

# NORTH MACEDONIA: GENDER ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE

## Headline Facts

Women seats in Parliament	Women working in the labour force	Girls' secondary school enrolment	Women's experience of physical or sexual violence since age 15	Women police personnel
38% (2018) <sup>1</sup>	51% (2018) <sup>1</sup>	48% (2018) <sup>1</sup>	14% (2019) <sup>2</sup>	12.7% (2015) <sup>3</sup>



**GENDER EQUALITY** The Republic of North Macedonia is socially and ethnically diverse, with women's status and social role varying between communities. Roma women and girls face the highest rates of discrimination, violence and gender inequality.<sup>4</sup> Macedonia ranks 66 in the Global Gender Gap Index (out of 149 countries) but slips down to 103 for indicators around women's economic participation.<sup>1</sup> There is a 27 percentage-point gap in labour force participation between women (51%) and men (78%).<sup>1</sup> Indicators around education, health and women's political participation show more progress.<sup>1</sup> Gender-responsive budgeting is now compulsory by law and work is ongoing to institutionalise gender budgeting in national policy-making and budgets at central and local levels.<sup>4,5</sup>

## MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING

North Macedonia is positioned on a key migration transit route in the Balkans.<sup>6</sup> Refugees illegally crossing the Greek border remains a cause for concern, particularly women and unaccompanied minors who are vulnerable to trafficking; however, numbers have decreased substantially since the 2015-2016 refugee crisis.<sup>7</sup> Sex trafficking and forced labour of women and girls has been reported in restaurants, bars and nightclubs, with foreign victims primarily originating from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Roma children are also at risk of sex trafficking through forced marriages.<sup>8</sup>

## SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Women's access to justice is slowly improving, with more survivors seeking care.<sup>15</sup> However, only 2% of women who experienced violence from their current partner reported the incident to the police<sup>16</sup> and survivors still find it difficult to access free legal aid, despite the 2009 law on free legal aid covering domestic violence.<sup>17</sup> Police and judicial officials have also reportedly been reluctant to prosecute domestic violence cases.<sup>18</sup> Challenges include the persistence of gender stereotypes among police and law enforcement officials, compulsory mediation and reconciliation procedures in domestic violence cases (despite the UN and Council of Europe stating that mediation is inappropriate in cases of violence against women),<sup>19</sup> and gaps in official data (e.g. femicides are invisible within the national statistics).<sup>17</sup> Minority women reportedly face larger challenges in accessing justice, particularly Roma women, women with disabilities, women in prostitution and transgender persons, although data is limited.<sup>17,19</sup> Several recent initiatives have aimed to strengthen access to justice, for example the HELP course on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence launched in 2018 for Macedonian lawyers.<sup>20</sup> Women's representation in the judiciary is high, with 60% of professional judges and 52% of Supreme Court judges being women.<sup>21</sup> However, only 12.7% of police officers are women.<sup>22</sup>

## VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Women are vital agents of change in countering violent extremism (CVE) in North Macedonia. For example, the MotherSchools programme in Skopje aims to help mothers identify early warning signs of radicalisation in their children and promote counter narratives to violence.<sup>9</sup> Research studies have also identified the need to do more to prevent radicalisation in Macedonian schools, taking a gendered CVE approach with young people.<sup>10,11</sup> Women's roles as active participants in violent extremism have tended to be overlooked.<sup>12</sup> Since 2012, it is estimated that 14 women travelled to Syria and Iraq as 'foreign fighters', out of a total of 156 Macedonian citizens.<sup>12</sup> Further cases have been reported of women and girls being radicalised in Macedonia, but caught before reaching Syria.<sup>13</sup> North Macedonia has one of the highest rates of violent extremists relative to population size in Europe - an estimated 42 potential 'returnees' per million (the UK has 6 per million).<sup>14</sup>

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women successfully lobbied for a gender quota of 40% of candidates for parliamentary candidates,<sup>23</sup> leading to a significant improvement in women's representation in parliament to 38%.<sup>24</sup> Where quotas don't exist, women's representation is lower.<sup>23</sup> For example, only 16% of ministers are women<sup>24</sup> and there is limited female political participation at local and mayoral level, particularly of Roma and Albanian women.<sup>25</sup> Concerns have been raised about the women's crosscutting coalition falling apart as well as the backlash against women's representation, particularly around family policy and women's rights.<sup>25</sup> The women's movement has a long tradition in Macedonia, for example with the creation of the Anti-Fascist Front of Women in 1942.<sup>26</sup> More recently, Macedonian women have mobilised around a variety of issues, including using social media to speak up about sexual harassment (#CepaKaжyBaM in Macedonian and #TaniTregoj in Albanian).<sup>27</sup>

## SOCIAL NORMS

Discriminatory social norms still act as a barrier to gender equality in the Republic of North Macedonia. The OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is 18% (2019), indicating low levels of discrimination in social institutions.<sup>28</sup> However, conservative attitudes about gender roles persist and almost half (47%) of women surveyed believe they face discrimination in the labour market.<sup>29</sup> 1 in 3 women believe that their primary roles are to be a mother and care for the home and family, rather than work in the formal labour market.<sup>29</sup> Surveys also reveal that 33% of women believe that it is important for a man to show his partner who is the boss. 37% of women believe that a husband should be obeyed, even if a woman disagrees.<sup>30</sup> Social norms are more persistent among Roma and Albanians and in rural areas, particularly around early marriage, GBV and access to further education, although there is some evidence that these norms and beliefs are shifting (particularly for Albanian women).<sup>4,31</sup>

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

GBV is widespread and often underreported.<sup>30</sup> The most recent nationally-representative survey of GBV in North Macedonia found that 14% of women say they have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 at the hands of a partner or non-partner (7% among Albanian-speaking women versus 16% among Macedonian-speaking women).<sup>30</sup> 44% of women had experienced psychological violence, 30% had experienced sexual harassment and 7% had been stalked.<sup>30</sup> Women who had experienced conflict (mostly the 2001 insurgency) were more likely to have experienced GBV, particularly sexual violence.<sup>30</sup> In 2014, Macedonia adopted a new law to prevent and respond to GBV, with an expanded definition to include economic violence and stalking. The law established a national coordination body with training for service providers and the education system.<sup>32</sup> The Government has also recently ratified the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>33</sup> The National Action Plan (2018-2023) for implementing the Convention has three main objectives: harmonising the legal framework; establishing general and specialised domestic violence services; and prevention activities.<sup>4</sup> Early marriage is a concern for Roma girls and in some rural areas,<sup>4</sup> with 19% of girls marrying before age 18.<sup>34</sup> There were also reports of GBV against refugee and migrant women and girls, including early and forced marriage, transactional sex, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and physical assault, particularly in 2015-16.<sup>35</sup>

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- [Image]: 'Equal! We Can' Women's Day March in Skopje Photo credit: MIA-MK <https://mia.mk/2019/03/equal-we-can-women-s-march-in-skopje/?lang=en>

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