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PAR PRINCIPLES MAINSTREAMING
IN SECTORAL POLICIES

REPORT FOR NORTH MACEDONIA

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INSTITUTION: Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
POLICY SECTOR: Agriculture

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Report summary

This report aims to present an analysis of the service delivery performance of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFW) of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM). The analysis focuses on monitoring the agriculture sector according to three SIGMA principles: (19) Users are at the centre in the design and delivery of administrative services; (20) Public administration delivers streamlined and high-quality services; and (21) Administrative services are easily accessible online and offline, taking into account different needs, choices, and constraints. This report is structured according to eight requirements, which are related to the following: (1) the possibility for citizens to voice their opinions on the quality of the services received from the particular sector-specific institution; (2) public display of information on citizen feedback and satisfaction with received services; (3) detailed segregation of such information, (4) adapting service provisions to the needs of vulnerable groups; (5) existing different channels for accessing sector-specific services; (6) stages of development of the e-services that the sector-specific institution provides; (7) availability of information on the accessibility of sector-specific services to users; and (8) availability of data relevant to sector-specific services in open formats.

Through the listed order, qualitative research methods and mechanisms have been used to determine whether the selected sector-specific institution has fulfilled the requirements mentioned above. More precisely, website reviews, legislation reviews, on-site visits, requests for access to public information (FOI requests), and interviews with relevant employees from the MAFW have been conducted during the past period. Overall, the analysis was conducted to determine if the citizens/users are able to use the services that the MAFW provides via different channels and assess their quality, as well as if they are able to voice or express their satisfaction with the service delivery performance of the MAFW. At the same time, the report shows whether the MAFW collects data and conducts regular examinations, which may contribute to future enhancement of the services as well as the service delivery performance tailored to the citizens' needs and priorities. Also, the analysis gives information about the institutions' investments in transparency and accountability by providing data in open formats, specifically the investments and efforts of the MAFW, which are the subject of this analysis.

Regarding the possibility of voicing the citizens' opinion on the services and the service delivery, the MAFW has limited the citizens by using only one publicly available method on their website (a form on which citizens can ask questions or report problems). In the section on services, there is another form for reporting issues with the Ministry's services, but this complaint form is linked directly to the national portal for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk). On the MAFW web portal, no available data provides statistics or responses from the citizens as feedback on their satisfaction with the service delivery. The only available report covers the number and the content of the request for FOI in the last several years (2021, 2022, 2023). Regarding the adaptation of the services to

the needs of vulnerable groups, the MAFW has an internal legal act for communication with citizens with disabilities, as well as an appointed person for working with vulnerable groups of citizens, but this information is not available to the general public. All of the services that the MAFW provides are available in the traditional (physical) way of delivery, and some of them are also provided electronically (www.mzsv.gov.mk). However, most of the services are available only in the traditional way (citizens can only download applications for the services). Two electronic services are available on different web portals: one on the national platform for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk) and another, an e-application for financial support in agriculture and rural development, is available on the web page of the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development (www.ipardpa.gov.mk). The e-services that the MAFW provides are user-friendly and have detailed guidelines for each of the services. The Ministry needs to work further on digitalising more services by concentrating them on one systematically organised platform to ease the citizens' path to using digital services. Also, in the future, the MAFW needs to collect information on the accessibility of the services available both online and through the traditional way, so that it can serve as evidence for future public service designing and enhancement of already existing services. Publishing more data in an open format in a systematic way, as well as coordinating with the national platform for open data, and registering the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development are other recommendations that should be implemented by the MAFW in the forthcoming period to improve its own transparency and accountability. According to the research and national data, the MAFW is among the first 15 institutions out of 98 range national institutions for active transparency in the country.[1]

Overall, the MAFW faces a significant challenge in adapting all services to be equally available to each group of citizens because of its complex work with specific groups of citizens (rural inhabitants, wineries, cooperatives, etc.). On the other hand, it has great potential to enhance its service delivery performance according to the general trends of modernisation in the sector. An additional motivation is the institution's high ranking in active transparency, which means that the institution already meets many similar requirements. With some additional efforts, the MAFW could very easily achieve the requirements and SIGMA principles on which this monitoring report is based.

1 https://www.ccc.org.mk/images/stories/ak2023mk.pdf

Introduction

I.1 Focus of the Monitoring in the PAR Area of Service Delivery and Digitalisation

The purpose of this monitoring is to conduct research, analytical, and advocacy work related to assessing how PAR is applied in the selected sectoral policy based on the predefined methodology. According to the defined methodology, monitoring in the Service Delivery and Digitalisation (SDD) area is conducted against three SIGMA Principles:

> *SIGMA Principle 19: Users are at the centre of the design and delivery of administrative services.*
>
> *SIGMA Principle 20: The public administration delivers streamlined and high-quality services.*
>
> *SIGMA Principle 21: Administrative services are easily accessible online and offline, taking into account different needs, choices, and constraints.*

SD checklist consists of eight requirements that pertain to the possibilities for service users to voice their opinion about the quality of sector-specific administrative services, data transparency and accessibility, practices of electronic service provision, as well as the accessibility and usage of services online and offline, taking into account the different needs and constraints of citizens. Specifically, it is monitored to determine whether citizens, as users of the services of the institutions, have the opportunity to voice their opinion on the quality of services received. For this report, we have monitored the MAFW and two web portals linked with the Ministry: the Agency for Financial Support for Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Governmental Portal for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk). Furthermore, it is monitored whether citizens' feedback channels are embedded into service providers' websites or government-sponsored service delivery portals and whether submitted feedback is made public. In relation to accessibility, it is monitored whether a responsible service provider ensures that vulnerable and marginalised populations can easily obtain the services they need and whether there are at least two options for accessing them (digital and in-person). In addition, monitoring focuses on whether the practice of collecting and publishing data on accessibility exists (such as statistics, analyses, reports, or similar). Electronic service provision is further monitored to determine the level of presence and development of e-services (based on the four-tier classification of the United Nations). Finally, the last requirement examines whether practices of publishing open data related to service provision are established and how regularly open datasets are publicly disclosed for further (re)use.

I.2 In this report

In this report, we have analysed the service delivery management of the MAFW, focusing on the opportunity for feedback provided by citizens and whether this feedback is published and used for further improvements in the services. The institution provides approximately 80 central services to its diverse users, including women, youth, individual farmers, cooperatives, wineries, CSOs, and people with disabilities. The MAFW was chosen as the focus of this report due to its complex structure and the wide range of citizen and legal entity users it serves. Through this analysis, we aim to raise awareness that service delivery and the quality of service management are equally important across all sectors and areas of society.

The agricultural sector is a very broad field that encompasses many public institutions, such as the regional units of the MAFW, the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Extension Agency, the State Inspectorate for Agriculture, and the Seed and Planting Authority. However, for the purpose of this analysis, we focus only on the MAFW as a national institution and, in some parts, on the Agency for Financial Support because their scope of work is very closely related and intertwined.

For this analysis, we obtained information from relevant government websites, research analysis, legal regulations, FOI requests, and in-depth interviews with respective MAFW employees.

Analysis

North Macedonia is in the penultimate place in Europe after Albania in the digitisation of public services and the last place on the e-Government Index for 2021 and 2022, according to the report from the European Commission.[2]

It has adopted the Strategy for Public Administration Reform 2023–2030,[3], which provides guidelines for digitisation according to European practices and regulations. Still, the system of digital solutions in the public sector at the national and local levels is fragmented and does not ensure efficient communication between state institutions.

These documents foresee the 'only once' principle, which means that public administration should receive information from citizens and businesses once and then communicate that information ex officio to various institutions to meet citizens' needs.

The National Portal for e-services has existed for years but does not fulfil its intended purpose, offering a limited number of e-services, according to the State Audit Office. Official data indicates that only 8% of the total population aged 18 to 64 is registered on the National e-Services Portal (www.uslugi.gov.mk), according to the analyses by state auditors in a report published in June 2024 entitled Slow Digitalisation, Insufficient Promotion, and Weak Utilisation of e-services.[4]

A National Council for Digital Transformation and two working groups were established to amend laws due to the digitisation of processes related to the procedures established by law and to coordinate activities in the field of information and communication technologies. However, the absence of activities and concrete results has allowed laws to be only partially complied with, public institutions to delay the digitisation of processes and services, and citizens to continue relying on services that require a physical presence.

The National ICT Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2023–2027[5] provides a clear roadmap for the implementation of digitisation, aiming to strengthen the public administration and the Government's ability to deliver services that meet the expectations and demands of citizens, businesses, and public officials. At the same time, it seeks to create the favourable environment needed for the integrated transformation and modernisation of the state, from infrastructure and connectivity to innovation programs and application programs for new technologies. The strategy particularly focuses on developing the digital economy to a higher level, emphasising the importance of a suitable regulatory environment and digital infrastructure in the country, enabling the use of new technologies in the ICT area to achieve stable and long-term connectivity and create a better future for citizens and society as a whole.

Speaking of national policies and strategic documents, in January 2021, the new National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2021–2027[6] was adopted, introducing for the first a new chapter focused precisely on digitalisation and the application of innovative methods and technologies. A significant portion of these changes were introduced as a result of COVID-19, which revealed that farmers and the rural population faced significant difficulties in communicating and interacting with institutions and municipalities. Still, there are serious challenges in the area of using e-services or e-communication at the institutional level.

2 https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/egovernment-benchmark-2023
3 https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/4201

4 https://dzr.mk/mk/240604-bavna-digitalizacija-nedovolna-promocija-i-slaba-iskoristenost-na-e-uslugi
5 https://ener.gov.mk/PublicDocuments/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0%20
%D0%98%D0%9A%D0%A2%20%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%20
%D0%B7%D0%B0%202023%20-2027%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%20-%20%D0%94%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%84
%D1%82_%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%86%D1%80%D1%82_id=46_version=1.pdf
6 https://ipard.gov.mk/mk/ipard-2014-2020-2/%D0%B8%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B4-2014-2020/zakoni/%D0%B-
D%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0
%B4%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE/attachment/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B-
B%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D-
0%B7%D0%B5%D0%BC%D1%98%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%82/

In the agriculture sector, farmers primarily use two websites, both connected to the National Portal for e-services, which were analysed in this report. The first is the general website of the MAFW— https://www.mzsv.gov.mk/. Within the site, there is a section for the National e-Agri Platform[7]— https://www.e-zemjodelstvo.mk/, but it is currently non-functional. Additionally, the MAFW website includes a subsection listing services provided by the MAFW, offering announcements and instructions on how to obtain them. Our review of over 80 services revealed that most require an in-person visit to the ministry or its regional units, as they are not available as full e-services.

Within this sub-section, there is a section where citizens can report a problem, which contains a link that directly leads to the National Portal for e-services: https://uslugi.gov.mk/. In this part, there are instructions on how to report a problem or dissatisfaction with the services offered by the MAFW. During interviews with employees of the MAFW, it was mentioned that through the National e-services system, they receive the reported problems and complaints. However, they noted that the number of submissions is very small, that they are resolve these issues, but that the problems and their resolutions are not published on a web page as problems and solutions or questions and answers. Unfortunately, there is no official online platform for expressing satisfaction from users of a particular service.

The other website, which is also highly important for the agriculture sector, is the website of the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development (https://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/), where information related to financial support in the sector is published, and the electronic application form for financial support is located. This e-application form is available exclusively to persons who are registered as farmers and not to the general public.[8] Due to its complexity, in most cases, it is filled out by the advisers in the National Extension Agency[9] or employees of the regional units of the MAFW. In the website's contact section, there is an option to ask a question electronically. We were told by employees at the Agency that such questions are forwarded by the IT sector to the relevant department, and after the questions are reviewed, responses are sent to the citizens, who are primarily farmers. However, those answers are not published publicly or archived appropriately due to the institution's insufficient administrative capacities, which is also mentioned several times as a challenge in the European Commission's reports on the country's progress.

From the brief analysis, we can conclude that citizens can only partially express their opinion on the quality of service delivery or their experience, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction with the services in the agriculture sector. Based on this, this **requirement is considered to be partially met**.

Requirement 2. Information on citizen feedback and satisfaction with received services is published

The Law on Quality Management[10] does not require the institution to publish the results of citizens' satisfaction measurements. However, as a document of public interest and in the interest of transparency and good governance, institutions should publicly display such documents.

Through a review of the MAFW website (https://www.mzsv.gov.mk/) and the online portal for e-services in the agriculture sector (https://uslugi.gov.mk/services-by-search-term.nspx), we concluded that there are no reports or other means of displaying information about citizens' feedback regarding their satisfaction with the service delivery of the MAFW. Additionally, we reviewed other government portals that might have published information useful for this analysis. For this purpose, we reviewed the State Statistical Office portal (www.stat.gov.mk) and the portal of the State Audit Office (https://dzr.mk/mk), where on 04 June 2024, a report about the effectiveness of the National portal for e-services was published. One of the findings revealed that this system is used by only 8% of the total population aged 18–64. A total of 65,000 services were delivered during 2020–2023, but there is still a lack of information about the services offered by this portal. According to this report, institutions do not have statistics about realised e-services, nor statistics or reports about citizens' feedback and satisfaction with the received services. One of the main recommendations is the creation of such reports and the regular monitoring of citizens' satisfaction with e-services.[11]

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7 https://www.e-zemjodelstvo.mk/
8 https://e-baranje.ipardpa.gov.mk/ords/f?p=757:LOGIN_DESKTOP
9 https://agencija.gov.mk/
10 https://kvalitet.mioa.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/konsolidiran-tekst-zakon-za-upravuva%D1%9Ae-so-kvalitet-2021.pdf
11 https://dzr.mk/mk/240604-bavna-digitalizacija-nedovolna-promocija-i-slaba-iskoristenost-na-e-uslugi

We have also reviewed the portal of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) (https://www.mioa.gov.mk/), now renamed the Ministry of Digital Transformation[12], but such reports are not available to the general public.

For additional information and further clarification on publishing citizens' feedback, we contacted the MAFW through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request in order to gather more information on the topic. The FOI request was sent to the MAFW on 15 April 2024, but we did not receive a response, although there is a legal obligation under the Law on Free Access to Public Information[13] to respond to each FOI request within 20 days.[14] After the establishment of the new Government on 1 July 2024, we sent the same FOI request again. We received a report on the Ministry's realised activities in 2023, the number of fund users, and related information. However, there were no numbers or reports reflecting citizens' feedback and satisfaction with the services received. According to the FOI response, in 2023, the Ministry's contact e-mail (info@mzsv.gov.mk) received 60 different requests, questions, and demands from citizens, all of which were resolved by referring them to the relevant sectors of the MAFW. Additionally,, one of the reports we received was the annual report on the number of FOI requests for 2023. From this, we determined that the MAFW received a total of 48 requests, of which 44 were positively responded to. However, other statistics were not provided.

In the interviews we conducted with employees of the Ministry, it was emphasised that all the requests and questions directed to them are, in most cases, answered through the sector groups organised in the MAFW. However, the minutes from these meetings are not published in any form and are not available to the general public.

We observed the same situation in the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development, where the main challenge lies in insufficient administrative capacities.

Furthermore, in accordance with ISO procedures governing the operations of the MAFW, each office within the MAFW is equipped with a box designated for clients and citizens to express their satisfaction regarding the services provided by the institution's employees. This procedure is intended to assess citizen satisfaction, thereby facilitating enhancements in service delivery and communication with the public. However, based on FOI responses and interviews conducted with MAFW employees, these procedures have not yet been effectively implemented within the institution.

In addition to the information received through FOI responses and interviews with the employees from the MAFW and the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development, there is no other publicly accessible information regarding citizens' satisfaction that the broader public can access.

Citizens face restrictions when attempting to convey their satisfaction regarding service delivery, as they are presented with only two options on the websites of both institutions: 'report a problem' or 'send us a message.' According to the most recent report from the State Audit Office, dated June 2024, these institutions do not gather data or compile statistics related to these interactions. Furthermore, the MAFW and the Agency do not publish data collected from these electronic forms. Therefore, we can conclude that the MAFW and the Agency **do not meet this requirement.**

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12 On 10 June 2024, the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia amended the Law on the Organization and Operation of State Administrative Bodies (LOOSAB), which resulted in changes to the government structure. In that regard, new ministries were created, some were separated into two ministries, while others merged the competences of two ministries, and the competences of the existing ministries were reallocated. The ministry responsible for public administration, previously titled "Ministry of Information Society and Administration," was separated into two new ministries: the "Ministry for Public Administration" and the "Ministry for Digital Transformation."

13 https://ippo.gov.mk/docs/xFiles/articles/zakonZaSlobodenPristapDoInfo/zakonZaSlobodenPristapDoInfo.pdf

14 During the preparation of the report, we were in the process of organising and implementing the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. Perhaps due to this situation, we did not receive any response to our FOI request.

Requirement 3. Published data on citizen feedback is segregated based on gender, age groups, education, and territorial distribution

The available data on the web pages and the response received through an FOI request do not show that citizens' feedback is categorised based on gender, age groups, education, or territorial distribution.

According to the requirements of the ISO 9001:2015 standard and the procedure measuring citizens' satisfaction with public services, the satisfaction of service users is measured as part of the evaluation of the performance of the Quality Management System to determine whether the organisation has fulfilled the requirements of service users. This activity is carried out by having service users fill out a questionnaire available on the Institute for Standardization of the Republic of North Macedonia's webpage.[15]

The Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) has released two documents/manuals intended to assist institutions in their measurement processes. However, data from MISA and the most recent report from the State Audit Office indicate that these manuals and the procedures outlined in ISO 9001:2015 are not being effectively utilised by the institutions.

A very positive example is the Agency for Administration, which prepares a yearly analysis of citizens' satisfaction with their services. These analyses are published online and conducted in accordance with the prescribed manuals. These reports provide clear demographic data about the respondents, and the 2023 report is available on the Agency's web page.[16]

However, this level of transparency is not observed in the activities of the MAFW, whether online or offline. Therefore, we conclude that the institution does **not meet this requirement**. The same applies to the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Requirement 4. Service provision is adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups

North Macedonia has adopted the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination[17], the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[18], and the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination[19] (2022–2026). The Law on General Administrative Procedure[20], which serves as a lex specialis concerning service delivery, establishes that administrative procedures are founded on several principles, including equality, impartiality, and objectivity, as well as the principle of service orientation for public bodies.[21] These principles are embedded within the provisions of this law to guarantee equal access to public services for all individuals. Another lex specialis that guarantees equality in all areas of society is the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (2020),[22] which focuses on eliminating discrimination in all fields, including service delivery to citizens. In July 2022, the Strategy for Gender

15 https://isrsm.gov.mk/mk/analiza-e-kenaqesise-se-perdoruesve-te-sherbimit_p10066.html
16 https://aa.mk/content/pdf/Drugi%20dokumenti/%D0%90%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%9A%D0%B5%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%B7%D0%B0-D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B-B%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%202022.pdf
17 https://bit.ly/38jackx
18 https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/zakon_za_ratifikacija_konvencija.pdf
19 https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/strategija_/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B-B%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%20%D0%B0%20%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B-D%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%20%20%20%202022-2026.pdf
20 https://aa.mk/content/zakon_za_opstata_upravna_postapka.pdf (from 2015).
21 Articles 8 and 9 from the Law on general administrative procedures.
22 https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D1%81%D0%B-F%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%87%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B5%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%8-8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0%20%D0%BE%D0%B4%20%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B-C%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0.pdf (Article 3, paragraph 2).

Equality (2022–2027)[23], and the National Youth Strategy (2023–2027)[24], were adopted as documents that focus on women and youth, considered marginalised groups, especially in rural areas.

These documents oblige the state to respect the rights of people with disabilities and marginalised groups of citizens. This entails a proactive responsibility on the part of the state to develop policies that facilitate the independent use of public services by people with disabilities and marginalised groups to the greatest extent possible. For this purpose, state institutions commonly appoint a person to communicate with citizens with a certain type and degree of disability and establish an internal procedure for such communication. Most public institutions have published the names of their employees who are responsible for working with vulnerable groups. However, this is not the case with the MAFW and the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development.

On the website of the MAFW (www.mzsv.gov.mk), there are ten sub-tabs: (1) Ministry; (2) Public Relations; (3) Public Announcements and Calls; (4) Documents and Public Information; (5) Legislation; (6) Programs; (7) Projects; (8) Open Balkan; (9) IPARD; and (10) Contact. Only two of the sub-tabs contain regulations and internal acts of the institution. The first one is 'Legislation'[25], with most laws linked to agriculture, such as the Law on Wine, the Law on Cooperatives, the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, etc. In this tab, no legislation is linked to communication with citizens with disabilities. Another tab linked with documentation and regulation on the web page is the tab named 'Documents and Public Information', which includes strategic documents linked to agriculture and rural development, internal acts, reports, services, and documents for improving the transparency and accountability of the Ministry. After reviewing the available documents, we have concluded that there is no document outlining the procedures that should apply to citizens from marginalised groups when they apply for any service, nor any information about the employees of the MAFW who are appointed to work with these categories of citizens.

During the interview with the employees of the MAFW, it was stated that there is an internal act and procedure for communication with citizens with a certain type and degree of disability. Also, the MAFW, according to legal procedures, has appointed a person responsible for facilitating access to services for people with any type of disability. However, as explained, this job position is not systematised as a role exclusively for working with people with disabilities. Because of this, we could not find it in the institution's organogram and systematisation policy. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, this data and information are not available online or visible on the institution's web page.

On the other hand, all services that are available on the web page have clear and user-friendly instructions[26] on how to access the services in the same manner for everyone. However, there are no specific services for vulnerable groups. From this analysis, we can conclude that the **requirement is partially met**, leaving significant room for improvement in the future. The findings for the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development are the same.[27]

23 https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/strategija_/%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0_%D0%B7%D0%B0_%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0_%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82_2022_2027.pdf

24 https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/nsm23-27-sluzhben-vesnik.pdf

25 https://www.mzsv.gov.mk/%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B0/%D0%9B%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B0.aspx

26 https://www.mzsv.gov.mk/%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B0/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8_%D0%B8_%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8_%D0%BE%D0%B4_%D1%98%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD_%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80/%D0%A3%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%B8.aspx

27 https://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/mk/Home/Index

The MAFW, according to the conducted website review, provides approximately 88 services (listed in Annex I), all of which are available on the primary website, 80 of which are available on the central government website for e-services[28], and only one service, e-application for subsidies and financial support in agriculture and rural development, is available on the web page of the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development. This system for e-application is available for all public calls and measures and can be used only by citizens registered as farmers and with a special ID number[29]. The user needs to have a profile to access a service. After the final step of the application process on this platform for a particular service, the user receives an e-mail confirmation of the application process. This is both in line with the service orientation of the administration and the principles of the rule of law and legal certainty. Here, we should mention that, according to the research of Rural Coalition[30], over 80% of the farmers do not use this system for applying for subsidies by themselves because they lack digital literacy and are uncertain about electronic systems when they apply for such important services as subsidies where they must enter information about the land they have, the number of animals, and the types of crops, etc. Thus, this electronic application, in most cases, is completed by the employees in the MAFW in the regional units or by the advisors that are employed in the National Extension Agency[31] (which is an advisory body in the sector).

All services that are available through the central web page of the Ministry are placed in the sub-tab named 'Services', and all of them are informational, explaining the procedure and steps to obtain each of the services. Only application forms for each of the services are available to be downloaded electronically, and all other steps must be done traditionally by visiting the institution or by sending the documents by post. None of the services are connected to the electronic system of the central e-services portal (https://uslugi.gov.mk/), and some of the documents for different services can be provided by the Ministry's regional units located in almost all cities in the country. Besides the electronic application for subsidies and other types of financial support, only one service is available on the central portal for full electronic application: the approval for the export of firewood, technical wood, and other wood assortments.

According to the research of Rural Coalition,[32] 45.9% of the inhabitants in rural areas are familiar with the national portal for e-services, and a similar percentage have visited it. However, only 17% have used the system and received some service electronically. On the other hand, more than 93% gave a positive answer to the question of whether they would use this system more for electronic services if there were appropriate support for its use and more user-friendly services.

Also, in the previous National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2021–2023[33], one of the commitments proposed by MISA and the MAFW was improving the e-services available on the national portal for e-services[34] and introducing a catalogue of new e-services developed according to the needs of farmers and rural residents.

From the brief analysis, we can conclude that the MAFW **partially meets this requirement** due to the lack of integration and coordination of the several online platforms on which the Ministry's services are available. Not all services offered can be accessed and obtained using both channels, making it difficult for users to determine which channel to use for a particular service that the MAFW provides.

28 https://uslugi.gov.mk/
29 https://e-baranje.ipardpa.gov.mk/ords/f?p=757:LOGIN_DESKTOP)
30 https://civicamobilitas.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/analiza-digitalizatsija-1.pdf
31 https://agencija.gov.mk/
32 https://ruralnakoalicija.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-1.pdf
33 https://ovp.gov.mk/%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%b5%d0%bd-%d0%b0%d0%ba%d1%86%d0%b8%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b8-%d0%bf%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%bd-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/
34 https://uslugi.gov.mk/

During the brief analysis to check this requirement, we reviewed each of the stages of the UN classification[35], which was provided as a methodology in the guidelines for the preparation of this monitoring report. This methodology, developed by the United Nations, establishes a Web Measure Index that evaluates the delivery of e-services across various countries worldwide. It serves as a foundational classification for the UN's assessment of the functionality of comparable websites in each nation, ensuring consistency in the provision of e-services. The Web Measure Model comprises four stages of e-government evolution:[36]

- Stage I—Emerging Presence;
- Stage II—Enhanced Presence;
- Stage III—Transactional Presence;
- Stage IV—Connected Presence.

The MAFW's webpage was analysed through all four stages to ascertain the current level (stage) of communication and service delivery to citizens, as defined by this UN classification.

Stage I[37]—Emerging Presence represents the existence of information that is limited and basic, published online by a public institution. In this stage, the institution publishes only basic documents and information that are widely available. According to this explanation, the MAFW as an institution has exceeded this stage because there is plenty of information available to the citizens online in all the areas of work of the MAFW, including the services and communication with the citizens. This is evident from the monitoring and reviewing of the institution's web page. The same situation is observed with the web page and communication with the citizens of the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Stage II[38]—Enhanced presence means that online public policies and governance sources of both current and archived information are available on the web page, such as policies, laws and regulations, reports, newsletters, and downloadable databases. According to our analysis and research, this stage has also been achieved in our country, especially after 2017, when the government and the institutions made significant efforts to improve transparency and accountability to the citizens. On October 31, 2017, the government adopted a list of 21 documents that each institution should publish on its website to improve active transparency.[39] Budgets of institutions, strategic plans, audit reports, organograms, public procurement plans, various contact data, and event calendars are some of the documents that should be included in this list of public documents that each institution should publish on its web page. The deadline given to fulfil this obligation was 15 days, so most institutions fulfilled it (although some did not fully). Still, the active transparency of all institutions was improved, and a lot of information about the work of institutions became available to the citizens and the general public.

According to research on CSOs within the country, this active transparency is slowly increasing each year. As a result, the average active transparency of the ministries, the Government, and the municipalities for 2023 is 76% (out of the maximum possible 100%), and compared to last year, it has improved by only three percentage points (from 73% to 76%).[40]

The active transparency of the MAFW in 2023 is 95.7% (out of a possible 100%), placing the ministry in the group of institutions with 'very good' active transparency (fulfilment of obligations from 80% to 100%). With these points, the ministry ranks 15th out of 98 ranked institutions.[41]

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35 https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index/Online-Service
36 https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index/Online-Service
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 https://prizma.mk/transparentnost-na-pauza/
40 https://www.ccc.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=517%3A-2023&lang=mk
41 https://www.aktivnatransparentnost.mk/institucija.html?institucii=mzsv

Stage III[42]—Transactional presence allows two-way interaction between citizens and the government. It includes options for paying taxes, applying for ID cards, birth certificates, passports, license renewals, and other similar citizen-to-government (C2G) interactions by allowing them to submit these online 24/7. Citizens can pay for relevant public services, such as fines for violations, taxes, and fees for postal services through their credit, bank, or debit card. Providers of goods and services can bid online for public contracts via secure links. This two-way interaction between citizens and the government is practised by the government itself and most of the country's institutions. Citizens can communicate with the government and its institutions in several ways, such as paying taxes or accessing other public services through an online system available 24/7. Three key methods are essential and represented in each institution: contact e-mail addresses, online forms, and/or special e-mail/portal for receiving requests and complaints from citizens.

Even though these forms are set and publicly available, challenges in communication have been observed. Research conducted by the Institute for Media and Analytics (IMA)[43] in 2023 revealed that out of 16 ministries, including the MAFW, contacted by phone based on the numbers published on official websites, only five ministries were available. Furthermore, information about the employees appointed to communicate with citizens or responsible for answering FOI requests is not updated regularly. However, most of them respond to the contact e-mail addresses provided on the web pages of the institutions as a contact point for citizens. The MAFW is one of those institutions highlighted in the research.

Connected presence is **Stage IV**[44], which represents the most sophisticated level of online e-government initiatives. It can be characterised by integrating government-to-government (G2G), government-to-consumer/citizen (G2C), and consumer/citizen-to-government (C2G) interactions. The government encourages participatory, deliberative decision-making and is willing and able to involve society in a two-way, open dialogue. Through interactive features such as web comment forms and innovative online consultation mechanisms, the government actively solicits citizens' views on public policy, lawmaking, and democratic, participatory decision-making.

Government-to-Government (G2G) involves sharing data and conducting electronic exchanges between governmental actors. This involves both intra- and inter-agency exchanges at the national level, as well as exchanges between the national, provincial, and local levels. The law sufficiently covers this component of General Administrative Procedure and the Law on Obtaining and Exchanging Evidence and Data Ex Officio from 2013.[45] The aim is to facilitate the process of public service delivery in such a way that institutions collaborate and exchange the necessary documents, so it would not be the citizens' obligation to resubmit documents already provided. However, the general situation in the country regarding this level of interaction is not advanced, and it has the potential to enhance institutions to become more proactive in sharing documents. With the intent to further strengthen interoperability, the Government established an Interoperability Platform[46] and adopted a National Framework for Interoperability[47] in 2016. However, research conducted by the Rural Coalition[48] shows that most of the documents farmers are required to collect still physically move from institution to institution, even though institutions are electronically linked and could easily share the documents that the MAFW and the Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development need from other institutions, especially during the period of application for subsidies or other types of financial support.

Government-to-Business (G2B) involves business-specific transactions (e.g., payments, the sale and purchase of goods and services) and online business-focused services. The Law on Public Procurement regulates these kinds of transactions between the private and the public sector. All public procurements are conducted online through a central government online portal[49], and they are coordinated by the Public Procurement Bureau. Public procurements are a broad and separate topic that deserves their own analysis, and it would be insufficient to cover

42 https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index/Online-Service
43 https://racin.mk/analizi/telefonskata-i-elektronskata-komunikaczija-so-institucziite-so-mnogu-predizviczi/
44 https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index/Online-Service
45 https://bit.ly/37FcwSo
46 https://mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1320
47 https://bit.ly/3swX6Hb
48 https://ruralnakoalicija.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-1.pdf
49 https://bit.ly/3swsHJc

the entire issue here since it is a central-level jurisdiction and not a sector-specific competence. For the purpose of this analysis, it is safe to say that generally, public procurements in the agriculture sector function fully online and through the public procurement portal. Also, most of the services aimed at the business sector are available online on the web portal of the MAFW or the general national portal for e-services[50], and because of the higher digital literacy and operability of the business sector in the country, most of the services are also widely utilised through electronic means.

Government-to-Consumer / Citizen (G2C) involves initiatives designed to facilitate people's interaction with the government as consumers of public services and as citizens. In this section, we have already mentioned that the Ministry belongs to the institutions with 'very good active transparency', and according to the research conducted by IMA, the Ministry is one of the institutions that responds well to the needs and requests of the citizens. Also, on a national level, we have the electronic platform[51] as a tool for the inclusion of citizens in the processes of consultation and decision-making related to drafting new laws, bylaws, strategic documents, etc. The new National Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026 also envisions upgrading the system and its availability for consultations with the municipalities and the local population. Furthermore, this process of the creation of the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership is another mechanism for consultation and collaboration between institutions and citizens in the development of a two-year plan for joint communication, consultations, and decision-making across the ministries, Government, public institutions, Parliament, and judiciary.

The Open Government Partnership (OPG) is a voluntary international initiative launched by eight countries (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, the UK, and the USA) in 2011. Immediately after its launch, North Macedonia joined this global initiative of governments and civil society organisations that advocate jointly for institutions to be more open and responsible to citizens.[52] Today, 78 member countries, along with numerous civil society organisations, participate in the initiative.

By joining the initiative, the Government of North Macedonia signed a Declaration through which it committed, together with civil society organisations and citizens, to prepare and implement concrete commitments for the promotion of transparency, support for civil participation, fight against corruption, and use of new technologies in the public sector for at least two years. The driving force of OGP is placing primary importance on citizens, who should be the ones creating policies and services that affect their lives.[53]

From our research, we can conclude that the availability and stage of development of e-services provided by the MAFW vary for each service. Not many services are fully available online (most of them have detailed guidelines on how to access them, but physical communication with the institution is needed, or communication by post). Some services are dispersed across different channels, i.e., web portals. Additionally, this sector lacks sufficient promotion of the services that are available online and better mutual cooperation between web portals and the institutions themselves to ensure improved integration. Therefore, we can consider this **requirement partially met**, and there is space for improvements and upgrades to the online services.

50 www.uslugi.gov.mk

51 www.ener.gov.mk

52 https://ovp.gov.mk/%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%be-%d0%b2%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%b8%d0%b-d%d0%be-%d0%bf%d0%b0%d1%80%d1%82%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%80%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%be/

53 Detailed information about this process in North Macedonia could be found at the web page https://ovp.gov.mk/

Requirement 7. Accessibility of Sector-Specific Services for Users

The official website of the MAFW does not provide specific details regarding the online services offered by this institution. Nevertheless, the institution's webpage features a dedicated sub-tab that lists all available services, including guidelines for application. It is important to note that most of these services require the physical presence of citizens at the institution. We received a similar response through the FOI request, noting that e-services can be found on the national portal for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk) as well as on the portal of the Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development (www.ipardpa.gov.mk), where an e-application for subsidies and other types of financial support is available. On the central government platform www.uslugi.gov.mk, we found only one service offered by the Ministry of Agriculture that is fully available online: the request for approval for the export of firewood, technical wood, and other wood assortments.[54]

Also, on the national portal for e-services, there are statistics about the number of registered users (165,354), the total number of e-services (264), the number of e-services that are available on the portal (125), the number of institutions that have services on the portal (173), as well as the total number of sent requests (84,589) and the number of sent requests in the last 30 days (1,760). These numbers are general, and because of that, we could not incorporate them into our sector analysis.[55]

From this brief analysis of the current state of online service availability, we can conclude that the MAFW **does not fulfil this requirement** due to the fact that there is no information displayed on the primary MAFW website related to the accessibility of sector-specific services. According to interviews with MAFW employees and the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026, the focus of the MAFW and the Government in the next period will be on digital transformation. Therefore, we expect improvements in the online availability of services and progress in meeting this requirement. The employees interviewed pointed out that this is not a complicated task at all, but there is simply a need for good internal cooperation, especially with the Department for Public Relations and the IT Sector, which are responsible for e-communication with citizens.

Requirement 8. Sector-Specific Service Data Available in Open Formats

According to the Law on Using Data from the Public Sector,[56] institutions are obliged, in accordance with their technical capabilities, to publish data that they create in the performance of their competencies unless it is classified information.

MISA, with the support of the Center for Change Management (CCM), created the Strategy for Open Data 2018–2020[57] and, accordingly, created the data.gov.mk national portal (https://data.gov.mk/), which incorporates all government institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture. This portal publishes the data of central and local institutions in an open format to make them available for usage and further data processing by citizens, CSOs, and other interested stakeholders. The Ministry of Digital Transformation now coordinates these processes, and the purpose of creating and publishing these types of data by the institutions is the continuous improvement of their transparency and openness toward citizens. Also, this platform should stimulate all institutions, central and local, to increase the number of datasets they publish in an open format, not only on this platform but also on their official web pages.

The creation of this platform, along with collaborative efforts among institutions and the donor community, has led to a gradual pace of development since 2020. The new strategy for open data is not yet prepared, and it seems that the publication of data sets in an open format is non-binding for institutions. This issue is left to the goodwill of the individual employees who have acquired knowledge and can create open data and make it publicly available.

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54 https://uslugi.gov.mk/services-by-application-type.nspx?serviceApplicationTypeId=1
55 https://uslugi.gov.mk/
56 https://bit.ly/3yy5qtU
57 https://cup.org.mk/publication/Strategija%20za%20otvoreni%20podatoci_mk.pdf

As we already mentioned, 'open data' is all information from the institutions published in a computer-processable form, available for further processing by each interested stakeholder in the country (citizens, CSOs, business companies, etc.). These data are also shared legally and are free to download, process, and publish. Keeping in mind this statement, we have noticed that some of the national and local institutions (ministries, municipalities, agencies, etc.) have failed in the process of making their data open and widely available because they are still publishing scanned versions of most of the documents. In most cases, this is due to a lack of software, training, employee capacity, and human resources, but very often, it is due to the unwillingness of the institutions.[58]

Meanwhile, the need arises for alignment of the Law on Using Data from the Public Sector with the EU Directive on open data and reuse of information from the public sector dated June 20, 2019 (2019/1024), as well as to address certain weaknesses in the application of the existing law.[59]

The ex-post open data analysis states that the alignment of the current law with the European directive was planned to be completed in 2022.[60] However, the new Law on the Use of Data from the Public Sector has not yet entered the parliamentary procedure.

A simple review of the national portal for open data, https://data.gov.mk/, shows that only 74 institutions are registered and have created their own profiles on Data.gov.mk. Moreover, some of them have not published a single data set so far. The MAFW has published five sets of open data in XLSX format, all of which consist of registers of different legal subjects in the sector, such as buyers, wine cellars, food carriers, etc. These data have not been updated since 2019.

On the MAFW webpage, several sets of data are in open format, but they are not easily accessible or user-friendly.

The Agency for Financial Support in Agriculture and Rural Development is not registered on the national platform for open data[61] as an institution that produces and publishes open data sets.

Because of all the above-mentioned points, we consider that the MAFW **partially meets this requirement**.

Final Assessment of the Requirements

Requirement	Final assessment
Requirement 1. Opportunity for Users to Voice Opinions	Partially met
Requirement 2. Publication of Citizen Feedback and Satisfaction with Services	Not met
Requirement 3 . Published Citizen Feedback Categorised by Gender, Age Groups, Education, and Territorial Distribution	Not met
Requirement 4. Adapting Service Provision to the Needs of Vulnerable Groups	Partially met
Requirement 5. Multiple Channels for Users to Access Sector-Specific Services	Partially met
Requirement 6. Development and Availability of E-Services	Partially met
Requirement 7. Accessibility of Sector-Specific Services for Users	Not met
Requirement 8. Sector-Specific Service Data Available in Open Formats	Partially met

58 https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1324
59 https://www.radiomof.mk/nekoj-prikachuva-drug-ne-e-obuchen-i-ne-znae-haos-so-objavuvanjeto-otvoreni-podatoci-kaj-instituciite/
60 https://metamorphosis.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/mk_procenka-na-dobroto-vladeenje.pdf
61 https://vlada.mk/data.gov.mk

III. Recommendations for improvements

Requirement 1. Opportunity for Users to Voice Opinions

Each citizen who uses the sector-specific service should have the right and the possibility to voice their opinion. To fully meet the first requirement, the MAFW should have a special e-form where citizens will have the opportunity to express their opinion and their level of satisfaction regarding the delivered services. Also, the MAFW should collect, analyse, and publish, in a separate sub-tab on its webpage, the opinions and feedback from citizens regularly through scores and graphic presentations, which will also be shared in public events with the local population.

Requirement 2. Publication of Citizen Feedback and Satisfaction with Services

As mentioned above, the MAFW should prepare a proper methodology according to the EU and national manuals for measuring the satisfaction of the users of services and perform the annual measurement of citizens' satisfaction. Also, it should work on publishing the results on its website and promoting them on social media channels because this process will help the MAFW to provide better and more user-friendly services tailored to the citizens' needs. At the same time, this activity will improve the MAFW's transparency and accountability as an institution.

Requirement 3. Published Citizen Feedback Categorised by Gender, Age Groups, Education, and Territorial Distribution

To fully meet this requirement, the MAFW should provide at least a data breakdown by gender, age group, education, and territorial distribution of the respondents. This is crucial for the institution, as it must consider the scope and diversity of its services' users.

Requirement 4. Adapting Service Provision to the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

This topic should be raised as a national issue with the involvement of all stakeholders and with consultation on national and international legislation that our country has adopted in the areas of creating an equal environment for the living conditions and functioning of all vulnerable groups of citizens. According to our analysis and research, service provision to vulnerable groups of citizens should be one of the areas addressed first with national strategic documents as well as with separate internal acts of institutions. Each of the services delivered by the MAFW should be equally available to each group of citizens, which demands additional efforts to create solutions to improve service provision and the availability of all services for all groups of citizens. The MAFW should develop a separate methodology for monitoring and evaluating service provision to see if the services are adapted to enable each citizen to access the service in the most appropriate manner.

Requirement 5. Multiple Channels for Users to Access Sector-Specific Services

To accomplish this requirement, the MAFW should continue with the procedure of preparing a catalogue of services that will be available on the national Governmental portal for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk). Also, there should be improvements to the sub-tab for services on the general web portal of the MAFW to increase the number of services available online. Because of the diversity of services and institutions, the MAFW should strengthen inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination, followed by the promotion of different channels for accessing sector-specific services with clear and simple guidelines. This will also positively affect citizens' digital literacy and increase the usage of e-services.

Requirement 6. Development and Availability of E-Services

In the upcoming period, the MAFW should work on the digitalisation of a larger number of services as well as provide equal access to e-services for each group of citizens. Also, it should have greater coordination and co-operation with national portals like ENER and the governmental portal for e-services (www.uslugi.gov.mk) to improve the availability of the digital tools that citizens could use not only to access some services but also to be included in the processes of decision-making and participation. Additional promotion of the services that are available online should be implemented by the MAFW in the forthcoming period. Also, it is very important for the institutions in the sector to build and practice mutual cooperation as well as to coordinate the data and services that will be available to each of them.

Requirement 7—Accessibility of Sector-Specific Services for Users

The MAFW should work to systematise sector-specific services and, in close cooperation with the National Portal for e-services, create a catalogue of services that includes information about the accessibility of sector-specific services. To accomplish this requirement, this institution should also improve its human capacities and enhance cooperation between different departments.

Requirement 8—Sector-Specific Service Data Available in Open Formats

Regarding the sector-specific data published in open formats, the MAFW needs to update its information on the central government portal (https://data.gov.mk/) since only five data sets were published in 2019. Also, the MAFW should open a special sub-tab for open data on its official webpage, which should be upgraded regularly. By promoting this data, the MAFW should increase its usage by all stakeholders. This will reduce the number of citizen demands on the institution and improve employee effectiveness.

Appendices

Free access to information requests

Institution	Date of sending	Date of receipt
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of North Macedonia	15.04.2024 (not answered) 01.07.2024	15.07.2024

Interviews

Institution/Organisation	Position	Date	Place
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of North Macedonia	Advisor for cooperation in agriculture sector; employee in rural development sector	17.07.2024	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management

Other sources

1. Law on the Introduction of a Quality Management System and a Common Framework for Evaluating the Operation and Provision of Services in the Civil Service (2013)
2. Law on General Administrative Procedures (2007)
3. Law on Obtaining and Exchanging Evidence and Data Ex officio (2013)
4. Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (2019)
5. Law for Using Data from the Public Sector (2015 and 2021)
6. Strategy for Public Administration Reform (2018–2022), and the Strategy for PAR (2023–2030)
7. National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (2021–2027)
8. National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership (2021–2023 and 2024–2026)
9. E-government Benchmark 2022 and 2023 (European Commission)
10. National ICT Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia (2023–2027)
11. State Audit Office—Report on a revision of the effectiveness of the National Government Portal for e-Services (2024)
12. Manual for Measurement of Satisfaction of Users of Services in the Public Sector (2007)
13. European Manual for Measurement of Satisfaction of Users of Services in the Public Sector (2008)
14. Analysis of the Survey for the Satisfaction of Users of Services of the Agency for Administration (2023)
15. National Youth Strategy (2016–2025)
16. National Gender Equality Strategy (2022–2027)
17. Report for Digital Literacy and Usage of e-Services in Rural Areas (2021)
18. Report on Active Transparency of Institutions (2024)