

Information provided by the Government of North Macedonia on the questions raised by the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing of 21 June 2021

The legislation in the Republic of North Macedonia doesn't have any laws or regulations in place that prohibit begging, eating, sleeping, or performing personal hygienic activities in all or certain public places.

As regards the question from item 4 referring to the measures for support of people living in poverty, we report that in view of creating opportunities for effective response and addressing the identified challenges in the field of social protection and poverty reduction, a step was taken toward reform of the social and child protection system, through preparation of a new Law on Social Protection and amendments to the Law on Child Protection.

The social protection system reform redesigned the system of financial rights arising from social protection with the introduction of the guaranteed minimum assistance, whose maximum amount is close to the minimum wage in the country, with which families at social risk can meet the minimum subsistence needs. This means properly targeting/focusing of social benefits to individuals and families at social risk of poverty and social exclusion. Bearing in mind that the reform envisages a more efficient connection of the social work with the employment measures, work is being done on activation of the able-bodied social protection beneficiaries on the labor market, by strengthening their working capacities for their successful reintegration in the society. This implies mandatory continuous attendance at trainings as well as acceptance of a job offer. At the same time, the beneficiaries are provided with support for completing their education and acquiring work skills, which will make them competitive in the labor market. The purpose of such planned measures is to directly affect the reduction of poverty and social inclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens.

Also, with a view to eradicate child poverty, the amendments to the Law on Child Protection provided easier access to child allowance for low income families with children, that is, recipients of the right to guaranteed minimum assistance. A novelty in child protection is the introduction of the education allowance for children who regularly attend classes in primary and secondary school, in order to support parents in meeting school costs, which prevents early school leaving. The current right to a Conditional Cash Allowance (hereinafter education allowance) only referred to children from secondary education who are beneficiaries of social financial assistance and child allowance, and it now extends to children in primary education, but also to all low-income households. In addition to these

rights, each household beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance receives 1,000 denar per month during the six winter months to cover heating costs.

Moreover, in order to ensure better access to social protection services, the reform of the social protection system includes substantial improvement in the area of social services, their type, coverage, method of provision, inclusion of other providers, and so on. Consequently, the possibility was opened for the establishment of social services at the local level by the municipalities themselves based on their needs in cooperation with civil society organizations.

Regarding the persons who are at social risk of homelessness, the social protection system provides temporary accommodation in a homeless center. In it, the homeless receive housing, food, medicine and psycho-social support in overcoming the situation. Accommodation is done with the consent of the homeless person.

Such center was established in Skopje as an organizational unit of the PI Intermunicipal Center for Social Work Skopje, which accommodates homeless people from the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. In the last period, especially during the winter months, as a measure for protection from the cold, other available capacities for social protection were used, where a large number of families at risk of homelessness were accommodated.

The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia also provides social protection services to the homeless and other categories of persons at social risk. Within the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, there are stations for homeless people where they receive food, clothes, medicine, conditions for maintaining personal hygiene and so on. In conditions of extremely low outside temperatures, overnight stay in the stations is provided. The activities of the Red Cross are also partially financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.