

COMPREHENSIVE ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET IN NORTH MACEDONIA

(A Policy Framework for Activation and Occupational Gap Reduction)



	FINDINGS	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & MECHANISMS
PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET	1. Addressing Gender Stereotypes and Cultural Norms Limiting Women’s Labor Market Entry	
	Affected Groups / Targets	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women with children, particularly those in culturally conservative communities. • Employers and businesses affected by gendered employment patterns. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender stereotypes reinforce traditional roles, particularly for mothers, discouraging women from workforce participation. • Women bear disproportionate responsibility for childcare and household work, impacting their career choices. 	<p>1. Expanding Family-Friendly Workplace Policies <i>Mechanism: Labor Law, Law on Equal Opportunities, Operational Plan for ALMPs & Gender Equality Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce flexible work arrangements (remote work, part-time, compressed workweeks) for working parents. • Implement mandatory parental leave policies to encourage shared caregiving between men and women. • Encourage on-site childcare facilities in medium and large companies through ease of the conditions for opening, and providing tax incentives. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrenched societal norms discourage women from entering male-dominated professions. 	<p>2. Employer Incentives for Gender-Inclusive Workplace <i>Mechanism: National Employment Strategy & Operational Plan for ALMPs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tax benefits and subsidies to companies implementing gender-inclusive HR policies. • Recognize “Women-Friendly Workplaces” through certification and public recognition programs. 	

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & MECHANISMS

3. Investing in Early Childhood Education and Childcare Services

Mechanism: Law on Child Protection, National Strategy on Early Childhood Development, Program on Child Protection Development & Program on Construction, Equipping and Maintenance of Childcare Facilities

- Expand **state-funded daycare and preschool programs**, particularly in underserved regions.
- Develop **mobile childcare services** for rural areas where access is limited.
- Introduce **affordable or subsidized childcare options** to reduce economic barriers for working mothers.
- Promote **public-private** partnership in the childcare sector.
- Open **childcare facilities** within the existing primary schools that remain empty due to the decrease of the number of pupils.
- Adjust the **working hours** of the kindergartens according to the usual working hours of the parents.
- Promote and **provide incentives for 'joint childcare'** when one person takes care of one child in his/her home, can take care of several more.

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PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET		<p>4. Restructuring Maternity & Parental Leave to Encourage Gender Balance <i>Mechanism: Labor Law & Law on Social Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce paid paternity leave to balance caregiving duties. • Strengthen return-to-work programs for mothers after maternity leave. • Implement career re-skilling programs for women re-entering the workforce post-childbirth. • Provide flexible working conditions to mothers who just return from maternity leave. <hr/> <p>5. Public Awareness and Educational Reforms to Address Gender Bias <i>Mechanism: Law on Equal Opportunities & Gender Equality Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement nationwide campaigns promoting gender equality in labor participation. • Introduce gender studies curricula in schools to combat bias early on. • Engage religious and community leaders in advocacy efforts for women’s employment rights.

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PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET	2. Reducing Barriers Related to Household and Care Responsibilities	
	<p>Affected Groups / Targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women, particularly caregivers. • Employers impacted by high female dropout rates. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women perform three times more unpaid household work than men, reducing their workforce participation. • Lack of elderly care services places additional responsibility on women. • Traditional norms discourage shared domestic responsibilities. 	<p>6. Promoting Shared Household Responsibilities and Workplace Flexibility <i>Mechanism: Law on Equal Opportunities, Law on primary education, Labor Law</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement workplace family education programs to encourage men’s participation in caregiving. • Require equal parental leave distribution for both parents. • Provide extended/day care for pupils in lower grades, where schoolwork will be completed <p>7. Expanding Elderly and Dependent Care Support <i>Mechanism: Law on Social Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop state-funded elder care centers to reduce informal caregiving burdens on women. • Provide financial incentives for home care services. • Promote and provide incentives for ‘joint housing’ of elderly people.

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		<p>8. Formalizing Recognition of Unpaid Care Work <i>Mechanism: National Social Protection Strategy, Social Protection Implementation Program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize unpaid caregiving work in pension calculations.• Provide certification and professional training for informal caregivers.



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PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET	3. Enhancing Educational and Training Opportunities for Women's Employment	
	Affected Groups / Targets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed or inactive women. • Women in low-income or marginalized communities. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women with low education levels face the highest inactivity rates. Women with primary education face inactivity rate of more than 80%, those with secondary education 50%, while 33% of highly education women are inactive (State Statistical Office, 2023) • Mismatch between women's skills and labor market demand. 	9. Expanding Vocational Training and Adult Education <i>Mechanism: Law on Adult Education, Operational Plan for ALMPs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop vocational training programs tailored for women in high-demand fields. • Provide state-subsidized upskilling programs for unemployed women.
		10. Encouraging Women's Participation in Digital and Green Economy Jobs <i>Mechanism: National Strategy for Digital Transformation, Green Economy Strategy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch free coding and digital literacy boot camps for unemployed women. • Develop green jobs training programs for women in environmental and energy sectors.
	11. Activation Programs for Social Assistance Recipients <i>Mechanism: Law on Social Protection, Operational Plan for ALMPs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement training-to-employment pathways for women receiving financial aid. • Provide conditional cash transfers linked to job-seeking 	

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PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET	4. Horizontal Occupational Segregation in North Macedonia	
	<p>Affected Groups / Targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed persons, especially women in lower-paid occupations. • Young girls and students at risk of career segregation. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor market analysis in North Macedonia reveals significant gender-based occupational segregation. While the broader category of ‘Professionals’ is female-dominated, there are substantial differences among sub-occupations. • Male-dominated fields: Science, engineering, and IT professions are primarily occupied by men, limiting women’s participation in these high-paying sectors. 	<p>12. Strengthening Career Guidance through the Employment Service Agency (ESA)</p> <p><i>Mechanism: Operational Plan for Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand ESA career advisory services with a gender-sensitive approach to inform women about job opportunities in high-paying sectors. • Develop career guidance materials highlighting successful women in STEM and male-dominated fields. • Create partnerships with employers to offer mentorship programs for young women in non-traditional careers. • Expand ESA-led job-matching programs for women interested in high-demand occupations.

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PART 1: ACTIVATING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female-dominated fields: Women hold the majority of positions in teaching professions, reinforcing gendered occupational patterns. • Technical occupations: In the category of ‘Technicians and Associate Professionals,’ science and engineering roles are 40% more occupied by men than women. • Healthcare occupations: Conversely, the number of female health associates is more than double that of men in this field 	<p>13. Introducing Employer Incentives for Hiring Women in Male-Dominated Occupations <i>Mechanism: Law on Employment & Labor Market Policies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide wage subsidies or tax incentives for companies that hire women in male-dominated industries. • Introduce gender-balanced hiring requirements for companies benefiting from state aid and public procurement. • Encourage businesses to develop gender-inclusive recruitment policies, ensuring hiring practices do not reinforce stereotypes. <hr/> <p>14. Promoting Gender Diversity in Entrepreneurship & Innovation <i>Mechanism: National Strategy for Entrepreneurship & SME Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish women-led business support programs offering grants, low-interest loans, and mentoring. • Develop business incubators focused on female entrepreneurs in non-traditional industries (e.g., tech, engineering). • Support STEM-focused scholarships for women entrepreneurs

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & MECHANISMS

5. High Demand for Male-Dominated Occupations

Affected Groups / Targets

- Unemployed persons, especially women.
- Students making career choices.

• **Half of all job vacancies are in elementary occupations and skilled trades—both of which are heavily male-dominated.**

• **Male-dominated sectors in demand: The largest job openings are in craft and trade-related occupations, which primarily employ men.**

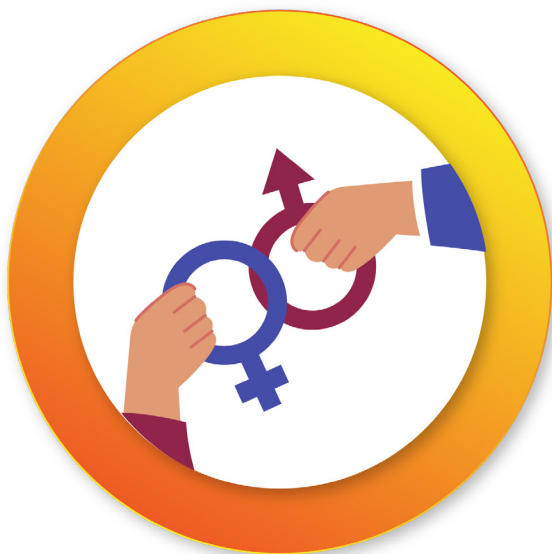
15. Promoting Women’s Entry into High-Demand, Male-Dominated Sectors

Mechanism: National Employment Strategy & Law on Vocational Education & Training & Law on national qualification framework

- **Expand gender-responsive vocational training programs in skilled trades** (e.g., construction, mechanics, electrical work, and advanced manufacturing) to encourage women’s participation.
- **Introduce targeted scholarships and grants** for women pursuing vocational training in male-dominated fields, including apprenticeships and certification programs.
- **Develop industry partnerships** with trade associations, employers, and unions to provide internship and on-the-job training opportunities for women in high-demand craft and trade professions.
- **Provide wage subsidies or hiring incentives** for employers who recruit and train women in craft, trade, and technical professions.
- **Launch mentorship and coaching programs** connecting women with successful female professionals in skilled trades and technical careers.

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PART 2: CLOSING OCCUPATIONAL GENDER GAPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-dominated professions in demand: While there is also high demand for professionals—an occupation group with a larger female workforce—most opportunities are in science, engineering, IT, and communication fields, where men continue to dominate. • Labor shortages in women-led occupations: Clerical support jobs, traditionally held by women, face occupational deficits, meaning the demand for workers is higher than the available supply. <p>This data highlights a gendered labor market imbalance, where male-led sectors experience high job demand while women-dominated occupations struggle with worker shortages. Addressing this requires better workforce alignment and increased female participation in high-demand fields</p>	<p>16. Addressing Labor Shortages in Women-Dominated Occupations</p> <p><i>Mechanism: Operational Plan for ALMPs & Law on Employment and Social Protection & Law on national qualification framework</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen ALMP programs to attract and retain workers in clerical, administrative, and care professions, ensuring better alignment between demand and labor supply. • Introduce targeted recruitment campaigns to increase interest in administrative and clerical jobs, particularly among unemployed and inactive workers. • Enhance work flexibility and digitalization in administrative professions to improve productivity and attract more candidates. • Offer reskilling programs for men interested in transitioning into administrative and clerical support roles, reducing gender-based labor imbalances.

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17. Increasing Workforce Alignment Through Gender-Responsive Skills Matching

Mechanism: Smart Specialization Strategy & Law on Higher Education & Law on national qualification framework

- **Develop a labor market forecasting system** to anticipate occupational shortages and adjust training programs accordingly.
- **Establish industry-specific training programs to upskill and reskill unemployed and underemployed workers** based on market demand.
- **Encourage gender-balanced enrollment** in educational institutions by setting **targets for female participation in STEM and technical fields.**
- **Introduce financial incentives for universities and vocational institutions** that actively support women's enrollment in high-demand sectors.

18. Strengthening Private Sector Engagement and Employer Policies

Mechanism: Labor Law & National Employment Strategy

- **Implement gender-inclusive hiring policies** in both **private and public sectors**, ensuring equal access to opportunities in high-growth industries.
- **Require gender diversity commitments** from companies benefiting from government incentives, grants, or state-supported projects.
- **Encourage companies to adopt inclusive workplace practices**, such as mentorship, leadership development, and anti-bias hiring policies, particularly in **STEM, trade, and craft sectors.**



19. Supporting Women's Mobility in High-Growth Sectors

Mechanism: Operational Plan for ALMPs & Law on Regional Economic Development

- **Introduce mobility grants** to help women relocate for **employment in high-demand, male-dominated sectors.**
- **Develop regional employment hubs** that connect skilled female workers with job vacancies in growing industries.
- **Expand access to childcare and work-life balance policies** in industries where women are underrepresented, making it easier for women to transition into male-dominated fields.

20. Reforming Educational Pathways to Promote Gender-Inclusive Career Choices

Mechanism: Law on Education & Law on Vocational Education and Training

- **Introduce career guidance programs in schools** that encourage young girls to pursue STEM, technical, and vocational education.
- **Incorporate gender-sensitive career counseling** into secondary and higher education curricula, challenging stereotypes about “male” and “female” jobs.
- **Launch “Women in STEM & Trades” campaigns** showcasing success stories of women excelling in high-demand technical professions

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PART 2: CLOSING OCCUPATIONAL GENDER GAPS	6. Highest Occupational Gaps Exist in Women-Dominated Fields	
	<p>Affected Groups / Targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed women facing limited employment opportunities. • Students choosing careers without considering market 	
	<p>Women-Led Occupations Face the Highest Employment Gaps</p> <p>The occupational gap—measured as the difference between labor supply and demand—is particularly high in women-dominated professions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sectors with the largest gaps: Teaching assistants, legal, social, and cultural professions experience significant labor market imbalances, with more job seekers than available positions. 	<p>21. Reforming Educational Policies to Align with Labor Market Needs <i>Mechanism: Law on Education & Smart Specialization Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce quotas for oversupplied university degrees where job opportunities are limited. • Introduce labor market forecasting tools to guide students toward high-growth professions. • Encourage universities to partner with private-sector employers to provide hands-on learning opportunities in high-demand industries. <p>Expanding Pre-Qualification & Requalification Programs <i>Mechanism: Operational Plan for ALMPs & National Lifelong Learning Law</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESA in cooperation with the Public Centre for Adult Education should fund intensive short-term training for unemployed women to transition into in-demand sectors. • Create fast-track certification programs for women with experience in declining industries to transition into growth sectors. • Strengthen public-private training partnerships to ensure alignment with real labor market needs.

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PART 2: CLOSING OCCUPATIONAL GENDER GAPS	<p>For example, for each job vacancy for teaching assistants and legal, social, and cultural professionals, there are 28 and 18 potential female workers, and 17 and 6 male workers, respectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited employment opportunities: Women working in these fields face higher competition for jobs, reducing their ability to secure stable employment. <p>This finding highlights a structural mismatch between job supply and demand in women-led occupations, emphasizing the need for workforce reallocation, career diversification, and skill enhancement initiatives to improve women’s employment prospects.</p>	<p>Encouraging Women’s Participation in Digital Jobs <i>Mechanism: Roadmap for Digital Transformation & Smart Specialization Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement coding bootcamps, AI & digital literacy programs for unemployed women. • Provide start-up funding for women entrepreneurs in IT technologies and sustainable businesses.

