

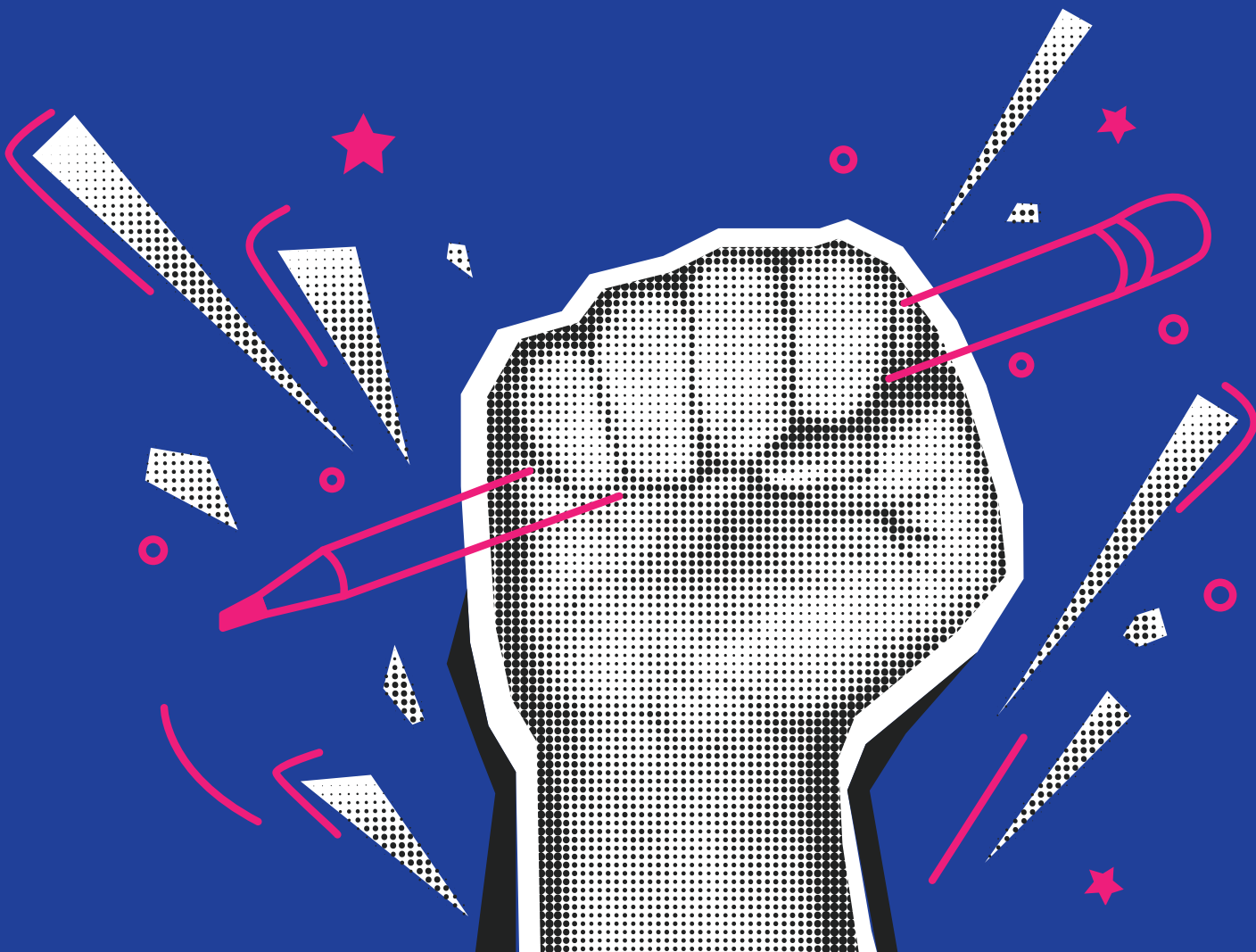
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TAKING

RESPONSIBILITIES TO

EDUCATION SERIOUSLY

REGARDING THE RIGHT





TAKING RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION SERIOUSLY

Publisher:
European Policy Institute - Skopje

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Graphic design:
Relativ

Skopje, 2021



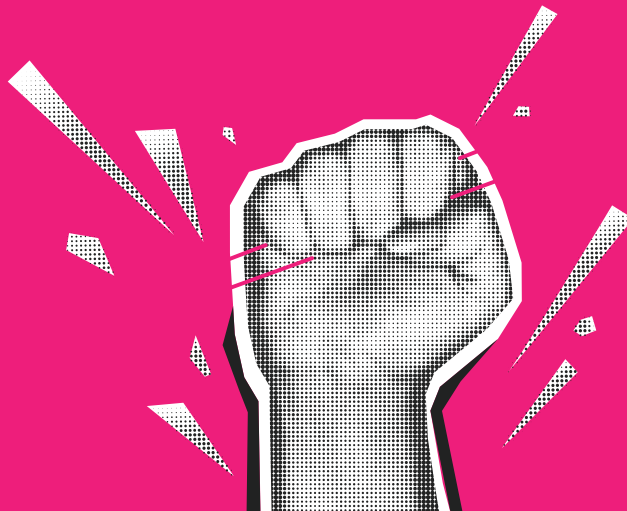
This publication was supported by the CIVICA Mobilitas Program. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of CIVICA Mobilitas, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and its implementing organizations.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



As an economic, social and political right, the main aim of the right to education is to promote the personal growth and development of an individual, as well as the ability for that individual to adapt in a society. While a global conceptual framework on the right to education as a human right is established under international human rights law and is fully ratified by North Macedonia, significant challenges remain at the national level. The European Union has developed guidelines under the Charter of Fundamental Rights recognising education as a human right (Article 14, Title II Freedoms), which North Macedonia as a candidate country should observe. Yet, the European Commission has reported clear challenges with the implementation and respect of the right to education in North Macedonia, whose addressing is long overdue.

This policy brief follows the conceptual structure of the “4A’s” of the right to education - adaptability, availability, accessibility and acceptability and detects key issues where the state has failed to fulfil its obligations pertaining to this human right. It demonstrates that the government has failed to implement the right to education to its full extent, as per the four A’s, including by persisting challenges such as pervasive discrimination and lack of resources, topped by partisanship. When discussing the education system in North Macedonia one should always keep in mind that it is a multicultural country. Yet, its educational system does not address well discriminatory and segregation practices. Not enough resources are invested in building a safe and healthy learning environment for all children. This issue begins with the lack of basic materials such as textbooks up until the whole

infrastructure of proper facilities and their sanitation. A larger part of the schools does not meet the basic requirements for a safe environment, thus exposing youth to (potential) danger. Each of the previously mentioned issues is linked to the issue of political suppression and the centrality of political elites’ own gains in reform processes, instead of interventions that can lead to achieving higher learning and safety standards.

This policy brief provides recommendations for addressing these challenges. While it is recognised that a core challenge remains that of reforming the political elites which will require a very complex and long-term process which are beyond the reach of this brief, smaller steps in the direction of fulfilment of the four As of education can be made that can lead towards the fulfilment of the right to education obligations of the country. Education should be the key to providing solid ground for well-being and exploration of the full potential of each individual and thus of society as a whole. More efforts need to be invested in prioritising and promoting education. All children should be provided with the basic requirements for their fundamental rights. Discrimination and segregation in education, in particular towards Roma children and children with disabilities, should be dealt with seriously.

1. INTRODUCTION



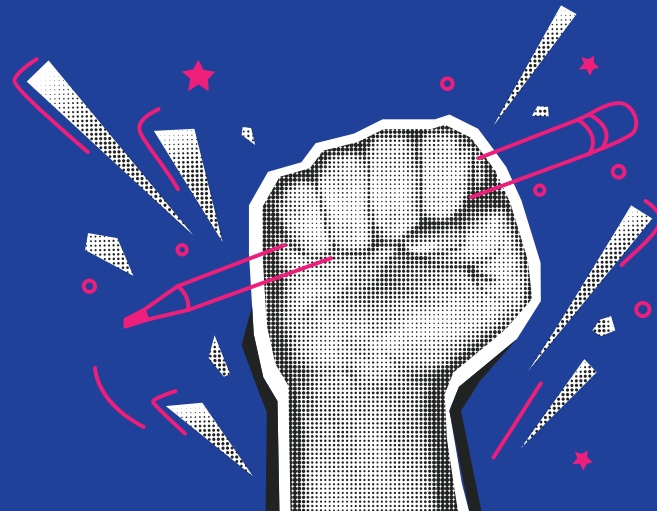
The educational process is considered the foundation for human development and empowerment. Over the past decade, the right to education has become part of an international discussion regarding the policies that follow it as well as the parties involved in its realization. Government officials of North Macedonia have prioritized new domestic and international strategies which allow for the emergence of the right in practice.

In 2018, North Macedonia launched the Comprehensive Strategy for Education for [2018-25](#) (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia). The strategy includes several actions relevant to evaluation and assessment and improving education quality, such as: significantly increasing the share of children in preschool and introducing a compulsory year of pre-primary education (ages 5-6); reforming the curricula and programs for compulsory education to increase their relevance and attractiveness, better aligning them to children's stages of development and focus more on learning outcomes; supporting the development and consistent use of quality textbooks; better orienting vocational education and training (VET) programs towards the needs of the labour market; strengthening the competence of teaching staff at all educational levels; strengthening management and leadership capacity at central and local government levels and within schools, and ensuring harmonized and transparent policies; developing a national assessment by 2020 and a new concept for the state final exam (state baccalaureate), in particular for VET students. Despite the government's strong participation in new action plans, learning outcomes still aren't improving, remaining among the lowest in Europe and the Western Balkans.

One of OECD's [recommendations](#) (OECD 15) is to construct a strong framework that will provide investments in the monitoring and evaluation system and steer the country toward improved educational outcomes. The policy brief focuses on the right to education with regards to North Macedonia's performance history in complying with it on its path towards the European Union. In order to assess the country's track record, it uses the "4A's" scheme whereby the right to education has four key elements - adaptability, availability, accessibility and acceptability. This document opens with a brief overview of this scheme. Following this, it outlines the right to education standards of international bodies such as the UN Council and CESCR. It, then, turns to the EU, giving an overview of European policies regarding this right. Following this, it moves to the national level and outlines the national policies followed by an assessment of the implementation of the previously mentioned four elements comparing and contrasting our findings with the ones provided by the European Commission in the annual progress reports (for the period 2018-2020). Based on these findings, the brief a number of recommendations. All of the data was collected through desk research and analysed with a qualitative analysis. The policy brief is based on the findings of a broader research paper - Education in North Macedonia from a Human Rights Perspective¹.

¹ Jana Pavlovska, Education in North Macedonia from a Human Rights Perspective (forthcoming)

2. CONCEPTUALIZING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



Education is a human right and should not be a privilege. The right to education should be well recognized, promoted, and secured at all levels, starting from the national/local level up to the global level. One can perceive education as the basis for establishing and developing human values, dignity, and respect, peculiarities which must be acquired at an early age for children to build their unique characters. Education can open a window for all children no matter their gender, nationality or religious beliefs to be included, empowered, and inspired to use their potential. When accepting the right to education as a fundamental one, it is important to understand that it could open a pathway towards appreciation and participation in modern society and all it has to offer.

The concept of education can be explained through the four elements (4 A's), developed by Katarina Tomasevski, which cover all grounds when it comes to implementing it to its full extent.

Availability: Ensure that education is available at all levels and provide the funding to make quality education a reality for those who do not have the resources, marginalized groups, and others.

Accessibility: The aim is to ensure that education is accessible to all, without discrimination, financial barriers at least for the compulsory school years, and ensure that any other obstacles related to the geographical location will be eliminated, to achieve universality.

Acceptability: Ensure that the content of education and teaching methods are acceptable. The implementation of the element of acceptability can be best measured through the indicator quality.

Adaptability: This element is dedicated to ensuring that the education aims at the full development of the personality anchored in rights and values that protect and promote human rights. This element focuses on the curricula of the educational system, and how adaptable it is to children of different ethnic minorities as well as those with special educational needs. The four elements allow for a scheme that is further on implemented on both international and national levels in order to evaluate the implementation of the right to education, its protection and areas which need further attention. Such an approach allows for the right to be understood and properly respected, knowing that it should be equally applicable to everyone.

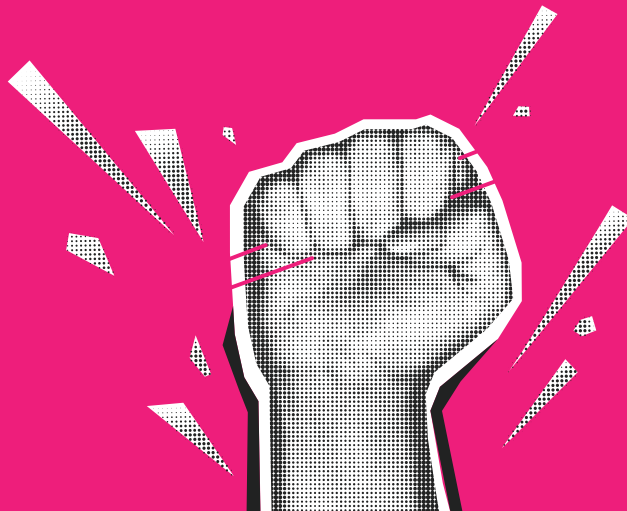
3. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



As claimed by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article [26](#) (The United Nations, pp.art. 26), education is a right to which all human beings are entitled. [According to Article 2 of Protocol No. 1](#) to the European Convention of Human Rights states that each person should be allowed access to education (Guide On Article 2 Of Protocol No. 1 To The European Convention On Human Rights -Right To Education). Education should be legally guaranteed without discrimination, and States must protect, respect, and fulfil this right. Nonetheless, the emphasis should be on the “no person shall be denied the right to education”. Due to its diversity and importance, the right can be classified as an economic, social, and cultural right, as well as a civil and political one.

To understand the value of education, one must recognize its aims and objectives, as well as the influence and power it has over the development of prosperous youth. Education inevitably leaves a footprint, whether that is on the individual or more generally on the social, economic, and political fabric of the country. That is why It is important to emphasize the fact that not only is it a fundamental right, but it is also in a way a requirement, a prerequisite, for understanding and exercising all of the other human rights. Following the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) [General Comment No.13 Article 13 \(1\)](#) declares that education should allow one to maintain their dignity, enable the freedom to be part of society as well as eliminate the racial barriers which surround us (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). In other words, education is responsible for the development of one's personality.

4. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



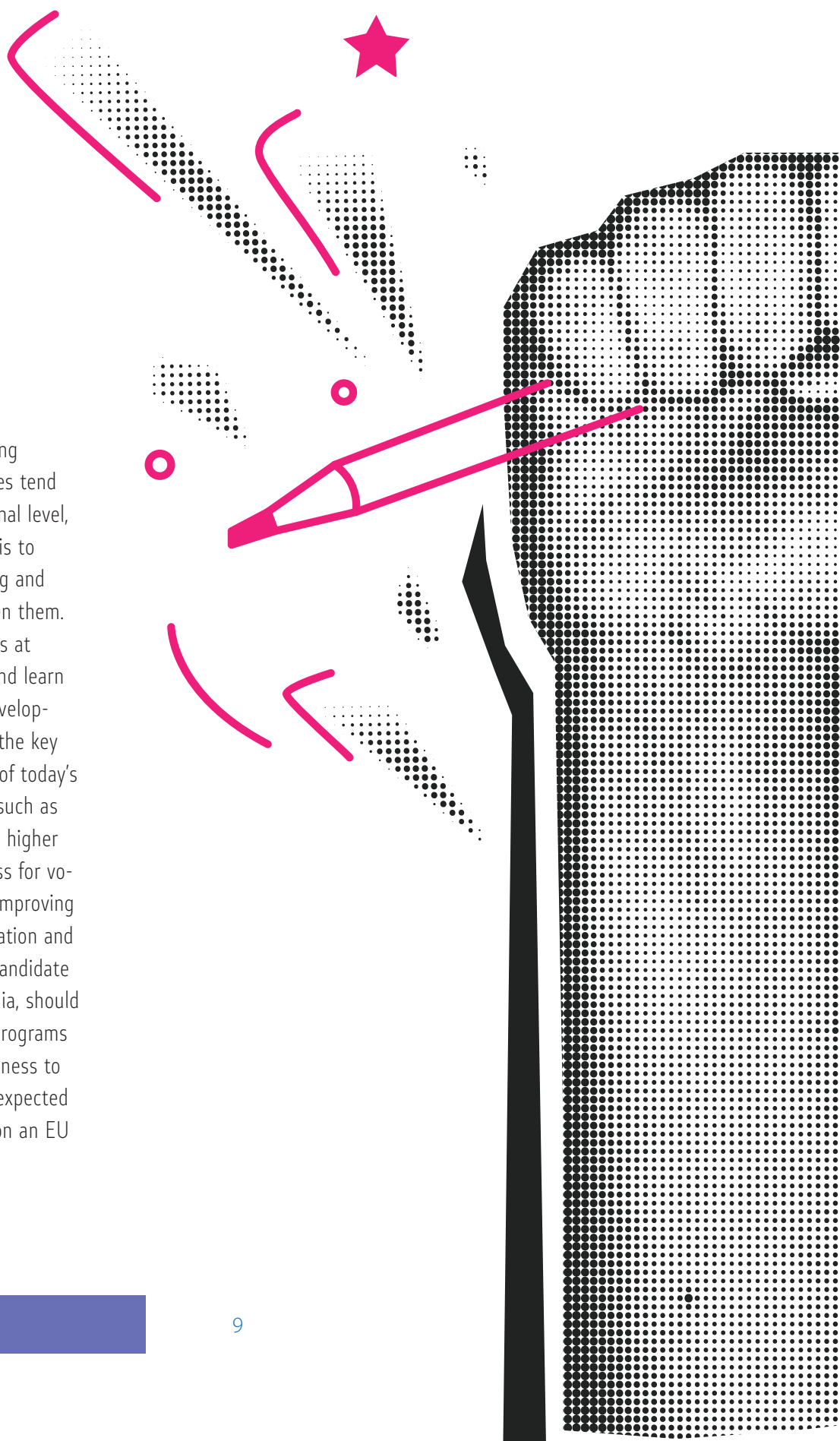
The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU is a document that sets down the fundamental rights. It includes the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, the case law of the European Court of Justice, and the rights and principles of each EU Member State. The [Charter](#) ("Article 14 - Right to education") recognizes the Right to education under Article 14 of Title II Freedoms, which includes dedicated provisions that must be respected in order for it to be properly implemented. The three provisions include:

1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training;
2. This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education;
3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical, and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.

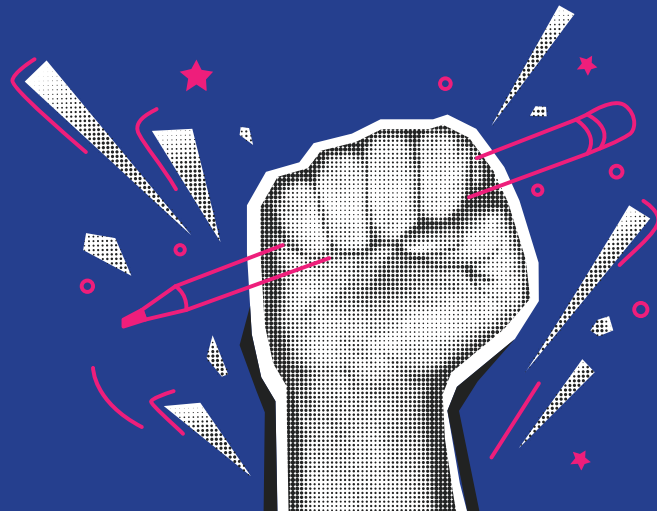
These three main points allow for the right to encompass all areas in which it operates, offering proper regulation and monitoring. [Restrictions](#) on access to education do exist only in terms of preventing deprivation of effectiveness (*Guide On Article 2 Of Protocol No. 1 To The European Convention On Human Rights -Right To Education*). Some of them include language, admission criteria, school fees, nationality, minimum age requirement, legal questions, disciplinary sanctions, and health. Each of these are determined by each state separately, keeping in mind that according to the first sentence in [Article 2 of Protocol no.1](#) the right to education is guaranteed and regulated by the Country (*Guide On Article 2 Of Protocol No. 1 To The European Convention On Human Rights -Right To Education*).

From an EU enlargement perspective, it is important to note that the right to education is mainly treated under Chapter 26: Education and Culture of the *acquis communautaire*. Through this chapter the EU envisages promoting cooperation amongst the Member States and transitioning States in increasing the quality of education, preserving cultural richness, strengthening the support and mutual cooperation amongst states, educational attainment, intellectual progression.

When it comes to policies regarding education, most EU Member States tend to conceptualize theirs on a national level, however, the goal of the EU here is to play a supportive role in promoting and strengthening cooperation between them. The 2020 strategy framework aims at enabling countries to cooperate and learn from each other's experiences. Development in education is regarded as the key element toward the development of today's society. Current training systems such as the Bologna process for European higher education, the Copenhagen process for vocational training are all aimed at improving the quality of EU's quality of education and training systems across Europe. Candidate countries, such as North Macedonia, should be included in such training and programs in order for their level of preparedness to improve. The inclusion should be expected to result in higher achievements on an EU level as well as national levels.



5. NATIONAL LAW AND POLICY AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



We are living through an age in which education is becoming of high prominence and a progressively important factor for our general well-being. That is why for education to have a positive outcome, all must be entitled to it. Apart from that, there should be a globally accepted and well-adapted system that will provide the skills and knowledge for a prosperous life. For those reasons, the Macedonian government must respect the previously mentioned 4 A's for the implementation of the right to be entirely covered. Herein, we provide the key points which demonstrate how the country fairs when assessed against the framework of the 4 A's.

Availability: When considering the rankings of North Macedonia in this field, World Bank reports indicate that one-third of schools require vital repairs - satellite and multiple-shift schools are particularly susceptible to infrastructure problems ("North Macedonia: Sustainability Of Delivery, Financing For Municipal Infrastructure & Services"). Due to the lack of investments, primary schools have insufficient resources needed to boost the quality. Many of the schools still function despite not being able to supply the children with their basic needs for a safe and comfortable environment. This includes a shortage of sanitary items in all areas of the building (classrooms, bathrooms, kitchen), proper meal preparation, lack of heating, and lack of school supplies (chairs, desks, lockers, boards). Furthermore, it should be noted that the educational system in North Macedonia is decentralized, meaning that the jurisdiction is in the hands of the municipalities. Thus, it is important to state that municipalities operate with only 5% ("Primary Education Improvement Project") of the cost of primary education which is supposed to be distributed towards both the salary of the staff and the maintenance of the school. Here lies the harm and impairment of capital expenses which consist of only 5% of the total educational expenses covering the whole country. This percentage denotes an amount far below what should be spent in this area, especially for proper infrastructure.

In response to this, there is a new operation, recently approved by the school board, that will help municipalities to amplify energy efficiency in public facilities (e.g. schools, hospitals and so on). The projects have been agreed upon with the government to finance non-structural renovations and energy-efficient projects which will finance the outdoor infrastructure, insulation, heating systems, and so forth. Another important issue, as reported by the Roma Education Fund, is the [discrepancy](#) in the quality of facilities between the cities and the rural areas (Roma Education Fund). This divide gives an unfair advantage to children living in urban areas because of the high-quality environment they live in. However, it is not the case for the suburban areas, which in North Macedonia are mostly populated by ethnic Albanians and Roma. Research by [OECD](#) (OECD, 2019, p.26) shows that less than 1% of the children from the poorest surroundings attend pre-primary school, compared to 59.9% of the children from the richest quantile. Research has shown that there are significant gaps in the pre-school attendance rates of 3-4 year-olds from Macedonian (36.5%), Albanian (2.9%), and Roma (2.6%) communities. In terms of the Albanian population, even though Albanians constitute more than 25% of the population, their presence in the system accounts for much less than that, with only 15.6% of secondary students and 5.5% of tertiary students. It can be concluded that the less privileged children face more difficulties with enrolling and participating in the system. The goal of the government should be to implement new initiatives which will encourage higher rates of enrolment, especially among the ethnic communities that are not in majority.

Accessibility: In North Macedonia, political issues still prevail in how the schools are organized and managed. North Macedonia faces [challenges](#) in regard to addressing discrimination (Roma Education Fund). The lack of training for school managers to promote and engage in inclusive education, parents with low socioeconomic status, and Roma are not taken into consideration for

decision-making processes in schools (school boards), there is no interest in taking measures to monitor and combat discriminatory claims and actions against ethnic minority students (mostly Roma), and no measures are taken against the schools who are unsuccessful in enrolling all the children from their neighbourhoods. North Macedonia still has not developed a strategy targeted toward eradicating prejudice and discrimination in the field of education. The lack of preparedness for identifying discrimination can be spotted, especially during school inspections. If those responsible are not able to notice it, the standards cannot be enforced.

The second factor, physical accessibility, should include school facilities that are safe to reach. Starting with elementary schools, according to the Law on Primary Education, each school in North Macedonia is obliged to enrol the children from its region, which is determined by the municipalities. The restriction of the municipal ones has been applied only for primary education. When it comes to secondary education, students have the liberty to choose wherever they want to be enrolled and what they want to study. Due to such liberty, many chose to enrol in schools based on the opportunity for future academic achievements, however, in some cases, many of the school facilities tend to be at far lengths from their homes. In order for no additional payment to be made by the children and their parents only for transport, the schools offer free yearly tickets for public transport. Aid in transport could be the smallest grant the government offers. As of the school year 2006/07, primary and secondary education have been made free of charge, which constitutes the economic accessibility to mandatory education. However, parents are still left with several payment responsibilities i.e preschool attendance, higher education, school supplies, maintenance, security, and in some cases private tutoring. These expenses may not be an issue to privileged families, but ethnic communities that are not in majority are more likely to struggle to supply finances causing many children to fail, drop out or miss out on the possibility of education in the first place. [Students](#) from low socio-economic

backgrounds are less likely to attain high achievements in education, as is the case in North Macedonia compared to many OECD countries, as measured by PISA (24, OECD, 2019). Inconsistencies in fulfilment of these three factors, due to external influences, depreciate the value of the right to education in North Macedonia creating substantial deviations from European standards.

Acceptability: North Macedonia is a [multiethnic and multicultural country](#) consisting of 64.17% are Macedonians, 25.17% Albanians, 3.5% Turks, 2.66% Roma, 0.48% Vlachs, 1.78% Serbs, 0.84% Bosnians, and 1.04% belong to other ethnic groups. Since all children are entitled to the right to education, the country must provide minimum standards for quality education to all of these communities (Eurydice). Linguistic diversity is implemented in some schools. This type of diversity is made possible through the [Law on the usage of languages](#) (2018). **Students** (OECD, 2019) from the larger ethnic communities that are not in majority - Albanian, Turkish and Serbian communities - are given the possibility to receive instruction in their mother tongue language in primary school, and for Albanian and Turkish students, in secondary education as well, as well as doing the state matura in their language of preference later on. However, there are some concerns raised over the ability of the government to promote inter-ethnic integration. In most multilingual schools, classes in different languages are held on a separate floor or even buildings, shortening or even eliminating all contact between different ethnic communities, thus making it harder for the students from the ethnic communities that are not in majority to gain proficiency in the Macedonian language. Another concern is directed towards the education of the Roma children, which apart from the fact that they have difficulties gaining access to schools, also face a lack of quality education. There are no institutions that cover the Roma language, and there is a shortfall of educated and qualified personnel who could be hired to teach. Worst of all, almost no training is provided for teachers to overcome this deficit. Apart from this, [North Macedonia](#) is report-

ed to have one of the highest percentages of students (52.2%) failing to display proficiency in the three educational areas (reading, math, science) among other countries participating in PISA (OECD, 2019). Another indicator from PISA shows that girls outperform boys in science (by 20 score points) and in mathematics (by 7 score points). The biggest advantage of girls is shown through their reading skills and literacy, making them one year ahead of boys in terms of test results (OECD, 2016). Due to these discrepancies, and the fact that all who pass the state matura can be enrolled in university, the educational gaps remain even after higher education, making graduates far less likely to be employed (graduates from North Macedonia employed after graduation is 55.4%, a percentage markedly below the EU level of 83%).

Adaptability: In North Macedonia the curriculum is prepared by the Bureau for Development of Education ([BDE](#)) in a centralized process, meaning that the Bureau has the main decision-making power (34). Over the years many positive additions have been made to the system in order for it to be appropriate and up to date. The latest addition to the curriculum for primary education is the **Cambridge Curriculum** ("Macedonia"), purportedly aiming to modernize the teaching system in grades one to nine by implementing more tête-à-tête learning activities. When it comes to the possibility for children to adapt, one must take into consideration that at their early ages of development the mind cannot hold the same attention span at all hours. [Evidence](#) shows that learning hours are not well adapted to children's development age, causing stress symptoms, sleep deprivation, and in the future more worrisome mental health issues. In order to prevent raising traumatized future generations, the schools ought to provide a more flexible and suitable learning environment (23, OECD, 2019). Another obstacle yet to be resolved are the issues concerning children from ethnic communities that are not in majority. Despite the modern additions to the system, slim to no progress has been made in incorporating Roma children into the system.

In order for the system to be adaptable certain changes must be made, starting with learning materials. Having in mind that every child has the right to education, children should learn to avoid discriminatory situations, and it is best to learn those skills through their [textbooks](#) (24, Roma Education Fund). In order for children to understand and accept ethnic differences, they must first understand history and culture. The reason why there are high discriminatory levels against Roma children, in particular, is due to the fact that the textbooks in the current curricula do not portray Roma culture, and when they do they mostly describe it through negative stereotypes. Textbooks should be made more adaptable since they tend to be the basis for understanding human decency and value towards others. The curriculum must impose quality material teaching manners and principles in addition to the general subjects so that it can meet up to the altitude of the right to education.

As noted by the USAID, North Macedonia [lags behind](#) other transitioning countries in many aspects including educational performance, work readiness, ethnic integration among youth, and inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education ("Education | Macedonia | U.S. Agency For International Development"). Additionally, the corruption scandal in 2015 has hindered the country's level of development (Lyman). This type of political crisis has given the population insight into the weak credibility of the government and its levels of corruption. [Steps](#) have been taken to establish legal and anti-corruption frameworks, yet their implementation remains a challenge. It is proven to be highly unlikely for regulatory, supervisory, and advisory bodies to carry out their functions in an effective way without any political pressures (Transparency International, 2014). The government is now implementing the new Comprehensive Education Strategy for 2018-2025 and has implemented the Action plan for 2020, aiming to undertake actions in improving the learning and teaching concept, as well as developing a more adaptable curriculum. However, despite the country's low performance in national progress assessment, its policies still

struggle with a low [impact on the increase of learning outcomes and the implementation of monitoring strategies](#) (OECD, 2019). The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for developing strategic and legal documents and defining and implementing policies for all levels of education, yet lacks the technical capacity for evidence-based policymaking or monitoring policy implementation (MoES, 2018). For there to be substantial evidence of the performance of the youth and the success of the government's action plans, one must collect data regularly and consistently. The country lacks this kind of data, thus posing an enormous obstacle to proper monitoring of the various educational activities and the quality of education. Since there are no clear indicators of the current situation in the educational field and its success rate, the government is unable to locate the issues that need improvement, thus making it unprepared for developing product strategies. In sum, for the government to live up to the standards of the successful European countries and pay proper respect to the prominence of the right to education, it must eliminate the high levels of corruption that are weakening the leadership, collect data, and implement efficient monitoring policies.

As a country in transition, for North Macedonia to be included in the European Union, there are obligatory criteria that the county is obliged to carry out and accomplish. Every year the European Commission prepares Progress Reports for each country in the transitioning process, to show whether those countries have made any advancements and whether they are ready to become part of the Union. The following paragraphs give information from reports in the timeframe of three years (2018-2020) whose overall trends show only moderate progression.

In 2018, the government adopted the [Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018-2025](#), which showed some initiative on the path toward improvement (The Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia 2018 Report). Despite this, it is failing to implement the strategies that they have been leading since 2016 such as the strategic

framework for education, support for teacher training, teacher professional development and an effective process of assessment, access to quality education for all in particular pre-school enrolment, children with disabilities and children from Roma communities. Some concerns include the level of spending on education, the level of enrollment in preschool and grade zero, improvements in the quality of primary and secondary education, and the completion rate. According to a [PISA assessment](#), North Macedonia holds a spot fourth from the bottom on a record of 70 countries (5,7,8) ("PISA 2015 Results in Focus"). Ethnic communities that are not in majority and VET programs lack the quality education they deserve, as well as qualified personnel to transmit the knowledge.

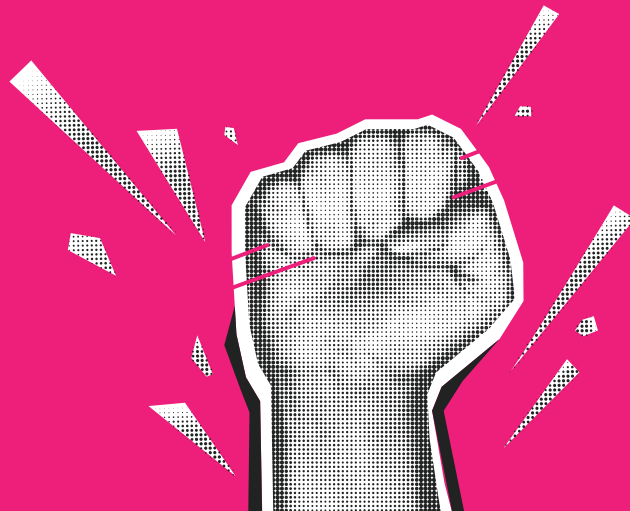
Moving on to the progress report from [2019](#), most of the actions from 2018 remained the same, seeing how there was limited progress with the Law on Higher Education and the implementation of the Comprehensive Education Strategy (North Macedonia 2019 Report). The government spending on education was concerning in 2018, however, the amount remained the same in 2019 as well. These concerns are also applicable when it comes to the levels of enrollment, quality of education and completion rates which all remain generally low. Such low indicators tend to be most common amongst the ethnic communities that are not in majority, less privileged children and/or children with special educational needs.

The [2020](#) European Commission's report shows some progress in the adoption of the new Law on Primary Education and the new Law on Teachers and Associates in Primary and Secondary Schools, reforms in Vocational Education and Training, and a slow progression in the Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018-2025 (North Macedonia 2020 Report). Some of the measures which are yet to be implemented include support for teacher training, improving the accessibility for children of other ethnicities (mostly Roma), making education more inclusive as well as sorting out the complications with TV classrooms which have become the only source of

learning to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To summarize, the European Union encourages and supports not only its Member States but also its candidates in their attempts to provide efficient education and vocational training for their citizens. The country has made many additions to the system to meet the requirements and achieve success on its path to becoming a Member State. However, despite the efforts made, many of the previously mentioned issues are yet to be resolved. The Progress Reports point out that the European Commission repeatedly points out for the same measures to be tackled. These include improvements in the strategic framework, support for personnel training, and improvement of quality education for children in preschool, children with special educational needs, and Roma children. These issues must be regarded as setbacks in terms of the acclimation of the right to education and its core requirements. For real improvements to take place, a line must be drawn between political influence and what is right for the system and the youth. If the State does not take appropriate measures to address the shortcomings in the education system, it will never surpass them, thus Chapter 26 will never be recognized and graded with full preparedness and excellent progress by the European Commission.

6. CONCLUSION



In a society governed by political gains, basic human rights have been put on hold for far too long. Education is of key importance beginning from personal up to global growth and development. Due to its influence, the right to education is a vital right to which all humans should be entitled and ought to have respect in order for it to have significance. Education should be the key to providing solid ground for well-being and exploration of the full potential of each individual and thus the society as a whole.

The right to education has been recognized by multiple ratified international treaties. Such treaties produce a common ground enabling an acceptance and understanding of the right, thus allowing it to be implemented and practised on a global scale. UN's Chapter 26 is of great importance in this section since it refers to the fundamental requirements for the right to education in each country. As with every other human right, the right to education is defined by criteria that every country must respect and fulfil for the right to have the intended effect. These criteria are the 4 A's of education - adaptability, availability, accessibility and acceptability.

North Macedonia has shown some level of observation of the right to education, however, there is still a large gap and need for improvement. Even though the government has implemented many initiatives and action plans in order to orient teaching and learning more closely to

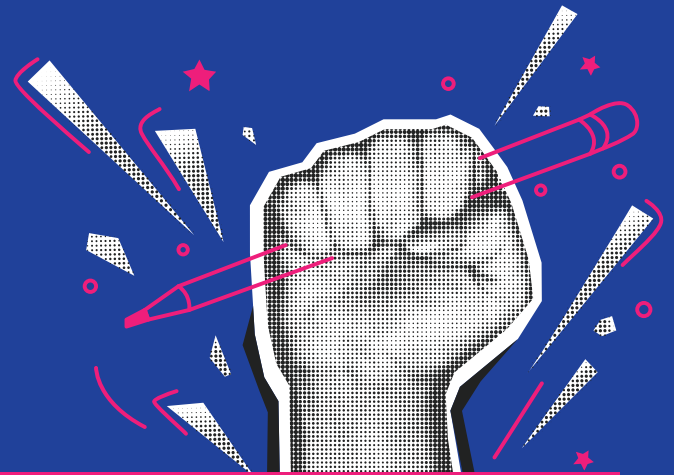
student needs, there are no significant results that show an improvement in the educational outcomes in the country. The level of enrolment remains unsatisfactory and the percentage of students who finish all compulsory educational levels or higher is even more concerning. This suggests the existence of standards that are not (well) implemented and an educational system in stagnation. The numbers outlining student outcomes are low on a domestic level, and even lower on an EU level. North Macedonia lacks the recognition and consciousness regarding the slow but steady downfall of an adequately educated youth at home. Apart from this, corruption and politicization are also to be named as some of the main causes of this rights violation. The European Commission's reports also show that the country has indeed introduced several improvements in its measures over the years, albeit highlighting that the most important issues are yet to be resolved.

A country ruled by corruption and goals only to be accepted in the EU without undergoing the necessary internal changes and hardly addressing the challenges on a national level cannot move further from its current point. To conclude, education should be considered as the key instrument from a non-productive environment towards a blooming future, therefore making it one of the highest priorities of each country. For this reason, we put forward the recommendations presented in the next section.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of thorough research, the main findings, and the main challenges established, we developed a set of recommendations that can provide a general direction towards fulfilling the 4A's of the right to education. These are referred to as the national authorities – the Parliament, the Government, and the Ministry of Education and Science first and foremost.

- 1. Improve the regulation and in particular its implementation regarding the provision of a safe and comfortable learning environment** (by addressing challenges such as shortage of sanitary items, lack of proper meal preparation, lack of heating, lack of school supplies);
- 2. Develop a comprehensive strategy targeted toward eradicating prejudice, discrimination and segregation in the field of education which will go beyond addressing stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination in textbooks** (this includes discrimination towards students of different ethnicities, religions, genders, and students with disabilities by teaching and management staff, other contractors or persons engaged in the educational process; the processes regarding the revision of the textbooks should continue);
- 3. Develop and implement a long-term plan for a full renewal of the education infrastructure in terms of provision of accessible and available infrastructure and work on eliminating the urban/rural quality divide in this respect;**
- 4. Promote a more flexible and suitable learning environment that will take due consideration of the well-being and mental health of all students** (most students tend to be sleep-deprived, have high levels of stress, and are prone to developing mental health challenges).



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