

# ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL PROMISES OF POLITICAL ENTITIES **GENDER ISSUES - ELECTIONS 2024**



Analysis of the gender issues in presidential candidates' programs and the electoral programs of political parties and coalitions

and

Analysis of the gender issues in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program, August 2024

Implemented by:



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems



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This analysis is made in the frames of the Electoral Support Programme of the Government of Switzerland, implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The views, opinions and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect those of the donor, the project or the implementer.

# 01 Introduction

In 2024, presidential and parliamentary elections took place in the Republic of North Macedonia. The first round of presidential elections was held on 24 April, while the second round was held concurrently with the parliamentary elections on 8 May. In the presidential pre-election campaign, citizens had the opportunity to be informed of the strategic intentions and goals presented in the presidential candidates' programs, while the preelection campaign for election of Members of the Assembly brought the citizens closer to the electoral programs of political parties and coalitions.

The subject of this analysis is presented at two levels:

**1.** Representation of gender issues and empowerment of women in the programs of presidential candidates and in the election programs of political parties and coalitions for the parliamentary elections. The analysis elaborates the programs of the following political entities and presidential candidates<sup>[1]</sup>:

- VMRO-DPMNE, Platform "Makedonija povtorno gordna (Macedonia Proud Again)" of the presidential candidate Gordana Sljanovska Davkova and the electoral program for the parliamentary elections entitled "Platform # 1198".
- SDSM and the Coalition for European Future, the electoral program of the presidential candidate Stevo Pendarovski "Nasiot pretsedatel Stevo (Our President Stevo)" and the electoral program for the parliamentary elections titled "Program for European Future 2024".
- European Front, Decalogue of the European President of the presidential candidate Bujar Osmani and the electoral program for the parliamentary elections "Europe 2030".
- Coalition Vlen (Vredi), the election program of the presidential candidate Arben Taravari "Presidential Platform" and the electoral program for the parliamentary elections "Plan 2030".
- Levica, the electoral program of the presidential candidate Biljana Vankovska "Go vrakame dostoinstvoto na nacijata (We restore the dignity of the nation)" and the electoral program for the parliamentary elections "Nepodmitlivite vo Sobranieto (Incorruptible in the Assembly)".
- GROM, the electoral program "Hrabro za Makedonija (Brave for Macedonia)" of the presidential candidate Stevcho Jakimovski.
- The program of the presidential candidate Maksim Dimitrievski was not available online.

[1] Titles of electoral programs and names of political entities are taken from the front pages of presidential candidates' programs and the electoral programs for parliamentary elections. The same titles will be used in a uniform way throughout the whole document. Any other official terms used in the document, such as the name of the country, will be used identically as in the original electoral programs of presidential candidates and electoral programs for parliamentary elections.

**2. Scope and treatment of gender and youth issues in the 2024–2028 Government Work Program, through analysis of the electoral programs of political entities represented in the Government, i.e.:**

- VMRO–DPMNE's electoral program "Platform # 1198".
- Coalition "Vlen" electoral program "Plan 2030".
- Movement ZNAM– electoral program "Proglas za dostoinstvena Makedonija (Proclamation for a Dignified Macedonia)".

From one election cycle to another, gender issues have been addressed in one form or another in the electoral programs of political entities. Numerous analyses, on the other hand, show a low degree of implementation of electoral promises related to gender issues. This is indicative of a superficial treatment of these issues, sometimes as declarative commitments that lack detailed analysis of the real needs or undertaken international obligations, including the already established standards within the legal framework. It is therefore important to ascertain whether political entities have strategies with regard to gender issues in this election cycle, and to propose recommendations to implement future specific measures and policies, both nationally and locally. In fact, one of the aims of this analysis is to facilitate a public discussion which can be then utilized in the public discussion related to the presidential and parliamentary elections, but also in the period before and during the upcoming 2025 local elections.

## 02 Representation of gender issues in presidential candidates' programs

The general analysis of presidential candidates' programs leads to the conclusion that pursuant to the powers associated with the position of a President, the programs mainly focus on the constitutional order, rule of law and justice, preservation of the security and national identity, foreign policy, NATO and EU membership and unification of the country, but less on cross-cutting issues and policies such as gender issues. Yet, the electoral programs of political parties such as SDSM and the Coalition for European future, VMRO–DPMNE and the European Front or the Coalition Vlen embrace issues related to women. Short overview of elaborated gender issues in the programs of presidential candidates is presented below.

### Scope of Gender Issues

Programs of presidential candidates address the gender issues to a minimum extent. Almost all presidential candidates' programs make no reference to gender or women-related issues. The only exception is the program of the presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova. Two female candidates run for the first time in these presidential elections and their programs are diametrically opposite. Gender issues are addressed in the program of the candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova (further elaborated below), while in the program of the candidate Vankovska no gender issues are addressed, showing that the candidate's gender does not necessarily impact the (non)representation of gender issues in the electoral program, as well as the fact that gender equality should not be necessarily advocated only by women.

Even though the program of the candidate of SDSM and the Coalition for European Future includes special sections on youth, marginalized citizens, people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, such special approach to issues related to women is lacking. Gender issues are to a certain extent addressed in the program of VMRO-DPMNE candidate. Some parts of the program only make a reference to the gender concept, while specific measures for gender equality are somewhat elaborated in other sections. Gender sensitive language is also used to a certain extent in the program. One section of the program of VMRO-DPMNE candidate dealing with staffing solutions for the cabinet of the potential future president, makes reference to the gender dimension as one of the aspects in the recruitment of her associates. In the section related to security, defense and NATO, the Centre for excellence of women, peace and security is singled out as one of the most important issues. The Centre will be established to promote women in the security and defense sector, both in Macedonia and regionally, based on theoretical and practical findings about the role of women in security. This project illustrates a concrete solution for implementing the gender equality policy and strengthening the position of women in the security sector. Furthermore, a project on Professionalization and gender equality in the diplomatic service is stipulated in the section on Diplomacy, however, this project includes only one commitment for equality on all grounds, and lacks concrete measures how to ensure gender equality. The section Protector of most vulnerable categories of citizens mentions a declarative support and commitment for Roma women, as members of a smaller ethnic community, especially with regard to unemployment, health and social issues.

VMRO-DPMNE candidate identifies herself “as activist and defender of women’s rights, rights of most vulnerable categories, and social justice”.

Extract of the electoral program of Gordana Siljanvska Davkova

### 03 Concluding observations on the presidential candidates' programs

This in-depth overview of presidential candidates' programs points to a conclusion that the scope of cross-cutting issues is generally insufficient. This particularly refers to gender issues, which apart from the program of the presidential candidate of VMRO-DPMNE, are lacking in any of the remaining analyzed programs.

There is an evident effort by some of the presidential candidates to include gender and gender-related issues in their programs. However, this is just a starting point, providing a basis for the future presidential candidates to operationalize them in practice.

The mainstreaming of gender related issues in the national legal and institutional framework is a reality, however, strengthening the practical implementation will be required. The commitments of presidential candidates for this group of citizens need to be further strengthened and translated into more concrete measures, also through the program and measures of the political entities represented in the future Government. When a message is conveyed from the highest level by a President of the country that any issues affecting women's rights should be placed high on the agenda of both national and local institutions, that would be indicative of the required consistent implementation, coupled with adequate allocation of human and financial resources.

The analysis of electoral programs of political parties and coalitions for the 2024 parliamentary elections shows that measures and policies targeting the women are represented in the electoral programs. Some of the political entities, such as Levica, included such measures and policies across special areas/sectors, while other entities such as VMRO-DPMNE, Coalition Vlen and the European Front dedicated special sections women. This is indicative of the efforts made by the political entities to introduce a strategic approach to women related issues.

Similar measures prevail across the electoral programs, and political entities with bigger parliamentary representation provide a wider range of measures and policies in several areas. However, it can be noted that all political entities address the key issues that affect women, health, economic support and employment and social measures. Furthermore, the programs include some of the already existing and implemented measures, as well as completely new measures or discontinuation of some existing measures. The detailed analysis of women related issues in the electoral programs for the parliamentary elections is presented below.

## Detailed overview of Electoral Programs

### Dedicated sections on gender issues

As noted earlier, gender issues have been included in the electoral programs for the parliamentary elections. However, this is done to a limited extent by most of the political entities as they fail to provide real mainstreaming of measures and policies across all areas and at all levels. An exception are the political parties with bigger parliamentary representation and despite of lacking depth, their women's policies are to a certain extent integrated across the whole program.

The overview of the scope of gender issues is divided in two parts:

- Focus on gender policies, dedicated to gender policies and elaboration of the measures stipulated in the political entities' electoral programs

and


- Cross-cutting gender policies, providing an overview of all other gender measures as cross-cutting issues in other thematic areas in the political entities' electoral programs.


The program of the Coalition Vlen "Plan 2030" and the program "Europe 2023" of the European Front lack special chapters or segments related to women and gender issues, and are therefore considered only under cross-cutting gender policies.

## The Platform # 1198 of VMRO-DPMNE

There is a focus on gender issues in Chapter VI. Rights and freedoms, program segment Woman are Central to the Macedonian Society.


Several aspects are included under this segment of the program:


 Combatting violence against women – measures which can be singled out are as follows: establishment of ten new centers for care and support of women survivors of gender-based violence, licensing of providers of specialized services for gender-based violence, as well as establishment of multi-agency teams tasked to apply the model for reporting various cases of violence. Furthermore, capacity building is foreseen for professionals who provide services to women survivors of violence. Tackling the problem of violence in schools is elaborated as special part of combatting violence, or specifically through new counselling programs for children and parents and new treatment procedures.

 Support for women in the family – incentives for new mothers, including support for employers who introduce flexible distance work so that women can balance the work and family obligations, as well as special measures for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers in respect of psychological support both during pregnancy and postpartum.

**The segment “Woman are central to the Macedonian society” starts with the following thesis: “Equality of women and men is a fundamental human right, essential element of democracy and imperative for social justice”.**


**Extract of the electoral program “Platform # 1198” of VMRO-DPMNE**


 Strengthen the economic independence of women– special measures such as equal pay for women and men, improving the conditions through systemic solutions for female farmers to be able to exercise the rights to pension and maternity leave, provision of retraining and additional skills training, support for mothers of children with disabilities, as well as education for all girls, being formulated as: “Full inclusion of young girls who are still out of the educational process. Young girls will be provided with career counseling in schools.”

 The Macedonian health system – supporter of women – which stipulates “affordable, efficient, and preventive health care to prevent malignant conditions in women, right to access appropriate health services in order to ensure safe pregnancy and childbirth, thus providing opportunities for giving birth to healthy newborns.” The promotion of women’s reproductive health care is also elaborated.

## The Program for European Future 2024 of SDSM and the Coalition for European Future


The program includes gender policies in Chapter IV. European quality of life, the following is highlighted in this chapter: “Gender equality remains to be our political imperative, because every woman is valuable and deserves to be equally respected, heard, valued, institutionally protected and paid”. Gender issues are further presented as follows:


 The largest part dedicated to gender equality includes commitments for gender equality and a set of concrete measures towards achievement of gender equality, such as: new Law on Gender Equality that entails the establishment of Secretariat for gender equality, introduction of parity in the Electoral Code, i.e. 50% - 50% representation of both genders on candidate lists for MPs and local councilors in the municipalities and the City of Skopje, and mandatory 30% quota for women as mayoral candidates. Legal protection of pregnant female workers is also stipulated with a view to regulate the maternity leave of female farmers in a systemic way, introduction of fellowship policy for girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), increased coverage with preventive check-ups for women in the program for early detection of malignant diseases and increased support for women’s participation in financial support programs for agriculture. Furthermore, it is planned to incorporate gender equality across all curricula.

 The chapter VII. Youth as pillar of the future, presents the Youth manifesto, showcasing the commitments for young people in the coming period, including the commitments for gender equality under the section Equality and inclusion for You. And for all. These commitments include: gender equality; life free of violence for every woman based on adequate legislative framework; accessible services for support, prevention and education; equal opportunities on the labor market by reducing the gender pay gap and introduction of care economy; equal representation of women at decision-making positions; up to 50-50% quota in the parliament and 40% quota for the less represented gender at all positions; education, protection and prevention regarding the sexual and reproductive health rights of young girls and women, and ensuring the rights of Roma women through full integration, engagement and accessible education.

### The program “The Incorruptible in the Assembly” of Levica

This program includes gender issues in Chapter I. Labor and Social Policy in the segment Women’s issues and gender equality. Several commitments and measures addressing the gender equality and improved women’s’ status in the society are included under this segment.

 The key commitment refers to the promotion of left feminism and promotion of women’s rights “by tackling the patriarchal morale, cultural stuffiness and misogynist attitudes“. Recognition of invisible labor and family care are also stated as commitments.

 Specific measures to support female workers refer to providing longer maternity leave, flexible or shortened working hours for a period of three years after childbirth, return to the job position held before maternity leave and introduction of paid maternity leave for female farmers.

**Only the electoral program of Levica stipulates a measure to tackle menstrual poverty, such as unpaid menstrual leave and tax incentives for menstrual hygiene and reproductive health products.**



## Cross-cutting Gender Policies

Women's policies are also included in other segments of the **VMRO-DPMNE program** Platform # 1198 as follows:

### ○ Chapter I. Fight for quality standard of living, that is:

The National plan for demography stipulates additional financial support for employed mothers after maternity leave, that is, return of paid personal income tax for every newborn. Also, it is foreseen to support companies that employ mothers, that is, to release the companies from payment of mandatory contributions for health insurance and insurance for unemployment, as well as personal income tax for a period of three years starting from the day of employment, whereby the employer bears the responsibility to guarantee the mother's employment for as many years as the measure is valid. Furthermore, up to six (6) free in-vitro fertilization procedures will be provided, irrespective of the mother's property status or number of children.

Projects to support women farmers are stipulated under the program segment Agriculture and food for Macedonia, under the thematic area Development of rural areas.

### ○ In Chapter IV. Functional system for citizens, under the program segment Ensure quality health system, a special aspect Care for women's health is stipulated, by means of raising awareness of women's health and opening of a special center for in-vitro fertilization at the University clinic of gynecology and obstetrics.

### ○ Chapter V. Patriotism that unites, stipulates the following:

In the segment Security and defense, Strengthening the role of women in the security structures of the police via equal representation of women at managerial policing positions.

In the segment Sport is our national pride, special aspect is stipulated titled Women in sports, to emphasize the increased involvement of women and girls in professional and recreational sports, as well as additional financial support for sports clubs, and continuous promotion of women's sport and sporting results.

Other chapters of the SDSM and Coalition for European Future's Program for European Future 2024 include other cross-cutting women's and gender policies and measures:

### ○ Chapter I. New economic strategy for European growth and standard stipulates financial support for female farmers with grants of up to 6.000 Euro, that may increase to 10.000 Euro. Furthermore:

The segment 1. Macedonia on the European market highlights the commitment for equal participation of women i.e. "Increased participation of women and vulnerable groups in economic activities is essential for achievement of social equality and inclusive growth", however, no specific measures are listed how to increase the participation.

The segment 4. The taste of Macedonia stipulates an increase to 100.000 mkd for a 9-month maternity leave in the 2024 Maternity program and increase of up to 150.000 mkd by 2027.

- In Chapter III. Care for All, the following measures are stipulated:

The segment 1. More and Better for All stipulates measure to bolster gender equality by economic empowerment and independence of women. To motivate the private sector to employ women, there is a plan to establish a support fund – release from payment of contributions for 12-month period for women with long-term unemployment status, women beneficiaries of guaranteed minimal assistance and women survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

The segment 2. European standards for the Macedonian health system stipulates enhanced mammographic screenings within the primary health care.

- Chapter V. Safe Macedonia includes commitments to ensure equality among men and women in defense and security sectors. Also, commitments to implement gender equality at the level of laws, strategies, etc. are highlighted as well as continuation of already initiated activities to enhance gender equality. Apart from already taken measures for enhanced gender equality (such as zero tolerance for sexual harassment in the Army, protection against harassment at the workplace, application of gender-responsible budgeting concept in the Army, etc.), no new measures or projects are stipulated.

- Chapter IV. European quality of life, section 4. Sport for healthy life, focuses on continuation of activities to strengthen gender equality in sports, i.e. up to 50% inclusion of women in governing structures of sports clubs and federations. In addition, there is a commitment that sports federations and clubs that receive state financial support, must enable the functioning of both male and female sports.

The following chapters and segments in the program **Europe 2030 of the European Front** include measures for gender equality:

- Chapter I. One Prime Minister for All, segment 1.1 Good Governance, stipulates the commitment participation, that is, both men and women equally participate in the decision-making process, and their participation should be organized to ensure equal and transparent access to information both to men and women.

- Chapter 3 Agreement for economic consensus includes the commitment Equal opportunities for all which stipulates equal participation in the economy for all, including on gender basis. This chapter also includes the following measures:

The segment Sustainable development and green transformation, section Rural and agricultural development, stipulates support for women in agriculture through subsidies, i.e. non-repayable grants of up to 6.000 Euro, and giving priority to women in procurement of agriculture machinery.

The segment Equal regional development stipulates incentives and special employment programs and opening of women's enterprises; tax incentives; keeping statistics of women's entrepreneurship; trainings for women; law on supporting social enterprises to assist the opening of social enterprises by women and young people, formalizing the informal employment of women; and reducing the gap in employment rates among men and women.

**Commitment: "Improve the women's access to health care and increased participation of children in pre school institutions, especially in rural areas".**

**Extract of the electoral program Europe 2030 of the European Front**

One special measure is Ensuring the highest rate of gender equality in the planning regions through: improved practices to identify gender issues; capacity building on gender equality for the members of municipal councils, Committee on equal opportunities and the Committee on social and health protection of children; systemic collection of gender disaggregated data and gender analysis; increased admission rate of children in kindergartens; and creation of opportunities for parents, especially for mothers to enter the labor market.

The segment Active young people and equitable society, under section 3.5.4 Sports and recreation, stipulates the Promotion of gender equality in sports through programs and tournaments for girls and women, in order to provide them with equal opportunities to develop their sporting skills, promotion of female coaches and leaders in sport, significant support for sport clubs, and specialized clubs for women and girls. Under the section 3.5.6 The family as pillar of the society, measures are also indirectly stipulated to strengthen the status of women in the society, such as paid family leave, including maternal and paternal leave, and access to health care for all family members.

**The Coalition Vlen** in its electoral program **Plan 2030** stipulates the following gender measures:

- Chapter VII. Wellbeing and economy, similar to the program of the Coalition for European Future, stipulates the introduction of 40% quota for women, that is, inclusion of 40% women at all levels. Positive discrimination is foreseen for job positions which are advertised, so that in cases where the applicants have achieved the same number of points, priority is given to the applicant of the less represented gender for that job position, also providing reduced profit tax rate for companies that employ young people and women.

In its program **The Uncorruptible in the Assembly, Levica** included several gender measures

- Chapter XII. Public security and national defense under the segment Police stipulates the introduction of special human resources department to tackle cases of domestic violence and sexual and gender-based crimes.

Furthermore, measures to support self-employment through access to interest-free loans and grace period for repayment, aimed for craftswomen and women from bankrupted state companies.

This in-depth analysis of political parties' and coalitions' electoral programs demonstrates that gender-related issues are extensively covered. Proposed measures in almost all electoral programs are neither supported by timelines for implementation, or any indicators are proposed to monitor the implementation. Therefore, it is almost impossible to assess whether any of the proposed measures are feasible and what type and volume of human and financial resources are needed to implement the programs.

### ***Gender Issues***

This in-depth analysis shows that the scope of gender issues is generally superficial, and refers to providing support for increased economic independence of women, as well as making sure that women are more available and flexible as pillars of family, which, on the other hand, is not necessarily a driver of gender equality. Furthermore, policies and measures addressing women in the electoral programs are quite similar, especially regarding female farmers in terms of providing them with paid maternity leave, even though this measure that has already been initiated. Other measures entail financial support and grants for projects that stimulate the activity of female farmers in rural development. It can be noted that the planned support for women farmers does not go a step further, i.e. it does not entail measures that would relieve women farmers from the burden of domestic obligations due to their engagement in agriculture.

Also, electoral programs include measures that support the continuation of certain past commitments, such as measures to reduce domestic violence/violence against women, support for women survivors of domestic violence, and measures to provide free screenings and mammographic screenings. Measures which aim to strengthen the role of equal opportunities committees and of equal opportunities coordinators, which are already established in the units of local government, are rarely included, implying lost opportunities to further strengthen the gender mainstreaming (through gender equality committees and coordinators) in policy creation and service delivery at local level.

Commitments in the field of sport are deemed quite interesting as many political entities pledge to increase the equality of women in sports. Some political entities make a step further and propose concrete measures to strengthen the position and number of women in governing bodies of sport federations and clubs, and stipulate greater support for women's clubs and women's sport. Regrettably, none of the analyzed programs include measures that would increase participation of women in the so-called "not typical female sports", such as football and/or boxing, that would reduce the participation gap of women in so called "typical female sports" and non-participation in "typical male sports".

Commitments and measures to reduce the pay gap between men and women are given more dominant place in the electoral programs of this election cycle, including the measures to ensure equal gender representation at job positions in the administration. Largest number of the electoral programs also stipulate commitments and concrete measures for quotas on representation of women in politics and decision-making positions. Similar to previous electoral programs, it is expected that the introduction of this measure is assumed/expected to increase participation of women in politics and boards and that should result in gender sensitive policies and services.

Unfortunately, the worldwide practice and the practice in the country thus far has shown that increased number of women is only an initial step and foundation for essential changes, that is, increased participation of women in politics and on managerial positions is not an end in itself. Gender equality and equal opportunities can be achieved only by continuous raising of the awareness and support of those who have already been included. Such type of measures have not been proposed in any of the analyzed programs.

It is worth noting that the electoral programs also recognize the importance of including women in the security sector of the country, seen from a different perspective. Some of the political entities simply repeat measures and activities which have already been taken, while other political entities include more systemic role of women, including the establishment of separate entities that focus on the women's place in the security and defense sectors.

Finally, it can be concluded that there are minimal commitments aimed for women from smaller ethnic communities. Commitments to embrace Roma women in the education, employment and health sectors are only formulated, but lack specific measures or approaches how to reach out to women from smaller ethnic communities.

It is of utmost importance to ensure that citizens are familiar with the scope of gender-related issues in the electoral programs. This will enable them, either individually or supported by the civil society, to hold both national and local authorities accountable.

Even though the scope of gender-related issues can be more thorough and strategic, still, it is very important to ensure that any of the foreseen measures are ultimately translated into concrete programs, coupled with financial projections, necessary budget for implementation as well as potential sources of funding.

Given the existing large number of priorities of the Government and a tendency to marginalize gender equality, it is very important that there is commitment and active lobbying for these measures by the civil society and citizens to ensure that these measures are implemented, by continuously monitoring the work of the Government.

Dialogue and public discussion will be needed in order to operationalize the women related measures from the electoral programs of political entities. Public discussions should open a possibility for equal representation of the needs and solutions on regional, ethnic and gender grounds.

The scope of gender-related issues in the electoral programs that specifically refer to smaller ethnic communities should be more extensive, coupled with increased number of measures and approaches to address the needs of these communities.

The analysis of the electoral programs for the 2024 parliamentary elections of political entities which are represented in the Government (VMRO-DPMNE, Coalition Vlen and the Movement ZNAM) shows that gender related measures and policies have been addressed in the electoral programs. This illustrates the promises of political entities also for a more strategic approach to women-related issues.

This comparative analysis aims to explore to what extent any of the promised measures targeting gender issues, empowerment of women that were part of the electoral programs of the now ruling parties, are included in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program. More specifically, the analysis will explore the electoral promises within:

- VMRO-DPMNE's electoral program "Platform # 1198".
- Coalition "VLEN" electoral program titled "Plan 2030".
- Movement ZNAM electoral program titled "Proclamation for a Dignified Macedonia".

### ***Comparative analysis of the scope and treatment of gender issues***

The analysis of gender issues in the electoral programs of the political entities VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition "Vlen", which are now part of the Government, revealed a limited scope, that is, lack of in-depth mainstreaming of gender measures and policies across all areas and at all levels of the programs.

These issues have not been at all addressed in the electoral program of the Movement ZNAM; therefore, the analysis further explores the comparison of gender-related promises in the election programs of VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition "Vlen" vis-a-vis the measures included in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program.

### ***COMMITMENTS and measures from Platform #1198 – key findings Chapter VI. Rights and Freedoms - program focus on woman ARE CENTRAL TO THE Macedonian society***

The Platform #1198 of VMRO-DPMNE focuses on gender issues in Chapter VI. Rights and Freedoms, program segment Women are Central to the Macedonian Society. The same focus is retained in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program, however, special sections covering various topics within the Platform #1198 have not been separated under different sub-chapters in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program.

Out of a total of 4 sections with promises under the program segment Women are Central to the Macedonian Society (combatting domestic violence, support for women in the family, economic independence and health), the 2024-2028 Government Work Program stipulates commitments and measures that refer to the 3 sections all together. The fourth section- Woman in the family, of the Platform #1198 has not been included in the Government Work Program, i.e. only the measures for flexible employment arrangements for women have been taken, but these measures are not exclusively targeting the women.

Even though pre-election promises of the Platform #1198 are included in the section on health, the Government Work Program lacks specific measures on how to implement the commitments.

Comparative analysis Table 1- Comparison of Platform #1198, program segment Women are Central to the Macedonian Society vis-a-vis 2024-2028 Government Work Program

**“Platform #1198”. (electoral promises)**

Combatting Violence Against Women – establishment of ten new centers for care and support of women survivors of gender-based violence, licensing of service providers for specialized services for gender-based violence, as well as establishment of multi-agency municipal teams that comply with the provided model for reporting cases of various forms of violence. Furthermore, it is foreseen to strengthen the capacities of professionals who provide services to victims of violence. Another special part to combat violence refers to tackling the problem of violence in schools through new counseling programs targeting both the children and parents as well as new procedures for interventions.  
Macedonian health sector -su

pporter of the women's health, where the following is stipulated "affordable, effective preventive health care to prevent malignant diseases in women, rights to access appropriate health services that will ensure safe pregnancies and childbirth, and ensure healthy newborns to couples." Advancement in reproductive health care for women is also elaborated.

**2024-2028 Government Work Program (extracts)**

Commitments:

- Zero tolerance for diverse forms of violence against women.
- Improved access to specialized support services for all women and their children, increased number and improved quality of support services.

Measures:

- Ten new centers for care and support of women survivors of gender-based violence will be opened
- An inter-agency governmental group will work on combating violence against women by means of strengthening the legislation, stronger and regular coordination of state and local institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as through consistent implementation of signed international agreements, conventions and resolutions on human rights and protection from violence against women.

Commitments:

- We will especially advocate for access to quality health care, in particular for socially vulnerable population groups regarding HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, abortion, infertility, and breast and uterine malignancies.
- Affordable, effective preventive health care will be provided to prevent malignant diseases in women.
- Rights to access appropriate health services that will enable women to have safe pregnancies and childbirth, and ensure healthy newborns to couples.



### **"Platform #1198". (electoral promises)**

Strengthening the economic independence of women, coupled with special measures such as equal pay for both women and men, improving the conditions for women farmers through a systemic solution enabling them to exercise their right to pension and maternity leave, implementation of retraining and professional development courses, support for mothers of children with disabilities, as well as education available to all girls, as stated: "full inclusion in the educational process of all young girls who are out of school. Young girls will be provided with career counselling in schools."

Supporting women in the family, coupled with incentives for new mothers, such as support for employers who have introduced flexible work from home that allows women to adjust their family and work responsibilities, as well as special measures for pregnant women and nursing mothers, such as psychological support for women during pregnancy and postpartum.

### **2024-2028 Government Work Program (extracts)**

Commitments:

·The inter-ministerial group of the Government will work on measures to fully include in the educational process all young girls who are out of school.

Measures:

·Through social dialogue, efforts will be made to reduce the wage gap between men and women, by setting a neutral plan for the classification of occupations dominated by female workers.

-Within the activities of the Employment Agency, institutions will develop plans and programs for greater inclusion of women from urban and rural areas on the labor market, prepare annual programs for women entrepreneurship, while budgets for this purpose will be continuously increased on annual basis.

Measures (in the program segment Productive and high-paying jobs):

- Greater flexibility of working hours for new parents in the first years of parenthood (work from home, flexible use of working hours during the week that complies with the work arrangements of the employer);

## CROSS-CUTTING Gender Policies

In Platform #1198 of VMRO-DPMNE, some of the cross-cutting gender policies were presented in Chapter I. Fight for a quality standard of living, and are now included under Chapter I of the Government Work Program, i.e. Quality standard of living – A new cycle of economic growth, where the same promised commitments and measures are included. In addition, measures to support mothers as well as firms that employ mothers are further specified.

- Chapter I, both in the electoral program and the Government Work Program, includes a special program segment targeting the agriculture, titled Advanced Agriculture. The promise made in the Platform #1198 to support projects for women in rural areas is also included in the Government Work Program under the segment Advanced Agriculture, aimed to reduce emigration from rural areas, but without specifying any planned projects.
- Chapter IV. Functional system for citizens, is phrased as Functional institutional system in the Government Work Program. Within this chapter, in the program segment Quality Health System, the same promise for establishing an IVF center at the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics is included, but commitments and measures to raise awareness about women's health are lacking.
- Chapter V. Patriotism that unites, is included under National Priorities in the Government Work Program. The program segment Security and Defense includes the commitment for representation of women in the security structures. This commitment stipulates "adequate representation of women in the security structures", while in the electoral program it was phrased as a promise for "equal representation of women in leadership positions". Also, there are no specific measures on how this will be achieved. Under the program segment Sport as national pride in the Government Work Program there are no commitments and measures regarding women and gender issues, even though promises were included in the Platform #1198 on the topic of Women in Sport.

Comparative analysis Table 2- Comparison of Platform #1198- cross-cutting policies vis-a-vis 2024- 2028 Government Work Program

## **“Platform #1198”. (electoral promises)**

Chapter I. Fight for a quality standard of living:

- In the framework of the National Demographic Plan, additional financial support is foreseen for employed mothers after the maternity leave, such as refunding of paid personal income tax for each newborn child. Support is also foreseen for employers such as exemption from payment of contributions from compulsory health and unemployment insurance, as well as personal income tax for a period of three years from the date of employment, with an obligation for the employer to keep the job position of the mother for as many years as the measure is used. It is foreseen that up to 6 in vitro fertilizations will be provided for free to a woman regardless of the property status or the number of children.

- Under the program segment Agriculture and Food for Macedonia, in the aspect Rural Development, it is foreseen to implement projects in order to support women farmers.

## **2024–2028 Government Work Program (extracts)**

Chapter I. Quality of life, - A new cycle of economic growth

Measures:

Cognizant of the demographic challenges facing Macedonia and the deteriorating fertility rates, the Government will upgrade the existing and will introduce new measures to support parents as follows:

- Increased one-off financial support for a first-born child;
- Drastic increase in one-off financial support for a second-born child;
- Introduction of one-off financial support for twins, third-born and each subsequently born child.

For mothers who are employed, we plan additional financial support after the maternity leave, as follows:

- One year refunding of paid personal income tax for a first-born child;
- Two years refunding of paid personal income tax for a second-born child;
- Refunding of paid personal income tax for a third-born and any subsequently born child, which will last until the age of majority of the first-born child.

For companies that will employ mothers of three or more children, we plan the exemption from payment of contributions from compulsory health and unemployment insurance, as well as exemption from personal income tax for a period of three years starting from the date of employment, with an obligation for the employer to keep the mother' job position for as many years as the measure is used. We will introduce the possibility for every woman, regardless of her property status or the number of children, to receive up to six free in vitro fertilizations.

Commitments: Supporting projects aimed for women farmers

CHAPTER IV Functional system for citizens, in the program segment There will be a quality health system, a special aspect is provided Care for women 's health by raising awareness of women's health and opening of a special center for in vitro fertilization at the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics.

#### Chapter V. Patriotism that unites

Under the segment Security and Defense, Strengthening the role of women in security structures in the police through equal representation of women in policing managerial positions.

The segment Sport as national pride stipulates a special aspect Women in sport, where it is planned to put emphasis on increasing the inclusion of women and girls in professional and recreational sport, as well as additional financial support for sports clubs that will enable this and continuous promotion of women's sport and the achieved sports results.

#### CHAPTER IV. Functional institutional system

##### Quality health system

We will open a modern in vitro fertilization center at the University Clinic of Gynecology and Obstetrics

#### Chapter V. National priorities Security & Defense

##### Commitment:

Strengthening the role of women is one of the fundamental principles of democracy. Adequate representation of women in the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and in intelligence and security sector institutions will guarantee the upholding of gender equality principles.

##### Sport as national pride

No commitments and measures are included.

### **Commitments and measures from Plan 2030 – key findings**

The analysis of the 2024-2028 Government Work Program shows that the electoral promises of the Coalition "Vlen" have not been included. In particular, this refers to the measure regarding 40% gender quota at all levels, the positive discrimination measure for job positions filled through vacancy notices and the profit tax reduction measure for businesses that will employ young people and women.

## General conclusions

The format of the 2024–2028 Government Work Program is based on a list of commitments, activities and measures. However, the goals lack precision and clarity with only some quantitative indicators and even less qualitative indicators. Also, the 2024 – 2028 Government Work Program lacks the subsections and topics that were included in the electoral programs, which further confuses the monitoring of the scope of some measures, as well as the target groups for those measures. The 2024– 2028 Government Work Program also lacks a timeframe for the implementation of the special measures, which further complicates the monitoring of the measures implementation of interest in this analysis.

This format prevents the public from knowing what are the specific goals to be met during the four-year term of the Government, and what results are expected, i.e. what should be the effect of stipulated measures.

Part of the quantitative indicators that were promised in the electoral program of VMRO–DPMNE "Platform #1198" are missing in the 2024 – 2028 Government Work Program. This makes it even more difficult to monitor the fulfillment of electoral promises.

The 2024 – 2028 Government Work Program was mainly designed on the basis of the "Platform #1198", while gender related measures from the programs of other political entities forming the Government have not been addressed separately or specifically integrated, that is, only measures that were already planned in the Platform #1198 have been included.

## Gender Issues

Regarding the representation of gender issues, it can be said that the majority of the commitments and measures that VMRO–DPMNE has stipulated in Platform #1198 are now included in the 2024–2028 Government Work Program.

Gender issues are still relatively unspecified, because as shown in the analysis, there are no measures for specific gender issues, but rather these issues are addressed as part of the listed commitments.

Some gender issues that were minimally addressed through cross-cutting policies and measures in the "Plan 2030" of the Coalition "Vlen" are not included in the 2024–2028 Government Work Program.

· Considering the format of the 2024-2028 Government Work Program, it is possible that some of the measures that lack clarity and precision, as well as some of the commitments, will be further elaborated within the special sectors and ministries. Therefore, it is recommended to additionally plan and carry out a monitoring of promised gender related measures which are addressed in the national strategies, plans, ministry strategies and similar working documents in order to determine whether the commitments, as well as the measures that lack precision and clear indicators will be o It is recommended that specific goals, timelines, clear expected results and quantitative indicators are part of the future planning of the Government and the Ministries for 2025, in order to enable the monitoring of the fulfillment of given promises.

· It is recommended to further disseminate the results of this analysis in order to reach out to the citizens, thus informing the citizens of the priority given to their needs in the 2024-2028 Government Work Program and to advocate for further implementation.

· It is recommended that active CSOs at local level undertake an ongoing monitoring of the annual work programs of local self-governments units to determine whether some of the gender related issues will be transposed at the local level, in what form and to establish a plan for further monitoring of the implementation. This is especially recommended with regard to the monitoring of the programs of local self-governments, given that they will implement the promised support of EUR 250 million for local self-governments.

· Civil society organizations should present their requests to the Government, competent ministries and agencies, so that parts of the programs that include commitments can be further operationalized and implemented as concrete measures.