



---

**Human Rights Council**  
**Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review**  
**Forty-sixth session**  
29 April–10 May 2024

## **North Macedonia**

### **Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights\***

#### **I. Background**

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, taking into consideration the outcome of the previous review.<sup>1</sup> It is a compilation of information contained in relevant United Nations documents, presented in a summarized manner owing to word-limit constraints.

#### **II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with human rights mechanisms**

2. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that adherence to the nine main international human rights instruments would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encouraged North Macedonia to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, to which it was not yet a party.<sup>2</sup>

3. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, which it had signed on 23 May 2012.<sup>3</sup>

4. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.<sup>4</sup>

---

\* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



### **III. National human rights framework**

#### **Institutional infrastructure and policy measures**

5. The United Nations country team recommended that the North Macedonia ensure that the national human rights institution had adequate financial and human resources to perform its mandate and strengthen the pluralism, inclusiveness and broader representation of society of the national human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).<sup>5</sup>

6. The United Nations country team also recommended that North Macedonia ensure the timely and systematic follow-up by the competent authorities to reports and recommendations of the national human rights institution.<sup>6</sup>

7. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia strengthen the independence and mandate of the Ombudsman and strengthen the capacity and the human and financial resources of the Ombudsman's Office for monitoring and safeguarding the rights of the child and the rights of persons with disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

8. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) encouraged North Macedonia to report on its implementation actions with regard to the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers, in particular by noting legislative or other measures it had adopted with the aim of ensuring the application of related norms and standards in national law, policy and practice.<sup>8</sup>

9. UNESCO offered to support North Macedonia in developing and nurturing its science ecosystem and in protecting scientific researchers, in line with the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers. North Macedonia was invited to reach out to the UNESCO secretariat for that purpose.<sup>9</sup>

10. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia implement fully the legislation relating to children's rights and ensure its dissemination to all those working for and with children; and develop child-rights impact assessment procedures for all policies relevant to children.<sup>10</sup>

11. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed the information about the increased funds provided for the functioning of the Ombudsman's Office and its appointment as a national body for the prevention of torture. The Committee expressed concern, however, that the Ombudsman's Office had insufficient human and technical capacity to promote and protect women's rights.<sup>11</sup>

12. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia take the steps necessary to bring the Ombudsman's Office fully into compliance with the Paris Principles, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.<sup>12</sup>

### **IV. Promotion and protection of human rights**

#### **A. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law**

##### **1. Equality and non-discrimination**

13. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and called for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalled the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals.<sup>13</sup>

14. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia determine a time frame and thematic priorities concerning the amendments to the law on equal opportunities for women and men, ensuring that amendments were in compliance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination in all areas covered by the Convention, in collaboration with stakeholders, including civil society organizations.<sup>14</sup>

15. The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted the establishment of the Commission for the Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination under the law on the prevention of and protection of persons against discrimination. It urged North Macedonia to strengthen the capacities and effectiveness of the Commission and the agencies responsible for receiving complaints.<sup>15</sup>

16. The same Committee expressed serious concern about the existence of stereotypes and social norms that perpetuated discrimination against children, in particular Roma children, children with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, and on the basis of children's social status.<sup>16</sup>

17. The same Committee urged North Macedonia to ensure the full enforcement of existing laws prohibiting discrimination and strengthen public education campaigns to promote tolerance, coexistence, respect for diversity, dialogue and inclusion, and raise public awareness of the prohibition of discrimination; and strengthen the implementation of the equality and non-discrimination strategy for the period 2022–2026, ensuring the participation of children and civil society in its design and in monitoring its effectiveness.<sup>17</sup>

18. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted with concern the continued underreporting of cases relating to discrimination on the basis of sex or gender received by the Commission for the Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman's Office.<sup>18</sup>

19. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia accelerate the adoption of the draft law on the prevention of and protection of persons against discrimination, ensuring protection from discrimination on the basis of sex and protection from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Right to life, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture**

20. The United Nations country team noted that instances of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by the police continued to be reported. In February 2023, the Parliament had amended the Criminal Code, abolishing the statute of limitations for the crime of torture, as requested by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Recommendations from the universal periodic review for improving conditions of detention had been partially implemented, amid delays in the implementation of the strategy for the penitentiary system for the period 2021–2025. Despite some progress having been made, conditions were not fully in line with international standards, in particular in the pretrial detention facility and the main Idrizovo Prison in Skopje. Prisoners and detainees lacked adequate access to health services, education and reintegration programmes, and received no information about their rights. Overcrowding and poor and unhygienic conditions affected women in particular.<sup>20</sup>

21. The Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed the measures taken to combat violence against children, including legal reforms that criminalized acts of physical, psychological and any other type of violence towards a child; and the adoption of the new national action plan for preventing and addressing the abuse and neglect of children and the strategy for the prevention and protection of children from violence for the period 2020–2025. However, the Committee expressed concern about the insufficient funds allocated for the implementation of the national action plan against violence.<sup>21</sup>

## **3. Human rights and counter-terrorism**

22. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism highlighted the dire conditions of mass arbitrary detention in the camps and prisons of north-east Syrian Arab Republic, stressing the particularly heinous consequences for vulnerable children who remained detained without access to education, health care, security and other fundamental rights. She welcomed the

substantial efforts made by North Macedonia to address the complex situation of their citizens returning from those prisons and camps.<sup>22</sup>

23. The same Special Rapporteur noted that North Macedonia had started to develop a model of community-based reintegration based on multidisciplinary expertise, involving social workers, clinical psychologists and security actors, to meaningfully reintegrate families, especially women and children, into their communities.<sup>23</sup>

24. The same Special Rapporteur called expressly for the repatriation of citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia to ensure that the return and accountability efforts continued. She recommended that North Macedonia continue to be vigilant to ensure that countering violent extremism policies and practices related to return and reintegration were truly compliant with human rights. She expressed concern that some reintegration efforts might, in practice, create rather than prevent stigma and exclusion. Furthermore, the prosecution and trial of returnees must meet international standards of due process and fairness, sentences must be proportionate and prison conditions must be adequate to ensure that returnees had an equal opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration into society.<sup>24</sup>

25. The same Special Rapporteur welcomed the proactive approach of the Government to the aforementioned challenging legal and political issue, which provided a valuable example to other States on how to facilitate the return and reintegration of their citizens from conflict zones.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law**

26. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted with concern the barriers for women to claim their rights and obtain redress, owing to the eligibility requirements; and the delays in confirming legal representation by legal aid providers, as well as unaffordable court and forensic fees; and the persistence of gender stereotypes among law enforcement officers.<sup>26</sup>

27. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia ensure the provision of quality, free legal aid to children accused of or recognized as having infringed criminal law at an early stage of the procedure and throughout the legal proceedings; designate specialized judges for children and ensure that such specialized judges received appropriate training on children's rights; and stop the practice of solitary confinement and investigate cases of the use of physical force against detained children by security staff.<sup>27</sup>

28. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia regularly monitor and inspect the educational correctional facilities in Tetovo and Ohrid Prisons to ensure the protection of detained children and the provision of the necessary services to them.<sup>28</sup>

#### **5. Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life**

29. UNESCO recommended that North Macedonia continue strengthening the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and opinion.<sup>29</sup>

30. The United Nations country team noted that the law on civil liability for insult and defamation of 2022 addressed shortcomings in the application of the previous law on the issue, introducing significant reductions to fines for media outlets and journalists in defamation lawsuits. Legal protections for journalists had increased under amendments to the Criminal Code, treating attacks on journalists as attacks on officials (punished by more severe sanctions). In addition, efforts had been made to further align domestic legislation with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council, which contained provisions on hate speech and discrimination and media accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities.<sup>30</sup>

31. The United Nations country team also noted that, despite positive legal changes, journalists continued to face threats, harassment and other obstacles to their work. The response from authorities, including internal and disciplinary investigations and reviews, had varied in effectiveness. Although instances of physical and verbal violence had decreased, online threats against journalists and media workers, targeting women in particular, were

reported as increasing, with up to 80 per cent of women journalists reporting having been targeted by online harassment.<sup>31</sup>

32. In that context, the United Nations country team urged North Macedonia to ensure the safety of journalists by promptly and thoroughly investigating threats and attacks, holding perpetrators accountable and providing protection when necessary. It called for the country to implement measures to combat online harassment of journalists, especially women journalists, including by providing support and resources for journalists facing online threats and encouraging responsible online behaviour.<sup>32</sup>

33. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern about the lack of programmes and strategies to ensure the participation of Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities in all spheres of life.<sup>33</sup>

## **6. Prohibition of all forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons**

34. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that North Macedonia ensure the effective enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation, including by providing judges, prosecutors, border police, immigration authorities and other law enforcement officials with mandatory training in its gender-sensitive application. The Committee also recommended that the country increase the coverage of the mobile teams for the identification of trafficking, along with strategies for the identification and referral of victims, and accelerate the adoption of mechanisms to provide restitution and compensation to victims of trafficking.<sup>34</sup>

35. The United Nations country team noted that, despite recent positive steps, the proactive identification of victims of trafficking remained a challenge, depriving victims of access to human rights and hindering the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators. Most of the victims identified were women and girls, who were nationals of North Macedonia, most often trafficked for forced marriage and sexual and labour exploitation. Members of the Roma community remained particularly vulnerable to trafficking. The identification of trafficking victims among migrants and refugees transiting the country raised specific challenges and required targeted capacity-building of law enforcement and social protection agencies.<sup>35</sup>

## **7. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work**

36. The United Nations country team noted that a new draft labour law was being finalized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, providing for the protection of pregnant women and parents from discrimination in employment based on pregnancy and parenthood and for the right to shared parental leave between mothers and fathers. If adopted, the legislation would promote the better inclusion of women in the labour market, in line with previous recommendations of the universal periodic review.<sup>36</sup>

37. The United Nations country team also noted that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a severe negative impact on the employment of already vulnerable segments of the population of North Macedonia. They included those employed in the informal sector, the self-employed or those, mostly women, working parttime. The labour market had yet not reverted to pre-pandemic levels of activity, following the drop in active population in 2020. Despite some recent improvements, the activity rate for women had remained more than 20 percentage points below the activity rate of men in 2021.<sup>37</sup>

## **8. Right to social security**

38. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia further expand social protection for all disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and agricultural workers, both women and men, by widely disseminating accessible information to persons with disabilities about their rights and entitlements.<sup>38</sup>

## **9. Right to an adequate standard of living**

39. The United Nations country team reported that overall poverty levels had declined from 35 per cent (2009) to 21.6 per cent (2019) but remained high in rural areas and in

households with children. Poverty reduction had been accompanied by improved living conditions, although access to quality public services remained at times problematic. It recommended that the Government continue its poverty reduction efforts and ensure access to clean water and sanitation for all, with a particular focus on groups (e.g. Roma) and settlements in rural areas that might lack such access.<sup>39</sup>

## 10. Right to health

40. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia improve the capacities of health-care professionals at all levels, establishing mechanisms for control and accountability, and ensure that out-of-pocket health-related expenses did not exclude poor and marginalized groups from access to health care.<sup>40</sup>

41. The United Nations country team also recommended that North Macedonia enhance access to quality primary care for all, ensuring in particular coverage in rural and remote areas.<sup>41</sup>

42. While taking note of the increase in prenatal and postnatal health-care coverage, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the steady decline in investment in the health sector and the decline in the quality of specialized maternal and child health services; the increase in the perinatal mortality rate and in the mortality rates of children under 1 year of age and children under 5 years of age; and the decrease in the vaccination coverage of children.<sup>42</sup>

43. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia allocate sufficient budgetary resources to the health sector to improve the quality and coverage of specialized maternal and child health services and that it identify the root causes of perinatal mortality rates and mortality rates of children under 1 year of age and children under 5 years of age in order to design evidence-based programmes to reduce mortality from preventable causes.<sup>43</sup>

44. The same Committee also recommended that the country promote greater access to comprehensive, age-appropriate, science-based education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including information on the prevention of adolescent pregnancy and high-risk sexual behaviour, and on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>44</sup>

45. The same Committee further recommended that North Macedonia implement targeted measures to eradicate child marriage and raise awareness, particularly among the Roma population about the negative impacts of such harmful traditional practices on children.<sup>45</sup>

46. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that North Macedonia ensure access to affordable and high-quality health care and family planning and sexual and reproductive health services, take measures to prevent stigmatization and prejudices against Roma women among medical practitioners and ensure that adolescents had access to accurate information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including on responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>46</sup>

## 11. Right to education

47. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia take the measures necessary to ensure that education was free of charge, paying particular attention to children with disabilities and those from vulnerable backgrounds, and put in place a strategy to enable children from marginalized communities and those subjected to exploitation and begging to continue their schooling.<sup>47</sup>

48. The same Committee also recommended that the Government take the necessary measures to grant technical and financial support to families living in poverty in order to stimulate enrolment in compulsory secondary education and ensure that vocational training was available and accessible; and develop an information and awareness-raising programme for parents on the importance of keeping their children in school in order to reduce the dropout rates.<sup>48</sup>

49. UNESCO stated that, during the previous universal periodic review, it had been recommended that North Macedonia continue efforts to provide education to all children,

especially those living in rural areas. The concept for development of a distance education system in primary and secondary schools of 2020 stated that all primary and secondary schools had access to broadband provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, except for primary schools in rural areas.<sup>49</sup>

50. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted with concern the high rate of girls who dropped out of school, including primary school, affecting in particular rural and Roma women and girls; the persisting barriers in access to education for girls belonging to ethnic minority groups, girls with disabilities and migrant and refugee girls; and the limited participation of women in tertiary education, in particular the lack of measures to monitor and promote access for women to non-traditional careers, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.<sup>50</sup>

51. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia adopt targeted measures to combat school dropout, focusing on measures to retain rural and Roma girls and migrant and refugee girls in school and to increase their attendance at the primary and secondary levels.<sup>51</sup>

## **12. Business and human rights**

52. The United Nations country team noted that North Macedonia was a party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. A strengthened legal framework against corruption had been established in the country with the adoption in 2019 of new legislation on the prevention of corruption and conflict of interests, and the transparent and merit-based appointment of members of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption. The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption, was in operation, and the authorities had investigated several cases, including against high-level officials and politicians, of corruption and vote-buying.<sup>52</sup>

53. The United Nations country team also noted that anti-corruption efforts were hindered by limited inter-institutional cooperation, information-sharing and follow-up to initiatives and recommendations of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption. Amendments to the Criminal Code had been adopted in September 2023, without consultation, reducing punishments for abuse of official position, in particular in public procurement. Public perception was that corruption remained widespread and was reported as occurring in central and local governance structures, customs administration, education, health, public procurement, property registration and the judiciary.<sup>53</sup>

54. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia enhance inter-institutional cooperation and information-sharing among relevant institutions in the fight against corruption and ensure that new legislation relevant to the fight against corruption was adopted, following broad consultations with civil society and anti-corruption experts, providing for sanctions that were effective, dissuasive and proportionate to the severity of corruption-related offences.<sup>54</sup>

## **B. Rights of specific persons or groups**

### **1. Women**

55. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that North Macedonia monitor and prevent any form of violence against women and girls, including unaccompanied girls in reception centres, improve the availability of open reception facilities for female migrants and provide a sufficient number of female staff members among medical and security personnel; and provide training on women's rights and gender-sensitive procedures to the border police officers, migration inspectors and civil servants in charge of migratory proceedings.<sup>55</sup>

56. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia conduct a legislative review and amend the relevant provisions in the law on family and other legislation, with the aim of abolishing any form of compulsory mediation and/or reconciliation in cases of gender-based violence against women.<sup>56</sup>

57. The United Nations country team acknowledged that amendments to the Criminal Code and the law on prevention of and protection from violence against women and domestic violence of 2021 were significant steps in addressing gender-based violence. A protocol for a multisectoral response to gender-based violence had been developed, in a highly inclusive process. Notably, new domestic violence legislation included provisions relating to refugee, asylum-seeking and stateless women.<sup>57</sup>

58. The United Nations country team noted that new provisions had broadened the definition of domestic violence to include violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex relationships, and psychological, financial, physical and sexual abuse. The definition of rape was based on the concept of freely given consent and marital rape had been criminalized. In addition, the crimes of female genital mutilation, stalking, sexual assault and sexual harassment had been introduced into the legislation. Social protection measures had broadened financial assistance and support for victims of gender-based violence, while the law on free legal aid of 2019 also addressed some of the needs of victims of gender-based violence.<sup>58</sup>

59. The United Nations country team stated that challenges included gender discrimination and stereotyping among the judiciary and the police, who often lacked the capacities to address gender-based violence using a rights-based and victim-centred approach. Centres for social work, key structures for the support of women victims of violence, were in urgent need of additional financial and human resources. A shortage of shelter spaces and the unavailability of emergency barring orders left many women victims of violence without protection. Some of those problems were more acute in rural areas, where specialized services and shelters were not easily accessible.<sup>59</sup>

60. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia ensure that training and capacity development were provided to the judiciary and the police, promoting a rights-based and victim-centred approach to tackling gender-based violence; ensure that centres for social work, shelters and other structures offering protection to victims of gender-based violence were provided with adequate human and financial resources and training; and ensure, in particular, that women, girls and other victims of gender-based violence in rural areas had improved access to specialized services and shelters to address their needs.<sup>60</sup>

61. The United Nations country team noted that the law on termination of pregnancy of 2019 had improved the reproductive and health rights and freedoms of women. The new provisions allowed for medical abortion and recognized the inviolable right of women to decide on their own to terminate a pregnancy.<sup>61</sup>

62. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia provide pregnant women with protection from discrimination in employment.<sup>62</sup>

## 2. Children

63. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that North Macedonia ensure the realization of children's rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It urged North Macedonia to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concerned children.<sup>63</sup>

64. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia ensure that data could be disaggregated by age, sex, disability, geographical location, ethnic origin, nationality and socioeconomic background to facilitate analysis of the situation of all children, particularly younger children, children in alternative care, children who were victims of neglect, violence or abuse, children with disabilities, refugee and asylum-seeking children, children in street situations and children in other situations of vulnerability.<sup>64</sup>

65. The same Committee also recommended that North Macedonia address the root causes that resulted in children being in street situations and develop programmes that



facilitated the reunification of children with their families when possible, taking into account the best interests of the child.<sup>65</sup>

66. The United Nations country team expressed concern that systematic measures were lacking to address the issue of children in street situations and child labour and the exploitation of children for begging.<sup>66</sup>

67. The United Nations country team noted that the Government had adopted a national strategy for the prevention and protection of children from violence for the period 2020–2025, with a corresponding action plan. Insufficient resources and inadequate application of protocols for protection from violence and for multisectoral cooperation hampered the implementation of the national strategy. Children who were victims and witnesses of violence were not always interviewed by trained forensic interviewers in child-friendly facilities, which would help avoid revictimization caused by repetitive interviews.<sup>67</sup>

### **3. Persons with disabilities**

68. UNESCO noted that, during the last universal periodic review cycle, it had been recommended that North Macedonia ensure that students with disabilities had access to education and that their inclusion in the education system was promoted. It had been reported, however, that in North Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic, radio and television programmes and printed learning materials had not been adapted for children with visual and hearing impairments.<sup>68</sup>

69. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia ensure the comprehensive and systematic collection of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, with a view to identifying forms of intersectional exclusion and discrimination and defining and implementing human rights-based policy interventions. It also recommended that the country promote access to justice for persons with disabilities by improving accessibility of facilities and to free legal aid.<sup>69</sup>

70. The United Nations country team also recommended that North Macedonia ensure the accessibility of polling stations to persons with disabilities and align the domestic legal and policy framework on the voting rights of persons with disabilities with international standards, ensuring that citizens were not deprived of voting and other rights on the grounds of intellectual or psychosocial disabilities.<sup>70</sup>

71. The United Nations country team further recommended that the country ensure full access by persons with disabilities to social services and the full implementation of the law on the employment of persons with disabilities, including in its provisions on labour assistance.<sup>71</sup>

72. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about gaps in the collection of centrally disaggregated data on children with disabilities; the insufficient financial and human resources allocated to achieve progress in deinstitutionalizing children with disabilities, and their continuing long stay in small group homes and day-care centres; and the lack of availability and the inadequacy of schools, buildings, transport and spaces for children with disabilities, which hindered their access to education.<sup>72</sup>

73. The same Committee recommended that North Macedonia establish a system of regular and systematic collection of comprehensive and disaggregated data on children with disabilities, strengthen its early detection and intervention programmes and improve specialized health care and age-appropriate rehabilitation.<sup>73</sup>

### **4. Minorities**

74. The United Nations country team noted that Roma were among the most marginalized groups in society, with limited participation in political life and access to education, health and social services, housing and employment. Roma were often targets of discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. They were affected by ethnic profiling, as well as by abusive behaviour by the police. A new strategy for Roma inclusion for the period 2022–2030 had been adopted, devoting particular attention to education. Thirty Roma educational mediators had been hired to work in 17 municipalities, and a special programme providing for the free enrolment of Roma children in preschools was expected to improve their learning outcomes.

Segregation of Roma children into Roma-only groups remained a problem, especially in primary schools in Štip and Bitola. Exclusion from or discrimination in access to health services for Roma were one of the causes of poorer health-related outcomes (such as life expectancy and infant mortality) than in the general population. The lack of access to gynaecologists and other sexual and reproductive health services left Roma women in a particularly vulnerable situation.<sup>74</sup>

75. The United Nations country team recommended that North Macedonia combat discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes against Roma and provide training and awareness-raising to members of the police and other State bodies on the impermissibility of ethnic profiling and of any discriminatory practices and abuse. It also recommended that the country cease any form of segregation of Roma children in schools, ensuring that they were included in mixed ethnicity classes and mainstream schools.<sup>75</sup>

76. The United Nations country team also recommended that North Macedonia promote equal access to health-care services for Roma, with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health services for Roma women.<sup>76</sup>

## **5. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons**

77. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern about the continued existence of stereotypes and social norms that perpetuated discrimination against children, in particular Roma children, children with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, and on the basis of children's social status.<sup>77</sup>

78. The same Committee expressed concern about the insufficiently systematic efforts aimed at addressing peer violence in schools, online bullying and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, children with disabilities and Roma children.<sup>78</sup>

## **6. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers**

79. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that, despite the positive developments in legislation (such as the adoption of the law on primary education in 2019 and corresponding by-laws, and proposed amendments to the law on secondary education), documentation requirements for enrolment in schools remained a significant barrier for many refugees and stateless children. The requirements particularly affected those who did not have proof of previous education or birth certificates, such as refugee, asylum-seeking or stateless children, which impeded their access to education. In addition, there were no adequate curricula or catch-up classes adapted to the specific needs of some asylum-seeker or refugee children, including language classes that would enable proper inclusion as stipulated in the law on primary education.<sup>79</sup>

80. In that context, UNHCR recommended that the Government ensure appropriate and effective access to education for all children, including refugee, asylum-seeking and stateless children and children under temporary protection, on the same basis as for nationals; and provide additional support and guidance to teachers working with asylum-seeking and stateless children in order to increase the effectiveness and quality of the educational process for all children attending classes. UNHCR also recommended that the Government assume a greater role in monitoring the enrolment rate and school attendance of refugee and asylum-seeking children in the compulsory and free-of-charge levels of education. The monitoring measures should also apply to stateless children.<sup>80</sup>

81. UNHCR recommended that the Government end the detention of asylum-seeking and migrant children and ensure the implementation of alternatives to detention; and ensure that alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children were in place and available on the same basis as for nationals.<sup>81</sup>

82. UNHCR underlined that the national legislation in North Macedonia guaranteed specific rights to refugees, such as the right to employment, social protection, health care, education and housing, but there was no legal framework for integration in force. The first integration strategy, spanning from 2008 to 2015, had been due to be followed by an updated strategy for the period 2018–2028. The updated integration strategy existed as an unadopted

draft with no legal force, leading to weaker coordination among relevant entities and reliance on donors. In addition, the integration process was hindered by language barriers and cultural differences, as well as by the lack of specific measures to facilitate access to rights and the lack of specialized assistance for persons with specific needs (especially persons with disabilities).<sup>82</sup>

83. UNHCR recommended that the Government develop a legal framework on refugee integration and ensure legislative harmonization through modifications of relevant laws that would be identified in the process to ensure full access to rights leading to self-reliance of persons granted international protection.<sup>83</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 [A/HRC/41/11](#), [A/HRC/41/11/Add.1](#) and [A/HRC/41/2](#).
- 2 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 52.
- 3 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 43.
- 4 *Ibid.*, para. 44.
- 5 Submission of the United Nations country team for the universal periodic review of North Macedonia, p. 3.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 13.
- 8 UNESCO submission for the universal periodic review of North Macedonia, para. 27.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 7.
- 11 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 17.
- 12 *Ibid.*, para. 18.
- 13 *Ibid.*, para. 7.
- 14 *Ibid.*, para. 12.
- 15 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 18.
- 16 *Ibid.*, para. 17.
- 17 *Ibid.*, para. 18.
- 18 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 13.
- 19 *Ibid.*, para. 12.
- 20 Submission of the United Nations country team, paras. 15 and 16.
- 21 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 24.
- 22 See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/germany-and-north-macedonia-un-expert-welcomes-efforts-repatriate>.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 13.
- 27 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 39.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 UNESCO submission, para. 25.
- 30 Submission of the United Nations country team, para. 20.
- 31 *Ibid.*, para. 21.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 33 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 29.
- 34 *Ibid.*, para. 26.
- 35 Submission of the United Nations country team, para. 18.
- 36 *Ibid.*, paras. 27 and 28.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 31.
- 43 *Ibid.*, para. 32.
- 44 *Ibid.*, para. 33.
- 45 *Ibid.*, para. 26.
- 46 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 38.
- 47 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 35.

- 48 Ibid.
- 49 UNESCO submission, paras. 15 and 16.
- 50 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 33.
- 51 Ibid., para. 34.
- 52 Submission of the United Nations country team, para. 12.
- 53 Ibid., para. 13.
- 54 Ibid., p. 4.
- 55 [CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/6](#), para. 46.
- 56 Ibid., para. 14.
- 57 Submission of the United Nations country team, para. 40.
- 58 Ibid., para. 41.
- 59 Ibid., para. 42.
- 60 Ibid., p. 11.
- 61 Ibid., para. 32.
- 62 Ibid., p. 8.
- 63 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 6.
- 64 Ibid., para. 12.
- 65 Ibid., para. 37.
- 66 Submission of the United Nations country team, para. 47.
- 67 Ibid., para. 43.
- 68 UNESCO submission, paras. 5 and 6.
- 69 Submission of the United Nations country team, p. 13.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 [CRC/C/MKD/CO 3-6](#), art. 23, para. 29.
- 73 Ibid., para. 30.
- 74 Submission of the United Nations country team, paras. 56–58.
- 75 Ibid., p. 14.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 [CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6](#), para. 17.
- 78 Ibid., para. 24.
- 79 UNHCR submission for the universal periodic review of North Macedonia, p. 4.
- 80 Ibid., p. 5.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid.
-