

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

ON WOMEN WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Project HOPE

„Helping w0men gain PowEr in their lives”



Co-funded by
the European Union

Profil**PASS**
HOPE

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON WOMEN WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Project HOPE – „Helping w0men gain PowEr in their lives”

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List of abbreviations

AE	Adult education
AEC	Adult Education Centre of the Republic of North Macedonia
APZ	Active employment policy
APLM	Active labour market policies
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) Germany
ESA	Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia
FMER	Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany
GAPS	Gender Equality in the Labour Market, Creating Perspectives
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
JPOA	Javno priznati organizator aktivnosti (Publicly recognized adult education provider) Serbia
NEET	Not in employment, education and training
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NQF	National Qualification Framework
MES	Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia
MI	Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia
MLFSAEO	Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Slovenia
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia
SORS	Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia
STEM	Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
YG	Youth Guarantee
ZUTD	Zakon o urejanju trga dela (Labour market regulation act) Slovenia

Introduction

Today, the position of women in the labour market and consequently in society is significantly determined by the processes of precarity, discrimination, normalized harassment, daily sexism, restrictive sexual roles and huge amounts of unpaid work. There has also been a recent increase in poverty among young women.

Despite the labour related legislative in all countries explicitly prohibits any gender-based discrimination, the practice shows that women more often experience unequal treatment in employment and work due to pre-existing gender stereotype-based expectations and beliefs. Education levels seem to be relevant factor for the overall employability of women: apparently, less educated women are those that are most likely to be out of the labour market. Women in general, are more educated than men especially considering tertiary level. Nevertheless, women more often complete bachelor studies in the areas of social and humanitarian sciences, compared to technical-technological field and biotechnical sciences, which might affect the opportunity of business start-ups, and consequently, enrol into lower paid sectors.

With the increasing involvement of women in the labour market, the traditional role of women has begun to change. Education, financial independence, career, the ability to achieve personal goals are no longer concepts reserved only for men. However, even certain changes are evident, in the so-called “classical” type of household, the husband is the main decision-maker with respect to employment decisions, so that the wife’s allocation of time, including employment, is treated as a residual. Despite women’s participation in the labour market, women still do more unpaid work, especially in the home environment.

Especially within countries with higher overall unemployment and low participation rates, women are much more exposed to inactivity and low employment, leading to their economic dependence, lack of decision-making power in the household (including expenditures for education and health of the children), greater tolerance to domestic violence etc.

Women’s participation in the labour supply is also affected by the flexibility of working time and arrangements, availability of working options and family responsibilities. Motherhood is one of the key determinants here; the younger the child, the lower the probability of a woman joining the labour market relative to not having children at all. Similarly, having responsibilities for the care of an elderly person is negatively related to participation rates in all countries (Eurofound, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally put new challenges on the status of women in relation to their employability. COVID-19 has highlighted social inequalities – related to disability, (un)employment, income, language and social-class. People have suddenly faced unemployment, having to find ways to support themselves and their families by working longer hours and taking extra jobs to protect household incomes. These inequalities have also deeply affected access and participation to lifelong learning. Quarantines, isolation, and the closure of schools and kindergartens and other public facilities were meant to control infection and sustain health, economic and social systems to the extent possible. Industries most adversely affected by the crisis (e.g. manufacturing, tourism, ca-

tering) as well as essential and indispensable activities during the pandemic (health care and nursing, production and sale of food, pharmacies, shops and supermarkets, financial services, maintenance of hygiene, etc.) predominantly engage women. The crisis has had a strong impact on the security, socioeconomic and health status of women, especially the most vulnerable, such as women who are poor, have disabilities, are elderly, have been widowed and/or are single mothers, victims of violence or belong to other vulnerable groups (Bashevska, 2020).

This comprehensive report provides overview of the actual needs and state of play of women with fewer opportunities, defined in broader sense. It reflects the summary of the findings of the national reports in 4 countries, involved in the HOPE project: Germany, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia.

The main findings of this report provide indications of connecting elements identified in the needs of the target groups and develop guidelines and recommendations of the potential implementation of the tool ProfilPASS adjusted to women with fewer opportunities.

Erasmus+ project HOPE – „Helping w0men gain in their lives”

The aim of the EU-funded project HOPE is to support counselling work and especially the identification of competences for women with regard to (re-)integration into the labour market. Counselling with the new developed ProfilPASS aims to encourage women with fewer opportunities to identify their competences and strengths and thereby facilitate their (re-)integration into the labour market and society. Women are more often in situations under a risk of poverty, e.g. due to interrupted employment or switched to part-time work due to childcare and/or care for relatives, low independent income, migration and refugee experiences as well as single women or divorced women with children. Through counselling process, competences can be identified and then reflected upon, together with a counsellor in order to identify possible matching occupational fields and to develop an individual plan for further educational and/or work-related paths of the women with fewer opportunities.

The project takes on special significance in view of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which promotes traditional gender roles and thus exacerbates the situation for women at risk of poverty. The aim is to promote long-term positive effects by (re)integrating women into the labour market as role models for others, e.g. their own children.

Within the framework of HOPE, various project materials will be developed to support counsellors in their work with the target group of women at risk of poverty. The ProfilPASS will be up-graded, taking into account the specific life situations of the target group, their experiences and their professional situation. In addition, a database with further support services (e.g. childcare, counselling services of the consumer centres) will complement the new ProfilPASS. Supporting materials for counselling work with women (women returning to work, young mothers, women with a migration background) will be developed. Existing competence assessment instruments from all partner countries that are suitable for the target group will be compiled in a toolkit. Furthermore, qualification materials (manual and curriculum) for counsellors will be developed, which serve as a basis for the implementation of a training for counsellors. After the development of the materials, a training for counsellors from all partner countries will take place. A total of 32 counsellors will benefit from the training. In a following test phase, 120 women at risk of poverty will be counselled. Finally, the materials will be evaluated and further developed.

The project is realized by the [German Institute for Adult Education \(DIE\)](#) with partner organizations [Lifelong Learning Center](#) from North Macedonia, [Udruzenje Laris](#) from Serbia, and [Ljudska Univerza Velenje](#) from Slovenia.



Background and methodological approach of the Comprehensive Report of HOPE – „Helping w0men gain PowEr in their lives”

This report was initiated and prepared to serve as starting point in the process of improvement and adaptation of the ProfilPASS for Adults and its adjustment to the need of women with fewer opportunities. It provides analysis of the state of play of women with fewer opportunities in the project partner countries, including a summary of examples of good practice and recommendations for further development and adjustment of the ProfilPASS.

For the needs of this project and report, the women with fewer opportunities are defined to:

- » Women with interrupted employment or with part-time work, e.g. because they are/were in charge of childcare/caring for others
- » Single or divorced women with children
- » Victims of domestic and gender-based violence
- » Women with low income

The report reflects the summary of the data provided within the national reports drafted by the project partners on the state of play of the women with fewer opportunities in their respective countries. They were prepared based on desk research on the existing relevant documents and interviews with relevant experts based on pre-defined template. Additionally, in Serbia, 3 focus groups interviews were held with women from vulnerable categories (in total, 30 participants): single mothers, Roma women, rural women, women with a low level of education, women with disabilities and women of 45+.

The national needs reports were provided by all partners: DIE (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung) was responsible for the national report from Germany, Lifelong Learning Center Skopje (LLC) contributed the national report from North Macedonia, Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje (AZ LUV) compiled the national report from Slovenia and Laris contributed the national needs report from Serbia.

The desk research provided the necessary theoretical base for understanding the state of play of the women with fewer opportunities, starting from the short summary of the legislative regulating the respective issue, analysis of the relevant up-to date studies and reports produced by different social partners, institutions and think-tanks, and as well statistical data available from reliable sources.

The interviews with the experts were done in order to provide an insight to practical aspects of the needs and identify the good practice examples in working with women with fewer opportunities. The experts involved were counsellors, practitioners, persons dealing with women with fewer opportunities on daily basis. The interviews were done in an informal atmosphere, by interactive conversation with the interviewed experts, based on predefined set of open questions. They were conducted in

January, February and March 2022. The activity was led by the North Macedonian partner Lifelong Learning Center from Skopje.

The guiding questions were:

- » What existing measures, initiatives or programmes geared towards assisting and supporting women with fewer opportunities exist?
- » What measures exist for assessment and validation of competences for this target group?
- » What examples of good practice are already available?
- » How to make competences of women with fewer opportunities visible?
- » What should be included in addition to an adapted ProfilPASS?

1. Demographic data related to the target group 'women with fewer opportunities'

For the purposes of this project and consequently, this report, the target group is defined in a very broad sense: women with fewer opportunities are seen in women with interrupted employment or with part-time work, e.g. because they are/were in charge of childcare/caring for others, single or divorced women with children, victims of domestic and gender-based violence and/or women with low independent income, women with migration and refugee experiences as well as single women or divorced women with children.

Today, the position of women in the labour market and consequently in society is significantly determined by the processes of precarity, discrimination, normalized harassment, daily sexism, restrictive sexual roles and huge amounts of unpaid care work. The precarious forms of work women are involved in led to increase of poverty. The overall inequality of women on the labour market leads to their economic dependence, lack of decision-making power in the household (including expenditures for education and healthcare of the children), greater tolerance to domestic violence etc.

According to [Eurostat](#), the **Gender Employment Gap**, defined as the differences between the employment rates of men and women aged 15–64 years, shows a significant difference in all participating countries compared to the EU level, where it is 11% in 2020: Germany 7.5%, Slovenia 5.9%, Serbia 14% and North Macedonia 19.9%, where we note almost double number compared to EU average. The gender employment gap is closely related to educational attainment. Apparently, less educated women are those that are most likely to be out of the labour market as their opportunity cost of non-working seems to be very low. The low educated women are also more likely to be married with low educated men and live in traditional families which influence both their decision to further their education and to work. More educated women would have higher labour market activity as their opportunity cost of non-working is higher than that of the less educated women (Mojsoska-Blazevski N. P., 2017).

In recent years, there are some positive trends indicating that the involvement of girls/women in different processes of education is increasing, especially, in the number of women enrolling at the faculties. There are more women enrolling in the second and third cycle of studies and graduating from the first, second and third cycles. All countries which are part of this project follow the overall trend at EU level in this sense: more women than men possess advanced or higher education considering the age group 25–34 years. According to [Eurostat](#): in Germany 36.1% women have higher education degrees (compared to total of 35.1%), in North Macedonia 44.1% women (compared to total of 37.7%), in Slovenia 56% (compared to total of 45.4%) and in Serbia 39.3% women (compared to total of 32.3%).

Nevertheless, women more often complete bachelor studies in the areas of social and humanitarian sciences, than in technical-technological field and biotechnical sciences, which might affect the opportunity of business start-ups as well as their incomes. Social professions are not yet paid according to their professional expertise and social importance. This aspect reflects existing segregation of women (higher representation) in the aforementioned lower paid sectors compared to the higher concentration of men in the higher paid sectors in the field of STEM (Entrepreneurship Strategy, 2018).

For example, in Germany, 75% of women work in so-called **system-relevant occupations**, which were and are in particularly high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic and are often paid less than so-called men's occupations. Examples of system-relevant occupations are sales occupations (82% women), nursing and geriatric care (84% women), educational and social occupations (83% women) and cleaning occupations (81% women) (DGB-Index Gute Arbeit, 2020, p. 2). Similarly, in North Macedonia, there is a significant sectoral segregation – traditionally high concentration of employment of women compared to men in education, health and social care sectors (Bashevaska, 2019).

In general, women are faced with more negative consequences in the area of employment as they are the ones that are expected to adapt to the needs and expectations of the family, taking care of children and elderly, especially in more traditional families and different ethnic communities. Despite strengthened supervision regarding gender-based discrimination in employment and increased awareness of this issue, women continue to be discriminated against more often than men, particular in connection with motherhood or parenthood and prejudices regarding care for the family and children. Employers are more reluctant to hire women as there is a probability that they could go on maternity leave, that they will benefit more from sick leave or the assumption that women will put family life before work. Too often, employers see this as a risk and a potential additional cost. Additionally, during the recruitment process, women are often given questions that infringe on their privacy and are not related to the workplace.

Although the female labour force participation rate in Germany increased from just under 48% in 1972 to about 68% in 2006, women in Germany still belong to the group at risk of poverty because of their labour market opportunities and earnings (Dressel, K., & Wanger, S., 2008, pp. 481–482). The North Macedonian labour market is characterized by high overall unemployment, and low employment and participation rates, in which, women are still much more exposed to inactivity and low employment. (Mojsoska-Blazevski N. P., 2017). In Slovenia, women make up a little less than half of the

working population. In the 4th quarter of 2020, according to [State statistical office](#), 90% of all women were employed, and 10% were self-employed and helping family members. Almost half of working women had a tertiary education. There were slightly more than a quarter of working men with such an education. Women are still in the minority in leadership positions, but their share in this group is also slowly increasing, almost 40% of managers in Slovenia in 2019 were women. With this data, Slovenia ranked fourth among the remaining EU-28 members. In Serbia, there is also a positive trend in the last five years concerning the activity rate of women in the labour market (it increased by 5.7%) and employment rate (by 9.4%), the gender gap is still very high and women are in a much more unfavourable situation comparing to their male peers. Although the unemployment rate of both women and men decreased recently, the unemployment of women decreased faster, which led to the difference in unemployment rates being reduced to 1.1% in 2019 (from 1.9 % in 2015). (Анкета о радној снази, Методолодија 2021). Even the rate of informally employed persons in Serbia is high, women are almost twice less than men involved in informal employment, mostly in service sector, except in food trade (78.6%) and health and social protection (64.5%) (Slobodan Kotlica, Nataša Stanojević, 2021). Some institutional changes manifested in the time limit for exercising the pension right, but also the introduction of penalties for early retirement influenced women's performance in the labour market, primarily in relation to activity and employment. The continuous increase in the retirement age has undoubtedly increased women's activity and employment by prolonging, willingly or unwillingly, the connection of older women's cohorts to the labour market.

There is a discrepancy into the participation rates of women compared to their **ethnicity** and/or **migrant origin**, mainly due to traditional ways of organizing the households and the role of the woman. For example, in North Macedonia, the participation rates of women from Albanian and Roma women were 11% and 36%, respectively (compared to 51% for North Macedonian women) due to norms and stereotypes deeply rooted in the family traditions and culture (Mojsoska-Blazevski N. P., 2017). In 2017, among the employed, marginalized Roma women were less likely to be in informal employment than males, but they are more likely to be inactive, or out of the labour force, often engaged in domestic and caretaking activities (UNDP, 2018). Even the access to employment is challenging on its own with the country's economy, but for Roma women it is almost impossible to find a job, caused by the low level of education, but also other factors, such as low salaries, no suitable job offers, employment through political affiliation etc. (Chichevaliev S., 2016). On the other hand, as well, only 4.1% of Roma women used some of the active employment measures and received any of the employment services (XEPA, 2021). In Germany, there is a considerable number of women with refugee or migration experience in first, second or third generation counting for 9.4 million women who may face possible language barriers preventing them to get more active, even if they have been living in Germany for several years (BMFSFJ, Juli 2020b, Gleichstellungsstrategie der Bundesregierung, 2020b, p. 12). The structural discrimination based on their skin colour, language, ethnicity, surnames etc. must also be considered.

Additionally, as a summary of all factors, women tend to be more involved in **part-time/mini** or **temporary jobs**, often in the so-called system-relevant occupations, meaning they are earning a lower income and are facing higher levels of uncertainty. In Germany, women represent 48% of part-time employees in the socially insured workforce (compared to 11% men). Of those employed exclusively

on a marginal basis, women constitute 2.85 million and men only 1.80 million (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019). In Slovenia, young people, especially young women, are subject to **precarious work temporary**, uncertain forms of work or in fixed-term employment. 12.7% of women work part time compared to 5.4% men and as many as 80% of young women aged between 15 and 25 years, are employed on a temporary basis (compared to less than 60% men). In Serbia, 7.6% of women work part time (compared to 5.3% of men) (ILO, 2017). As opposite, in North Macedonia, the share of females working part time is very low, ~4% in 2020 (compared to 32% in EU-28), which is mainly due to low availability of part-time work options and other forms of flexible working schedules. This may be the explanation why the country faces very high inactivity of the population, approximately 35% of the population aged 15–64 years in North Macedonia is inactive with inactivity much higher among females. Out of those females in the country working part time, 34% report they could not find a full-time work, 19.5% that they work part time due to other family and personal responsibilities, 5.5% report to work part time due to taking care after child or elderly, and 35% state that there are some other reasons (Mojsoska-Blazevski N. P., 2017).

On the other hand, the reasons for the great gender gaps in the employment rate of women are related with the factors not coming out only from the labour market or choice of education, but also from factors such as **availability of services for family life support** (e.g. kindergartens, all-day care for children in schools, accommodation of elderly persons), but also from **cultural stereotypes**.

Motherhood is one of the key determinants of female labour force participation; the younger the child, the lower the probability of a woman joining the labour market relative to not having children at all. Similarly, having responsibilities for the care of an elderly person is negatively related to participation rates in all countries although not as strongly as having small children (Eurofound, 2016).

Women's **age** is also considered as a relevant factor in the female labour force participation. Women's participation increases in their youth (aged 20–30 years), decreases in their 30s as many women temporarily leave the labour market to have children and later, in their 40s, return to the labour market when the participation reaches the highest level. In Serbia, women over the age of 45 represent one of the groups on the labour market that deserve special attention. In 2016, 48% of women between the ages of 45 and 64 years was inactive, compared to 28% of men (Анкета о радној снази, Методологија 2021).

Interrupted career paths are a consequence of the **care work** that women take on at home by fostering their own children or caring for relatives. Women not only provide the majority of childcare in Germany, but also take on two-thirds of care for relatives in need of care in private households (Rothgang, H., & Müller, R. (Eds.), 2018, p. 113). In Germany, women spend an average of 52.4% more time daily on unpaid care work (based on the most recent time use survey 2012/2013). This is equivalent to spending one hour and 27 minutes more each day (BMFSFJ, 2018, pp. 11-12). Most of the women who **earn their living** mainly through their own employment live in East Germany, as these are regions that belonged to the German Democratic Republic (DDR), in which the expansion of day-care centers and women's employment were strongly promoted (BMFSFJ, 2020a). Rural areas in the West are more likely to be characterized by low mobility and long distances to day-care centers, forcing women to stay at home. The distances to qualification measures or work can also be difficult in these regions.

In addition, there are generally not enough affordable childcare facilities, so that families or single women have to rely on help from their own personal environment, if this is available.

In 2020, according to Eurostat, Slovenia had the largest share of employed women with children (86.2%), while the European average labour market participation for women in the same age group, but without children, is 76.8%. Slovenia traditionally ranks very high in statistics dealing with women's participation in the labour market, as mothers return to full-time work after maternity leave, and rarely exercise their right to part-time work until the child is three years old. At the same time, access to services – especially care for the elderly – is being limited rather than expanded, meaning that there is more and more unpaid work for women due to socially defined gender roles, leaving them out of the (paid) labour market. Vulnerability and low employability of older women (aged 54–64 years) reflect the fact that they take responsibility for caring for elderly or dependent family members. This group of women is more likely to shorten working hours or give up employment altogether.

The traditional role of women in North Macedonian society in terms of home care, taking care of minors and adults who cannot take care of themselves, is one of the major obstacles to greater participation of women in the labour market. 55% of inactive women are housewives, though the effect of this factor on inactivity is magnified at the lower levels of education. 23.4% of inactive women in 2019 stated that they are not active in the labour market precisely because of home care (only 0.9% of inactive men stated the same), and an additional 19% that they are inactive due to other family and personal responsibilities (0.7% of inactive men)¹. The percentage of women dedicating time to childcare and grandchildren daily is greater compared to the percentage of men (the difference is 9.4%). The percentage of women spending time in domestic activities is seven times greater compared to that of men. The indicators in this sub-domain show that employed women spend much less time to sports, cultural and leisure activities, including voluntary and charitable activities compared to employed men (Bashevskа, 2019).

In Serbia, 87% of women working less than full-time in 2019 said it was due to caring for children or disabled people (compared to 13% of men), and 61% women worked less than full time due to other family or personal reason (compared to 39% of men). Similar trends are noted as well into the statistics related to the reason of the inactivity, 97% of the inactive women are inactive due to care of children or adults disabled persons (compared to 3% men) and 77% were inactive due to other personal reasons (compared to 23% men). Very interesting in this regard is to see the data indicating that 63% of all inactive women were inactive since they were discouraged in possible finding job (Анкета о радној снази, Методологија 2021).

Women are less likely to earn their own living wage and, on average, earn lower gross hourly wages than men (**Gender Pay Gap**). The indicator measures the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. According to Eurostat, in Germany, in 2020 it was 18.3% with decreasing tendency, while in Serbia, for 2020 it was 9.6%. in North Macedonia, in 2017 it was 15%, and this gap increases additionally of 17.3% if components like education, work experience, age and

1 - <https://www.macedonia2025.com/whats-new/weekly-op-ed/>

job profile are taken into consideration. The gender gap is 28% if people who only completed primary school are taken into consideration (Eurostat, 2018). Even though women with better education are employed, still, they earn less than men. A woman with same work characteristics as a man, earns 17.9% less, that is, a woman would need to work additional 65 days to acquire the same salary level as a man. This results in women having lower return rate of her investments in education, selection of occupation and sector of action (Mojsoska-Blazevski N. , 2021). In Slovenia, the wage gap has been widening in recent years: in 2012 it was 4.5%, 8.1% in 2015, and in 2018 as much as 9.3%.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has additionally put new challenges on the status of women in relation to their employability. It highlighted social inequalities – related to disability, (un)employment, income, language and social-class. People have suddenly faced unemployment, having to find ways to support themselves and their families by working longer hours and taking extra jobs to protect household incomes. The pandemic shows that the increase in care work due to closures of schools and childcare facilities lead to a reduction in working hours in families with children. Women in particular reduce their hours because they work more often in part-time or mini jobs, resulting in less loss of salary for the entire family. The proportion of families in which the woman takes over (almost) all childcare has roughly doubled from 8% to 18% (Jessen, J., Spieß, C. K., & Wrohlich, K., 2021, p. 131).

In North Macedonia, the parents of children below the age of 10 were entitled to stay at home to care for them (one of the working parents) and allowed for extended paid leave for pregnancy, childbirth and parenting. This put considerable pressure on working mothers who had to balance working from home with the additional part-time role of educator for their younger children. However, these measures did not affect the women involved in informal economy, women farmers, single mothers (widows, single-parent families), victims of violence and domestic violence, and manufacturing workers and workers in essential sectors who are at constant risk of infection and of losing their jobs (production facilities, manufacturing, textile factories, shops, markets, etc.). For both women and men, the assessment demonstrated that the number of hours spent in cleaning and household maintenance increased by 37%, shopping and procurement of groceries by 36% and cooking and serving meals by 29%. The pandemic has significantly increased the hours that women spend performing unpaid domestic work and caring for children. Unlike men, during pandemic, almost twice as many women spent significantly more time doing household chores, with the exception of buying and purchasing groceries, of caring for children and other unpaid domestic work. Additionally, if the pandemic persists over the longer term, use of this measure exclusively by women may further strengthen traditional gender roles, where women are primarily responsible for childcare and domestic unpaid work, and men are primarily responsible for paid work. This would in turn limit career opportunities for women (Bashevska, 2020).

Childcare facilities for **single parents** are particularly important. Among single parents, 25% were affected by financial difficulties due to the pandemic (Statistisches Bundesamt Destatis, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung WZB, & Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung BfB , 2021, p. 499). 90% of employed single parents with children under the age of 13 in Germany are female (2018) and were unable to pursue their gainful employment due to the closure of childcare facilities during the pandemic (Statistisches Bundesamt Destatis, 2020). In North Macedonia, 7% of all families are one-parent families of a mother with children (compared to 2% of families with single fathers with

children). The rate of divorces per 1000 marriages remains relatively steady (~ 1%). In approximately 37% of all cases the mothers received custody over the children, compared to 9.7% of the fathers (State Statistical Office, 2021). Childcare facilities are free of charge for children of single parents who earn monthly income up to the minimal wage. In Slovenia, 7% of all women are divorced, 11% are widows, while 10% of all women are single mothers with children (Statistical office of Republica Slovenia, 2021). In Serbia, 77.3% of single families are mothers with children. 78.5% of women over the age of 15 are widows, and 59.7% are divorced. (Census of population, households and apartments (Анкета о радној снази, Методологија 2021)).

In Germany, 37% of women have experienced **physical and/or sexual assault** at least once in their adult lives. Around one in seven women has had to suffer sexual violence since the age of 16. Almost 60% of women report various forms of gender-based harassment in public and private spaces and in work contexts (BMFSFJ 2004; Nachdruck Mai 2008, p. 7). Violent offenses in partnerships are mainly directed against women, accounting for 80.5% of the total. The number of female victims increased again in 2020 compared to the previous year (Bundeskriminalamt, 2021, p. 30). In North Macedonia, the recent studies indicate that, the threshold of tolerance to violence is increasing as the education is lower. Statistically significant differences exist by ethnicity, being higher for North Macedonian women (16%) and lower for Albanian women (5.9%). Of those who said they were victims of domestic violence (5.9%), only 23.8% reported it, with many deterred due to not wanting to appear weak or due to fear (Marija Topuzovska Latkovikj, 2021). In addition to COVID-19 crisis, the MI reported that, with the start of the pandemic and the introduction of the curfew, from 12 April to 12 May 2020 there was an increase in domestic violence by 44.6% compared to the same period in 2019 (Bashevka, 2020).

2. Types of measures intended for women with fewer opportunities

Given the complexity and the heterogenous character of the target group of women with fewer opportunities, very diverse measures are available in the countries involved in this project. In Germany, there is a multitude of contact possibilities and counselling centres for the heterogeneous target group of women with fewer opportunities which are mainly supported by the state and implemented nationally. In Slovenia, North Macedonia and Serbia, there are some options available that are state funded and nationally organized, in most cases directed to the general target group, thus involving women (with fewer opportunities). In these countries, there is a vast majority of measures provided within different (mainly donor-funded) projects, which, in certain cases, puts significant challenge on their sustainability. As well, even these civil sector projects are evaluated as useful, in many cases they require engagement that women (with fewer opportunities) sometimes cannot fulfil, e.g. independence, active participation in education, demands for association, taking personal responsibility.

Especially in the case of Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia, measures directed exclusively to women (with fewer opportunities) seem rather limited and mainly concentrated in the areas of support of victims of domestic violence and economic empowerment of women, often sporadically imple-

mented and only in certain cities and/or regions. In most cases, the women are considered, among others, as a preferred target group, based on their age and status (i.e. young unemployed mothers), employment and or level of education (i.e. NEETs) or ethnicity (i.e. Roma women) etc. However, given their importance to the target groups, they are summarized within this report.

In **Germany**, the establishment of a Federal Foundation for Gender Equality (Bundesstiftung Gleichstellung)² is underway. It is a public foundation based in Berlin. The aim of the foundation is to strengthen and promote gender equality in Germany, by providing knowledge, supporting and networking committed individuals, and generating new ideas for greater equality. The foundation will be an open house for equality, a meeting place for all those who are committed to more equality in Germany (BMFSFJ, 2022).

There are many regional and local counselling centres and emergency calls for women with fewer opportunities, which mainly address the issue of violence against women. There is a national association of women's counselling centres and women's emergency centres, Frauen gegen Gewalt e.V. (Women against Violence), as well as regional institutions such as women's shelters and women's offices that offer local help and protection in order to escape the situation of violence. Afterwards, the further planning of life paths and how these are to be pursued are discussed. The existing counselling centres for women, as well as women's emergency centres and hotlines will be compiled separately and made available. In addition, there are regional and local counselling centres on the topic of returning to work at the employment agencies and job centres. The pension insurance companies also offer counselling for women; the respective regional office is the appropriate contact point. Confessional counselling centres (CARITAS, DIAKONIE, Pro Familia, AWO) offer counselling for couples, families and women, focusing on topics such as separation, divorce and pregnancy. Vocational orientation is not the focus, but these services are important as support to strengthen the target group and prepare them for re-entry into working life.

The German Federal Government promotes programmes and support services with different thematic focuses. Some of these are presented in more detail below. The first point of contact is the website of the BMFSFJ³. There is a family portal where you can find information on specific topics. It contains contact addresses for counselling services and an overview of financial support options. It is recommended to include this portal, along with further links, in the HOPE-Toolkit⁴.

Federal initiative 'Cliché-free - Initiative for career and study choices free of gender clichés' (Klischeefrei - Initiative zur Berufs- und Studienwahl frei von Geschlechterklischees)

'Klischeefrei - Initiative zur Berufs- und Studienwahl frei von Geschlechterklischees' is funded by the BMFSFJ and BMBF with the objective of dissolving gender stereotypes and the associated subdivision and valuation of so-called women's and men's professions. The relevance for gender equality policy

2 - The law establishing the Federal Foundation for Gender Equality came into force on May 28, 2021

3 - For further information see: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/equality>; <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/frauen-und-arbeitswelt>

4 - For further information see: <https://familienportal.de>; www.infotool-familie.de

is shown by the fact that the career choice behaviour of young people is still strongly influenced by gender stereotypes despite role models that are now outdated. They should be given the opportunity to find a profession that suits their strengths, interests and life plans – free of gender stereotypes. The objective of the initiative Klischeefrei is to support and network all those involved in career orientation processes, from early childhood education to schools, universities, career counselling, business and industry, and parents, in order to enable young people to choose careers and studies free of stereotypes. The initiative is currently supported by around 250 partner organizations, including federal ministries, federal states, trade unions and employers' associations, schools, universities, institutions and companies. The partner organizations are committed to providing career and study guidance that is free of stereotypes. Furthermore, the future days Girls' Day and Boys' Day, which are held annually, support the initiative. [Klischeefrei](#) bundles and develops good practice examples, promotes exchange and networking are promoted, for example at annual conferences⁵.

Federal initiative 'Gender Equality in the Labour Market. Creating Perspectives' (Gleichstellung am Arbeitsmarkt. Perspektiven schaffen, GAPS)

The programme GAPS, launched in 2022, has the objective of ensuring that women and men participate equally in working life and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Equal Rights. It combines modern gender equality policy with a labour market policy approach. In this way, the Federal Ministry for Equal Rights wants to increase equal opportunities, as well as promote the equal participation of women and men in the labour market and an equal division of work and family care work, support women in the complex challenge of re-entering the labour market or reorienting themselves professionally, and thus create the conditions for an independent livelihood and old-age security. Target group are people who want to reorient themselves professionally, who want information on the topic of reconciling and sharing gainful employment and care work, or who want to return to work after a career break. Companies, associations, counselling centres, trade unions and many more can also benefit from the programme.

The objective is to enable women and men to live independently from their earned income and to develop professionally. The portal 'Creating Perspectives' ('[Perspektiven schaffen](#)') contains further information. Among other things, it shows how women and men can organise gainful employment and care work in such a way that they can realise their ideas of life and work equally. Other components of the GAPS action programme are currently the re-entry calculator and the group on the social network platform [XING: GAPS – Equality on the Labour Market](#). Creating Perspectives of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

The predecessor of GAPS was the action programme 'Perspectives for Re-entry' (Perspektive Wiedereinstieg), which was implemented from 2008 to 2021 with the [Federal Employment Agency](#) and other cooperation partners. With funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), the associated federal ESF programme 'Perspectives for Re-entry' supported providers and provider associations throughout Germany from 2009 to 2021 in making it easier for women and men to return to work after a family-related career interruption.

5 - For further information see: https://www.klischee-frei.de/de/klischeefrei_53000.php

Federal initiative 'Fem.OS – Outreach orientation and counselling system in social media for migrant women' (Fem.OS – Aufsuchendes Orientierungs-und Beratungs-System in den sozialen Medien für Migrantinnen)

'Fem.OS – Outreach orientation and counselling system in social media for migrant women' is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency. Women with migration experience have a below-average labour market integration, which is characterized by low employment rates, often underqualified jobs, lower pay and partly precarious working conditions. Financial support and counselling services do not reach many migrant women. Closely related to labour market integration are issues such as protection during pregnancy, childcare, family health and protection against violence. These are often demanded by migrant women and have a direct inhibiting effect on professional integration.

This target group obtains information on typical family and women's topics as well as on labour market-related topics mainly in the mother-tongue via social media (including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, web forums), because there are less language barriers and their use is compatible with family obligations. By doing so, women are reached, where they are looking for information and counselling. Thus, it partially compensates for the deficit in access to information and the gender distribution in face-to-face counselling centres, which are more often visited by men. If they wish, they are given an opportunity for individual counselling, e.g. by the counsellors for equal opportunities on the labour market of the Federal Employment Agency (BCA).

Already in social media groups and forums where questions are asked about entering or returning to working life, the academic staff of Fem.OS conduct an orientation talk with the women. Initial wishes are formulated and objectives defined, further information is provided and reference is made to the specialised counselling services of the employment agencies and job centres.

If the person seeking advice shows interest and agrees, their request is anonymously forwarded to the competent employment agency in her place of residence and suggested appointments are made. There, the women are supported in an initial interview, primarily by the Equal Employment Opportunity Officers (BCA). In this conversation, initial individual framework conditions are clarified and options for further steps are explored. This form of referral from the social media to the BCA of the employment agencies makes access to the employment agency low-threshold. If the women's German language skills are not sufficient, the employment agencies or job centres can call in an interpreter service.

The counselling aims at the women's needs for successful labour market integration. The topics are diverse and the counselling takes into account the specific challenges for women with migration experienced to find a connection in the labour market. Qualified labour market counselling is made possible through a transition to the specialized counselling of the employment agencies and job centres⁶.

6 - For further information see: <https://femos.minor-kontor.de/en>

Federal initiative CHANCE+

The initiative CHANCE+⁷ is funded by the [Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs \(BMAS\)](#), ESF and the EU. The objective is to get refugees into work and it is not limited to women. One expert reported on their experiences as a counsellor, as they accompanied a woman on her way with the help of this initiative.

CHANCE+ is a project network with six partners in four cities/regions. In Cologne, these include Caritas, the Catholic Association for Girls' and Women's Social Work (Katholischer Verband für Mädchen- und Frauensozialarbeit e.V.) and the Cologne Job Centre. In Bonn, the Cologne Refugee Council (Kölner Flüchtlingsrat e.V.) takes care of the support and placement of the participants, in Düsseldorf and the district of Mettmann the respective Caritas associations. CHANCE+ is coordinated by the Cologne Job Centre. People with refugee experience are supported in making use of their competences and skills and to develop and implement (new) career perspectives. The website regularly reports on role models who have gone through the programme and can now inspire and motivate others. In addition, courses on the topic of digitalization and IT courses are offered, among other things. There are various coaching measures, as well as several qualification and support offer in different areas in Cologne, Düsseldorf and the district of Mettmann.

Overview of measures about career re-entry for women on 'German Education Server. Your Guide to Education' (Deutscher Bildungsserver. Ihr Wegweiser zur Bildung)

On the website [Deutscher Bildungsserver. Ihr Wegweiser zur Bildung](#) (German Education Server. Your Guide to Education) provides an overview of various initiatives and programmes that support women in re-entering the labour market.

- » [BBS – Berufsbildungsstätte Westmünsterland: Frauen fördern Frauen](#) (BBS – Berufsbildungsstätte Westmünsterland: Women support women) offers a comprehensive range of counselling and courses for women returning to work, women re-entering the labour market after a family break, for self-employed and working women. An important feature is that childcare is offered. For decades, the Berufsbildungsstätte Westmünsterland GmbH has been offering vocational orientation and qualification programmes that are particularly suitable for women in terms of their objectives and contents as well as their organizational structure. The focus here is on concrete practical support and counselling for women returning to work and women in situations of career change, as well as the promotion of women in so called male-typical occupations.
- » [Bga – Bundesweite Gründerinnenagentur](#) (bga – Federal Agency for Women Entrepreneurs) is a service for all those who want to become entrepreneurs, are already self-employed, advise women who want to start their own business or are otherwise committed to improving the start-up opportunities for women who are self-employed. The internet offer includes information on setting up a business, working aids, information on events and an online search function for coaching and counselling opportunities for women entrepreneurs throughout Germany. The service

7 - For further information see: <https://www.netzwerk-chance.de/>

is constantly being expanded and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection.

- » [Verband Berufstätiger Mütter](#) (Association of Working Mothers) offers information and professional articles on the association's info portal, e.g. on childcare for children aged 0–3 years, 3–6 years and of school age, as well as information on reconciling family and work, and provides an exchange platform for working mothers.
- » [Frauen coachen Frauen – Coaching für Berufs- und Karriereplanung](#) (Women coach women – coaching for career planning (FdF Institut – Berufs- und Karriereplanung) offers individual online counselling via a moodle platform and face-to-face workshops on the topic of career re-entry, career reorientation and career change for women. In addition, there is the possibility to join a virtual network of women who are looking for a new way into professional life.
- » [Wiedereinstieg – Frauen steigen wieder ein! Forum W – Portal zum beruflichen Wiedereinstieg in NRW](#) (Re-entry – Women get back into the workforce! Forum W – Portal on re-entry into the labour market in NRW). The portal, which is operated by the Ministry of Regional Identity, Communities and Local Government, Building and Gender Equality of the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia, bundles information and links on the topic of professional re-entry. The guide for a quick return to work helps to find out how to successfully return to work after a longer period of family leave. In the local offers, users can find selected contact and counselling centres for re-entry in their municipality or region. In addition, there is the possibility to research answers to already asked questions on the topic of professional re-entry in a dialogue pool, as well as to pose one's own questions to experts online or by telephone and to receive an answer at short notice.

In the **Republic of North Macedonia**, [Employment Service Agency](#) provides access of all registered unemployed persons and employers to different employment programmes, measures and services. The right to participate is being determined based on the requirements and criteria defined for each individual employment programme, measure or service, and as a general rule, these programmes, measures and services strive for equal representation of both men and women, in accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. ESA, by posting public announcements of programmes and measures on their website and social networks, encourages unemployed people to register as unemployed and then participate in any of the measures offered. In general, the activities include **Self-employment (entrepreneurship) support** – unemployed can start their own business (special focus is put on unemployed women from vulnerable groups of marginalized persons), and **On-the-job training for a known employer** – equips the unemployed persons with the skills and competences required for performing their work tasks in line with employer's needs. Other measures involved are **vocational trainings in line with employer's requirements, (online) Occupations-in-demand training and driving lessons for C and D categories**. For all of these measures, trainees receive a monthly allowance in the amount of 9,000 denars – around 150 Euros for the duration of the training of up to three months, paid by ESA. In 2021, in total 882 persons are to be involved in different training (ESA, 2021).

Starting from 2019, ESA implements a 36-months EU funded project “**Labour Market Activation of vulnerable groups**”, aiming at reducing the long-term unemployment and dependence on guaran-

teed minimum assistance, by effectively involving vulnerable groups, especially users of guaranteed minimum assistance, by including them in specialized skills development programmes and services. This project has two components: (1) SIM Counselling and Motivation Programme and (2) Support Employment by Trainings. Within the second component, the main objective of which is to improve the skills and knowledge of recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance through training, traineeships and subsidised employment in order to facilitate the integration of these persons into the labour market, three measures are envisaged: 1. Training for vocational occupations (required occupations in the labour market), 2. In-work trainings (training at a known employer) and 3. Cost-sharing employment (wage subsidy), with an expected reach of 400 persons (ABPCM, 2020).

Related to **primary education**, even there has been an ongoing process of revising and piloting the programmes for the (formal) primary education of adults, the supply of verified institutions providing this kind of training options is rather limited. Competition of the primary education could be achieved into the specialized school [Anton Simjonovic Makarenko](#) in Skopje, and unofficially, in several Open Universities for Lifelong Learning in the country. It is available for persons over 18 years old, who bear all the costs by themselves.

In cooperation with [MOE](#), [AEC](#) implements a project for shaping of **secondary education of adults** which completed only primary education, in order to enhance their easier access to labour market. The curriculum is developed in accordance to the programmes in the formal secondary education. So far, the competition of secondary education was possible in the following occupations: economical-legal, machine, electrotechnical, traffic, graphic, hospitality, agricultural-veterinary, chemical-technological and personal services. In the period of 2010–2019, 2950 persons were involved in the project, and in 2020, the activities were interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis (Mojcovska, 2020).

The Workers' Universities/Open Civic Universities for Lifelong Learning also provide courses for **basic and vocational skills** to all interested in obtaining skills, knowledge and certificate, but they do not have specific mechanisms to identify and support the women by providing a tailor-made course for them. However, they do offer completion of primary and secondary education to drop-out adults (over 16 years) by taking few exams. In addition, the Workers' Universities offer by the state verified and nonverified vocational courses⁸. In some cases, the courses are designed and offered by the Workers' Universities themselves and in other cases they apply for providers of the courses announced by the ESA.

Other AE verified providers also provide verified programmes for **non-formal education** of adults which leads to knowledge, skills and competences, and lead to partial and/or full professional qualification. For these two types of programmes, officially recognized state certificate is issued by ESA, recognized at the labour market. The AEC, holds a registry of all verified institutions and programmes and it is available on their website, which contains the database of all providers of non-formal education (regardless verified or not). It is easily accessible and provides different filters for more specific search. The only pre-condition for involvement into these verified programmes for non-formal education is for the candidate to possess valid ID and to have completed primary education.

8 - The process of verification of non-formal adult education programmes in North Macedonia is not compulsory.

Project: “Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education”

In the following three years, an EU funded project “Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education” (EuropeAid/140265/IH/SER/MK) will be implemented by international consortia in close cooperation with relevant public institutions. The overall objective of the project is to improve competence matches of youth and adults in line with labour market needs by increasing access to quality VET and AE. Among others, the project aims to increase enrolment in VET/AE programmes through introduction of Regional VET Centers, develop and implement programmes for post-secondary education, align the national systems of VET and AE with the EQAVET and to develop, upgrade and implement procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning as an important path towards quality education for adults.

[Education for Employment E4E@mk](#) project is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and is implemented by HELVETAS North Macedonia, the North Macedonian Civic Education Center and the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia. The main objective of the project is to contribute towards a more gainful employment of youth (ages 15–29 years), including vulnerable groups, in a socially inclusive and sustainable way. It’s a 10-years programme which started in 2018 and it intends to raise the level of employability through initiating systemic and sustainable changes into the formal and non-formal system of vocational education and training. It supports suppliers to offer non-formal VET required in the labour market and promotes them as the main element into lifelong learning and employment.

[Training center CES](#) in cooperation with the [Center for Vocational Education and Training](#) conducted a series of vocational trainings for unemployed women from underdeveloped rural areas of different ethnicity (Turks, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians) from four regions: Skopje, Stip, Tetovo and Kumanovo with highest unemployment rate among women in the country. The trainings were implemented within EU-funded project: **“Entrepreneurship Platform for Economic and Social Inclusion of women from minority groups”** with an overall objective in improvement of the employability of women at the labour market in North Macedonia, coming from vulnerable groups. The activities encompassed opening regional training centres aimed at long-term education, pre-qualification and development of personal skills, improvement and strengthening the relations between the offer and the demand of workforce, support and enhancement of the personal capacities and possibilities for employment and self-employment by increasing the level and acquiring appropriate practical skills. System for continuous training of specific target group was developed aimed at increase of professional skills according to previous identification of the real needs of employers. Target group were long-term unemployed women from minority ethnic communities in particular members of Roma, Albanian and Turkish communities being at age from 18 to 55 years in municipalities considered. 111 unemployed women aged 18–55 years coming from less developed areas and different ethnic backgrounds got the opportunity to qualify in a profession demanded on the labour market: hairdresser, cosmetician, masseur for cosmetic massage, accounting officer.

The **career guidance** and counselling in the Republic of North Macedonia provides limited opportunities, even though, in recent years, important steps are done in providing the necessary legal base

for its systematic implementation. The career guidance and counselling are strongly supported and prioritized in an all-related key national strategic document. However, this aspect is rarely directed specifically to women, with small marginal exceptions in individual guidance opportunities for women with fewer opportunities developed under certain ESA measures and other separate donor funded projects with limited scope of implementation in terms of funding and duration.

ESA is one of the key players on the area of career guidance and counselling. ESA provides career counselling as part of their measure 4 of the operational plan – professional counselling and career guidance. The activities range from providing unemployed persons with skills for exploring their career opportunities, job searching skills and personal career plan. The career counselling is provided individually or in groups tailored to the needs of the participants by providing information about specific occupations, self-support and self-assessment tools that guide the unemployed in making decisions about development of their career action plans. The preparation of high-quality individual plans is a very important precondition for providing appropriate and relevant services for the unemployed persons, with the goal of finding suitable employment within a certain period of time. It is organized into one central and 30 local centers for employment. The main target groups are mostly unemployed people, but also pupils, students and those who want to change their career paths, including women.

Within the project “**Labour Market Activation of vulnerable groups**” and its first component, SIM Counselling and Motivation Programme, ESA intends to stimulate and assist the process of involving receivers of guaranteed minimum assistance in training and other active employment measures and thereby facilitate the inclusion of these individuals in the labour market. It offers two types of support: counselling (to assist receivers of guaranteed minimum assistance in the process of their activation and integration into the labour market) and mentoring (to identify the personal and professional barriers and difficulties that they face during the training or employment process and identifying factors and reasons that make it difficult to integrate into the training or employment environment).

In 2018, ESA started with implementation of “**Youth Guarantee**” as a pilot activity in three employment centers (Skopje, Strumica and Gostivar), and in 2019 it was implemented throughout the country, with special focus in three regions (Polog, Northeast and Southwest). The YG allows young NEET people up to the age of 29 to receive a suitable job offer, to continue their education or to be involved in any of the active employment programmes and measures, in a period of four months after their registration as unemployed persons in ESA. After being registered in the register of unemployed persons, they are immediately referred to their first interview with employees of the ESA, who profile their employability, using a control questionnaire and prepare Individual employment plans. These plans define the activities that enable the young unemployed person, in a period of four months, to be re-involved in the educational process (not in regular education) or to be involved in any of the active employment measures or services, which will enable to increase their employment opportunities or to be offered suitable employment that suits their education and competences. Activities include group and individual counselling, providing job search assistance services, motivational trainings, involvement in any of the measures for labour market integration, i.e. employment, education and training measures (ESA, 2021). In 2020, 25.487 young people in total were involved in the YG, out of which, 12.852 were women. Out of the total, 7424 got employment and 1254 were involved into some of the active employment measures, setting the success rate of YG to 34% (ABPCM, 2021). In 2021, in

total, 19.298 were involved, out of which 14.428 (or 74.8%) are women⁹.

Several **other initiatives** are relevant in this manner: In 2014 and 2015, certain activities in reference to this service were developed within the USAID project "[Youth Employability Skills \(YES\) Network](#)". A manual was developed and training for career counsellors was conducted. In addition, there were trainings held for the employees in assessment tools and use of BIPO ("Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation"), a toolset developed as part of the project.

The MLSP, together with the ILO launched the [Occupational Outlook](#) website to provide offers insight into occupations that have positive job prospects in the medium term, with the potential the list to be widened in the following years. For each profession, the Outlook provides a job description, conditions of work (pay, work schedule, work environment, work risk), education, training and work experience requirements, and job prospects.

[Euroguidance Center](#) has been established in the frames of [National Agency for European Educational programmes and mobility](#). It is part of 34 national resource and information centres for guidance in 34 European countries. Its main target group consists of guidance practitioners in education and employment, among them professionals who provide information and guidance on international learning mobility to end-users seeking studying and training opportunities abroad.

The law on HE (2018) imposes an obligation to each university establish at least one Career Center which is expected to take care of alumni records, to organize career fairs, connect the students with the business and potential employers and assist their transition into their first workplace. So far, several HEIs established their career centres: Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Faculty of Economics within the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, the University Goce Delcev, Stip (public universities) as well as the South-East European University, the American College and the FON University (private universities).

The [National Roma Centrum](#) implements several initiatives related to Roma women. Within the project: "Empowering the Roma women in the Republic of North Macedonia", a detailed [research](#) was prepared related to the availability of the measures for development of competences and gaining qualifications for Roma women with low/no education and qualifications from five statistical regions in the municipalities of Kumanovo, Kochani, Kichevo, Stip, Veles and Prilep. The main findings indicate that Roma women lack relevant info on the opportunities available, and the persons involved in direct work with this target group lack relevant training and tools to motivate and offer the relevant support in the process. In that manner, a [manual](#) was prepared to support the educators and counsellors working at grassroot level in their daily activities. The manual provides systematic overview of the education and training opportunities of Roma women with low qualifications. It was developed in a very practical manner, by using real stories and practical examples to be used by the educators in working with the target groups. It also contains list of available training providers of nationally verified learning opportunities in the respective regions (Mojcovska, 2020). The organization as well implements diverse activities related to the Roma women issues in the field of education, employment and

9 - For further info see: <https://vlada.mk/node/27569>

health, and recently, they initiated a project for counselling and legal support to Roma women victims of domestic violence.

Within the [NGO HERA](#), the **First Family Centre** is the first specialised counselling service in the country for victims/survivors and perpetrators of gender-based and domestic violence, including minor children and other family members who are directly or indirectly affected by violence. The centre provides psycho-social support, counselling and legal support services to families that have developed conflicting relations or have resorted to gender-based and domestic violence. In addition to individual, group and family counselling with psychotherapists, the centre also provides counselling for social rights, referral and accompanying to relevant institutions and organizations for legal assistance. All services in the centre are free and confidential.

Coaching and mentorship are mainly done through donor funded projects and are often not embedded in some of the institutions after the life cycle of the projects. Several projects were implemented to support ESA professionals to develop mentoring skills. Mentorship is involved as part of the reformed curricula, where around 500 company mentors were capacitated to support and guide students during their practical training at their working place. Directed exclusively to women, several initiatives are noted:

The OSCE Mission to Skopje and the MLSP implemented a project activity to promote women's professional development and leadership in the public sector, through a Mentoring Programme for women employed in the state institutions in the country. The Mentoring Programme provided possibilities for personal and professional development of women in the public sector by creating a concept of mutual support and empowerment, exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as by strengthening the solidarity and networking of women. It included twenty pairs of mentors and mentees trained for their specific role of mentors/mentees.

[Stella – Women's Mentorship Network](#) is a non-profit organization with a mission to inspire, empower and connect girls and women by advancing access to education, entrepreneurial opportunities and social change. They initiated a Women's Mentorship Network, an online platform that connects girls and women with experienced mentors who offer personal mentorship in different fields of study and work. They established the first ever women-led and women-focused mentorship programme in North Macedonia, which developed into a network of experienced women mentors in different areas available for one-on-one guidance and advice for mentees through individual mentorship in pursuing further studies and/or jobs that best fit their interests. Their target groups are women in general, women in higher education, women entrepreneurs, but as well, rural women.

Related to formal recognition of diplomas or certificates, although the initial steps were taken in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2014 to introduce VNFIL, its implementation is still being hold back due to lack of legislative base, which is expected to be adopted soon. The reference law on adult education has been revised and adopted to introduce and enable VNFIL. In 2019, it has been additionally amended and is currently in the procedure of adoption within the parliament. So far, in the frames of the [E4E@mk project](#), a validation procedure was piloted for the qualification of a waiter/waitress.

The validation will be done in four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. In the first two initial phases, the trained validation counsellor offers support, relevant information, advice and guidance to the potential candidate and ensures that the knowledge, skills and competences become visible. Then, the evidence of the achievements of the learning outcomes is being collected in the form of a portfolio to be assessed. Apart of the assessors, capacitated vocational professors and school physiologists and pedagogist will take part in the assessment process. The validation process will be conducted by an accredited institution and will consist of modules, which can be evaluated and validated independently. Based on that, an adequate certificate will be issued i.e. one certificate per module or one certificate for a competence if all modules are successfully validated. The validated competence will be equivalent to level 3 to 5a of the NQF.

The validation counsellor is trained and licenced and is part of the official registry of Validation Counsellors in AEC. In the next two phases (assessment and certification), the validation assessors evaluate the portfolio and confirm (or not) that the candidate has achieved certain standard for qualification in compliance with the NQF. Validation assessors are trained and licenced and are part of the official registry of Validation Assessors in AEC. With the support from Erasmus+ centralized actions, in the initial phase of establishing VNFIL, qualification standard and training programme for validation counsellors was drafted. With the support of Lifelong Learning Center, in the frames of the project financed by DVV International, a training programme and a standard for assessors were developed and a training for validation assessors was held. In the following period, the validation will be piloted in five qualifications.

There are several, however limited **available resources** for women with fewer opportunities. Some of them are:

- » List of verified training programmes and credited training centres available on the [AEC](#) website.
- » [Gender equality platform](#) unites NGOs dealing in gender equality and intents to integrate gender aspects in all society flows.
- » [National network against violence over women and domestic violence](#) offers free of charge legal advice, psychosocial support, social services and support to victims in re-integration.
- » [Discrimination protection network](#) advocates cases of discrimination in front of domestic and international courts.
- » [National platform for women entrepreneurship](#) strengthens the capacity of civil society organizations to create public policy proposals and advocacy in the field of women entrepreneurship, by merging existing networks into a single platform that will be of interest to women entrepreneurs at all levels.
- » [Women's Mentorship Network](#) connects girls and women with experienced mentors who offer personal mentorship in different fields of study and work.

In **Slovenia**, active employment policy (AEP) measures mean intervention aimed at immediate elimination of issues in the field of employment and the labour market, which must, however, achieve synergies with systemic solutions and measures of other sectoral policies. Most of the active labour

market policies (ALPM) measures are implemented by the Employment Service, and some other institutions, i.e. Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Public Development Fund staff and scholarships, Social Chamber of Slovenia etc.

The Employment Service is based on the Employment and Unemployment Insurance Act, and since 2011 based on the Labour Market Regulation Act (LMRA) implemented measures aimed at:

- » Training and education,
- » Promoting employment,
- » Creating jobs,
- » Promoting self-employment.

The [Employment Service of Slovenia](#) offers a wide range of education and training programmes for officially registered unemployed persons. These programmes enable unemployed persons to complete primary education and be trained to perform a chosen job or profession. They are aimed at different target groups (young people, long-term unemployed, women etc.). Some of them are, for example:

- » **Formal education** – Provides completion of formal primary and secondary education of adults. The individual facilitates the path to employment or the desired profession.
- » **Work test** – A person can take the work test on the knowledge and skills individual in a specific job regardless of the duration of unemployment.
- » **On-the-job training** – Young adults up to the age of 29 who are registered as unemployed can take part in on-the-job training at an employer.
- » **Learning workshops** – The programme is intended for people who are looking for their first job and have been unemployed for at least half a year, have been unemployed for at least two years or have completed at most primary school. It is an opportunity to gain practical knowledge, skills and experience in training workshops with employers in the field of social entrepreneurship.
- » **Non-formal education and training for young people** – The [programme](#) aims to improve the employment opportunities of the unemployed by participating in non-formal education and training programmes. By joining the programme, they gain new knowledge and skills that are in demand by employers. The programme is especially intended for those who have work experience or a profession for which there is no demand among employers.
- » **Local non-formal education programmes** – A person is undergoing education or training for the professional jobs and tasks required by employers. It is similar to the previous programme, but for a different target group. By joining, all registered unemployed persons, regardless of their age and duration of unemployment, or whose employment is at risk, can increase their employment opportunities with new knowledge and skills that they can use in the workplace.
- » **Verification and certification of NVQ (National Vocational Qualification)** – An individual with certain knowledge and experience performs the verification and certification of NVQ and the candidate, if successful, receives a corresponding publicly valid certificate.

- » **PUM-O:** Project-based learning for young adults – Dedicated to young unemployed adults aged 15–26 years, the aim of the project is to develop their potential for successful reintegration into education, professional identity development and thus successful labour market integration.

In addition to the programmes listed above, there are several other programmes/projects available, namely:

- » **Social activation** for women with migrant background, especially from Albania and Kosovo, is financed by Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. The programme is intended to get to know their skills, work outside the home, get to know Slovenian institutions and to raise work competences to facilitate integration into the labour market.
- » The project called **Kolegice** (Colleagues) enables young women entering the labour market to network and acquire the competences of the future. The project was implemented by the Nefiks Institute, whose mission is to provide young people and youth organizations with appropriate professional support in recording non-formal education and the effects of youth work with a view to its recognition in the wider society. Over the years, Kolegice have worked as clubs – young women have met in weekly meetings where participants have developed their career plans, and together with other participants have prepared events that have contributed to their career development (e.g. educational workshops on CV composition), visits to companies, hosting lecturers in the field of self-employment, marketing...). In the continuation of the project, the young women connect with a mentor, who is successful in the professional field they are interested in.
- » Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and Ekvilib Institute since 2007 give **“Family-friendly company”** certificate to companies which fulfil conditions. Family-friendly companies are committed to taking a set of measures that will make it easier for employees reconciling personal and professional life. Measures, which they adopt must be formalized by writing into corporate internal acts.

In **Serbia**, the [National Employment Service](#) implements active employment policy measures, which encompass mediation in the employment of jobseekers, active job search measures and professional orientation and career planning counselling throughout the calendar year. These measures are foreseen in the Employment Strategy and the Action Plan, as national legal documents. Based on these documents, every local self-government, i.e. city or municipality in Serbia should adopt a Local Employment Action Plan. However, not all local governments adopt the Local Action Plan and citizens living in these municipalities cannot exercise their right to be involved in active employment measures.

Active Employment Policy Measures are:

- » **Employment mediation and employment support**
- » **Career guidance and counselling**
- » **Measures of active job search**
- » **Additional education and training:** Professional internship, internship for young people with university education, internship for the unemployed with secondary education, acquisition of knowledge, training for the labour market, training at the

request of the employer, functional basic adult education.

- » **Subsidized employment and self-employment:** Subsidies for employment of unemployed persons from the category of hard-to-employ persons, support for self-employment (one-time amount of RSD 250.000, approx. EUR 2.000), salary subsidies for persons with disabilities.
- » **Public works** includes beneficiaries of social financial assistance, Roma, persons without completed primary school, persons with disabilities. Public works are those organized for the purpose of employment, preservation and improvement of the working abilities of the unemployed, as well as for the realization of a certain social interest.

The [Ministry of Economy](#) annually announces public calls for grants within the Programme for Encouraging Entrepreneurship Development through Financial Support for Business Beginners. These projects include procurement of equipment for female business beginners and a set of services for newly established micro and small enterprises and entrepreneurs and guarantee schemes for obtaining funds from EU and Western Balkan Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility sources for competitiveness.

Several other initiatives are relevant in terms of **economic empowerment**. Implemented through various donor projects, the programmes mentioned below support women from the following categories: single mothers, women of 45+, women with disabilities, Roma women, victims of domestic violence, rural women. The coverage of women who can receive support through these programmes differs from the categories of women who can receive support from the state.

- » The project "[Key Steps to Gender Equality](#)"¹⁰ aims to align the legal and strategic framework with the EU acquis in the field of gender equality, by strengthening institutional capacity and mechanisms at national and at the local level, support for the introduction of a gender perspective in public policy documents and support to civil society organizations. The most important segment of this programme is the economic empowerment of women through education, start-up programmes for the purchase of equipment and materials to start their own business.
- » [Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation](#), with the support of the IKEA Serbia and Mastercard are implementing the project "[I am brave](#)" where companies founded by women and/or run by women are supported, as well as legal entities that employ at least 50% of women. The main activity of the supported legal entities is the production of e.g. toys, textile products, old crafts, food, drinks etc.
- » The Programme "[Inclusion of Roma and Other Marginalized Groups in Serbia](#)" implemented by the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, with the expert support of the GFA (Gesellschaft für Agrarprojekte in Übersee) [consulting group GmbH](#).

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10 - The project will be implemented from 03.2021 to 02.2024 by UN Women in cooperation with Coordination Body for Gender Equality, Ministry of European Integration, women's civil society organizations. This project is funded by the EU Delegation to the Republic of Serbia.

3. Competence assessment or validation for women with fewer opportunities

From the national reports of the countries involved, it is quite clear that there are no unified structured competence assessment processes directed to women with fewer opportunities, except maybe in Germany, where the support programmes focus mainly on the target group of women with a migration history or well-qualified women in management and the STEM subjects. In all countries, there are different measures for competence assessment of women with fewer opportunities, but they vary and are not uniformly designed, and in most cases, they are directed to general target groups (i.e. adults, young people, employees in certain sector, unemployed persons etc.). This offers big potential to the newly developed ProfilPASS to be used. The following initiatives for competence assessment and validation have been identified in the HOPE national reports.

In **Germany**, some of the women's offices also offer coaching measures with competence assessment. Furthermore, they provide support by offering job application training and integrated internships, as well as mentoring measures to prepare for (re-)entry or reorientation, business start-ups and more. The counselling services which are provided by female employees with a migration history can serve as role models and the language services are low-threshold. The possibility of childcare, as well as low-threshold contact and networking offers are well accepted and should be further expanded.

'IQ Network - Integration through Qualification' (IQ Netzwerk - Integration durch Qualifizierung)

For more than eight years so-called bridge measures have existed in Baden-Württemberg, which are often located at the Adult Education Center (VHS) and are funded by the IQ network. They are aimed at men and women with migration background, whereby the proportion of women is certainly 70%, who have a qualification training/study in their home country that is not recognized in Germany and preferably have a B2 level in German. The basic concept was adopted in Rhineland Pfalz by the Ministry for Women and Integration and has been implemented as a women and integration project by the Center for Continuing Education and Knowledge Transfer (ZWW) for three years. It provides assistance in the recognition of degrees, not exclusively for women, but generally suitable for people with migration history. [Some good practices for counsellors](#) can be helpful for counselling women with migration history. For the counsellors who provide information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications, the following [IQ Good Practice](#) are available from the four IQ fields of action intercultural competence development and anti-discrimination, job-related German, counselling and qualification as well as migrant economy. The examples are generally aimed at employment services, counselling centers, education service providers and companies and promote a systematic transfer. The IQ Good Practice approach is particularly concerned with ensuring that tried and tested instruments, concepts, measures and formats are used, disseminated and sustainably anchored both within and outside the funding programme. Currently, a total of 55 info sheets of IQ Good Practice examples are available.

Federal initiative ‘Strong at Work – Mothers with a Migrant Background Join the Workforce’ (Stark im Beruf – Mütter mit Migrationshintergrund steigen ein)

The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs and [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) programme Strong at Work – Mothers with a Migrant Background Join the Workforce (Stark im Beruf – Mütter mit Migrationshintergrund ein) targets mothers who have lived in Germany for a long time as well as newly immigrated or refugee mothers and pursues the objective of making it easier for this target group to enter the labour market. There are 90 contact points nationwide. Through individual support and courses, they encourage mothers to become gainfully employed and introduce them to the labour market. The participants receive counselling and information on all questions relevant to the labour market, on the compatibility of family and work, and support in (re)entering the labour market – from vocational orientation to the start of an internship or training to the first phase of employment (BMFSFJ 2021a). It is relevant to equality policy, as mothers with a migration background are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. Only 52% of all mothers with a migrant background are in employment (compared to 85% of the fathers). The objective is to promote employment prospects for these mothers and to harness the potential for employment and realization of the specific employment aspirations of 407.000 of the 1.185 million immigrant mothers who are not in employment (BMFSFJ, 2020b, p. 44).

The impact analysis draws on experience from six years of programme operation with 115 providers and around 16.000 participants. For this impact analysis, participant monitoring and formative evaluation were supplemented by online and telephone surveys of “Stark im Beruf” providers and job centers. The results show that the programme is characterized by a mix of coaching and courses with continuous support in all phases of employment:

- » Everyday language support, especially for mothers with little language skills,
- » Social integration through contacts between the participants and the inclusion of network partners,
- » Individual coaching and counselling for mothers on childcare and reconciliation, competences and career prospects.

The modular structure of each “Stark im Beruf” project also contributes to its success. They do not follow a prefabricated course plan, but agree with the participant on flexible and individually tailored support, which includes both individual counselling and group offerings. In the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, the flexible programme orientation was evident, e.g. in the rapid conversion to digital formats. A special plus is the close cooperation of the contact points with the local job centers and employment agencies. The services offered by “Stark im Beruf” add value to the regular counselling provided by the job center, which the latter is often unable to provide (BMFSFJ 2021b, p. 3). Up to 90 contact points were funded nationwide in each of two funding periods between 2015 and 2022. The programme has been very successful, as about 16.000 mothers have been reached by the programme and more than 13.000 mothers have gone through the programme completely, so that almost one third of them have moved into (socially insured) employment, as of September 2021 (BMFSFJ 2021b, p. 9).

Important core components of all offers in the programme, which do not follow a fixed module sequence and which can be profitably used for ProfilPASS counselling, are:

- » Vocational and personal activation and stabilization, e.g. with vocational counselling and orientation of the participants, support in determining competences, individual support planning and/or coaching;
- » Support of the family environment and counselling of family members in the context of the participant's occupational (re-)entry (e.g. by involving partners/fathers or family-related offers);
- » Counselling on the reconciliation of family and in employment;
- » Involvement of and networking with stakeholders who – in addition to cooperation with the job centers and employment agencies – support the target group in family-oriented professional integration, e.g. migrant organizations, youth welfare offices, companies;
- » Placement of or in job-related qualification, internships or employment (BMFSFJ 2021b, p. 10).

The support, which is tailored to the participants, differs from purely modular offers because the contact points do not regard the promotion of the participants' focus on gainful employment merely as a technical qualification, but start with the participants' own self-image. By means of an in-depth competence assessment, their strengths and support needs are identified together with the supported mothers. Similar to ProfilPASS counselling, not only particularly formal competences are identified, but also informal ones such as organisational skills. This procedure strengthens the self-confidence of the supported mothers and thus lays the foundation for their path into employment. Depending on the results of the competence assessment, the focus of the support is determined: Both social and professional integration are strengthened (BMFSFJ 2021b, p. 47).

In **North Macedonia**, some processes for competence assessment are ongoing, they serve for concrete measures to be implemented (active employment measures, training needs etc.). There is no specific unified, structured tool directed to competence assessment of women with fewer opportunities. The competence assessment activities directed to women with fewer opportunities are mainly organized within (donor-funded) projects and thus, limited in scope, outreach, and are done in correlation to the concrete needs of the project. In certain cases, a counsellor to conduct the assessment of competences was considered as a good practice example, but however, with no clear info on the procedures implemented and tools used. There is no direct connection between these certain measures, initiatives or programmes, and they seem to be hardly transferable to other realities. Employment Service Agency provides competence assessment for registered unemployed persons interested to participate in the active employment measures leading to individual employment plan which provides guidelines to further education and/or employment. The counsellors in the employment centres perform certain competence assessment procedure based on structured questionnaire leading to individual employment plan which provides guidelines to further education and/or employment. As well, similar procedure is implemented within the Youth Guarantee skim. These activities are considered relevant and appropriate but lack psycho-social assessment and counselling as very important link which is missing in the whole process. Another impression is that institutions have neither transpar-

ency nor staff capacity to implement it in a timely manner to avoid certain adverse consequences. Only NGOs offer training through which an initial assessment of competences is made and then supplemented or acquired new knowledge. In some cases, individual counsellors are being hired, but little info is available on the methodology and tools used in this process. The state institutions are valuable stakeholders, but the NGOs are seen as social partners which are more flexible into the approach to target groups in their full complexity of traditions, religion, family, educational, employment and other aspects. From policy level, the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning is at its initial stage, the administrative base of the process has been set, and amendments to the Law on AE have been proposed, to be adopted soon. Validation in 5 identified qualifications will be piloted, to be defined in the following period.

According to the 2016 National Survey of Adult Competences, **Slovenia** lags behind internationally in the area of competences, and lacks ways to assess them appropriately and free of charge at any time. Slovenia is far from the place where every adult can evaluate their competences in an appropriate way at any time and **free of charge**. The situation with women (not only with fewer opportunities) is as well not very satisfactory, from one side, due to lack of possibilities for competence assessment and on the other side due to women's unawareness of their totality of competences.

In **Serbia**, the law governing the adult education (more precisely Article 39, paragraph 3) introduces special procedure recognizing prior learning and professional qualifications acquired at the JPOA. The knowledge, skills and attitudes, gained through participation on non-formal adult education activity, and/or through work or life experience are assessed in compliance to the qualification standard. It is completed by issuing an appropriate public document or certificate.

Assessment and validation of competences is as well performed within the employment process. The harmonization with the profile of the job request is monitored by the experts in the field of employment or career guidance. Different questionnaires and tests to assess personality, knowledge, and skills are being used in this process.

4. Examples of good practices related to competence assessment for women with fewer opportunities

In **Germany**, within the Erasmus+ SCOUT project – “aSsessing Competences fOr fUTure” (2017–1–DE02–KA204–004194) a toolkit was developed for counselling new immigrants which includes a ProfilPASS in simple language. The materials, available in German, Slovenian, English, Greek, Spanish and Swedish, as well as the entire project, were recognized by the German National Agency as an example of best practice. This ProfilPASS is the core of a toolkit that includes several methods for assessing the competences of new immigrants. Women with migration experience and low German (or Slovenian) language skills are considered one of the target groups. The adapted version of the ProfilPASS

is characterized by shortened text passages, use of simple language, increased use of visualizations, pictograms or similar to facilitate understanding and access to the texts, content orientation according to the life situation, experiences and professional situation of new immigrants and additional tools (incl. moderators and testimonials) to facilitate access to the text and transfer to the realities of life. All materials are available on the [project homepage](#).

In **North Macedonia**, even again directed to general target group, relevant mechanisms are implemented within Open Universities for Lifelong Learning/Workers' Universities, which have had the practice to assess competences gained through non-formal or informal learning and issue adequate certificates (not formally recognized by the state). This is done in form of a three- to four-member commission, where through theory and practical exam the participant is assessed for the competence of interest. In some instances, the participants are asked to provide written documentation such as previous work experience, reference letter, etc.

In **Slovenia**, there are several mechanisms for competence assessment of young people, such as [Nefix](#) and ProfilPASS, but they need to be adapted for the needs of the women with fewer opportunities. The mission is to provide young people and youth organizations with appropriate professional support in recording and registering informal education and the effects of youth work with the aim of recognizing it in the wider society. The aim is to help young people with career development, employment and active citizenship, and provide help and support in the organisational and other development of youth and non-governmental organizations. The intentions are the informally acquired knowledge to become equivalent to formal knowledge in the employment of young people.

Some of the other examples of tools maybe identified in: [Online Skills Assessment Questionnaire \(SVOS\)](#), an online tool that allows one to assess their skills for free. It was designed by the Andragogy Centre of Slovenia in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. It is intended primarily to assess basic skills and the results can support career guidance. Also, an [EU tool](#) is in use for the early profiling of skills of third-country nationals. The [Project Social activation](#) is considered as successful programme, financed by Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Through systematic 6-month process (divided into 3 modules), the participants in the introduction module get to know the opportunities in the local/regional environment, supporting institutions and programmes that enable help on the personal and career field. In the execution module, the participants (with the support of mentors) are given an opportunity to try themselves out in working activities in companies of chosen employers in their local/regional environment, or if they are not yet capable of such integration for whatever reason – in individual activities. The purpose of individual activities is to strengthen or to get them more aware of their strong points, encouragement on specific areas that are currently enabling them an active participation in life and entrance to the labour market. The last, exit module is used to look over the gained/acquired competences of the participants and enable them an additional support for easier realization of their goals in life in general.

In **Serbia**, several projects or initiatives could be noted, e.g. **“Creating the Employment Opportunities for the Deprived Groups by Improving Municipal Services”** was a project funded by the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ) in 2018/2019. 40 women with fewer opportunities received counselling with the ProfilPASS and made positive changes in their employment and work.

Association Laris signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the National Employment Service of the Republic of Serbia. Memorandum aims at creating the enabling environment referring to modernisation and improvement of services and counselling process for job seekers, creating conditions to improve employability of the persons difficult to employ, in accordance with the present legal framework.

“Single Mother – I have rights, too” under the Project [“Strengthening Gender Equality and Status of Single Parents at the Labour Market”](#) was implemented in cooperation with the Foundation “Ana and Vlade Divac”, Office for Cooperation with the Civil Society and Centre for Dignified Work. In 2019 when over 60 women were supported and guided towards improving the quality of their own and their families’ lives.

“Economic empowerment of women of 45+” supported the creation of small associations of women in four cities, which received equipment and training to begin their economic activity. The project was implemented in partnership with the Association “Women at the Crossroads” from Belgrade and the associations “Putokaz” from Kragujevac, “Miona” in Aleksandrovac and “Protekta” in Niš, within the UN Women grant “The Status of Women in the Labour Market” funded by the European Union in 2019/2020.

Through project **CORE** – “assessing Competences for REintegration” (2019–1–DE02–KA204–006193), Association Laris staff were trained to work with the ProfilPASS designed for young adult NEET people, some of which were single mothers and women with fewer opportunities in Serbia. The project was realized by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) with partner organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. It was funded by the European Commission through the ERASMUS+ Programme (KA 204 – Strategic Partnerships for adult education) in 2019–2021.

„Own competences to employment” aimed for the economic empowerment of single mothers, their activation on the labour market and starting of their own business. Project was financed by the Serbian Ministry of Labour, Social and Veteran Affairs in 2020/2021.

“45+ Women Support Network” was an initiative within “For the Active Civil Society Together – ACT” project, advocating for improving the employability of women aged 45 years and older. The project is funded by Helvetas Swiss interoperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC.

5. Problem areas related to competence assessment for women with fewer opportunities

Motivation and self-awareness

Lack of interest, lack of motivation and lack of self-confidence are noted as very big obstacles of women with fewer opportunities to enrol in any kind of educational activity and/or employment. The unconsciousness of women about what they have at their disposal and the inability to recognize their skills are the biggest problem related to the assessment of their competences. It is seldom combined with low awareness on the existing tools for their recognition and validation. This is especially highlighted for women from rural areas, as well as Roma women who have a low level of education and it is relatively difficult for them to first open up for cooperation and articulate their feedback. Depending on the traditional, religious, and family contexts they live in, part of these women has certain prejudices, live in closed environments and often need “permission” for public exposure. In many cases, within these communities, violence is normalized (the man is to be listened to), and as well, women are financially dependent from their partners and do not have the necessary funds for basic personal needs.

On the other hand, in some cases, participants in the focus group indicated even if they were involved in the process of active employment measures, they mostly managed on their own when looking for job, and only one third of those who underwent the competence assessment process used the results to find employment (in the case of Serbia). Having in mind low education, lack of qualifications and family circumstances makes it difficult to access the labour market. They do accept any job that can provide them with income, e.g. seasonal jobs, cleaning buildings and apartments, working in the market, working in cold storage facilities, taking care of older people, etc., thus continuing the circle of poverty, with no clear understanding on their competences, nor the need of them to be evaluated.

In that sense, extracting information from the target group is very important, as they are mostly not aware of all the competences they have and can use in their work (e.g. organization, etc.). It is also important to note that some target groups (e.g. victims of violence) have often been in a subordinate position for a long time, have low self-esteem and self-confidence, and are unaware of their positive qualities. Special attention should be paid to the following competences:

- » Reading competences and writing competences,
- » Problem solving competences,
- » Digital competences (computer skills and knowledge, e-mail use, internet use),
- » Language competences (knowledge and use of a foreign language),
- » Lifelong learning competences,
- » Personal development competences.

It is of key importance to establish an honest connection, gain trust and give the impression that their life challenge is very important. One needs to be open, sensitive and perceptive. Special attention should be to their occasionally acquired knowledge. Their self-image and self-thinking would also be

a special challenge, as (re-)integration into the labour market can be a big step for women with fewer opportunities.

The cooperation among social partners and relevant institutions is crucial, especially at local level, in reaching the women with fewer opportunities, which, in many cases, are hard to reach, need additional motivation and/or are living under certain religious or family traditional norms. Currently, this cooperation is assessed as fragmental, set based on concrete issues (i.e., only on domestic violence) or non-existent at all (the case of North Macedonia). Another impression is that institutions have neither transparency nor staff capacity to implement the assessment. Local grassroots NGOs may be considered as social partners which work close to the target group, are aware of their sensitivity and can provide the necessary human approach.

Family responsibilities

Women with fewer opportunities usually live in traditional extended families involving high level of daily obligations related to the care for children and the elderly. Besides the above-mentioned prejudices in these closed environments, finding a balance between home and work is a great challenge. Overcoming these challenges is not an easy process and requires a long time, and also indicates that any kind of intervention to be taken needs to be organized closely to their place of residence. Therefore, it must be considered whether and to what extent counselling can be provided at a local counselling centre or whether there is the possibility of online counselling. The care of the children or the relatives in need of care during this time must also be taken into account.

Lack of access to relevant info

Lack of access to information and insufficient openness for change are issues to be put great attention to. Women with fewer opportunities face low awareness on the availability of relevant services, institutions that provide them as well as opportunities available. As well, there are women who do not know how to use a computer and how to get access to certain information that is available only online. According to the desk research and experiences of the interviewed experts, women with fewer opportunities give highest importance to face-to-face contact as a source of information on the learning opportunities. The programmes need to have wider promotion, especially among target groups of women which could be very specific and sensitive, e.g. rural women, women who do not have access to internet and/or have limited literacy.

Another very important aspect is the fact that almost all supportive measures are directed to women who are already registered in relevant institutions, i.e. as unemployed in employment agencies, victims of domestic violence in shelter centres, immigrants in immigration offices etc. Based on this status, they are able to receive some support in employment process, counselling and assessment. In many cases, women with fewer opportunities are not aware of the fact that they need to be registered. This aspect needs wider promotion as well.

Language barriers

Some of the women with fewer opportunities face language barriers (mostly emphasized among

Roma and Albanian women in North Macedonia and women with migration background in Germany and Slovenia). Literacy in the language of the country of residence is necessary for social integration, and especially important in economic integration. Lack of language skills needs to be addressed more. For this reason, it is important that suitable counsellors carry out the counselling, ideally with the same mother tongue and/or a similar cultural background.

Place of residence

The area where the counsellee lives must be taken into account, especially considering women with fewer opportunities living in rural areas. The counselling and further qualification measures should be easily accessible and integrable into the women's everyday life. These women are not expected to own a car, the public transport in rural areas is irregular, and the internet connections may be questionable. In addition, suitable technical equipment and technical knowledge to operate it would have to be available. Otherwise, it must be ensured that women from rural regions are mobile enough to reach the counselling centre.

6. Needs of women with fewer opportunities regarding their competence assessment

The needs of the target group are just as heterogeneous as the realities of life of the individual women themselves. Having in mind that these women come from vulnerable categories, the general conclusion is that they do need support, special attention, appreciation, affirmation, encouragement, and counselling in which the competence process is broken down and made easier to understand. Besides at personal level, they need support in the system (facilitated access to preschool institutions, flexible working hours, employment contracts, adequate social and medical protection, work with families, support in accessing labour market, synchronized measures etc.). The support needs to be continuous, not periodical or temporary, both in the process of (re)integration into the labour market or education system.

From the focus groups' interviews, it is evident that the target group concerned desperately needs to determine their position in the labour market in order to strengthen their identity **and raise self-confidence**, accompanied with financial independence. The attitude towards the assessment of competences is positive, because women think that it could have been better when someone asks them what they know, than when they are offered jobs for which they do not have the necessary knowledge but have to accept them. Women with fewer opportunities often lack self-confidence, have doubts in their abilities and in most cases, are not aware and/or can hardly interpret their abilities and competences because they do not associate them with professional life. It is as well emphasized regarding women with migration history that a feeling quickly arises that everything from the home country is worth nothing because the degrees from the home countries are not recognized in Germany. The

women with fewer opportunities probably have a lot of informally and casually acquired knowledge that they can use in the labour market and present them in front of the employers. At the same time, it would be easier for the employer to be aware in advance of certain competences and the potential the woman has and how it could be beneficial to the company. Therefore, it is particularly important to make also these formal competences visible and to recognize them.

What is common element in most of the cases is the need **for individualized, tailor-made approach to every woman**, adjusted to her needs in relation to her educational background, family relations and availability of time and other resources. Appreciative counselling at eye level, openness to different concerns is particularly important. Face-to-face meetings would be preferred as some of the women do not have access to computer and internet, and it is easier to build bonds between the counsellor and the individual woman involved.

The **time** for competence assessment is identified as an important factor in two aspects. These women, usually heavily burdened with **family responsibilities**, lack free time to dedicate to other side activities. This implies that the assessment and counselling in general, needs to be short in time, structured and preferably organized close to the place of residence to the individual women, so that little or no time is wasted in traveling. At the same time, in many cases, the needs overlap, for example, among mothers, single parents or not, with or without a migration background, since ensuring **childcare** and the possibility of time-adjusted orientation and qualification offers is often needed. Difficulties with regard to these needs are particularly evident in rural regions and the often long distances between childcare facilities and qualification offers, as well as the dependence on the home environment if no childcare is guaranteed.

In addition to recognizing their own competences, there is a great need to find **trustworthy counsellors** who will work with the women on an ongoing basis at eye level. To meet the different needs of the women, it is important that counsellors are well networked and know about appropriate measures so that these can be used additionally or subsequently. When women are counselled by women and identification with the counsellor is possible or group counselling sessions are made possible, it is especially encouraging. Empowering each other in groups also promotes contacts and building networks.

The approach in counselling needs to be very informal, so that firstly the trust of the counselee is gained and then to proceed to the assessment of their capacities. During the counselling process, it has to be made very clear what are the final benefits of the process, what will they gain in the end and why it is very important. Sending positive messages and words of encouragement could be beneficial, as well as highlighting that each women has certain acquired competences and skills that she is not even aware of. In some cases, the support of social worker might be useful. It was also emphasized that it is important to have good, experienced competence in counselling in order to deal with the biographies in an appreciative, constructive and strengthening way and to have enough time to be able to do this.

In terms of institutionalization, it is very important that competence assessment is provided as **continuous process**, implemented frequently and transparently, by concrete institutions. These oppor-

tunities have to be visible and widely promoted by tailor-made campaigns at local level, involving usage of role models and concrete positive examples of successful stories. The combination of different, low-threshold, often free support services from a single source and the interlocking of the services has proven to be a successful instrument. Long-term support, sometimes over longer periods of time, which is not tied to the time limit of a measure, also plays a major role here.

The local NGOs are seen to have great potential in reaching the target groups, especially those which deal on grassroot level and involve local women in their activities. Other local women trust them, and the institutional barrier is expected to be smaller. Representatives of this kind of institutions could be trained to be counsellors. Involved state institutions and local NGOs need to develop more structured and continuous cooperation especially in accessing the target group. Networking with all relevant stakeholders, organizations and intensifying the cooperation of institutions and the civil society sector can help to maximize the use of all resources.

7. Feedback on the existing ProfilPASS and suggestions for its further development

The existing ProfilPASS portfolio seems to be easily accessible and very easy to use. It provides continuous and subtle support for each counselled person to identify independently. The advantage of working with such a tool is working in direct face-to-face contact with counsellor and that the guidance is provided throughout the entire counselling process. As opposite, although very useful and appropriate, online versions/tools require both technical equipment and digital competences that not all women coming from vulnerable groups have.

The ProfilPASS portfolio offers possibility for individualized work, i.e., option to adapt the instrument to the beneficiary, and not vice versa. Especially since, unlike the existing practices and experiences, this tool is not burdened with heavy questionnaires and tests with which the counselees are reluctant and even sometimes afraid to answer. It is evaluated as an extremely useful tool, all the listed components that have been used so far are relevant for assessing the competences of the group for which it is intended. It is rich in content of useful and precise instructions and information for counselled persons that they need during the preparation of documentation for job applications, how to “dare” to look for suitable job, and very important, how to communicate more easily with employers, as well as with their environment.

Furthermore, it was expressed in the interviews that the ProfilPASS procedure is very useful from experience and often brings amazing things to light. It is also very suitable for becoming aware of one's own strengths, interests and competences and for strengthening self-confidence (quote from one interview: “everything we know can be valued and can be used”).

When concerning ProfilPASS dedicated to women with fewer opportunities as specific vulnerable

group, it is important to integrate gender-sensitive terminology, avoid too complex terms and adjust the language to match counselees' level of understanding. It could be useful to integrate elements related to everyday and family life which may be directly or indirectly related to work (e.g. ability to organize work well, events, appropriate communication, ability to negotiate...), in which women with fewer opportunities have acquired the most knowledge and skills.

It was pointed out that lack of language skills needs to be addressed more and, for example, more visual materials, such as picture cards or competence cards, can be used to start counselling. The language must remain simple. Difficult sections need explanation and a lot of patience. A simpler application, a more playful approach, more clarity, e.g. by adding picture cards, would be desirable. It is also very important to deal intensively with values, without which individual career orientation and the associated development of perspectives are inconceivable.

The "I-approach" in which the question of the different roles that the person seeking advice takes on should be clarified. Possible central questions might be:

- » What are the different roles I have as a woman: wife, homemaker, mother, partner, caregiver, single parent, divorcee, etc.?
- » What have I done and accomplished?
- » What burdens were involved and what positive aspects were there, however?
- » Is there a new role for me? At this point it would be important to present and explore the different facets of identity as a woman.

The following topics could be either newly included or deepened in a ProfilPASS for women with fewer opportunities:

- » Role-models:
 - » Were/are there people in my life who were/are role models for me?
 - » In which respect? Why?
 - » What do I like, impresses me about them?
- » Own values that are particularly important for the fit in professional (re)orientation. Here it is also important to address cultural characteristics and differences/ commonalities:
 - » What is important to me personally?
 - » What values do I hold?
 - » What gives me meaning?
- » Strengthening of self-esteem and explicit exercises for this:
 - » e.g. Giving each other feedback in the group about what one admires and appreciates in the other
 - » e.g. The pride story ("I am proud of this....")
- » Realistic dreams, which can give a hint of perhaps hidden life plans and desires. It is often worthwhile to pick up and revisit these early life plans in light of the here and

now,

- » e.g. Through the approach “When I was a child/ As a teenager I wanted ...”
- » Important people in my life, deepening this chapter to become aware of existing social resources and networks and to activate them
 - » Subdivision e.g. in emotional, financial, health-related, time-related etc.
- » More time for me and my objectives. This is already present in the ProfilPASS under “My next objectives and steps”, but should lead more strongly to:
 - » Concrete restructuring of daily routines,
 - » Seeking help and making use of support options.

The last part could be linked to the previous keyword, e.g. in the gradual transfer of certain household chores or of more responsibility to the children (age-appropriate) or the partner. At the same time, it may be necessary to put up with things being done differently or taking longer.

8. Important challenges that could arise during the HOPE project implementation

The main challenges are being identified in the mentality of the people, the patriarchal structure in relatively closed communities/families and the need to obtain a permit to participate in any activity and programme outside the family circle. It could be manifested with distrust and the resistance at the very beginning and lack of interest of the women with fewer opportunities to enrol. The target group could be difficult to reach, especially women with migration experience and women who are very involved in family obligations, as well as women in rural areas with low mobility and poor Internet connection. The lack of trust, apathy of the target group, doubts of the possibility of changes and the change of their life goals could also be some of the challenges. It is important to ensure childcare, if necessary, and to offer the possibility of timed orientation and qualification programmes.

Another challenge is seen in the profile of counsellors. Special attention needs to be put in selecting the professionals, persons with relevant experience in dealing with women with fewer opportunities, preferably from local communities. Language barriers could be addressed through native-speaking counsellors. At the same time, it would be desirable for counselling to take place from woman to woman in order to simultaneously fulfil a role model and empowerment function. As mentioned in the sections above, local NGOs are seen to have great potential in reaching the target groups, especially those which deal on grassroot level and involve local women in their activities, representing one of the options to recruit the most suitable persons for this activity. The expansion of the network of counsellors was especially praised.

Multisectoral cooperation could as well be challenging not only on the associations and civil society organizations, but also on some of the institutions from the wider environment with which constant coordination is needed, such as: employment agencies, centers for social work, various associations to help women, counselling centers, professional workers in maternity homes and safe houses, etc.

9. Advice regarding the development of the HOPE-Toolkit

The ProfilPASS for women with fewer opportunities would be very beneficial in dealing with the target groups and meeting their needs. As the target group is very diverse, it is important that the tool is personalized and adapted to the individual sub-groups and the materials and/or tools are designed to “extract” information about the competences and abilities from the target group. These activities need to be carried out by suitably qualified counsellors who will be able to provide the necessary support and guidance.

A possible subdivision for the HOPE-Toolkit would be e.g. single mothers, women with a migration history, strengthening part-time employees in the knowledge of possible support offers for the division of care work and financial support possibilities, women founders in relation to the [DISCOVER project](#) (2018-1-DE02-KA204-005095) and victims of sexualized and domestic violence, experiences of violence in the partnership and thus overall strengthening women in their self-esteem and making their competences visible and acknowledged. A specific subgroup of the target group are young mothers who have dropped out of education and have difficulties in re-entering education or the labour market. This target group has already been supported within the framework of the EU-funded [CORE](#) project (2019-1-DE02-KA204-006193). However, the toolkit materials developed in the [BYM-BE project](#) can also be used for HOPE project, as they list supporting institutions in the participating countries.

When put into practice, ProfilPASS for women with fewer opportunities will complement all other non-formal tools implemented with relative level of quality.

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Annex 1: Guidelines for focus groups and interviews

Agenda for focus group or qualitative interviews with experts:

- » Welcome, short presentation of key elements of HOPE
 - » Introduction of participants
 - » Clarification of what is expected from participants/interviewees
 - » Discussion on questions below
1. Please give us an overview of **existing measures, initiatives or programmes** geared towards assisting and supporting **women with fewer opportunities** (Women with interrupted employment or with part-time work, e.g. because they are/were in charge of childcare/caring for others, single or divorced women with children, victims of domestic and gender-based violence, women with low income) that you know about. Why do you think these are important? What institution(s) is/are responsible for those measures? Are they successful and in what way?
 2. Please tell us if the competences of the women with fewer opportunities are **assessed or validated**. If they are, how is that done?
 3. Could you give us some examples of **good practices** regarding this group's competence assessment? (Are there already measures, initiatives or programmes for other groups which could be useful for the HOPE target group: women with fewer opportunities?)
 4. What would you say are some **problem areas** related to the competence assessment of women with fewer opportunities? If you were to assess their competences, what possible problems, challenges or issues would you pay special attention to?
 5. In your opinion, what are some specific **needs** of women with fewer opportunities regarding their competence assessment? Why do you think they should have their competences assessed?
 6. Please provide us with some feedback on the **existing ProfilPASS versions (ProfilPASS – kickstart your career! / ProfilPASS for adults / ProfilPASS for young people / Pasos kompetencija / Competences Passport)**. Which additional elements you think would be helpful? (For interviewers: give a brief overview of the concept and the purpose of the ProfilPASS, as well as its benefits and limitations you know of. Show interviewees or participants a copy of the instrument if they have not seen it before.)
 7. What is your opinion on the **objectives** of HOPE? What challenges do you think we could face in its implementation, and how do you think we could overcome them?
 8. What kind of a **product or tools** would you use when working with women with fewer opportunities? Do you think that a toolkit of some kind would be useful?

Annex 2: National Report Template for HOPE

Demographic data related to the target group

Researcher instructions: Please conduct desk research and deliver concrete numbers on how many women with fewer opportunities are in your country, where they mostly are (e.g. in urban or rural areas, or perhaps other important factors). Please include data related to drop-out from jobs or educational/training measures, reasons for dropping out, barriers faced by these target group (e.g. difficulties accessing education or employment), if they might belong to some and which minority groups.

Types of measures intended for women with fewer opportunities

Researcher instructions: Please add your findings from desk research and summarize answers to question 1. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Possible types of measures, e.g.:

- » Courses offered by different institutions or organizations
- » Employment or internship programmes facilitated by institutions, companies or organizations
- » Career guidance and counselling
- » Coaching or mentoring services
- » Formal recognition of diplomas or certificates
- » Available resources: educational materials, online platforms

Competence assessment or validation for women with fewer opportunities

Researcher instructions: Please add your findings from desk research and summarize answers to question 2. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Examples of good practices related to competence assessment for women with fewer opportunities

Researcher instructions: Please add your findings from desk research and summarize answers to question 3. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Problem areas related to competence assessment for women with fewer opportunities

Researcher instructions: Please add your findings from desk research and summarize answers to question 4. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Needs of women with fewer opportunities regarding their competence assessment

Researcher instructions: Please add your findings from desk research and summarize answers to question 5. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Feedback on the existing ProfilPASS and suggestions for its further development

Researcher instructions: Please summarize answers to question 6. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Important challenges that could arise during the HOPE project implementation

Researcher instructions: Please summarize answers to question 7. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Advice regarding the development of the HOPE-Toolkit

Researcher instructions: Please summarize answers to question 8. of the interview or focus group guidelines.

Project Coordinator:



Project Partners:



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