

# Pledge by North Macedonia

Succeeded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 2 December 1993

Ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict on 12 January 2004

Ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography on 17 October 2003



## Pledges

1. Based on the principle of the best interests of the child, with a view to prevention and early intervention, the policies of the Government and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy are aimed at abandoning the practice of placement of children in an institution and their further "institutionalization". The Government is conducting an intensive process of deinstitutionalization, with the main commitment being to ensure that no child under the age of 18 is placed in an institution after 2020.
2. On the other hand, the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 "Timjanik" pays great attention to the development of community social services. When it comes to children, the focus is on prevention, i.e., identifying and supporting families at risk of leaving their children for any reason. Preparations are presently being made for the current residential institutions at the start to assume this role, which, through direct work and support for at-risk families, will need to enable these families to provide appropriate care for their children (by means of information, rights support, counseling and training, etc.).
3. Efforts are also being made to provide adequate support to families with children with disabilities, such as the introduction of a respite care at the expense of the state, which is expected to be launched in 2020.

## **Commitments to mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

In light of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it can rightly be said to be one of the most widespread and universal instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights. Children, as persons enjoying human rights as any other individual, have an equal right to be treated with dignity, involved in the decision-making process relating to them, and in all processes affecting them, on equal treatment without any discrimination on any grounds whatsoever. While much has been achieved in this area, on the basis of this and numerous other acts and documents that more or less protect and advocate for their rights, there is still an obligation to step up efforts to protect the rights of girls, children with disabilities as well as those in specific and vulnerable situations. To end their suffering, their economic and sexual exploitation, forced child marriages, and sexual mutilation as opposed to their greater inclusion in the educational process, as well as through access to all essential services and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process affecting them.

We should recall that the Republic of North Macedonia accessed the Convention through a succession of the former SFRY, while in accordance with the reporting obligations under Article 44 of the Convention, in March last year, the country also submitted the Combined Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports on the Convention and on the two Optional Protocols.

The initiative to renew the commitments to the implementation of the Convention in question offers an excellent opportunity to recall the importance of the Convention, as well as to summarize the achievements and what remains a challenge, to which we should focus our joint efforts in the future.

The key points of the efforts of the Republic of North Macedonia to mark this important anniversary are as follows:

1. Based on the principle of the best interests of the child, with a view to prevention and early intervention, the policies of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy are aimed at abandoning the practice of placement of children in an institution and their further "institutionalization". The Government, through the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, is conducting an intensive process of deinstitutionalization, with the main commitment being to ensure that no child under the age of 18 is placed in an institution after 2020.

2. The starting point of the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 "Timjanik" is the fact that it is in the best interest of the child to grow and develop in a family or family-like environment. On the one hand, the process of transforming social residential institutions for children has begun and now it is undergoing an intense process: the institutionalized mode of care is replaced by non-institutional forms such as foster care, adoption, or small group homes that accommodate five to seven children.

3. During 2018, two institutions have completely changed the way they care: one for children without parents or parental care, and the other for children with social-educational problems. Thus, about sixty children between the ages of 7 and 18, who were then placed in institutions, received care that is more appropriate: 49 in small group homes and 8 in foster families. All ten children then placed in the only institution for people with disabilities have moved into three new small group homes. Group homes offer incomparably better housing conditions than institutions do, but also opportunities for individual work and support to beneficiaries by employees.

In 2019, the only institution in the country for infants and young children up to the age of 3 has changed the way children are cared for: 31 children then placed in the institution have been housed in five small group homes in rented apartments with 24-hour support by professional staff. This enables young children, who have been abandoned by their biological families, to receive appropriate emotional and sensory stimulation from an early age. This in turn encourages their proper child growth and development.

In compliance with the relevant international standards and conventions, in order to respect human rights and freedoms, activities were launched in 2019 to create conditions for complete transformation of services provided to children in conflict with the law from 14 to 18 years. Services for children in conflict with the law are based on a modern interdisciplinary approach and maximum integration of children, while respecting the child's personal dignity and integrity, and developing their self-esteem. To this end, these children have been moved to two group homes to provide comprehensive treatment and child protection. This implies, in the shortest possible time, with the support of professionals and with the active participation of the children, to overcome the current state of risk, to raise the children's capacities, to meet their needs, to encourage their growth and development, as well as to enable their quick exit from the social protection system.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is making significant efforts to promote foster care and encourage citizens to register as foster families. During 2018, in partnership with UNICEF, the conducted national campaign "Every Child Needs a Family" to promote foster care has resulted in 51 new foster families registered in the country. The present number of foster families is 202, involving 347 children. The new Social

Protection Law provides for additional new, specialized forms of foster care, including kinship care, as well as appropriate training and support for foster families.

On the other hand, the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 "Timjanik" pays great attention to the development of community social services. When it comes to children, the focus is on prevention, i.e., identifying and supporting families at risk of leaving their children for any reason. Preparations are presently being made for the current residential institutions at the start to assume this role, which, through direct work and support for at-risk families, will need to enable these families to provide appropriate care for their children (by means of information, rights support, counseling and training, etc.). Efforts are also being made to provide adequate support to families with children with disabilities, such as the introduction of a respite care at the expense of the state, which is expected to be launched in 2020.