

**SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY  
IN NORTH MACEDONIA:  
DISCOURSE, POLITICS AND PERSPECTIVES**

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*Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo*

Maja Gerovska Mitev  
Suzana Bornarova  
Faculty of Philosophy  
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje

# CONTEXT

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- Yugoslav heritage (1944-1990): universal access to social welfare/care, albeit with different degrees of quality for different constituents; social security system based on Bismarckian contributory principles with social protection rights along socio-professional status; good geographical distribution of Social Work Centres (created in the 1960s) providing cash benefits as well as support for (limited) social services.
- Reforms since the 1991: at least four phases of social policy and social work developments since 1991, during which new principles of social policy creation were introduced and reinforced: deinstitutionalisation (small group homes, day care centers), decentralisation (functional, administrative), pluralisation (social service providers), conditionality (cash transfers), individual responsibility (introduction of the fully funded pensions insurance pillar), etc.

# Discourse and politics of the welfare state

- Discourse: sporadic, rarely backed up by evidence and too often initialized within the auspices of different international governmental or non-governmental organizations; dualist approaches advocating a) restrictive approach to social policy along the principles of market economy and b) approach that aims to preserve the gains in the social protection from the previous socialist system and establish a welfare state as a universal protector (Hristova, 1998); curative and pre-emptive welfare state with limited available resources, dysfunctional administration and outmoded social measures (Ruzin, 1999); economists justifying the welfare state only on the basis of increased efficiency (Slaveski, 1998).
- Politics: shift in semantics – from anti-poverty to social inclusion strategies (2000-2010); between conservative/populist (2007-2016) and social-democratic welfare state (2017-2022).

# Socio-economic trends impacting social policy and social services

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Unemployment rate (15-74)	EU27	10.9	10.1	9.1	8.2	7.3	6.7	7.1
	North Macedonia	28.0	26.1	23.7	22.4	20.8	17.3	16.4
At risk of poverty rate	EU27	17.3	17.4	17.5	16.9	16.8	16.5	16.7
	North Macedonia	22.1	21.5	21.9	22.2	21.9	21.6	21.8

Table: Unemployment rate and at risk of poverty rate, 2014-2020, EU27 and North Macedonia

Source: Eurostat, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa\\_organ/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_organ/default/table?lang=en);

[https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_li02&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_li02&lang=en)

# Key challenges in Social Policy

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- Low effectiveness of the active labour market policy, as well as limited activation of the guaranteed minimums assistance beneficiaries.
- Restricted access to unemployment insurance.
- Arbitrary setting of social assistance benefits and lack of their update with a more reliable referent standard (i.e. minimum wage).
- Despite improvements in targeting cash transfers, social assistance is still not covering many people living at risk of poverty: Coverage of people at risk of poverty with the GMA in 2020 shows that only 22.5% of the poor are covered with this benefit.
- Adequacy of social assistance has improved but is still low: for one-member household the GMA represents 28% of the minimum wage.

# Coverage of contributory and non-contributory social protection

**Table 1: Beneficiaries of social insurance**

	Beneficiaries (most recent year)	Respective Population (Census 2021)	% of respective Population/ Coverage proxy
Pension and disability insurance	291,795 (aged 62 and above)	389,251 (aged 62 and above)	75%
Health Insurance	1,859,835 (2020)	1,836,713 (total resident population)	Based on HIF - 90% coverage.
Unemployment Insurance	5,279 (unemployment compensation)	109,249 (unemployed persons aged 15+)	4.8%

Sources: Health Insurance Fund of North Macedonia - Annual Report for 2020, Pension and Disability Insurance Fund of North Macedonia – Annual Report for 2021, Employment Agency of North Macedonia – Annual Report for 2021, State Statistical Office of North Macedonia – Census data for 2021.

**Table 2: Beneficiaries of social assistance**

2020	Beneficiaries	People at risk of poverty	Coverage of people/children at risk of poverty with SA
	101,802 (household members)	452,000	22.5%
Guaranteed minimum assistance			
	40,306 (children beneficiaries)	122,000 (children at risk of poverty)	33%
Child Allowance			

Source: State Statistical Office, 2021

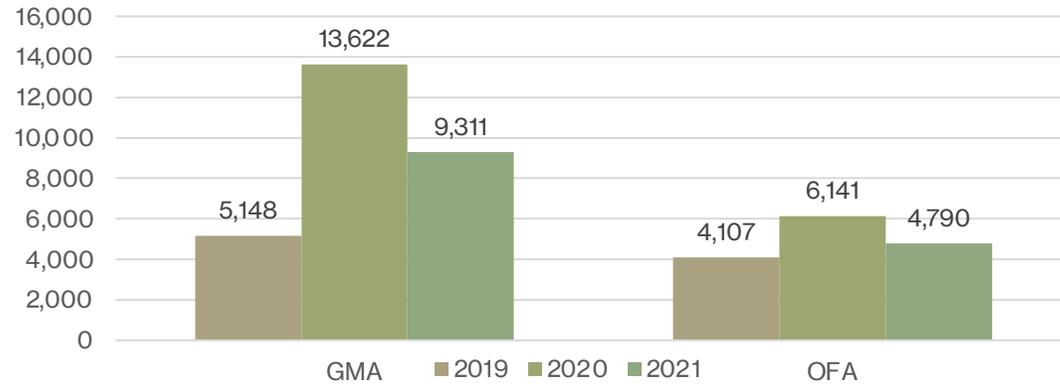
# Impact of COVID-19 on social policy and social services

- Policy wise: temporary horizontal and vertical expansion of the social protection (temporal removal of access criteria in unemployment insurance and GMA that led to new categories of beneficiaries; temporary increase in duration of benefits); Widening the stipulated social risks to include natural hazards and other new health and climate risks in the GMA eligibility criteria.
- Social service delivery gaps and limitations in terms of community work, field home visits, community organization and social action activities. No requirement of activation of social assistance beneficiaries during pandemic further distorted job search motivation and practices among the vulnerable households. No field visit requirements for new social assistance applicants during the pandemic led to cases of fraud.

# GMA and OFA applications and their processing during COVID-19

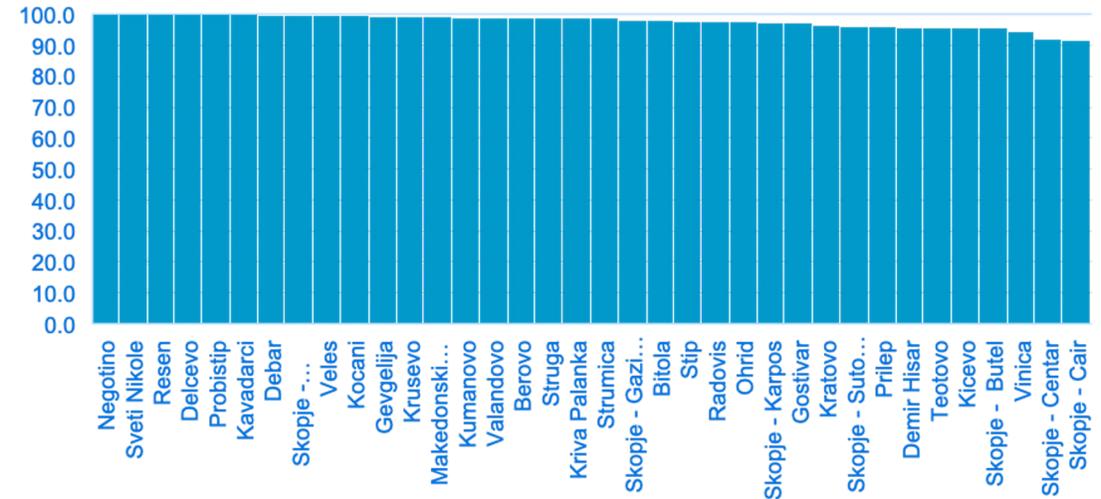
- GMA applications increased, but processing varied between CSW.

Graph 1: GMA and OFA applications at the CSW, 2019-2021



Source: MLSP, Cash Benefit Management Information System (CBMIS) Database, 2022

Graph 2: Processed GMA applications in 2020 per CSW, in %



Source: MLSP, Cash Benefit Management Information System (CBMIS) Database, 2022

# Key challenges in social work and social service provision

- SWCs are overburdened with extensive administrative work, scarce and inappropriate human resources and heavy work-load.
- Lack of systematic and functional cooperation between the SWCs and Employment Centres contributes to long-term dependency on social assistance.
- Lack of financial decentralisation hinders enhancement of local social services.
- Obstacles in implementation of the already introduced case management practice in SWCs
- Lack of supervision in all social protection institutions
- Insubstantial monitoring, evaluation and oversight of social services delivery
- Absence of quality standards for all social services
- Insignificant involvement of municipalities in the delivery of social services

# Future perspectives

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- Social Policy: Emphasis on the need and capabilities for introduction of the long-term care insurance, inclusion of non-standard workers in the social insurance, particularly in unemployment insurance system (Gerovska Mitev, 2019), increase of public spending especially in social protection, education, and health (Popovski, N, Jovanovic, B. and Tevdovski, D., 200) and expanding the universality of child benefits (Gerovska Mitev, M, Carovska, M. 2020).
- Social Services: Need for further reorganization, restructuring and upgrading of human capacities in the SWCs; Development of quality standards for all social services; Further development of integrated, preventive, socio-educational and socio-medical services, as well as the services for resocialization, reintegration and rehabilitation of most vulnerable service users; Introduction of supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the social services delivery with adoption of adequate mechanisms and instruments.