**Information provided by the Government of North Macedonia as contribution to the Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity**

 In reply to the letter and Questionnaire of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity of 20 December 2023, the Government of North Macedonia provides the following information:

 In the Republic of North Macedonia, there are no noted policies or enacted laws that prevent, limit the right to free expression and freedom of the citizens themselves, as well as civil organizations, regardless of their affiliation on any basis. One of the basic postulates of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia is the right to freedom and freedom of expression of the citizens, according to Article 9 of the Constitution, their equality before the laws.

 According to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (2020), the prevention and prohibition of discrimination, the forms and types of discrimination, the procedures for protection against discrimination, as well as the composition and work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination are regulated. The purpose of this Law is to ensure the principle of equality and prevent and protect against discrimination in the exercise of human rights and freedoms. The application of the law is by all natural and legal persons, all state authorities, local self-government unit authorities, legal persons with public powers and all other legal and natural persons in the field of: 1) work and labor relations; 2) education, science and sports; 3) social security, including the area of social protection, pension and disability insurance, health insurance and health care; 4) judiciary and administration; 5) housing; 6) public information and media; 7) access to goods and services; 8) membership and action in political parties, associations, foundations, trade unions or other organizations based on membership; 9) culture and 10) all other areas (Article 3). Article 5 of the law prohibits any discrimination based on race, skin color, origin, national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, belonging to a marginalized group, language, citizenship, social origin, education, religion or religious belief, political belief, other belief, disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health condition, personal characteristic and social status or any other basis. Pursuant to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination from 2020, a Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination was established, which acts on every petition for determination of discrimination as well as undertakes activities for promotion, protection and prevention of equality, human rights and non-discrimination, monitors the implementation of this law and provides opinions and recommendations, promotes the principle of equality, the right to non-discrimination and dealing with all forms of discrimination through increasing public awareness, information and education.

 In the direction of building policies for the promotion of human rights and non-discrimination, the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 was adopted. This strategy was adopted by the Government of RNM on May 25, 2022, and is a basic strategic document in the national policy for equality and non-discrimination. The strategy expresses the readiness of the Republic of North Macedonia to unite all perceptions, activities and resources in a coherent framework and a single approach for sustainable development, for the advancement of human rights and for the establishment of equal opportunities. Based on this strategy, a National Action Plan 2022-2024 (NAP) with fiscal implications has been prepared.

Namely, based on the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination and the National Action Plan by Government Decision, a National Coordinating Body (NCB) was established to monitor non-discrimination situations and the implementation of laws, by-laws and strategic documents in this area (Official Gazette of RNM No. 218 /22). At its first session, the NCB discussed a special strategic goal for the protection of LGBTI+, which will be an annex to the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in the direction of Implementation of the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2022-2026 and the National Action Plan during 2023 paid attention to capacity building and education of employees in the public sector.

The need for education arises not only because of the obligation to act according to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, but also because of the improvement of the quality of one's work and the return of trust from citizens to the institutions. In addition, due to the fact that according to the data, citizens may be victims of discrimination, but due to insufficient knowledge, they may not be able to recognize it. Institutions can also refer citizens to competent institutions that act on discrimination.

 In cooperation with the OSCE Mission and the Association Center for Change Management, a project was implemented to raise the awareness of officials in the public sector in recognizing the forms of discrimination and promoting equality and equal opportunities in order to fulfill the obligations arising from the article 3 of the Law on prevention and protection against discrimination. Within the framework of the project, the following activities were carried out:

* A Manual for trainers in the area of the principle of non-discrimination and the duty to implement equality in the public sector has been prepared;
* A program was created for capacity building and training for public sector employees at the local level;
* Workshops were conducted for 6 trainers within the Program, intended for trainers who acquired knowledge in the previous phase of implementation of the same project and was intended for employees in the public sector at the central level (conducted in the period from July to November 2022) – Trained 6 people (5 women and 1 man);
* 5 cascade two-day trainings were conducted for public sector employees at the local level in the area of the principle of non-discrimination and the duty to implement equality in the public sector. The trainings were conducted in the cities of Strumica, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Veles and Skopje with a total of 78 participants.