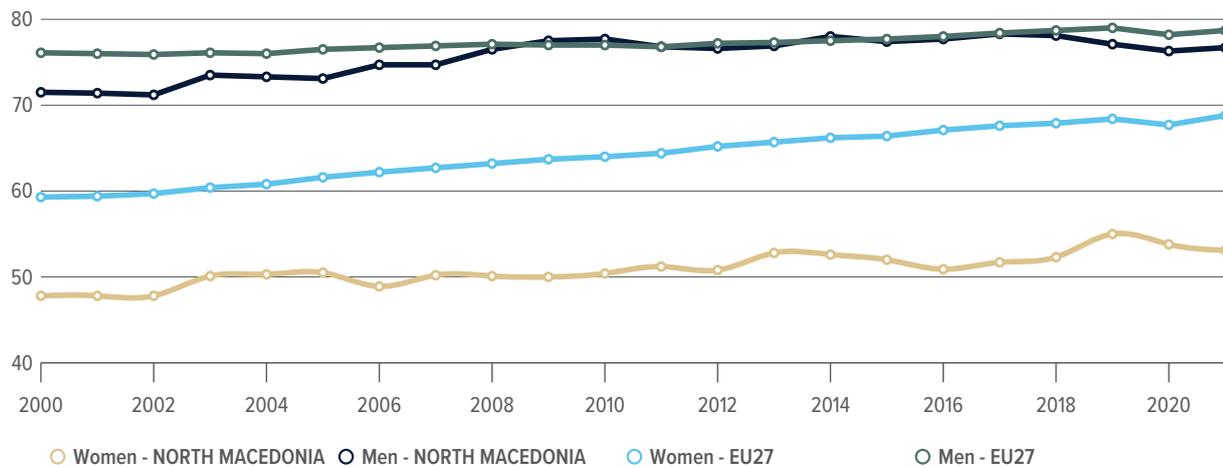
4.1 LABOR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

In North Macedonia, significant and enduring disparities persist in labor market outcomes between women and men. While female labor force participation has shown a gradual increase since 2000, it still lags far behind that of men. As of 2021, there exists a substantial gap of 23.6 percentage points in the labor force participation rate (53.1 percent for women compared to 76.7 percent for men) (Figure 16). Despite efforts, these rates have plateaued for both genders, perpetuating the gender gap. North Macedonia displays wider gender disparities in labor force participation compared to the EU-27, primarily due to a lower proportion of women participating in the labor force in contrast to the EU-27 (where it exceeds 68 percent). Meanwhile, male LFP levels are comparable between North Macedonia and the EU-27.

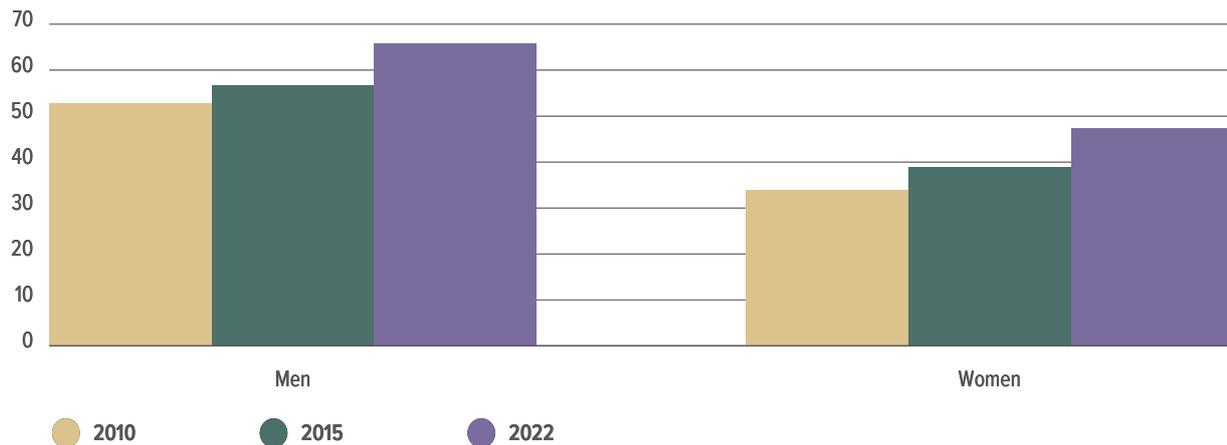
¹⁴ Source: Penning (2020). GEGI index measure of gender employment gaps equal to the long-run GDP per capita gains from increasing women's employment rates, so they are equal to men's. The basic GEGI is defined as the gap between male and female employment as a share of total employment.

Figure 16. LFP Rate (percent population 15-64 years old) (2000-2021)

Source: Gender Data Portal. Original Source: International Labour Organization. "ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections database (ILOEST)" ILOSTAT. Accessed: January 11, 2024

**Figure 17. Employment to Population Ratio by Sex (percent population 15-64 years old)(2010-2022)**

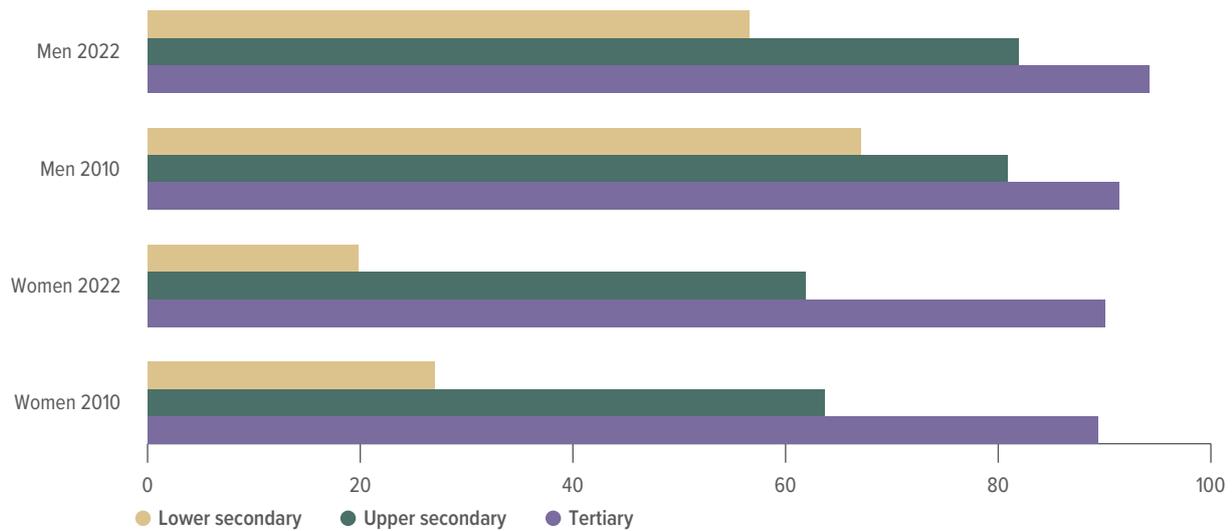
Source: See Jobs Gateway. Accessed: January 12, 2024.



Similar to the labor force participation rate, North Macedonia also experiences enduring disparities in employment rates between men and women. Over the past decade, the employment-to-population ratio for males aged 15-64 has consistently exceeded that of females. As of 2022, the employment rates stand at 45.5 percent for females and 64.3 percent for males (Figure 17). Among the Western Balkan countries, North Macedonia exhibits one of the widest gender gaps in employment rates, following BiH and Kosovo.

Figure 18. LFP Rate by Education Attainment in North Macedonia (percent population 15-64 years) (2010-2022)

Source: SEE Jobs Gateway. Accessed: January 11, 2024



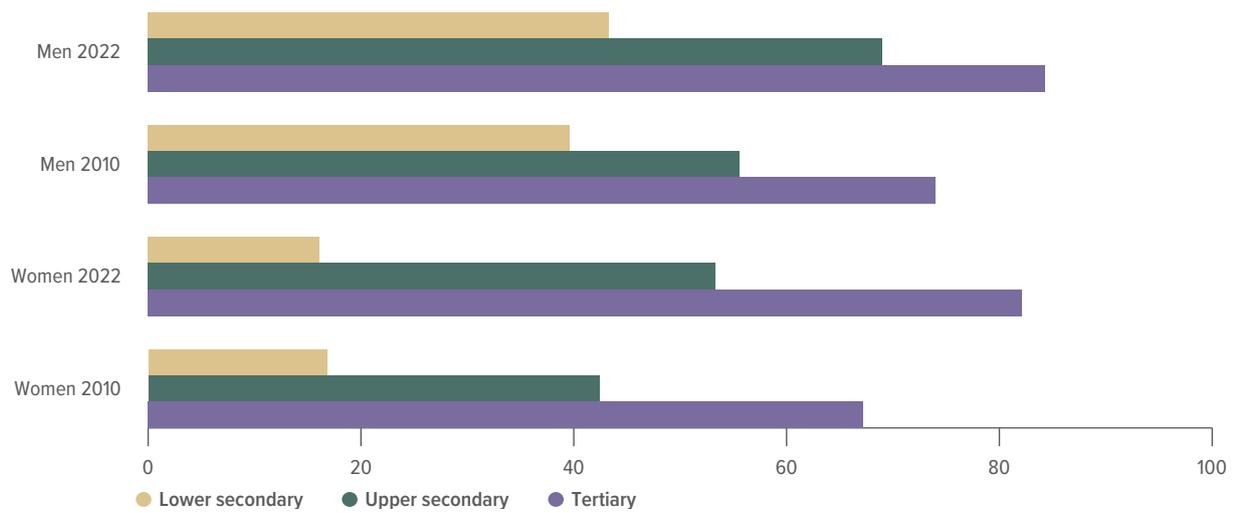
The gender gap in labor force participation and employment rates is notable among individuals without tertiary education. In 2022, men and women with only lower secondary education had a participation rate of 67 percent and 27 percent, respectively, indicating a significant gender gap (Figure 18). However, this gap decreases considerably among those with tertiary education, where there are no significant differences in participation rates (94.2 percent vs 90 percent). The gender gap in the activity rate widens with age, peaking among the population aged 50-64 (at 34.8 percentage points in 2022).¹⁵ A similar pattern is observed for employment rates (Figure 19). Gender gaps in employment rates are particularly pronounced among individuals with lower and upper secondary education (26 and 16 percentage points, respectively). However, for those with tertiary education, there are no significant gender disparities (2.2 percentage points). Upon closer examination of the employment rate among individuals aged 15 to 24 with tertiary education, a substantial gender gap exists within the same population (68 percent for men and 43 percent for women in 2020). This suggests that young, educated women either face lower employment prospects or are more selective in accepting job offers.

The rates of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are elevated for both young women (17.9 percent in 2021) and men (18.8 percent in 2021), but gender gaps have decreased since 2010 (Figure 20). Although NEET rates for both genders remain elevated compared to EU-27 countries, the gender gaps in NEET have been narrowing over the last 15 years.

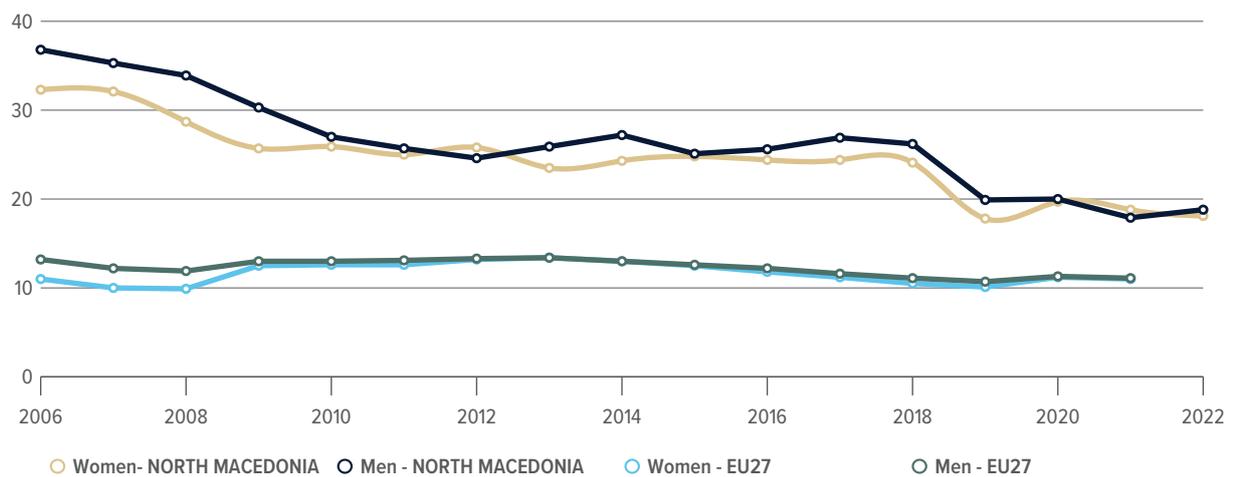
15 SEE Jobs Gateway. Accessed: January 12, 2024.

Figure 19. Employment to Population Ratio by Sex and Educational Attainment (percent population 15-64 years old) (2010-2022)

Source: See Jobs Gateway. Accessed: January 11, 2024

**Figure 20. Young People Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) (2006-2021)**

Source: World Bank, Gender Data Portal. Original Source: ILOSTAT. Accessed: January 12, 2024.



The transition to adulthood in North Macedonia follows distinct paths for young men and women. Typically, men experience a decrease in inactivity and an increase in employment rates after completing their education. On the other hand, women often transition from education to a period of inactivity, which aligns with the start of family-related activities from their late teens through their twenties and thirties (Figures 21-24). While the inactivity rate among men tends to stabilize or decline during these years, the rate of women not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET) progressively rises, persisting until around age 40. This pattern highlights significant gender disparities in the transition from education to the workforce, influenced by societal roles and family responsibilities.

Figure 21. NEET Rates by age

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2021.

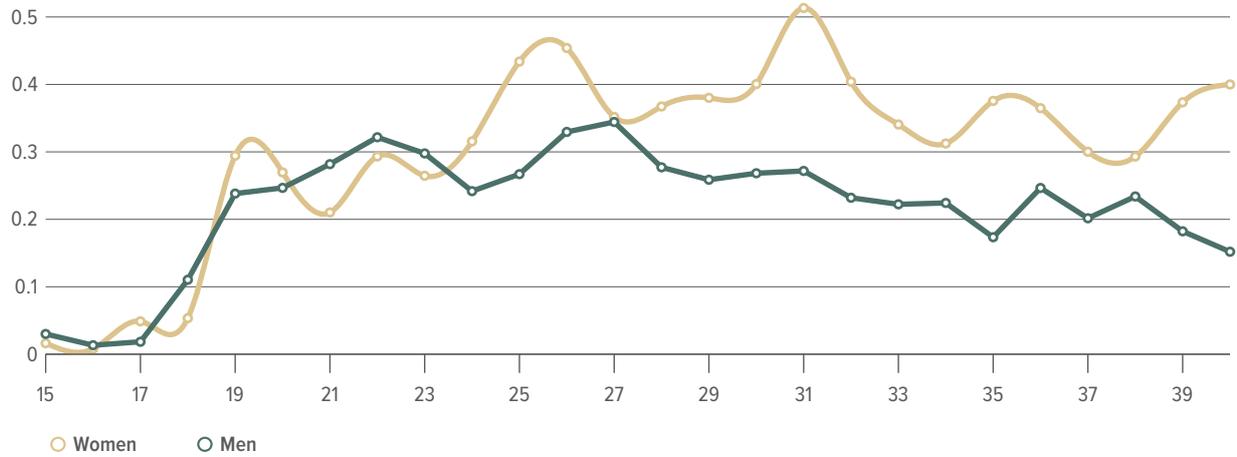


Figure 22. Employment Rates by age

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2021.

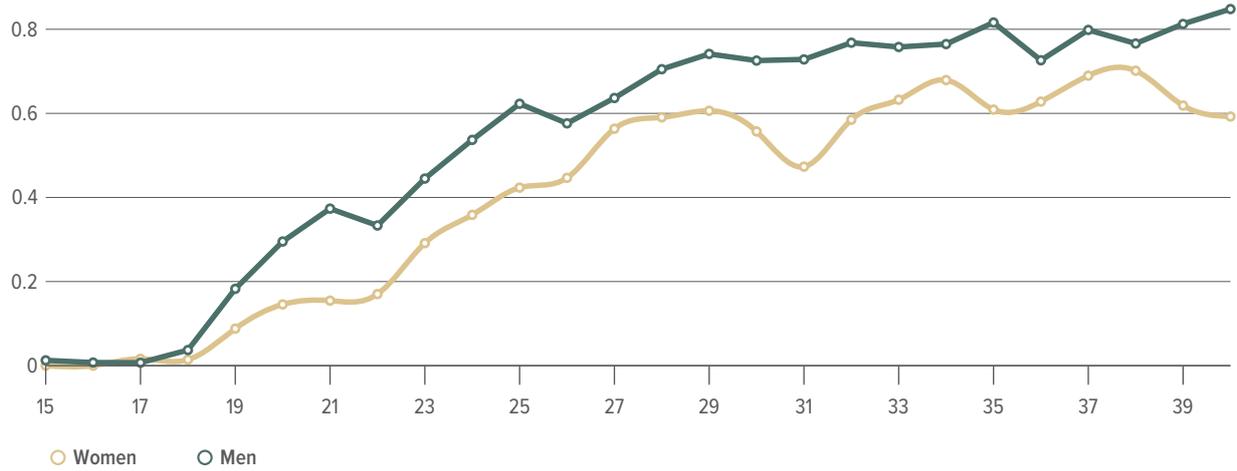


Figure 23. Family Formation by age

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2021.

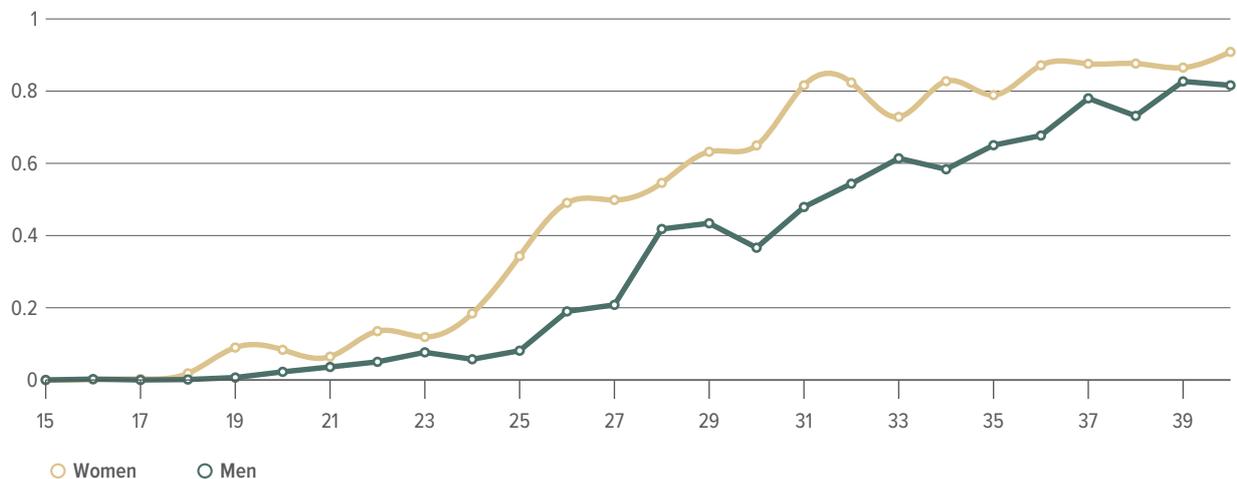
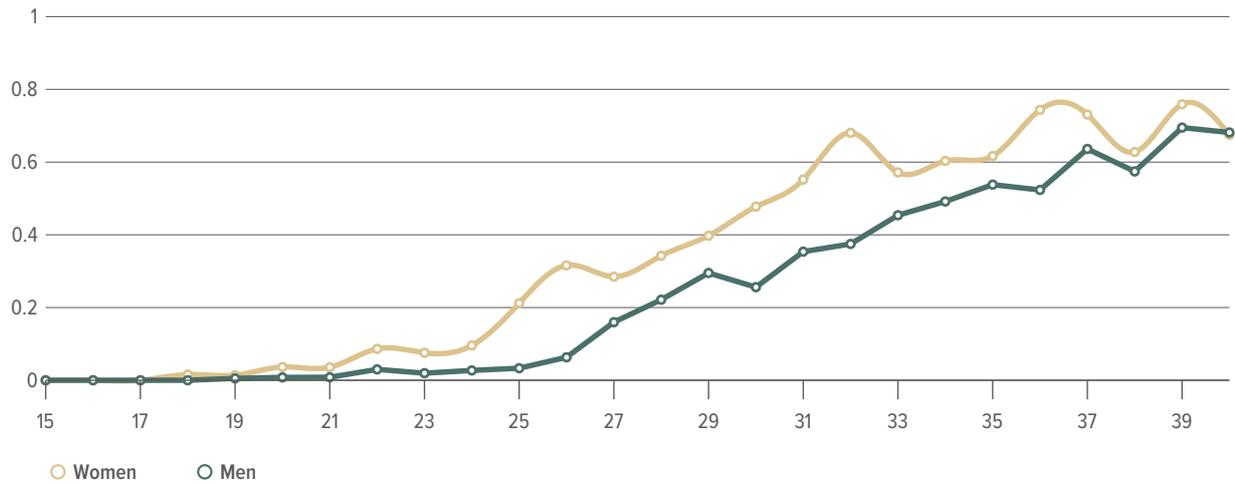


Figure 24. Share of Adults with Children 0-17 Y.o. by Age

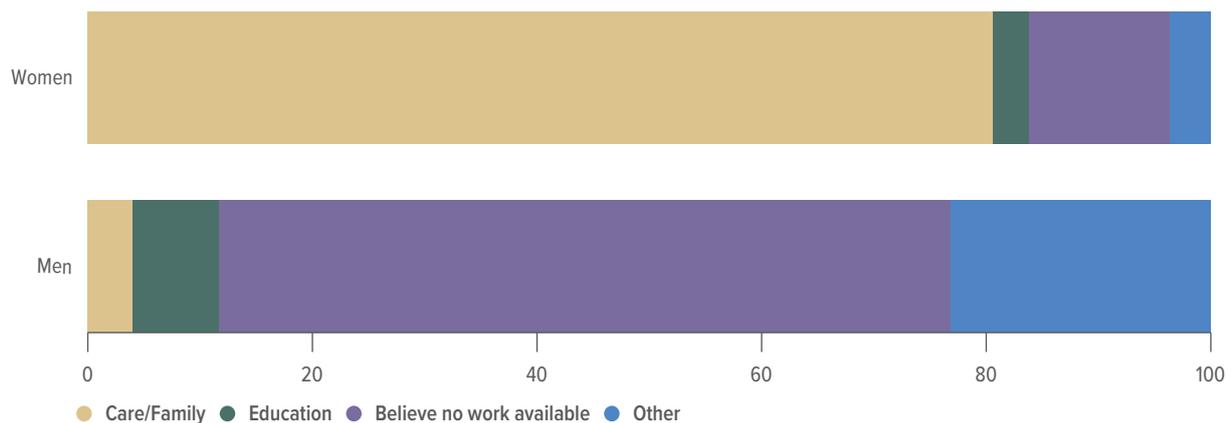
Source: Labor Force Survey, 2021



Men's inactivity in the labor market is mainly tied to factors such as education, training, or perceptions of job availability, while for women, it is primarily due to family commitments. Market-related reasons account for over 73 percent of men's inactivity, compared to only 15 percent for women. Conversely, nearly 80 percent of women cite personal or family obligations as their main reason for inactivity, in sharp contrast to just 4 percent of men (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Reasons for Inactivity by Sex (age 25-64 y.o.)

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2021.

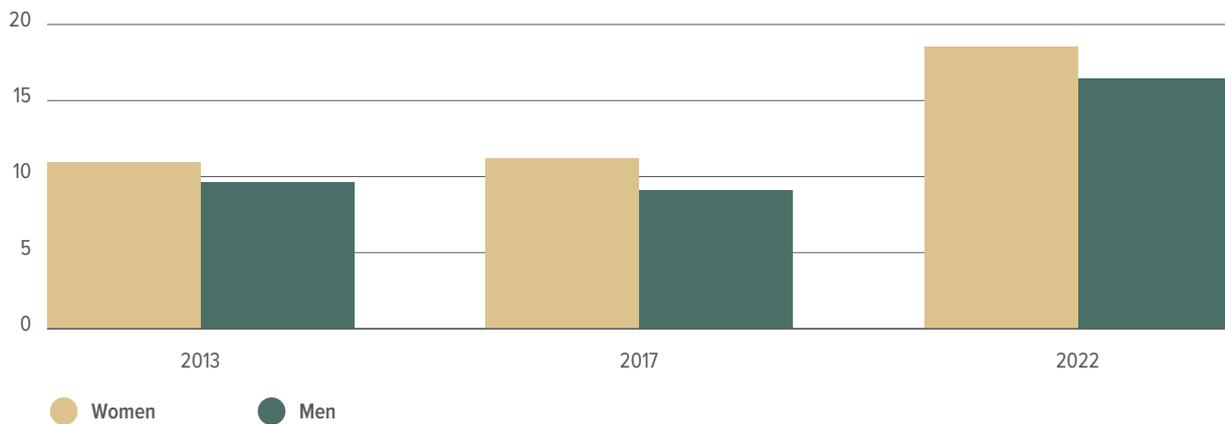


In alignment with EU countries and other Western Balkan nations, both women's lower labor market participation and their prevalence as part-time workers stand out (Figure 26). Part-time employment can present significant challenges for women, including restricted career advancement and inadequate long-term economic and social stability. Additionally, it's crucial to underscore the scarcity of viable part-time job opportunities (with fair wages) in North Macedonia. This scarcity like-

ly contributes to decreased labor market participation among women who have young children or caregiving responsibilities within their families. Conversely, informal or precarious employment is more prevalent among men.¹⁶

Figure 26. Share of Part-Time Employment by Gender (2013-2022)

Source: ILOSTAT. Accessed: January 12, 2024



4.2 NEED AND PROVISION OF CARE

The gender-based division of care responsibilities significantly affects women's economic participation. Social norms often place a heavier burden of caregiving responsibilities on women compared to men. This burden is magnified when access to quality public or private care is limited, or resources to hire paid caregivers are scarce. Consequently, women, who disproportionately engage in unpaid work, often find themselves time-constrained, with less opportunity to participate in paid employment or work longer hours while juggling both paid and unpaid labor. This lack of time due to domestic responsibilities hampers women's ability to complete their education, secure paid employment, dedicate time to starting or expanding businesses, and work as many hours for pay as men, pushing them towards informal or lower-paying jobs.

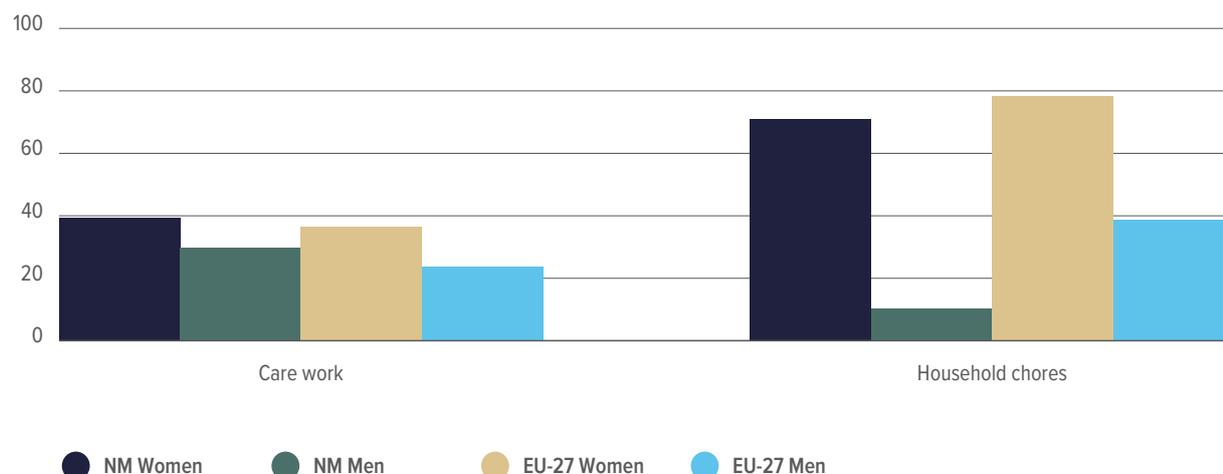
In North Macedonia, 48.7 percent of men and 37.7 percent of women agree with the statement that "A woman should do most of the household chores even if the husband is not working".¹⁷ Consequently, women are the primary participants in unpaid care activities and domestic work in North Macedonia, leading to a significant gap in household chore completion between women and men (Figure 27).

¹⁶ Sources: Gender Data Portal. Original Source: ILOSTAT. Accessed: January 12, 2024. SEE Jobs Gateway. Accessed: January 12, 2024.

¹⁷ LITS IV (2023)

Figure 27. Unpaid Domestic and Care Work (percent, 18+ population) (2019)

Source: Gender Equality Index (GEI) North Macedonia 2019 (SSO, 2019); and GEI EU (EIGE, 2022)



Men's employment status doesn't affect the average time spent on domestic work and childcare; both employed and unemployed men dedicate approximately one hour daily to unpaid work. However, for women, the contrast is striking, especially when compared with men in the same employment category. Employed women spend three times more time daily on domestic tasks and childcare than employed men. In contrast, unemployed women spend nearly five times more time on domestic work compared to unemployed men.¹⁸

The unequal distribution of domestic work and childcare often stems from the absence of comprehensive social, educational, and labor policies that address the reinforcement of gender norms and stereotypes at both individual and structural levels. Despite a recent increase in the number of kindergartens, access to childcare services remains limited, with 87 percent of children under the age of 3 not enrolled in childcare facilities, and satisfaction with the available services ranking lowest in the region.¹⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated preventive measures have worsened the inequality in household chores and childcare responsibilities (UN Women, 2020). Women, especially mothers and those living with partners, have seen a significant increase in unpaid domestic work and childcare hours. Men reported spending more time on domestic tasks, particularly childcare, compared to the pre-pandemic period. However, these changes were less pronounced than those experienced by women.

In North Macedonia, traditional childcare demands have been complemented by eldercare needs due to increased longevity: lower fertility rates and higher life

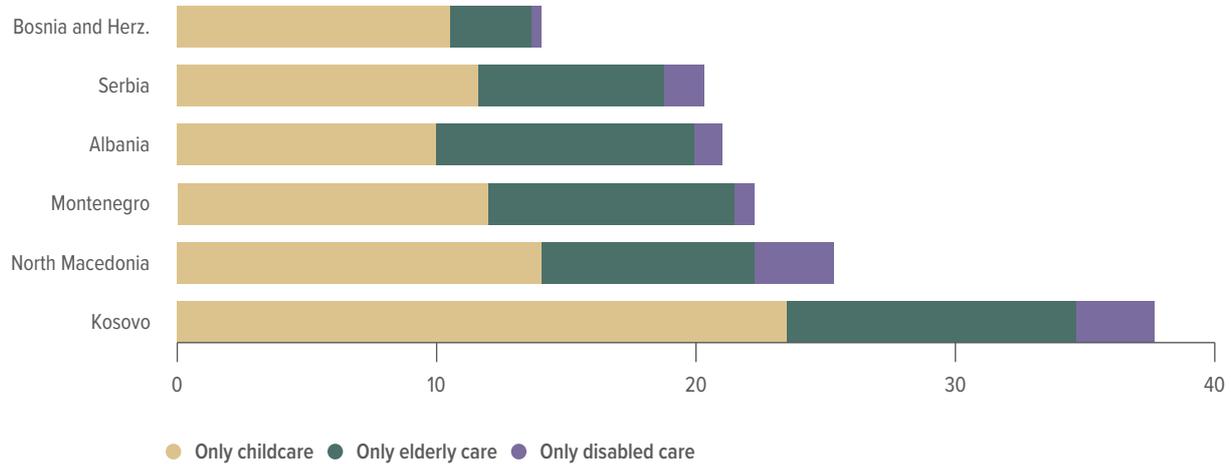
18 SSO, 2015

19 See: Data from EQLS, 2016. See also MLSP (2022), SSO (2022); Leshoska et al. (2022).

expectancy are leading to a more aged population. These additional caregiving responsibilities may further burden women within households.

Figure 28. Care Need in Households (percent of the population living in households with children, elderly and disabled, by country) (2023)

Source: LFTS IV (2023)



The percentage of the population residing in households with young children (ages 0-6) and the elderly (ages 65+) serves as a crucial indicator of care requirements. In North Macedonia, living with elderly individuals (aged 65+) is more prevalent than living with young children (aged 0-6). Specifically, 36.3 percent of the population cohabitates with someone aged 65 or older, compared to 17.1 percent living with young children.²⁰ While the presence of an elderly person may entail increased caregiving responsibilities for other adults, it could also result in reduced childcare duties if the elderly individual is providing care for grandchildren themselves.

According to Life in Transition Survey (LFTS) IV, in North Macedonia 14 percent of the population resides in households solely requiring childcare, 8 percent in a household solely requiring elderly care, and 3.1 percent in a household requiring both (see Figure 28).²¹

Household members are the primary caregivers. In North Macedonia, 66 percent of households with childcare needs and 95 percent of households with elderly care needs opt not to use institutional care facilities. The most common reasons for not utilizing childcare facilities include childcare being provided by household members and concerns regarding the quality of the service. Similarly, elder care facilities are less frequently chosen due to caregiving provided by household members or the use of live-in support (Figure 29).

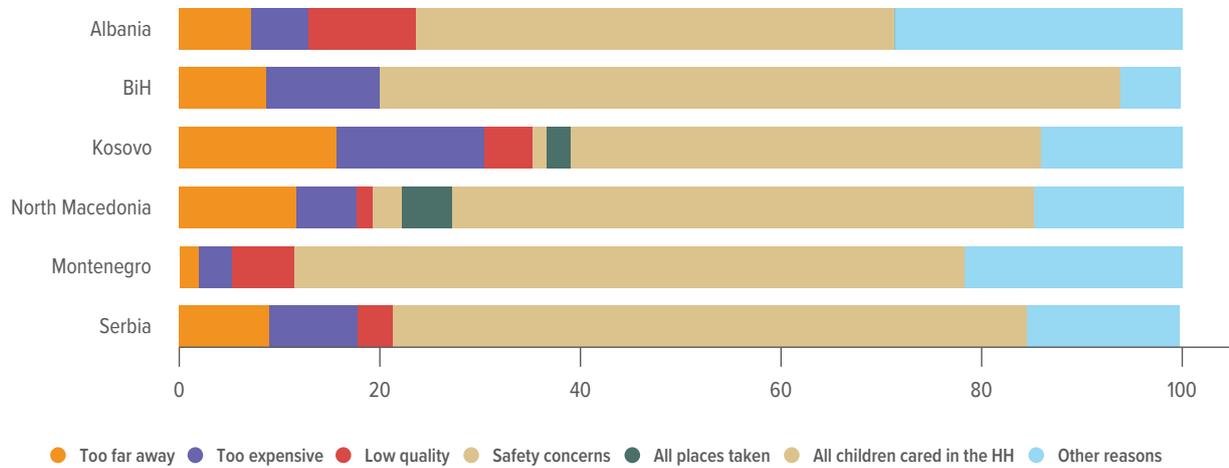
20 LITS IV (2023)

21 The LITS IV includes a question asking whether each household member needs care and whether they use institutional care facilities. The question is asked for all children (0-6 years old), and elderly people.

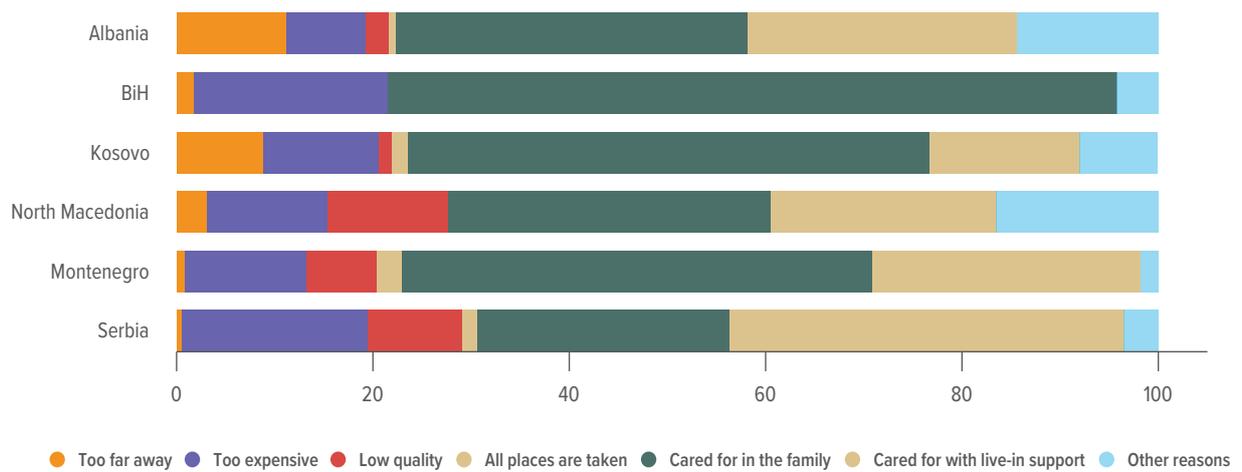
Figure 29. Reasons for Not Using Care Facilities by Type of Care Needed (2023)

Source: LITS IV (2023)

A. Reasons for not using childcare (percent of the population living in households with childcare needs), by country



B. Reasons for not using elderly care (percent of the population living in households with elderly care needs), by country



4.3 LABOUR MARKET SEGREGATION

Men tend to be overrepresented in industries traditionally seen as male-dominated, like construction (11 percent of employed men compared to 1 percent of women), mining, quarrying, and utilities (6 percent of men compared to 1.3 percent of women), as well as trade and transportation (28.7 percent of men compared to 22.9 percent of women) (Figure 30). Conversely, women are more likely to work in sectors typically considered female-dominated, such as manufacturing (17.4 percent of men compared to 23.5 percent of women), professional services (7.6 percent of men compared to 10.8 percent of women), and public administration and social services (16.7 percent of men compared to 29.3 percent of women). This concentration of women in specific industries not only leads to occupational segregation but also positions them more frequently in less profitable roles within each sector. For example women in agriculture working as unpaid contributing family workers, and those in manufacturing often being confined to low-paying positions characterized by limited advancement opportunities and substandard working conditions.

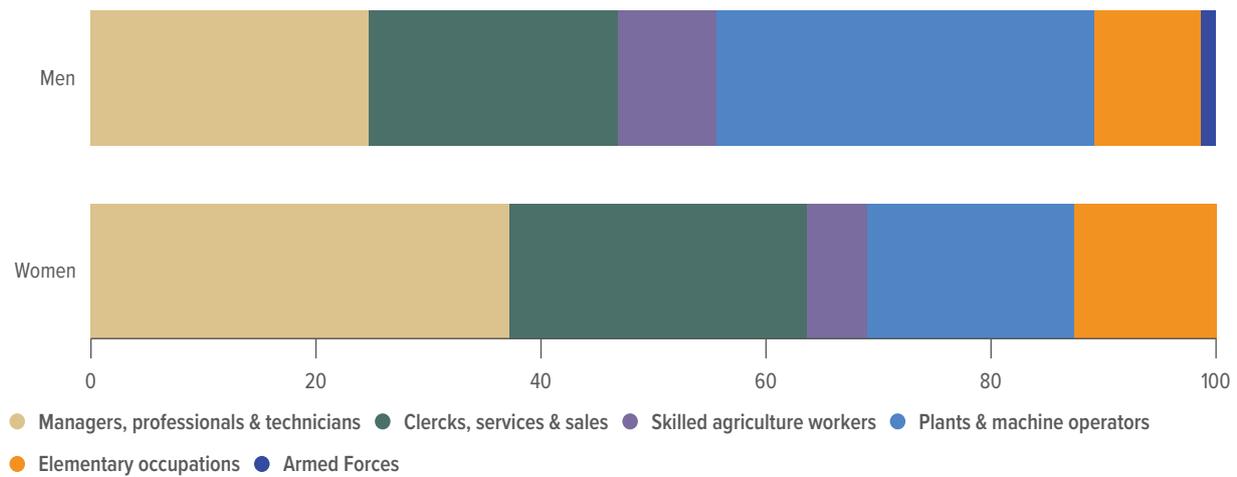
Figure 30. Share of Employment by Sectors and Gender (2020)

SSO, 2022



Figure 31. Share of Employment by Occupation and Gender (2020)

Source: SSO, 2022



Women outnumber men in managerial, professional, and technical roles by 13 percentage points, which could reflect their higher levels of educational attainment (Figure 31). However, gender gaps persist in elementary occupations and clerical, service, and sales occupations (3 and 4 percentage points, respectively), leading to a prevalence of women as unpaid contributing family workers in agriculture rather than as paid employees. This situation limits their involvement in income-generating activities. Additionally, significant gender gaps exist in occupations traditionally associated with men, such as plant and machine operators and assemblers (15 percentage points), and skilled agricultural workers (3 percentage points), which predominantly involve physical labor.

4.4 WAGE GAP

In the last decade, almost every developed nation has enacted regulations requiring the equitable treatment of women in the workforce.²² Despite progress in reducing the gender wage gap in numerous countries, it remains globally a relevant aspect of labor markets. According to ILOSTAT Global Wage Report 2018/19,²³ the raw mean gender pay gap is equal to 18.8 percent,²⁴ meaning that for every dollar men earn, women earn 81.2 cents. According to the same source, Northern, Southern and Western Europe have a lower raw gap of 13.3²⁵ percent, positioning

22 Data from Women, Business, and the Law (2024) show that 98 out of 190 countries had a law on equal pay for men and women. This has increased from 21 out of 190 countries in 1991.

23 See ILOSTAT, 2018

24 The data refers to the Factor weighted mean gender pay gap using hourly wages. The gender pay gap is higher when the estimate is based on monthly wages rather than hourly wages, and it's equal to 20.5 percent, reflecting the fact that in most countries, women and men differ significantly with respect to working time – specifically, part-time work is more prevalent among women than men.

25 The highest average gap is noted in Sub-Saharan Africa (21.8 percent) and West Asia (20.8 percent).

the region on a stronger foundation in the ongoing efforts to close the gender pay gap.²⁶

Data from EU-SILC (2019) reveals that in North Macedonia, the gender pay gap is such that women earn 9.8 percent less than men (Table 2). Upon controlling for individual characteristics, occupation, and industry, the gender wage gap widens further. Specifically, the gap escalates to 14 percent after controlling for individual characteristics such as education level, age, and experience. This result may suggest a higher return to education and experience for men, potentially highlighting barriers for women in accessing the labor market and more lucrative sectors. It may also mean that, on average, employed women exhibit higher skill levels than their male counterparts. In other words, women, on average, have better labor market characteristics, which ‘hide’ the true magnitude of the gap. However, after controlling for individual and market factors such as occupation and industry, the wage gap narrows to 7.6 percent yet remains, suggesting the possibility of lingering discrimination against women.

Table 2. Gender Wage Gap in Hourly Wages in the Western Balkans

Note: Log the difference between female and male full-time employee hourly wages in each country. Individual controls: Education level, age and age squared, experience, and its square. Market controls: Occupation and Industry. Kosovo does not include experience due to high levels of non-response. Montenegro’s education and industry variables are less disaggregated than in the other countries. Source: EU-SILC, 2019

Country	ALB	MKD	MNE	SRB	XKX
YEAR	2020	2019	2019	2020	2018
RAW GAP	-0.091***	-0.098***	-0.119***	-0.132***	0.042*
INDIVIDUAL CONTROLS	-0.175***	-0.139***	-0.150***	-0.168***	-0.063***
IND. + MARKET CONTROLS	-0.117***	-0.076***	-0.094***	-0.139***	-0.083***

4.5 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Entrepreneurship offers economic prospects for women and plays a role in job creation and overall economic development. Nevertheless, North Macedonia has fewer women-owned businesses, with female proprietors being more common in sole proprietorships. In 2019, women owned only 21 percent of enterprises in North Macedonia, significantly lower than the average share in European countries (40.1 percent in 2021) and similar to other Western Balkans countries (22.5

²⁶ The Foundation for the Advancement of Economics’ gender pay gap data for Western Balkans shows that the unadjusted wage gap for North Macedonia stands at 13.4 percent lower than the EU level of 16 percent. See the Foundation for the Advancement of Economics Policy note (2013). Data are from 2008. More recent data are not available.

percent in the period 2016-2021). Additionally, women own a smaller share of larger enterprises compared to men (Table 3).

Table 3. Active Enterprises by Size and Sex of Owner (percent) (2019)

Source: SSO, *Women, and Men in North Macedonia 2021*

	2019	
	Men	Women
Total Enterprises	78.9	21.1
1-10 employees	78.8	21.2
11-19 employees	88.8	11.4
20+ employees	82.9	17.1

Since 2011, a smaller proportion of women compared to men have owned formal institution accounts. This gender gap has widened over time; by 2021, 80 percent of women owned such accounts compared to 90 percent of men. Furthermore, both men and women in North Macedonia have lower ownership rates of financial institution accounts compared to their counterparts in EU-27 countries (Figure 32). Despite these challenges, North Macedonia boasts the highest share of financial account ownership for both men and women among Western Balkan countries, along with Serbia. Data on mobile money account ownership for North Macedonia is not available.

Table 4. Borrowing from formal and informal channels, by sex (percent) (population 15+) (2011-2021)

Source: World Bank, *Global Financial Inclusion, 2021*

		2011	2014	2017	2021
Borrowed from family or friends	Female	21	18.6	17.5	20.2
	Male	26.2	21.7	23.8	30
Borrowed from a formal financial institution	Female	10.1	21	19.1	20.2
	Male	11.1	29.2	21.9	24

In North Macedonia, 20 percent of women and 30 percent of men borrow through informal channels, often relying on family or friends for financial assistance. Over the past decade, rates of borrowing from informal sources have been slightly higher for men (Table 4). Similarly, men have higher rates of borrowing from formal financial institutions. It's noteworthy that the proportion of individuals borrowing

through informal channels is nearly twice as high in North Macedonia compared to the EU-27 countries in 2021, but slightly lower than the average for Western Balkan countries.

Women are more frequent users of digital payments. Data on digital payments shows that in 2014, 45 percent of women and 63 percent of men made or received digital payments (Figure 33). These rates increased for both genders in 2017 to 61 percent for women and 70 percent for men. By 2021, the rates of digital payments had further risen to 69 percent for women and 80 percent for men.

Figure 32. Financial Institution Account Ownership, by sex (percent) (population 15+) (2011-2021)

Source: World Bank, Global Financial Inclusion, 2021.

Note: The chart shows the percentage of respondents who report having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank or another type of financial institution.

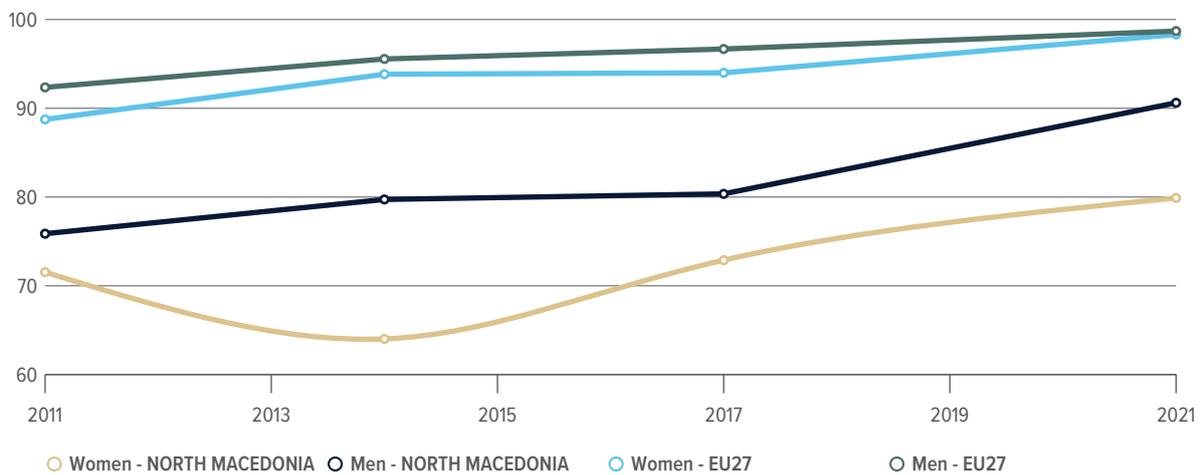
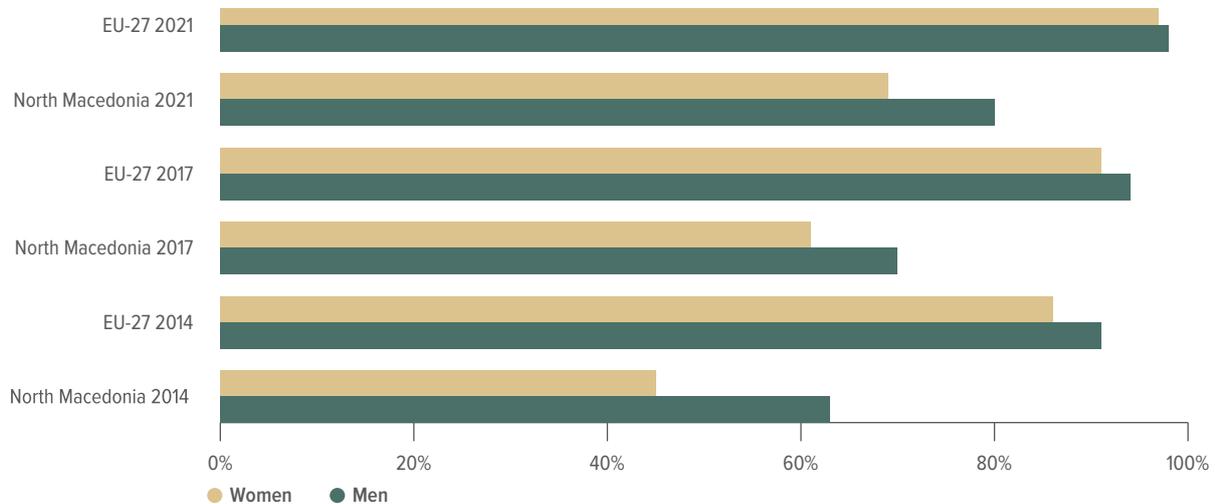


Figure 33. Made Digital Payments in the Last Year, by sex (percent population 15+) (2014-2021)

Source: World Bank, Global Financial Inclusion, 2021.



Despite having equal legal rights to property, women and men often do not have the same access to information, leading to significant gender gaps in property ownership influenced by local customs and cultural norms. In North Macedonia, women have a disproportionately low share of property ownership compared to men, with 83.4 percent of properties owned by men (Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016). Although there is no legislative barrier to women's right to property ownership, the prevalent traditional gender norms affect the ownership and the inheritance practice, where properties are more often passed to men in families (Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016; UN Women, 2019). However, there has been a gradual change in the past years, which might improve the property ownership of women in the foreseeable future (UN Women, 2019).



SPOTLIGHT 3 - SOGI

The Western Balkan countries have made strides in protecting fundamental rights, including those of sexual and gender minorities. However, the European Commission emphasizes the need for stronger implementation to combat discrimination and violence. The EU enlargement process offers an opportunity for SOGI inclusion, with support from various development partners. Limited data on SOGI reveal the profound impact of discrimination, exclusion, and violence on LGBTI individuals and the region as a whole.

Endowments - LGBTI individuals in the Western Balkans face significant challenges in education, employment, and accessing essential services due to discrimination, bullying, and violence. A 2018 World Bank survey revealed alarming rates of negative comments and conduct towards LGBTI people in schools, with a notable impact on mental health, including increased suicide rates. Discrimination extends to healthcare, where nearly 40% of respondents reported mistreatment or avoided treatment due to fear of discrimination. Widespread violence against LGBTI individuals further exacerbates the situation, with many cases going unreported. Additionally, accessing housing presents hurdles, as evidenced by higher refusal rates for same-sex couples compared to heterosexual counterparts. Montenegro's recent passage of a same-sex partnership law signals progress towards equality in various domains.

Economic Opportunity - Data on labor market outcomes for LGBTI people remains extremely limited across the Western Balkans. A 2019 World Bank study in Serbia found that 15 percent of LGBTI people have experienced discrimination at work. Discrimination adversely affects their socio-economic outcomes; 10 percent of respondents have quit a paid job, and 7 percent have taken unexpected leave from work due to the discrimination they experienced. The same survey found that LGBTI people who reported experiences of workplace discrimination also reported lower incomes. A 2020 survey by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found that LGBTI people in North Macedonia and Serbia frequently experience discrimination in the workplace: 25 percent of respondents in North Macedonia and 24 percent in Serbia respectively.

Voice and Agency - Discrimination, exclusion, and violence remain widespread, and LGBTI people often lack trust in the institutions designed to protect their human rights. Research in Serbia, for example, found that the vast majority of LGBTI people have low trust in the political system (95 percent), the legal system (93 percent), and the police (91 percent). The World Bank approaches sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) inclusion through its commitments to gender equality as well as social inclusion – two crucial components of the World Bank's twin goals to eradicate extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity. Like heterosexual and cisgender women and girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people are held to and impacted by prevailing restrictive gender norms and thus struggle to equally participate in markets, services, and spaces. In the Western Balkans, the same restrictive norms that hinder women and girls from achieving their full potential lie at the root of stigma, prejudice, and violence against LGBTI people.

Sources:

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2020. *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lqbt-equality-technical-report_en.pdf

World Bank Group. 2018. *Life on the Margins: Survey Results of the Experiences of LGBTI People in Southeastern Europe*. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30607>

World Bank Group. 2019. *A Comparative Analysis of the Socioeconomic Dimensions of LGBTI Exclusion in Serbia*. World Bank.

5. VOICE AND AGENCY

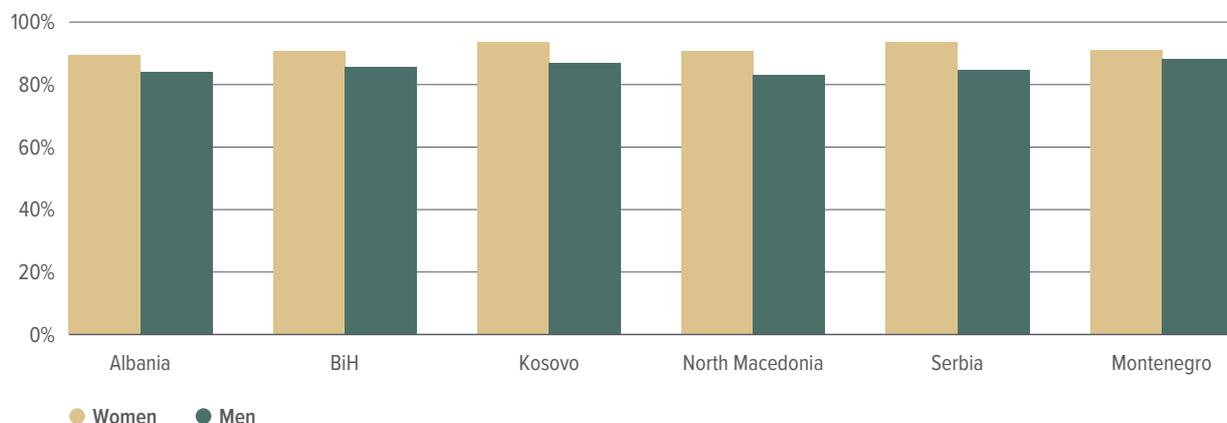
Women’s agency in North Macedonia has substantially improved, especially through increased political participation and decision-making. However, concerns remain in terms of violence against women.

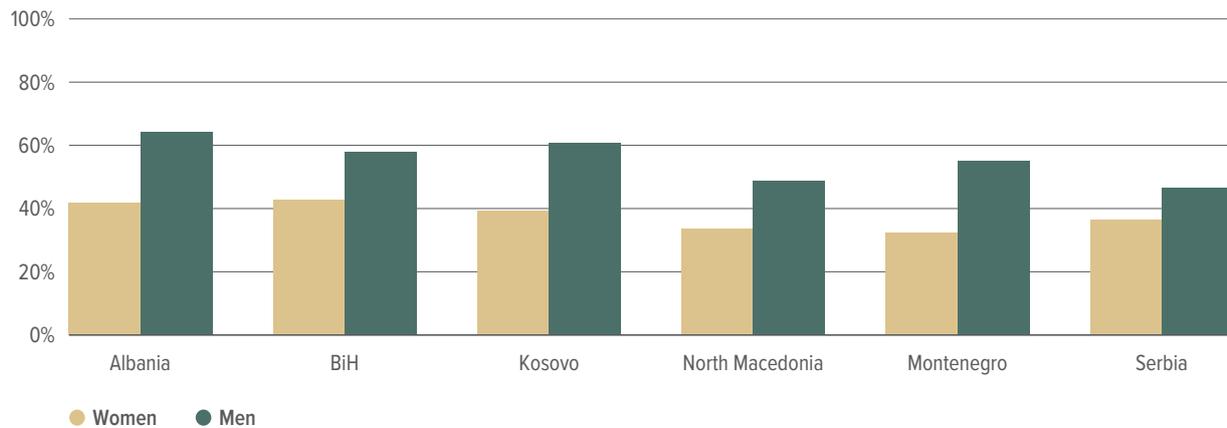
5.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN

Social norms often shape gender roles and stereotypes, which can have negative effects on women’s outcomes by limiting their participation in the public sphere and their influence within the household. While most of the population perceives women and men as equally competent as business executives, there is a wider gender gap in perceptions of political leadership. According to the Life in Transition Survey 2023, 90.7 percent of women and 83.1 percent of men perceive men and women to be equally competent as business executives. Although women tend to agree more with this statement, the gender difference is not substantial. However, there is a significant gender gap in perceptions of political leadership. For the statement “Men make better political leaders than women do,” 33.6 percent of women and 48.6 percent of men agree or strongly agree (Figure 34).

Figure 34. Beliefs Related to Women’s Role in Public Life
Source: LITS IV (2023)

A. Women are as competent as men to be business executives (% of the population agreeing)



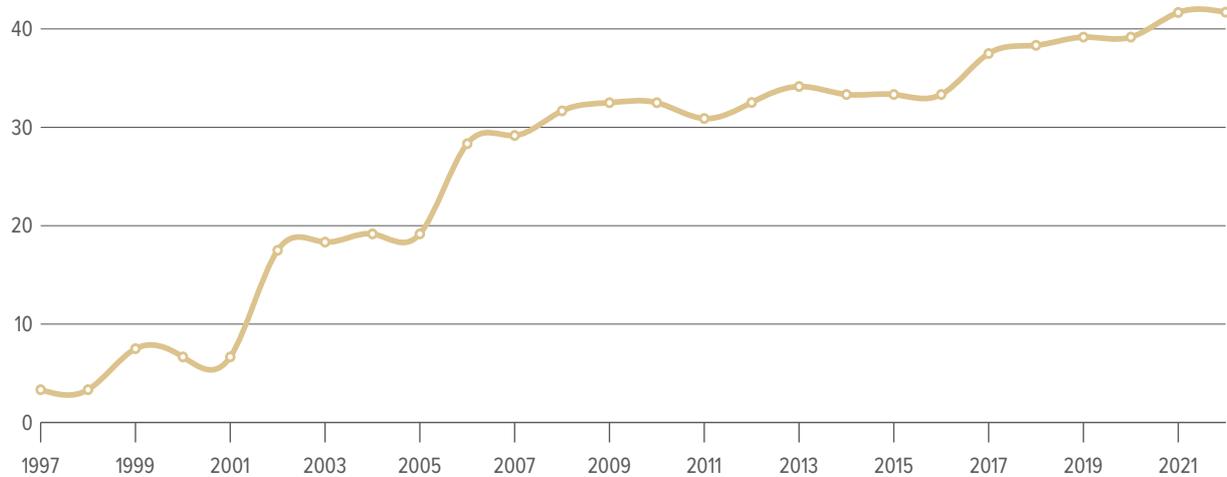
B. Men make better political leaders than women do (% of the population agreeing)**5.2 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

The representation of women in parliamentary positions has increased significantly, from 3.33 percent in 1997 to 41.7 percent in 2022 (Figure 35). However, the share of women in ministerial positions has seen a much smaller increase, rising from 16.7 percent in 2005 to 21 percent in 2020 (Figure 36). This level remains low compared to the averages for both European countries (32.2 percent) and the Western Balkans (32.8 percent). Notably, the first government since the independence in 1991 did not include any women ministers. The first significant change occurred in 2004, with the appointment of two women ministers, but there was little change in subsequent years in the late 2000s (SSO, 2022). Between 2017 and 2020, governments had four women ministers out of 22, while the new government in 2022 had three ministers and a woman serving as Deputy President of the Government in charge of good governance. Thus, there persists a significant gender gap, with the share of male ministers remaining notably higher than that of female ministers, and this gap has seen minimal change in recent years.

Figure 35. Proportion of Seats Held by Women (percent) (1997-2022)

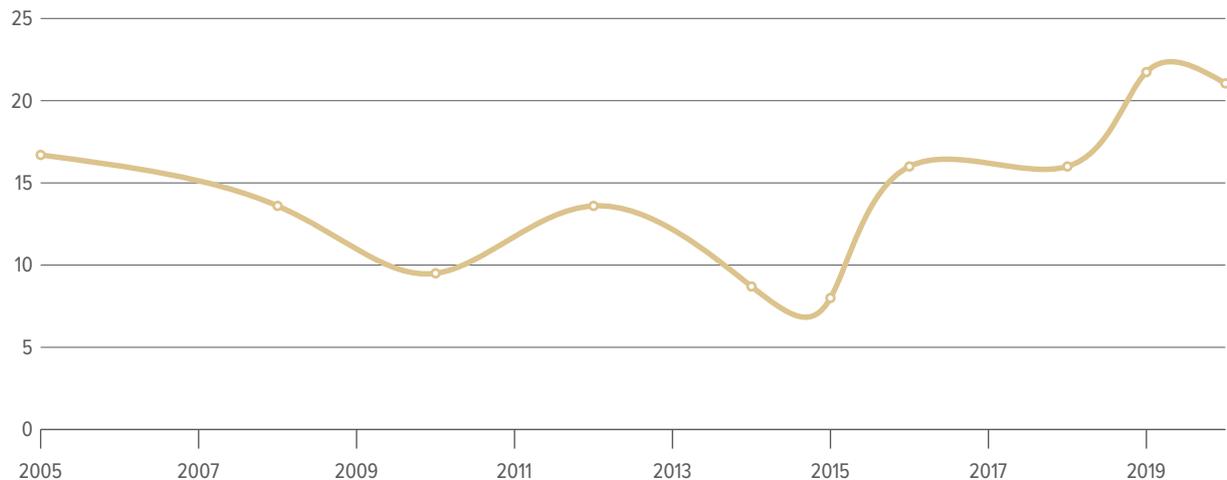
Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal. Original Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Note: women in parliaments are the percentage of parliamentary seats in a single or lower chamber held by women. Accessed: January 12, 2024.

**Figure 36. Proportion of Women in Ministerial Level Positions (percent) (2005-2020)**

Source: Gender Data Portal. Original Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Women in Politics.

Note: Women in ministerial level positions is the proportion of women in ministerial or equivalent positions (including deputy prime ministers) in the government. Prime Ministers/Heads of Government are included when they hold ministerial portfolios. Vice-Presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies are excluded. Accessed: January 12, 2024.



While changes in the Electoral Code have led to some progress, particularly in the representation of women councilors in local municipal councils, the number of elected women at the local level, especially as mayors, remains low compared to men. Throughout the years, there has often been a lack of women candidates for mayoral positions, and subsequently, few women have been elected as mayors (Reactor, 2021). Since the first local elections in 1996 up to the latest in 2021, a total of 660 mayors have been elected, of which only 18 were women, with the remaining 642 being men (Reactor, 2021). In the 2021 local elections, only 25 women ran as candidates in 17 municipalities out of 80 municipalities and the city of Skopje as a separate local administrative unit. Following the 2021 local elections, only two women were elected as mayors, including the mayor of the City of Skopje, out of a total of 81 municipalities.

5.3 ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP

In addition to political representation, women are significantly underrepresented in positions of economic power. They account for only 19 percent of board members in the largest traded companies, supervisory boards, or boards of directors (Table 5). Although there has been a slight improvement in the leadership of the central bank, with the appointment of the first woman Governor in 2018, men still occupy 100 percent of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions in the largest listed companies in the country (Reactor, 2022).

A recent report indicates there is significant gender disparity in the management structures of public enterprises, with women notably underrepresented (Popovikj and Pankovski, 2020). In 2019, 28 percent of women were part of the management structures of the enterprises, comprising just 6 percent of CEOs, 30 percent of members of Management Boards, and 32 percent of members of the Supervisory Boards of public enterprises (Popovikj and Pankovski, 2020). These power imbalances cannot solely be attributed to educational attainment or lack of expertise, as employed women, on average, have higher educational attainment compared to men.

Table 5: Distribution of Economic Power, North Macedonia and EU (2015-2020)

Source: GEI 2019, 2021 (EIGE, 2022). EU-28 for 2015.

	North Macedonia		EU-27	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Share of members of boards in largest quoted companies, supervisory board or board of directors				
2015	21	79	14	86
2018-2020	19	81	29	71
Share of board members of the central bank				
2015	25	75	18	82
2018-2020	32	68	24	76

5.4 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women remains a challenge in North Macedonia, with social norms often tolerating such behavior.²⁷ Findings indicate a very high prevalence of various forms of violence against women (OSCE, 2019). More than half of women report experiencing some form of gender-based violence since the age of 15. Additionally, 30 percent of women disclose experiencing sexual harassment since the age of 15, with 10 percent reporting such incidents in the 12 months preceding the survey. Psychological violence perpetrated by an intimate partner is particularly common. Both women and experts in the country highlight the shortage of shelters, which face sustainability challenges due to inadequate funding, primarily reliant on foreign donors. Women in rural areas encounter specific obstacles, including limited access to shelters near their homes and high financial dependence on their partners.

Table 6. Experiences of Intimate Partner Domestic Violence (2019)

Source: OSCE, *Violence against women: North Macedonia (2019)*

TYPES OF VIOLENCE	EVER	LAST 12 MONTHS
Any type of violence	54.0	20.0
IPV	44.0	12.0
Sexual harassment	30.0	10.0
IPV/non-IPV sexual and physical violence	14.0	4.0
Stalking	7.0	2.0

²⁷ North Macedonia still lacks available comprehensive data on the prevalence of gender-based violence. Relevant institutions lack comprehensive and standardized mechanisms and procedures for continuous data collection and reporting on the prevalence of gender-based violence, even though, recently the State Statistical Office has initiated the process of methodological preparations for a national survey, aimed at continuous data collection and production of statistics on this alarming societal problem (Gender Equality Platform, 2022; GREVIO, 2022).

Harmful traditional attitudes towards gender roles are changing, however, slowly (OSCE, 2019). There remains an important minority of women who retain a traditional view of the role of women in society (OSCE, 2019). Nearly half of the women (48 percent) think that domestic violence is a private matter and should be handled within the family, including 31 percent who agree that this should be the case. In comparison, across the EU, only 14 percent of women would agree that domestic violence is a private matter.

While attitudes towards women who experience sexual violence are generally supportive, there is still a significant portion of the population holding concerning beliefs. Thirty percent of women believe that those who claim abuse or rape often fabricate or exaggerate their experiences, and a similar proportion believes that violence against women is frequently provoked by the victim (28 percent). Interestingly, women with tertiary education and those residing in urban areas are less likely to hold these views (OSCE, 2019).

SPOTLIGHT 4 – Intersectionality: gender and the Roma community

The Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe, and they rank among the most marginalized, vulnerable to human rights violations and socially isolated communities in the European Union. According to the last census from 2021, there were 46,433 people counted as Romani in North Macedonia, equal to the 2.53 percent of the population.² Roma women face higher unmet medical needs, partly due to high costs or lack of insurance. Antenatal care coverage is lower among Roma women compared to national averages, and post-natal care is also less accessible.

Barriers to education for Roma include poverty, early marriage, and exclusionary practices, impacting their future economic and social opportunities. Financial constraints and the need to work contribute to education barriers and early dropouts among Roma men, whereas for Roma women and girls, early marriage is a common barrier. Following the context and access to primary and secondary education, Roma students have a low share of enrolment in tertiary education and in 2020/2021 the share of Roma women is slightly higher compared to men. While Roma enrolment in education is below national averages, North Macedonia shows relatively higher completion rates for Roma in tertiary and secondary education.

Labor market participation is significantly lower among Roma women, with gender gaps in employment outcomes. Limited public transport and infrastructure in Roma and rural areas, along with safety concerns in public spaces, hinder their employment opportunities.

Furthermore, Roma women are particularly susceptible to intimate partner violence, which often goes unreported due to various societal and institutional barriers. Traditional attitudes and norms among Roma and Albanian-speaking women may also restrict their access to necessary services and support.

Notes: 1. Roma is used to refer to a number of groups (for example, Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal), including travelers, without denying the specificities of these groups. These groups are all considered under the wider Roma umbrella in the European Union (EU) Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (European Commission 2011). 2. See State Statistical Office Census 2021.

Sources: Robayo-bril et al., 2019; Hughson, 2014; UNICEF, 2014, World Bank, 2015

6. CONCLUSION

Gender equality plays a vital role in driving economic development and fostering a fairer society in North Macedonia. While commendable progress has been made in education, health, and political participation, there are still critical areas requiring attention to fully realize gender equality. Despite women in North Macedonia attaining higher educational levels than men, their presence in the labor market remains significantly lower, pointing to systemic barriers hindering their full economic participation.

Women often encounter reduced employment opportunities and may withdraw from the labor market upon transitioning to motherhood. This not only impacts individual women but also has broader economic ramifications by underutilizing a significant portion of the workforce. Accessible childcare services can alleviate these barriers, leading to more equitable labor force participation rates between genders. Additionally, addressing the educational disadvantages faced by boys, particularly in higher education, is a challenge that North Macedonia must confront to ensure that all individuals can reach their full potential.

Driving these improvements necessitates a robust framework for collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data. Such data will empower policymakers to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by different groups, enabling tailored interventions.

In conclusion, advancing gender equality in North Macedonia is crucial for social justice and unlocking the economy's full potential, allowing both women and men to contribute equally and thrive.

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