



## ERASMUS+ Partnership project “CALL4ACTION: Capacity All for Action”

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North Macedonia is classified as an upper middle-income country, with a GDP of US\$ 12.7 billion and a GDP per capita of US\$ 6,102 (World Bank, 2020b). Average annual economic growth reached 2.7 per cent in 2018 and 3.6 per cent in 2019. The estimated unemployment rate for the first half of 2019 was 17.5 per cent (RESRP, 2020). As a result of Covid-19, the country is facing its deepest recession in two decades, with economic activity forecast to decline by 5 per cent in 2020 (EBRD, 2020) and the unemployment rate rising to 16.7 per cent, despite government attempts to cushion the impact on the labour market (World Bank, 2020c).

The 2019 Social Protection Law promotes the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination in the realization of social protection rights, which are based on equal and just treatment, recognizing disability as a basis for discrimination.

### Definition

According to Article 2 of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a person with disabilities is defined as:

"A person with disabilities is any person who, due to physical, sensory, intellectual or mental impairments or other impairments that result from long-term, severe or permanent functional limitations, faces barriers that restrict participation in social life, on an equal basis with others."

This definition is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and recognizes the diverse nature of disabilities, including physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental impairments. The law aims to ensure that individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination and are provided with equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of society.

### Current situation

Accessibility is a prerequisite for people with disabilities to live to participate independently and fully and equally in society. No access to physical environment, transportation, information and communication, including information and communication technologies and systems, as well as to other conveniences and services open or provided to the public, persons with disabilities do



not have equal opportunities for participation in their societies - [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

According to the SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of North Macedonia – 2021, made by UN:

- a) the approach based on the rights of persons with disability is not consistently adopted in legislation, and the medical approach to disability is still predominant.
- b) public spaces, infrastructure and information are largely inaccessible for citizens with disabilities. As the sign language is not recognized as an official language, media programs are largely inaccessible to people with disabilities. Universal design as a standard is not recognized and incorporated in legal obligations.
- c) There is a lack of knowledge of the concept of accessibility by all stakeholders
- d) The access to services, including to support services, for persons with disabilities, is mainly based on the medical model of disability.
- e) The non-institutional support provided for children and adults with disabilities is quite restrictive.
- f) The reforms in education, although advanced in the primary education sector, are yet to tackle the secondary education, which remains segregated and restrictive. The participation of people with disabilities in the higher education is inconspicuous.
- g) The concept of independent living is not properly understood by stakeholders, and the placement of persons with disabilities in group homes is not in line with the CRPD. systemic changes are needed to enable independent living of persons with disabilities and ensure respect for their human rights on an equal basis with others.
- h) The employment system does not offer opportunities for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the open labour market.
- i) Persons with disabilities have limited access to justice. There is a lack of analysis of court cases related to disability. All categories of persons with disabilities face difficulties regarding access to courts and justice, which limits their right to a fair and just trial under equal conditions, and the knowledge of judges in the field of disability is still at a very low level.
- j) The country lacks consistent and comparable statistics on persons with disabilities.

#### Population with disability in N. Macedonia

In North Macedonia, out of 1 836 713 inhabitants, 94 412 (5%) are people with disabilities in 2021. From which 52203 are males and 42209 are females.

NOTE: These data do not refer to registered persons with disabilities, but to persons who declared in the Census (only on the basis of a statement, the opinion of persons without any documentation) that they have difficulties (categorized into 4 groups) in performing their daily activities. Macedonia do not have official registry for people with disabilities.

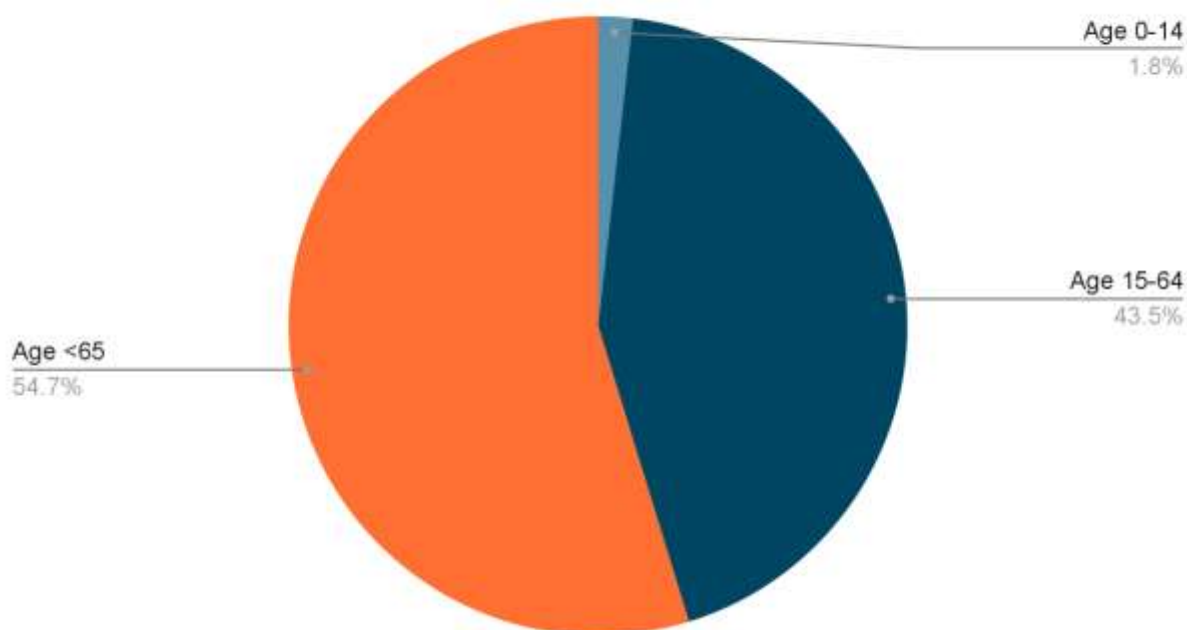
Total residential population for people with disabilities in Macedonia.



	Total	Men	Women
Total	94 412	42 209	52 203
Age 0-14	11 674 (1.8%)	1 013	661
Age 15-64	40 985 (43.5%)	20 570	20 415
Age <65	51 753 (54.8%)	20 626	31 127

Source: stat.gov.mk

### Residential population of people with disabilities



Population in North Macedonia according to the disability type, age and gender				
	Males	Females	Total	Percentage
People with disabilities	42209	52203	94412	5%
People with disabilities 0-14 y.o	1013	661	1674	0.09%



People with disabilities 15-65 y.o	20570	20415	40985	2.2%
People with disabilities 65+ y.o	20626	31127	51753	2.80%
People with movement disabilities 0-14 y.o	137	121	258	0.01%
People with movement disabilities 15-65 y.o	6738	6859	13597	0.70%
People with movement disabilities 65+ y.o	8603	16041	24644	1.34%
People with visual disabilities 0-14 y.o	150	157	307	0.01%
People with visual disabilities 15-65 y.o	2588	3090	5678	0.30%
People with visual disabilities 65+ y.o	2716	3670	6386	0.34%
People with hearing disabilities 0-14 y.o	40	29	69	0.003%
People with hearing disabilities 15-65 y.o	753	666	1419	0.07%
People with hearing disabilities 65+ y.o	2248	2211	4459	0.24%
People with communication disabilities 0-14 y.o	279	106	385	0.02%
People with communication disabilities 15-65 y.o	1352	841	2193	0.11%
People with communication disabilities 65+ y.o	595	723	1318	0.07%
People with other disabilities 0-14 y.o	407	248	655	0.03%
People with other disabilities 15-65 y.o	9139	8959	18098	0.98%
People with other disabilities 65+ y.o	6464	8482	14946	0.80%
Total population in Macedonia			1836713	

## Legal Framework

The legal framework for people with disabilities in North Macedonia is based on several laws and regulations aimed at protecting the rights and ensuring the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

**Law on Social Protection** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 108/2009, 163/2010, 136/2011, 15/2015, 86/2018, and 3/2019). This law establishes the general principles and measures for social protection, including provisions for people with disabilities to access social assistance, services, and support.

**Law on Health Care** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 15/2018, 26/2018, 57/2018, and 97/2019). This law ensures that people with disabilities have access to healthcare services, rehabilitation, and other necessary medical support.



**Law on Primary Education** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 33/2008, 142/2008, 88/2009, 123/2009, 55/2011, 87/2011, 13/2013, 99/2015, and 123/2016). This law ensures inclusive education for children with disabilities in mainstream schools, providing them with equal opportunities for education.

**Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 85/2007 and 43/2011). This law focuses on promoting the vocational rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities, encouraging their active participation in the labor market.

**Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 46/2011 and 137/2018). This law prohibits discrimination based on disability and other protected characteristics, ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for people with disabilities.

**Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 52/2008, 113/2008, 54/2009, 84/2010, 24/2012, 29/2018, and 40/2018). This comprehensive law outlines the rights of persons with disabilities, covering various aspects such as accessibility, social inclusion, education, and employment.

**National Strategy for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities** (2019-2024). This strategy provides a framework for promoting the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in all spheres of life.

**National Council for Disability Issues** established to coordinate policies and actions related to the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

North Macedonia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on April 18, 2011. The CRPD is an international human rights treaty that aims to protect the rights and dignity of people with disabilities and promote their full and equal participation in society. By ratifying the CRPD, North Macedonia committed to implementing measures to ensure the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities within its territory.

### **National strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2023-2030 with Action plan 2023 – 2026**

The National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030 is a multi-sectoral strategic document prepared in a broad participatory process, involving 216 participants from 31 institutions and 27 civil society organizations, with the support of the German Society for International Cooperation.



The strategy sets ambitious benchmarks for advancing the rights of the people with disabilities, based on the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Equality Union - Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 of the European Union, as well as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy is based on the principle of human rights and the basic principle "Leave no one behind" from Agenda 2030.

The goal is the promotion, protection and complete enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities, of equal basis with other citizens, as well as promotion of respect for their dignity.

The priority areas of the national strategy are:

1. Accessibility
2. Equality, access to justice and active participation in public and political life
3. Access to health care
4. Children, social protection and independent living
5. Right to education
6. Employment and right to work
7. Local inclusive communities
8. Public awareness
9. Culture, sport and recreation.

## Accessibility

People with disabilities in Macedonia encounter various barriers during their daily activities such as, building entrances, usage of residential and public facilities and institutions, public transport, and other services. People with disabilities in North Macedonia face several challenges regarding accessibility, hindering their ability to fully participate in society. Some of the key challenges include:

**Physical Accessibility:** Out of 533.659 building in N. Macedonia only 13.142 (2,5%) are accessible for people with disabilities. The other fact is that, the only accessibility that is provided are the ramps and or elevators, other accessibility such as pathways to the buildings, floor signs, accessible lighting sockets, assisting doors are no provided to any building.

Although the legal framework and policies adopted in this area are rather clear, there are problems die to inappropriate implementation and different interpretations. Many public institutions, even new buildings, are not physically accessible for persons with disabilities. Despite the legal obligation, in practice, making a building accessible and available to disabled persons largely remains a matter of individual choice by public and private entities. Many public and private



buildings, including government offices, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and recreational venues, lack proper accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. This makes it difficult for individuals with mobility impairments to access these spaces independently.

**Transportation:** Public transportation systems often lack accommodations for people with disabilities, such as wheelchair-accessible vehicles or designated spaces for mobility aids. This limits their mobility and ability to travel independently. The Law on Road Transport does not provide substantive equality. The Law only has provisions for transport benefits of persons with disabilities, who must be members of NSIOM. A similar legal solution is given in the Law on Public Roads, which allows persons with disabilities not to pay toll for the use of public roads.

The legislators have also not regulated the movement of persons with disabilities with a guide dog.

**Information and Communication:** Information and communication materials, including websites, documents, and public announcements, may not be accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments. The absence of alternative formats like Braille, audio descriptions, or sign language interpretation can lead to exclusion from vital information and services. Persons with hearing and speech disability are pointing out ([according to the focus groups analysis by UNICEF](#)) that they are facing difficulties in realizing rights due to the insufficient number of trained sign language translators and interpreters.

There is no separate law, or part of a law, which would stimulate learning Braille alphabet, and this must be provided for in the future.

Assistive technology resources are limited to two web portals and a handful of Braille printers. There are two websites (<http://nssrm.org.mk/> and <https://samoglas.mk>) with libraries of audiobooks in Macedonian, including fiction, professional literature on law and certain laws and manuals relevant to persons with impaired vision. Braille alphabet printers are located only at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, Public School for Rehabilitation of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments “Dimitar Vlahov” and the National Association of Blind Persons.

The Committee for Information and Communication Technologies at the Faculty of Philosophy created the first Cyrillic font for dyslexic persons, Dyslexic FZF, and easy to read mandatory school reading books were promoted in cooperation with Einstein Association.

The Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services related to accessibility and availability of broadcasters and broadcasting accessible and available information of different types does not have an explicit prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.

**Employment:** Despite legal protections against discrimination in employment, people with disabilities still encounter challenges in accessing job opportunities. Employers may not provide reasonable accommodations or may have negative perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities. No official data or statistics are available on disability prevalence or inclusion of PWD in the open labour market. In 2018, the Employment Agency registered 1,328 unemployed PWD,



of whom 440 were women. The small number does not only indicate that people with disabilities do not need work, but also their inactivity in the labor market, as a consequence of the environment that does not encourage them to do so. But the National law provides a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for supporting the economic integration of PWD. Most PWD are employed in “protection companies” or sheltered workplaces – companies set up by a PWD or employing at least 40 % PWD for 90 days continuously (Art 9, Law on Employment of Persons with Disability 44/200 (LEPD)). A key challenge and policy objective has been to further integrate PWD in the open labour market (RESRP, 2020). Quotas for the employment of PWD (in the public and private sectors) have been in place since 2014, ranging from 2 % to 6 % of the total workforce depending on the activity (up to a maximum of 20 PWD workers for companies employing more than 1,000 employees) (Civica Mobilitas, 2015). State financial support is available for employers to fulfil these quotas, in the form of a Special Fund for the Improvement of Employment Conditions and Work of Disabled People. The existing statistics provide no information about the number of self-employed persons with disabilities.

Education: Inclusive education can be limited in some areas, and schools may lack the necessary resources and trained staff to accommodate students with disabilities effectively. According to the WB report from 2015, the representation of children with disabilities in preschool education is below 5%.<sup>99</sup> According to a 2018 report, the percentage of children with disabilities is 1.19% of the total number of children attending kindergartens.

The greatest progress in terms of inclusive education can be seen in the reform in the primary education. The enactment of the new Law on Primary Education (LPE) supported by the Concept of Primary Education and the Concept for Inclusive Education and a series of bylaws, paves the way for the inclusion of all children in regular education by 2023.

Despite the intention to fully include children with sensory disabilities, the legislative framework does not regulate the use of sign language or the Braille alphabet. The study of sign language is not envisaged either as a compulsory subject or as an optional one in the Concept for Primary Education.

The training of the teaching staff on the issue of disability usually takes place through projects and support from international institutions without any long-term strategy by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The physical and communicative accessibility, as well as access to assistive technology is a major problem for persons with disability in the education.

Access to healthcare: The legal framework and policies governing access to health services are not in line with the CRPD. The procedures for obtaining primary, secondary, and tertiary health care are not accessible and available to persons with disabilities. Access to health services is based on the medical model of disability.

Access to orthopedic devices and equipment is quite limited, determined by age, amount of co-payment.

There is a lack of specialized health services, and programs and services for prevention, early detection, diagnosis, early treatment and rehabilitation for children and adults with disabilities





An additional barrier to access to health services is the inaccessibility of both public and private health facilities and institutions. This includes the inaccessibility of gynecological institutions (public and private). Accessibility standards are not set out in the rules for placing on the market medical aids, products, and equipment.

**Attitudinal Barriers:** Negative attitudes and stigma towards people with disabilities persist in society, leading to social exclusion and limiting their participation in various activities.

**Lack of Awareness:** Many people may not be aware of the rights and needs of individuals with disabilities, leading to a lack of understanding and support for inclusive practices.

### **People with disabilities in rural areas:**

The challenges faced by people with disabilities in rural areas of North Macedonia can be distinct from those in urban settings. Rural areas often have unique characteristics that influence the experiences of individuals with disabilities. Here are some specific rural perspectives and demographic challenges for people with disabilities:

**Limited Access to Services:** Rural communities may have limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and vocational rehabilitation. People with disabilities in these areas may face greater difficulty in accessing specialized care and support services compared to their urban counterparts.

**Lack of Infrastructure:** Rural areas may have inadequate infrastructure, including poorly maintained roads, limited public transportation options, and inaccessible buildings. The lack of proper infrastructure can make it challenging for people with mobility impairments to move around independently.

**Social Isolation:** Rural communities often have smaller populations and a closer-knit social fabric. While this can foster a sense of community, it may also lead to increased stigma and social isolation for individuals with disabilities, as there may be less exposure to diversity and inclusivity.

**Limited Employment Opportunities:** Rural economies may offer fewer job opportunities, especially for individuals with disabilities who require specific accommodations. Limited job prospects can lead to higher unemployment rates among people with disabilities in rural areas.

**Demographic Challenges:** North Macedonia's rural population tends to be older on average than urban populations. This demographic trend can lead to a higher prevalence of age-related disabilities in rural areas, necessitating specific support and care services.



**Distance to Healthcare Facilities:** Rural residents often face greater distances to reach healthcare facilities, making it challenging for individuals with disabilities to access regular medical check-ups and specialized treatments.

**Educational Challenges:** Rural schools may not be adequately equipped to cater to the diverse needs of students with disabilities. This lack of resources can hinder inclusive education and limit opportunities for skill development and social integration.

**Limited Awareness and Advocacy:** Rural communities may have lower levels of awareness regarding disability rights and available support services. Advocacy efforts and awareness campaigns may be less prevalent in rural areas, which can lead to reduced empowerment and self-advocacy among individuals with disabilities.

## Discrimination

Discrimination against people with disabilities in North Macedonia remains a significant concern despite the country's legal framework aimed at protecting their rights. Individuals with disabilities in North Macedonia may face various forms of discrimination in different aspects of their lives. Some common areas where discrimination occurs include:

**Employment:** People with disabilities often encounter barriers when seeking employment or while working. Discrimination in hiring practices, unequal pay, lack of reasonable accommodations, and limited access to vocational training can hinder their access to the job market.

**Education:** Inclusive education for children with disabilities is still a challenge in some areas of the country. Many schools may not be adequately equipped to provide necessary accommodations, leading to limited educational opportunities and exclusion from mainstream education.

**Accessibility:** Access to public spaces, buildings, transportation, and information can be limited for people with disabilities. The lack of proper accessibility measures can significantly impact their ability to participate fully in social life.

**Healthcare:** People with disabilities may face challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare services tailored to their specific needs. This can lead to disparities in health outcomes and a lack of equal treatment.

**Social Stigma:** Negative attitudes and stereotypes towards people with disabilities persist in society. This social stigma can lead to exclusion, isolation, and limited opportunities for social interaction.



Legal Rights: Despite having a legal framework in place, enforcement and awareness of disability rights might be inadequate, leading to difficulties in accessing justice and remedies for cases of discrimination.

It's important to note that the situation might have evolved since my last update. Efforts by the government, civil society organizations, and disability rights advocates continue to work towards improving the conditions and opportunities for people with disabilities in North Macedonia. The implementation and enforcement of existing laws, along with public awareness campaigns, are crucial steps in combating discrimination and fostering a more inclusive society.

#### Literature

[Convention for people with disabilities](#)

[Registry for organizations working with people with disabilities](#)

Stat.gov.mk

#### Good practices

[Предлог закон за дата база на лица со попреченост](#)

#### References

[Convention for people with disabilities](#)

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