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National Study Report

North Macedonia

SEPTEMBER 2021



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ASOCIACIÓN PARA LA PROMOCIÓN Y GESTIÓN DE SERVICIOS SOCIALES GENERALES Y ESPECIALIZADOS (PROGESTIÓN), SPAIN

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1 INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

The Republic of N. Macedonia is a landlocked country along the Balkan Route, in South-East Europe, bordered by Greece and Bulgaria, both crucial entry points of the immigrant route. Macedonia has a territory of **25,713 km²**, and a population of 2.068.808.

N. Macedonia gained its independence from the former Yugoslav federation in September of 1991, and it is considered a country in development, its current primary goal being joining the European Union. For the most part, Macedonia isn't a country where migrants seek asylum and citizenship, but rather a point along the transition route where they receive temporary accommodation, medical assistance and transportation to the north border of the country where they continue their journey through Serbia and towards the western European countries. Nonetheless, numbers indicate that with the years, more and more migrants and refugees choose to stay in the country.

The desk research was compiled by conducting an analysis of secondary data provided by a variety of official sources, such as the State Statistical Office, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, as well as non-governmental organizations like the IOM and the Red Cross.

The research consists of qualitative and quantitative data alike, painting a comprehensive picture of the state of affairs regarding migrants and refugees in the country, forming into one cohesive summary research.

2 MIGRANTS' WOMEN AND REFUGEES WOMEN IN YOUR COUNTRY/REGION

2.1 Amount of the newly arrived and countries of origins

During the year 2017, 2,975 temporary residence permits were issued to foreign nationals, which is a slight decrease compared to last year. Foreign citizens most often resided on the basis of employment, work or self-employment - 1,220 permits, as members of a close family of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia - 638, then, on the basis of schooling or studying - 572, on the basis of family reunification - 431 and else. Most of the permits were issued to Turkish citizens -

1,098, Serbian - 366, Albanian - 238, Kosovo - 238, Bulgarian - 96, Greek - 84 and a small number of other foreign nationals

Regarding asylum applications, most of them are people from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, etc. In addition, in 2017, 376 persons have been granted the right to asylum for subsidiary protection, while 20 persons have recognized refugee status. In the Reception Center for Foreigners in Skopje, in 2017, 131 people were accommodated, of which 92% were male or 121 persons, and the remaining 10 were female. In 2018, the authorities reported that they registered a total of 1,098 migrants and asylum seekers, which is 9 times more than the number listed for the same period in 2017 (122), and 18% of them are women. This proves that the effort to prevent the arrival of migrants in the country proved to be insufficient and apart from preventing the migrants from passing through the country regularly, they achieved nothing else. Women who are constantly on the move are at increased risk of various forms of exploitation and many factors, such as traveling alone, the urgency to reach their final destination, language and cultural barriers that limit their ability to seek protection as they travel. To this end, state institutions, as well as NGOs working directly with them, must be effectively organized and receive appropriate training to be able to offer protection to these particularly vulnerable migrants. Unfortunately, in the past few years, state authorities have failed to provide adequate and well-organized protection for all arriving migrants, especially women.

2.2 Integration Programs from day of arrival

Strategy and Programs of Institutional Stakeholders

In 2017, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy created a strategy for the integration of refugees and foreigners in the Republic of N. Macedonia for the period of ten years, from 2017 to 2027. The target groups of the program for integration are: people with a recognized refugee status, people under subsidiary protection, asylum seekers and foreigners with a legal residence in the country.

It is the strategy's goal that during the process of receiving asylum, the asylum seekers can attend educational and professional training programs that will later ensure a smoother integration into the society. The asylum seekers also have access to the labor market, and the ability to apply for work permits.

The programs developed with the Strategy treat each person as an individual, rather than as a homogenous group. The individual method has already found application in the Center for the integration of refugees and foreigners where

family plans for integration, with a special emphasis on the individual needs, are developed.

Since its inception, the Center for integration has created 196 family plans for integration, or 100% of the applications fulfilled, which focused on providing access to healthcare, education, housing and employment. Improvements are necessary in determining the timeframe for implementation of the family plans, determining the percentage of realization of the measures and so on.

It has also been noted that the local government bodies had absolutely no role in the integration of the target groups.

On the other hand, non-governmental organizations have played a key role in the work with migrants, and they can be crucial partners in the process of developing alternative models and solutions for integration.

A program for language learning for adult asylum seekers is in development, and it will concern not only the target groups themselves, but the educators as well. Opportunities will be provided for the asylum seekers to learn the native language, and the educators will be trained for working with immigrants. The access to education for all immigrants, children and adults alike, is free.

The process of employment has been majorly simplified, the Agency for employment only requiring a personal ID document, and a proof of the status of refugee, or person under humanitarian or subsidiary protection, to issue a work permit, which then allows the members of the target group to participate in the labor market.

Refugees can apply for citizenship after 6 years of uninterrupted stay on the territory of the Republic of N. Macedonia, whereas persons under secondary protection can do so after 8 years of uninterrupted stay.

According to recent research about the vulnerability and needs of women-migrants in Macedonia, titled “Gender aspects of migration” (MYLA 2019), the Macedonian border patrol, in collaboration with FRONTEX, aims at preventing new immigrant arrivals. As a result the migrants only solution is to take the alternative routes and methods of transportation.

The situation the immigrants were put in led to an increase human trafficking operations. In the period between January and June of 2018, 306 migrants were identified as human trafficking victims, a concerning fact in of itself, becomes more concerning when noted that it increases the risk of human trafficking of migrant women for 15%.

Unfortunately there is no existing official database for human trafficking victims amongst migrant in the Republic of N. Macedonia due to the quick turnover of migrants, as well as the lack of proper trainings for the identification and assistance of human trafficking victims.

In 2018, the authorities reported that 1.098 migrants and asylum seekers were registered, which was 9 times more than the same time the previous year, 18% of whom were women, proving that the attempts to prevent migrants from entering the country did absolutely nothing but expose migrant women to various types of exploitation from different sources.

Recommendations for improving the situation include: individual registration and documentation of the migrants upon entrance into the country, guaranteed access to legal aid, putting an end to the illegal detainment of migrants, especially women and children, developing gender-specific policies and conditions based on comprehensive research data.

As a crucial part of integration, the target groups can start the process of family reunification up to 3 years after their status has been recognized.

It is worth noting that none of the programs and measures make a discernible difference between men and women, and that there are no special programs for migrant women and refugees.

Work of the Red Cross of the Republic of N. Macedonia

The Macedonian Red Cross is a voluntary, large, independent humanitarian organization of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia and it operates as a non-governmental and non-political organization on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia.

The Red Cross provides support with humanitarian and medical assistance for the migrants and the refugees situated in the Tabanovce and Vinojug transit centers through its mobile field units, as well as the irregular migrants in Lojane, Vaksince and the Center for integration – Gazi Baba. The MRC also works on reducing the vulnerability of babies, children, women, elderly people and disabled people through coordinated collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The Red Cross has a 24/7 presence in the transit centers, while providing assistance to the migrants and refugees and building trust with the local communities simultaneously.

During the four year presence in the transit centers, the Red Cross has worked with over 1.000.000 migrants, many of them women and unaccompanied children. The volunteers work with several different translators, fluent in the languages commonly spoken by migrants.

The Red Cross' focus is on the primary care for immigrants upon their entrance, and travel through the country. As far as the process of integration is concerned, the Red Cross' assistance and support focuses on providing food, housing, and health and sanitary products during the process, in collaboration with the governmental organs.

3 Mapping Stakeholders

Stakeholders involved in work with migrant women in North Macedonia operating at local, regional and national level are as follows:

- The Ministries of Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Labor and Social Policy and Healthcare are the governmental organizations that work with migrant women, providing security, healthcare, integration and education. Though migrant women make up a large, especially vulnerable part of the migrant group, there are no special programs that address their issues and needs.
- The non-governmental organizations that work with migrant women include: Open Gate - The Association for Action Against Violence and Trafficking in Human Beings, Legis, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association and the Red Cross. The non-governmental organizations' main focus is on ensuring the safety and welfare of migrant women, as well as preventing human trafficking.
- There are some organizations whose work is in the field of creating capacities of support and assistance within governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country. One such organization is the International Organization for Migration, which influences the national capacities in the area of asylum, migration and human trafficking through different projects.
- USAID, a governmental organization, through proper planning and financing helps increase the capacities, and strengthen the support and inter-state collaboration, along with educating the civilian population and raising awareness.

Stakeholders/organisations involved in supporting entrepreneurs are as follows:

There are many different organizations, measures and programs, which support entrepreneurship in the Republic of N. Macedonia. They include, but are not limited to: national and local government institutions and bodies, chambers of commerce, business support organisations, accelerators and incubators, higher education institutions and etc.

List of government institutions:

- Ministry of Economy
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
- Municipalities (80)
- Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia
- Entrepreneurship Support Agency of Republic of North Macedonia

List of chambers and BSOs:

- Chamber of Commerce of North Macedonia
- Association of Chambers of Commerce of Macedonia
- Macedonian Chamber of IT companies
- The Economic Chamber of Macedonia
- Association of Business Women - Macedonia

List of accelerator institutions:

- Center for Knowledge Management.
- Business-Technology Accelerator UKIM LCC Skopje
- Association of Business Women - Macedonia

In addition to the stakeholders identified above, there is also a civil society.

Stakeholders involved in supporting entrepreneurship for migrant women:

As of August, 2021, there are no organizations, governmental and non-governmental, that are involved in the area of supporting entrepreneurship for migrant women; however, all stakeholders listed in the preceding section support women entrepreneurs.

4 Barriers and needs of reaching the target group

4.1 Barriers & Needs for Labor Market Integration of Women Migrants

The main barriers that can be identified regarding migrant women in their labor market integration consist of: existence of a language gap, lack of education, recognition of international certificates and diplomas and a lack of working experience. As noted in the Strategy for refugee integration by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the barriers can be overcome with specific measures, pertaining directly to every one of them.

The language gap is the biggest, most daunting barrier out of all. Most migrant women come from middle-eastern and African countries, which subsequently means they have never encountered the Macedonian, or any other similar language. If they cannot speak the native language, they cannot successfully integrate within the society, and they cannot participate in the labor market.

The right to an education is a fundamental human right, and it is essential in providing insight about the Macedonian society. The main goal is to maintain the independence of the migrants and refugees through educating them about the constitution, values and the legal system. On the other hand, the educators need to receive special training so that they can teach the material in a more comprehensible and relatable way.

The lack of working experience is a common occurrence among immigrant and refugee women, due to the situation in their countries of origin. Though many of the migrant women haven't had official employment, they are often skilled workers, especially in the area of caregiving.

4.2 Recommended Solutions

The process of language learning needs to be commenced at the Center for integration, at the very beginning of the asylum seeking procedure, so that by the time asylum is granted, the refugee can either join the regular schooling system, or join the labor market.

The recognition of certificates, diplomas and qualifications is the most efficient way to include the refugees in the labor market, which will lead to a more inclusive integration. The integration of educated and skillful workers can be beneficial for both the host country and the workers themselves. The process of accreditation can be simplified and expedited through direct governmental measures, along with bilateral and multilateral agreements.

The key solution to the issue of education for migrants and refugees is in fact providing free access to the education system for children and adults, while also training the educators so that they are prepared to work with refugees and migrants who come from all sorts of backgrounds.

When it comes to accessing the labor market, the host country, through its organs, like the Center for integration, can help allocate the migrant women to the type of work they might be best suited for after they have completed the language course.

5 METHODOLOGY / METHOD FOR WORKING WITH MIGRANT WOMEN

The methodology for working with migrant women is no different than any process requirements for all migrants in N.Macedonia. The same has been described in the previous sections of the study where the process is presented from the point of view of different organisations involving: institutions, NGOs, and local governments.

As of August, 2021, in the Republic of N. Macedonia, there is no specific process and methodology for working with migrant women that would provide them with entrepreneurship training; however, organisations working in the field of entrepreneurship training do not discriminate in this manner.

5.1 Provision of Entrepreneurial Training

In N. Macedonia there are many useful entrepreneurship trainings provided through different means.

Face to face trainings, online trainings, mentoring programs, coaching, programs and recently there are online learning programs and the WECAN learning platform of the Center for Knowledge Management. [WECAN - Women's Entrepreneurship CoAches traiNing \(knowledge-center.org\)](https://www.knowledge-center.org/wecan)

5.2 Which further methods are suggested to be developed?

It is recommended that more online learning platforms to be developed especially in mentoring and coaching of women for the enterprnuruial journey, as these programs have proven to be very efficient in the past.

6 MATERIALS AND TOOLS FOR MIGRANTS

While the Republic of N. Macedonia has many varying materials and tools for work dealing with interculturality and gender equality, none of those are made for, nor being applied to, migrants and refugees.

The educational tools for distance learning are available but they are not being implemented in the education of migrants.

Creating the materials and tools for migrant education is of paramount importance, and the education itself cannot exist without them.

The comprehensive education has to consist of materials regarding:

- language learning,
- the rights and responsibilities as defined by law,
- the process for identification paperwork acquirement,
- the process for asylum seeking,
- accessing healthcare,
- accessing childcare,
- the process for the certification and accreditation of international diplomas and certificates,
- the procedure for opening a bank account,
- ways and means of accessing the labor market,
- the procedure, along with the necessary paperwork, for launching a company,
- identifying financial support for launching an enterprise,
- the legal framework for managing an enterprise.

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