

ADULT LEARNING IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Factsheet

This report has been prepared for the European Training Foundation by Biljana Mojsovska Manojlova, with the contribution of Maria Carmo Gomes. ETF's Lisa Rustico steered the elaboration process and peer reviewed the report.

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INTRODUCTION

This Factsheet was developed in 2025 by the European Training Foundation (ETF) as part of a mapping of Adult Learning (AL) in the EU candidate and potential candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine.

This project focuses on AL as a sub-sector of growing importance, given ongoing societal and economic transformations and the increasing demand for monitoring and reporting on reforms aimed at upskilling, reskilling, and overall human capital development.

AL is understood as an important part of Lifelong Learning¹ (LLL). It includes formal (i.e. linked to formal qualifications) and non-formal learning (mainly in companies but also in other learning environments), including upskilling and reskilling activities, and learning aimed at developing a wide spectrum of skills².

In accordance with Article 2 of the Adult Education Law (MK) 2024/08-6455-1 of the Parliament of Republic of North Macedonia (MK)³, Adult Education (AE) is part of the education system, which provides, training, qualifications and learning for adults. The AE enables adults throughout their lives to acquire competencies and qualifications necessary for personal and professional development, work and employment, as well as socially responsible behaviour. AE is realized as formal education, non-formal education and experiential (informal) learning (Article 3). What in national language is called AE, excluding informal learning, constitutes the scope of this mapping. In other words, in the text of this report, the term 'Adult Learning' will cover what in the country is called 'formal and non-formal adult education', pertaining to adults from the age 16+ (and by exception from 15+ if without elementary education), based on the principal of equal opportunities to all adults, regardless of age.

For the development of this Factsheet, a systematic collection of information was conducted through desk research and field work. The analysis is organised around the analytical framework and guiding questions presented in [Annex I](#). Group and individual interviews were carried out in June 2025 with representatives of relevant institutions – key actors and stakeholders in AL in North Macedonia including formal and non-formal AL providers, such as the seven Regional VET Centres (RVETCs). The list of interviewees is enclosed as [Annex II](#). This report has been validated by the Adult Education Centre (AEC) and Department for Secondary Education, Adult Education and Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES).

The information presented in this document reflects on, and offers insights into three important AL dimensions: **1. Strategic and policy frameworks**, **2. Legal and institutional arrangements** and **3. Types and forms of formal and non-formal AL provision**, and it will serve as a basis for ETF and stakeholders involved to identify priority areas for possible future actions or policy advice.

This factsheet presents factual key-elements about AL in North Macedonia, considering the three dimensions mentioned above.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

¹ Cedefop's glossary defines lifelong learning as 'any learning activity undertaken throughout life in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and qualifications for personal, social or professional reasons' [lifelong learning | CEDEFOP](#)

² Skills are understood in a broad sense, encompassing skills, knowledge and competences for life, well beyond the skills needed for the labour market.

³ Article 2 of the Adult Education Law (MK) 2024/08-6455-1 of the Parliament of MK of December 24th, 2024 (Official Gazette 3, 03.01.2025, p. 249), <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20obrazovanie%20na%20vozasnite%20mk.pdf>

Country context

The Republic of North Macedonia has been going through a difficult period of economic transition, resulting in low participation in the labour market, high unemployment rates and increasing levels of poverty. Despite significant progress in macroeconomic stabilization, job creation has been limited. According to the Census in 2021, the total number of inhabitants is 1 836 713.

North Macedonia is subdivided into eight regions and 80 municipalities with significant territorial and socio-economic differences. 33% of the population lives in the capital city, Skopje. Primary and secondary schools, kindergartens, several nursing homes and cultural institutions are under the jurisdiction of municipalities (City of Skopje, i.e. Ministries responsible for institutions/establishments founded by the Government). (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2025).

Key Country Insights⁴

- **Demographics:** Ageing population, low birth rates, and youth emigration are reshaping the demographic landscape. By 2044, 30% of citizens will be over 65
- **Labour Market:** Employment rate (20–64) was 61.7% in 2023; long-term unemployment remains high at 13.1%, well above the EU average of 2.5%. The economic inactivity of 39% poses another critical challenge
- **Youth & Vulnerability:** NEET rate for ages 15–29 reached 24.1% in 2023 (EU: 11.2%). Poverty affects 21.8% of the population- 50% more than the EU average
- **Digital & Education:** 91.1% use the internet, but 56% of adults lack basic digital skills. Lifelong learning participation among 18–69-year-olds was 27.7% in 2022
- **Urbanisation:** Over 60% live in urban areas. The rural-urban divide further exacerbates inequalities in education and employment opportunities.

⁴ Data of relevance for this section was gathered from following sources: (i) SSO, S. S. (2023). *Adult Education in the Republic of North Macedonia Results from the Adult Education Survey, 2022*. Skopje: State Statistical Office, (ii) SSO, S. S. (2023). *Statistical Yearbook 2023*. Skopje: State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2023/SG2023-web.pdf> (iii) Eurydice report. (2021). *Adult education and training in Europe*. European Education and Culture Executive Agency, <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/adult-education-and-training-europe-building-inclusive-pathways-skills-and> (iv) European Training Foundation (2024). *Key policy developments in education, training and employment- North Macedonia*. European Training Foundation; https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-12/Country%20Fiche_North%20Macedonia_2024_EN_web%20%281%29.pdf

CHAPTER I: ADULT LEARNING STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

This Chapter offers insights into the main policy objectives of AL in North Macedonia, and their alignment with EU goals and initiatives, national strategic and policy priorities, main indicators and targets to be achieved and their comparison to EU targets.

Strategies

Adult learning has been and remains an integral part of the overall strategic vision on the sustainable development of the education system. The goals, priorities and mid-term plan on the sustainable development of this sub-sector have been set and (re-)defined in a continuous manner and stipulated in various strategic documents.

The overarching approach to adult learning encompasses a wide spectrum of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning modalities for the adults of aged 16+ (and 15+ if without elementary education by exception), based on the principal of equal opportunities to all adults, regardless of age, and extends beyond objectives tied solely to labour market integration.

Overview on relevant strategic documents

Education Strategy 2018 – 2025

The Education Strategy (2018-2025) and its accompanying Action Plan, developed with support from the European Union, serve as the foundation for the activities of institutions in MK in the field of education for the period up to 2025. The Strategy is based on clearly identified key challenges in the sector and defines the priority areas that need to be addressed within this timeframe.

Adult learning represents one of the pillars of the Strategy. The main priorities are related to increasing the qualifications of adults, improving the content, quality, legislation, organization and governance of AL.

For each of the above-mentioned priorities, a detailed Action Plan has been developed, with defined measures, activities, budget, responsible institutions and implementers, as well as accomplishment timelines.

The MoES reports annually on the implementation of the Strategy. Its results are summarized in the *Annual report 2023 for the implementation of the Action plan of the Education Strategy 2018-2025 (2024)*. An overview of the activities presented in the Annual report, is enclosed as [Annex II](#)⁵. The annual report for 2024 and 2025 are not available yet.

Meanwhile, the MoES, in cooperation with international partner organisations, is working on the development of the new National Education Strategy 2026 – 2032.

Adult Education Strategy 2025 – 2030

The *Adult Education Strategy (2025)* was developed in the frame of the EU-funded project led by Adult Education Centre (AEC) 'Implementation of the European Adult Learning Agenda in North Macedonia' (2024-2025)⁶, as a measure to support the country in facing and overcoming the challenges such as ageing population, persisting skills mismatch and high emigration rates⁷.

⁵ The document reports on the activities and not on the policy implementation.

⁶ <https://cov.gov.mk/en/2024/01/26/implementation-of-the-european-agenda-on-adult-learning-in-north-macedonia/>

⁷ The number of people emigrating in 2024 was highest among the population aged 35-39 years followed by 40-49 years old people, Makstat Database, https://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/en/MakStat/MakStat_Naselenie_NadvoresniMigracii/275_Mig_reg_NadOts_ml.px/table/tableViewLayout2/

The main goals of the action plan derived from the Strategy aim at increasing participation and inclusion of adults in LLL, expanding access to AL, increasing financial support for AL, promoting innovation and digital transformation, as well as enhancing professional development of AL staff and strengthening monitoring as a quality assurance prerequisite. It places special emphasis on the current challenges of the AL sub-sector such as opening access to vulnerable groups, building synergies among relevant actors, in particular with the business community and as well as the internationalization of AL. It is thereby to a high extent aligned with the European Skills Agenda⁸ and the Union of Skills Communication⁹ as well as in compliance with the current developments at the national level related to recent amendments of the legal framework for skills development policies.

It sets a target of 35% of the adult population being enrolled in adult education (both formal and non-formal), of which 20% of the participants shall belong to vulnerable groups, and 20% of adults will be over the age of 50. The strategy envisages regular evaluation or monitoring of results. No progress report or evaluation study of the new Strategy is currently available.

Reform Agenda of North Macedonia 2024 – 2027

As part of the national response to the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans¹⁰, Policy Area 3 of the Reform Agenda of North Macedonia for 2024-2027¹¹, focuses on human capital development, precisely in the area of ‘Education and Skills’. This area includes three main reforms: improving Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, increasing participation in AL through Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) processes, and enhancing the quality of secondary and higher education. These reforms aim to bridge the skills gap, improve labour market alignment, and foster the modernisation of the education system. The total funding allocated for this policy area is approximately EUR 83.49 million (approximately MKD 5 billion) to address issues such as the mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs, low participation in AL, and the need for modernised curricula integrating digital and green skills. The MoES, in collaboration with the Centre for Development of Vocational Education (CDVE) and RVETCs, is responsible for monitoring the achievement of the indicators and implementing these reforms.

No progress report or evaluation study of the National Reform Agenda is currently available.

Legal framework

New laws on Adult Education, National Qualifications Framework and Vocational Education and Training were developed, while the Law on Secondary Education was amended, all in order to create adequate legal conditions for the operationalisation of the priorities of the AL political agenda, in alignment with European standards.

The by-laws for the respective laws have already been developed but not yet adopted. They are essential, as they define and regulate the procedures foreseen within the laws, so their adoption is a prerequisite to continue with the processes of implementation such as the ones for Verification of special non-formal AL programmes¹² and Accreditation of their providers (hereby referred as “Verification”) and Validation of non-formal education and informal learning (VNFIL).

The legal deadline for adoption of the bylaws is six months after the adoption of the main laws, being already in delay.

⁸ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/european-skills-agenda_en

⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_en

¹⁰ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/75354ed6-6f5a-426e-9f29-f1c77ce8ce18_en?filename=factsheet_GP_February2024.pdf

¹¹ The Reform Agenda of North Macedonia (<https://mep.gov.mk/en-GB/eu-integracii/plan-za-rast-za-zapaden-balkan-i-reformska-agenda/reformska-agenda-na-severna-makedonija-20>) is a key component of the country's strategy to accelerate its path towards European Union membership and foster socio-economic growth. It outlines a series of reforms aimed at strengthening governance, boosting the economy, and aligning with EU standards. The agenda is supported by the EU's Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, a €6 billion financial instrument designed to incentivize and support these reforms.

¹² As per the Adult Education Law, the so-called special programmes are non-formal AL programmes for acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences.

Overview of relevant legal framework

Law on Adult Education

The new *Law on Adult Education (MK) 2024/08-6455-1*, came into force in January 2025, after an almost seven-year stall. Its most significant features are the changes related to verification and the setting out of the conditions for launching the long prepared national VNFIL system.

Its provisions consist of changes related to the procedures and conditions (e.g. extension of the duration of the programmes' verification from three to five years, and the assignment of full responsibility to the AEC over the process of accreditation of providers – instead of the previously shared responsibility with the MoES). Legal changes aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the verification process, as per the priorities defined in the strategic framework. The AEC now can also offer AL programmes, which are to be verified by the MoES.

Law on Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The new *Law on VET (MK) 2024/08-6443/1* of the Parliament of North Macedonia¹³ also came in force in January 2025, whose main novelties relevant to the AL sub-sector were related to the regulation of the RVETCs. These are selected secondary municipal schools which are transformed into State secondary schools tasked to become centres of vocational excellence by providing: (i) formal secondary and postsecondary education of adults; (ii) special non-formal AL programmes and VNFIL; (iii) research, development, and innovation; (iv) cooperation with the business community and business relations; as well as (v) networking, international cooperation, and (vi) promotion of their institutions.

Law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The new *Law on the NQF (MK) 2024/08-6453/1* of the Parliament of North Macedonia¹⁴, was also adopted in early 2025, refining governance, quality assurance processes, and alignment with European standards. The Law clarifies and strengthens the responsibilities of bodies like the NQF Board and NQF Sectoral Committees. The scope of responsibilities of the NQF Sectoral Committees is extended with the review of Occupational Standards, which are relevant to non-formal AL, as they serve as a basis for verification of programmes.

It offers legal provisions for introduction of Vocational qualifications (occupational qualifications, with no value in the formal education system), which can be acquired through publicly adopted programmes, modules or courses, by completing special AL programmes, or through VNFIL. These qualifications represent formally recognized competence for performing tasks within one or more occupations at a specific level of requirements, or partial qualifications, which enable employment and job prospects or personal development. Vocational Qualifications provide evidence about which units of learning outcomes or different combinations of learning outcomes have been achieved.

The Vocational Qualifications as such are of high relevance for AL as their respective standards are the basis for assessment of knowledge, skills and competences through VNFIL assessment processes. Due to the absence of such standards so far, the AL sector could use only existing educational qualification standards (for qualifications acquired in the formal education system).

¹³ Law on VET (MK) 2024/08-6443/1 of the Parliament of MK of 27 December 2024.

<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20soo%20mk.pdf>

¹⁴ Law on the NQF (MK) 2024/08-6453/1 of the Parliament of MK of 27 December 2024, (Official Gazette 3, 03.01.2025),

<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20NRK%20mk.pdf>

Adult Learning policies

Verification of special programmes for non-formal adult learning

Verification was introduced in 2012 as one of the responsibilities of AEC aiming at assuring quality of non-formal AL programmes and raising participation in therein. The verification process, which is not compulsory for providers, consists of two streams: (i) the verification of special AL programmes; and (ii) the accreditation of the institutions, i.e. the providers of the respective special AL programmes.

In the period from October 2024 to April 2025, a total of 38 new special non-formal AL programmes were verified. With this, the number of currently active verified programmes is 317. Statistical data on the number of accredited programmes and the trainings held for the respective programmes for the period 2018-2024 can be obtain in [Annex IV](#).

Currently, the digitalisation of the AEC procedures for the submission of applications for verification is on-going and it is expected that it will speed the entire process up.

Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL)

VNFIL has been a priority of the country's AL policy agenda for a decade. Despite considerable funding resources allocated and continuous efforts to support the systemic and comprehensive establishment of a national system, this it has not yet materialised.

The *Law on Adult Education (MK) 2024/08-6455-1* defines VNFIL as a process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying acquired knowledge, skills and competences in non-formal education and experiential (informal) learning, in accordance with the standard for the respective qualification. VNFIL can be conducted only by public institutions for primary and secondary education (including RVETCs), accredited as service providers by the AEC. Through the Validation procedure, an individual may obtain a vocational qualification up to Level Vb of the NQF and Level I of the NQF (primary education).

The process of VNFIL will be implemented based on the methodology proposed by the AEC and approved by the Minister of Education and Science. Currently, a first draft of the Methodology is in preparation.

National performance against key EU targets on adult learning

Participation of adults in learning

EU target by 2025 and by 2030	National target
At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the previous 12 months, by 2025.	12.7% of adults (25-64) participated in at least 1 educational activity in the last year (2016) (Eurydice report, 2021). 27.7% of adults (18-69) took part in formal or non-formal education and training during the past year (SSO S. S., 2023).
At least 60% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the previous 12 months, by 2030.	35% of adults should have participated in learning during the previous 12 months by 2030, of which, 20% belong to vulnerable groups and 20% are over the age of 50 (Adult Education Strategy 2025 - 2030, AdultEd: Transforming Lives, Building Futures, 2025).

Source: Author

The *Eurydice report on adult education (2021)*, based on Eurostat collected data, reports North Macedonia as belonging to the bottom group of countries that are below 10 percentage points than the EU average (43.7% in 2016). Newer data from State Statistical Office, even related to extended target group of adults aged 18-69, also presents a very low participation rate of adults in learning activities.

The participation rates of low-qualified adults are extremely low (- 1 % or less) with the following disaggregation by ISCED categorisation: Levels 0-2 (0.2%), Levels 3-4 (3-4%), Levels 5-8 (4.5%) (European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2021).

More recent data show a slight improvement with 9.2% of all adults without any education, uncompleted or completed primary education attended education and/or lifelong learning opportunities (13.7% men and 5.4% women) (SSO, 2023).

Underachievement in basic/digital skills and top performance in basic skills

EU target by 2030	Current state of play in North Macedonia
The share of underachievement in literacy, mathematics, science and digital skills should be less than 15%, whereas the share of top performance in literacy, mathematics and science should be at least 15%.	15-year-old students scored below the OECD average in mathematics, reading, and science (ranked 61st in mathematics, 71st in reading, and 68th in science among the 81 participating countries) 1% of students were top performers in mathematics, almost no students were top performers in reading and science. (<i>PISA 2022</i>). Low achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics or science represent 73.6% in 2020 (compared to ED-27 of 26.2%) (<i>Eurostat</i>). Early leavers represent 5,7% in 2020 (<i>Eurostat</i>) 32% of adults possess basic or average digital skills (compared to EU average of 56%), revealing a significant digital divide that particularly affects older and vulnerable populations. Moreover, a mere 3% of individuals have more advanced digital skills (UNDP, 2024). Only one in three employees report needing IT training for their job. Overall participation in training for digital skills remains low—especially among older adults and those with lower education levels (ESJS, 2025)

Source: Author

Experience in formal schooling for young people tends to influence AL participation. A brief analysis of indicators measuring young peoples' formal education outcomes shall provide relevant information to better understand the state of play in AL.

The country has not yet set national targets and relative monitoring mechanisms corresponding to PISA targets.

STEM in VET

EU target by 2030	State of play in North Macedonia
The share of students enrolled in STEM fields in initial medium-level VET should be at least 45%, with at least 1 out of every 4 students female.	7.15 % of the population in 2022 aged 20-29 (upper secondary education-vocational), slightly increasing to 7.53% in 2023. 66% of all students finished regular upper secondary VET in the school year 2022/23 (43% girls) (Statistical Yearbook of the MK 2024).

Source: Author

STEM in higher education

EU target by 2030	State of play in North Macedonia ¹⁵
The share of students enrolled in STEM fields in third- level education be at least 32%, with at least 2 out of 5 students female	Share of students enrolled in STEM fields represents 36% of all students in 2023/24 (48% are women). STEM graduates represent 35% of all graduates in 2023. (SSO S. S., Statistical Yearbook of the MK, 2024). Female graduates in STEM education fields represent 48.2% in 2022 (Eurostat).

Source: Author

¹⁵ NOTE: in the absence of official data availability, the data presented are extracted from the Statistical Yearbook of MK, 2024 and are calculated and compiled by the author based on the definition of STEM fields.

The interest to study STEM seems to be at satisfactory level in the country compared to EU 2030 targets. The share of female students corresponds to the share of female graduates. By groups of sciences representing STEM, women represent 60% in natural sciences and mathematics, 14% in engineering and 30% in technology/ICT. While women now account for approximately half of STEM graduates, they remain underrepresented in engineering and ICT, where male enrolment still dominates significantly. The strongest gender balance can be observed in the field of natural sciences and mathematics; weaker in technology and engineering.

ICT PhD programmes

EU target by 2030	State of play in North Macedonia
The share of students enrolled in ICT PhD programmes should be at least 5%, with at least 1 out of every 3 students female.	8% PhD students were registered in 2022 and 7.5% for 2023 in all PhD fields. 22% of all ICT PhD students were women in 2022 and 72% in 2023 (Statistical Yearbook 2023, 2023) (Statistical Yearbook of the MK, 2024)

Source: Author

There is no specific data available publicly detailing the exact share of students enrolled in ICT PhD programmes within the higher education system in MK. However, the country's education strategy prioritizes improving human resources in various sectors, including higher education, and aims to strengthen the capacity of universities.

Conclusions

Strengths

- Legal framework is fully aligned with policy objectives and national strategies. Despite delays in the adoption of the Adult Education Law, developments deriving from its adoption should enable operationalisation of the envisioned reforms and foster quality assurance of AL.
- Two main strategies – the Education Strategy and the Adult Education Strategy are adopted and being implemented, with respective Action Plans, framing AL in MK. A new Education Strategy covering the period 2026 – 2032 in process of development.
- The digitalization of AEC services related to the procedures for the submission of applications by the providers for the Verification of AL non-formal special programmes is seen as an innovation that should bring positive change in the direction of acceleration of the entire process.

Challenges

- The past delays in the adoption of a complete legal framework, including the still pending necessary bylaws, may have hindered and continue to hinder AL policy implementation and impact, e.g. in terms of increased participation and broader access to AL opportunities. This refers also to the Verification of special AL non-formal programmes, accreditation of the respective providers as well as to VNFIL.
- The participation of adults in lifelong learning is far below the EU set targets. This seems to be influenced by pupils' underperformance in literacy, mathematics, science, and digital skills in initial formal schooling (PISA results). The absence of equivalent national targets and relative monitoring mechanisms might weaken the possibility to design and implement effective policies, track progress over time, and mobilise coordinated efforts to improve adult learning outcomes.
- Some providers report on companies' low interest for certificates gained through verified non-formal AL. This seems to be linked to labour shortages, not only skills shortages.

State of play¹⁶

- The adult learning legal framework is **fully aligned** with policy objectives and national strategies, though not completed by the adoption of secondary legislation.

¹⁶ This section is built around the guiding questions presented in [Annex I](#).

- The strategic framework is characterised with an overarching, ambitious, generally formulated scope and goal definition which does not necessarily take in account the specifics, characteristics and may not respond to the needs of the regions. Its main priorities, in line with the legal framework, aim at contributing to sustainable development and quality assurance in AL, human capital development in line with the labour market needs, increased participation in AL with special emphasis on marginalised groups. Special emphasis is set on compliance of the AL system with EU trends.
- There is a lack of coordinated action among non-state actors in advocating for progress in AL and in proactively engaging with policymakers to support them in the implementation of relevant initiatives.
- State investment in AL remains below the indicators set in national strategies and with a view to the EU targets and **fragmented**, just like AL governance (see chapter 2) and AL implementation.
- Main focus of AL policies is on Verification of AL non-formal special programmes, accreditation of providers, and VNFIL mechanisms further implementation, which have been pending for more than 10 years, however.
- Benchmarking indicators and other national targets only **partially match** relevant EU policy targets and benchmarking indicators (i.e. the share of adults' participation in AL). For instance, the country has not set national targets and monitoring mechanisms related to employment outcomes.

CHAPTER II: INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND GOVERNANCE OF ADULT LEARNING

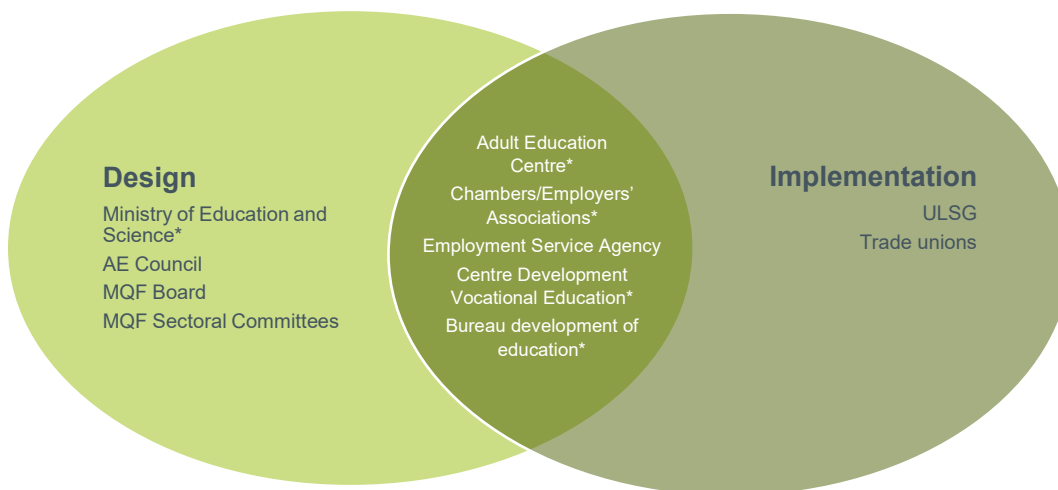
This Chapter analyses and presents the division of roles and responsibilities among institutions in charge as well as the main features of the model of governance in place for AL sub-sector.

Institutional arrangements

The AL sub-sector is governed within a centralised and unitary system, with limited municipal autonomy. While municipalities play a supporting role, policy, financing, and programmatic authority remain at the national/central level. Public institutions responsible for the development of AL policies include the MoES, Ministry of Economy and Labour (MEL), the Adult Education Council (AEC), RVETCs, the units of local self-government (ULSG) and other social partners.

Roles and responsibilities in adult learning

The diagram below offers an insight into the responsibilities of each of the involved institutions as defined under the adopted legal framework. A detailed overview of the institutions and their responsibilities is enclosed as [Annex V](#).



* Monitoring & Evaluation

To some extent, there is a lack of utilisation of the full potential of the responsibilities assigned to the different institutions and examples of dysfunctionality of processes in practice, such as legal obligation for the municipalities, as per *Article 11 of the Adult Education Law (MK) 2024/08-6455-1* to report to the institutions the labour market skills demands. In practice, this procedure is not systemically implemented by municipalities, leading to partial insights into skills needs at the municipal level. The establishment of RVETCs is intended to ensure the systematic collection of data at the regional level and to address the needs of municipalities within each region.

Adult Learning governance model

Overall, there is a high degree of centralisation of the AL system governance. The structure and division of roles and responsibilities of the institutions in charge for governance of the AL sub-sector are regulated by law. The recent new provisions of the relevant legal framework are related to clarifying the allocation of tasks and responsibilities aiming at improving the functionality of the system and acceleration of processes and procedures.

Intra-sectoral cooperation and coordination

Based on the legal responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in AL, including social partners, roles are clearly defined and institutions contribute to processes at local, regional and national levels in a participatory way. Beside the MoES and the AEC as main policy makers in the area of AL, there is a broad spectrum of other institutions, such as the ESARNM, active participating and contributing to policy implementation.

A detailed overview of the representation and composition of the various institutions in governance, steering and coordination bodies relevant to AL is enclosed as [Annex VI](#). This approach offers a platform for exchange and joint efforts in identifying challenges, discussing current issues related to labour market skills demand and AL skills supply, and finding solutions to sustainable models of collaboration and efficient alignment of supply with demand.

Despite of the clear division of responsibilities stipulated by law and the broad participation in various bodies, intra- and intersectoral coordination remains to a certain extent slow and not always efficient.

Providers of formal and non-formal adult learning

As per the *Adult Education Law* (MK) 2024/08-6455-1, formal and non-formal AL may be provided by various institutes such as a school, a higher education institution as well as by a specialised AL institution (legal entity with registered AL activity).

Below is an overview of the diversity of AL providers along with a brief description of their scope of works:

- primary education of adults is offered by the specialised school Anton Semjonovič Makarenko and by the Open Civic Universities for Lifelong Learning (OCULL)¹⁷
- secondary education for adults can be offered by the gymnasiums, under conditions defined per Law and per the statute of the school
- secondary and post-secondary vocational education for adults is provided by the secondary vocational schools, RVETCs and OCULLs
- non-formal AL is offered by public and private education providers, by legal entities whose registered activity is in AL, local and international NGOs, Citizens' Associations, Chambers of Commerce and Crafts, OCULLs, trade unions, and other employers' organizations.
- AEC is a provider of public special non-formal AL programmes in line with the needs of the state

Funding of Adult Learning

AL in North Macedonia is financed by:

- the State budget of North Macedonia

¹⁷ The OCULL are institutes providing public services in the area of formal education of youth and adults - primary and secondary education for adults (based on state accreditation), professional training, vocational education for occupation, technical education for post-secondary education of adults, re- and upskilling, including non-formal AL intended for making these individuals capable for work, for various social activities or personal development.

- the budgets of the Units of local self-government
- learners' self-financing
- donations, loans, donor contribution through projects
- operational plan for active labour market programmes and measures (under Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, ESARNM)
- companies.

The state budget allocated to education has been dropping to 9.15% of the overall state budget in 2024, down from 11.7% in 2023. Public spending on education and training, as a % of GDP, also decreased from 3.58% in 2022 to 3.17% in 2024, still below the EU average. Municipalities, which are directly responsible for schools, contribute very little to secondary education, with only 1.18% of AL funding coming from their own budgets.

One of the indicators set in the current Education Strategy envisages a separate budget line for AL in the state budget with at least 1.5% of the total budget planned for Education. In 2023, the total budget of AEC, was 0.09% of the total budget for Education (MoES, 2024), as was the case in 2022. It is important to underline that due to the fragmentation of the financing sources, there is no comprehensive insight into the total AL funding volume. There is data available only for some budget lines (e.g. completion of secondary education financed by the AEC). For some budget allocations, no specific amounts were planned in advance (e.g. financing completion of primary education of adults by MoES).

A summary of the funding sources, types and available data on funding volumes is included in this report in [Annex VII](#).

The practice shows that despite the legal possibilities; some funding mechanisms are not enforceable. Namely, the legal arrangements which differentiate 2 levels of funding (as shown in [Annex VII](#), out of which only the first one is legally obligatory i.e. the State level.

The legal flexibility in this context, offers the possibility for not financing AL sub-sector as needed due to absence of legal obligation. An example for this is the fact that the municipalities don't allocate financial means to the Open Civic Universities which are under their responsibility.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Institutional roles and responsibilities

The mechanisms, roles and responsibilities for quality assurance are defined in the *Adult Education Law (MK) 2024/08-6455-1* and pertain to the formal adult education and to the programmes for non-formal AL accredited by the AEC.

The division of roles and responsibilities over monitoring and quality assurance of AL, among MoES, AEC, BDE, CDVE is as follows:

- monitoring of the implementation of the AE Law is conducted by MoES.
- monitoring of the implementation of remedial education through advisory-consultative, mentoring-instructional support and professional supervision is conducted by CDVE and BDE;
- professional supervision and oversight of the implementation of non-formal AL is a responsibility of AEC;
- inspection supervision and quality oversight over the AL and VNFIL service providers is conducted by SEI, which as of 2025 is part of MoES.

Keeping in mind the lack of human resources in the AEC and the CDVE, the performance of the responsibilities in monitoring and assuring quality of AL is rather limited.

Continuous professional development of adult learning practitioners

Goal 7 of the Action plan of the Adult Education Strategy 2025-2030 sets a Key Performance Indicator of 100% involvement of the AL staff in continuous professional development by 2030.

In the context of assuring quality of the verified special non-formal AL programmes, the *Adult Education Law* (MK) 2024/08-6455-1 envisages regulations related to the teaching staff performing educational work with adults, as follows:

- special non-formal AL programmes are implemented by teaching professionals who meet the standards relevant for verified special programmes and have acquired training for working with adults, organised by the AEC or accredited institutions and organizations. The standards are set out in the respective bylaw regulating this segment.
- If the institution does not have a teaching professional who meets the abovementioned requirement, the special programmes may be implemented by a person who has not yet acquired training for working with adults, with the obligation to complete such training within six months.

The programmes for adult educators are verified by AEC based on the Occupational Standard for Trainer¹⁸, which requires possession of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in implementation of andragogical principles in educational work with adults.

In line with Article 21 of the Adult Education Law MK) 2024/08-6455-1, AEC and/or an AEC accredited provider can deliver a programme of this type.

Through the project 'Implementation of the European Agenda on Adult Learning in North Macedonia'¹⁹ (2024-2025), AEC initiated capacity building of teachers/ trainers/ instructors of AL programmes (involving also the RVETCs). So far, 45 trainers participated in this programme and by the end of October 2025, an additional 30 will attend this training. AEC has also conducted capacity building activities of the AL staff of the RVETCs, by facilitating workshops aiming at informing and building the capacities of the staff of RVETCs for their new responsibilities in the field of AL and VNFIL, following up to the efforts deployed in 2023-2024 with EU support²⁰.

Since 2018, first cycle studies in Andragogy²¹ are available at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius university in Skopje, thus allowing the completion of a higher education Bachelor degree course in an AL-related study field.

However, there is a need for further information, raising awareness and capacity building of the staff of the institutions which will be VNFIL service providers.

¹⁸ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eXwO9GneS5HMjh0NLctjVxg1so4eFjrh/view>

¹⁹ <https://cov.gov.mk/en/2024/11/27/the-public-institution-adult-education-centre-has-initiated-a-series-of-trainings-of-trainers-of-adults/>

²⁰ IPA project 'Increasing the attractiveness and relevance of VET and adult education' and ETF technical support and capacity building intervention.

²¹ <http://fzf.ukim.edu.mk/>

Conclusions

Strengths

- There is a clear division of roles and responsibilities of the actors operating in AL sub-sector as per the adopted legal framework. They participate and are represented in various coordinative bodies with an advisory function.
- Opportunities for the continuous professional development of AL teaching staff are improving. On top of existing programmes, donor's project support and institutional efforts in the direction of improving skills of teaching staff.

Challenges

- There is a lack of utilisation of the full potential of the responsibilities assigned to the different institutions (e.g. RVETCs) and examples of dysfunctionality of processes implementation in practice.
- Dialogue among institutions in charge of AL at all levels could be more proactive and systematic to facilitate the design of a comprehensive financial multi-annual planning of AL and mobilise funds adequately.
- Lack of human capacities of the responsible institutions in performing monitoring and quality assurance in AL, which remains rather limited as a responsibility of MoEs and the AEC. In wake of the new legal responsibilities assigned to it, the AEC has become even more understaffed.
- Further information, raising awareness and capacity building actions to aimed at VNFIL practitioners is required.
- The legal flexibility in the context of funding AL sub-sector offers possibility for not financing it duly due to absence of legal obligation. It is of crucial importance to create a systemic and sustainable mechanism of data collection for financial allocations related to AL, from across all relevant sectors, in order to generate insight into the overall financing of AL.

State of play²²

- Beside the MoES and the AEC as main policy makers, there is a broad range of institutions participating in policy design and implementation through their participation in various coordination bodies with various levels and types of roles – decision making, consultative and advisory – defined in law.
- Current financing models are partially adequate: some provide for obligatory State funding, ensuring predictable budget allocations, while there is space to increase the utilisation of funding potential as per legal provisions.
- There is a high level of diversity of stakeholders with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities in the legal framework but in practice processes suffer from slow and at times inefficient procedures and the necessary human resources dedicated to AL (i.e. understaffing of the institutions in charge for policy implementation such as the AEC).
- The management of AL policies is centralised and therefore does not allow for further autonomy and delegation of competences to other administration and government levels, i.e. providers.
- The AL outcomes and qualifications are fully integrated and linked to National Qualifications Framework.
- The monitoring and quality assurance aspects of AL are only partially covered with limited capacities and human resources allocated to these tasks in the institutions with such responsibility.

Source: Author

²² This section is built around the guiding questions presented in [Annex I](#).

CHAPTER III: ADULT LEARNING PROVISION

This Chapter offers insight into the AL provision in MK as the third dimension in the focus of this factsheet. It presents the existing AL programmes as well as the support measures and services made available to adult learners.

Adult learning types and programmes

Programmes for remedial education for adults

Formal AL is organised through primary, secondary and post-secondary education programs tailored to the needs and capabilities of adults organised in educational institutions that are verified for these programmes.

As outlined in Chapter I, some special non-formal AL programmes and the providers who offered them can be verified and accredited by the State, a process which is not legally mandatory.

In the below table the types of programmes for acquisition of qualifications through formal AL and verified non-formal AL are presented:

Types of programmes for acquisition of qualifications through formal and verified non-formal adult learning

Type of programme	Provider(s)	Target group	Final certification / qualification
1. Remedial education – Completion of primary education for adults	Specialised schools, OCULLs	15+	Diploma for completed primary education with a diploma supplement for Level I of NQF
2. Remedial education – Completion of secondary education for adults	Secondary schools (including RVETCs)	Persons with completed VI/VII grade of elementary school	Diploma and diploma supplement for Levels II to IV of NQF
3. Post-secondary education of adults a) Specialistic education b) Master education	a1) Public and private institutes a2) Institutes for secondary VET (including RVETCs) a3) Trade entities b) Chambers of Crafts	a) Persons with completed secondary VET on Level III and Level IV of NQF b) Persons with completed secondary VET from Level II to Level IV of NQF	a1) – a3) Diploma for specialist with diploma supplement on Level Vb of NQF b) Diploma for master on Level Vb of NQF
4. Special programmes for non-formal AL – partial of full vocational qualification	Accredited providers – secondary VET schools, RVETCs, OCULLs, higher education institutions, private entities with registered AE activity and NGOs	16+	For partial qualification: Certificate for module(s) of a vocational qualification and a certificate supplement For full qualification: Vocational qualification certificate and a certificate supplement
5. Special programmes for non-formal AL for acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences which do not lead to a vocational qualification	Accredited providers – secondary VET schools, RVETCs, OCULLs, higher education institutions, private entities with registered AE activity and NGOs	16+	Certificate with a supplement

Type of programme	Provider(s)	Target group	Final certification / qualification
6. VNFIL vocational qualification	VNFIL accredited public AE institutes	18+	Certificate for a vocational qualification or a module of a vocational qualification, Levels II - Vb of NQF and certificate supplement
7. VNFIL educational qualification – Primary education	VNFIL accredited public AE institutes	16+	Certificate for an educational qualification on Level I of NQF and certificate supplement

Source: Author

In the school year 2023/2024, 532 adults completed remedial primary education, while out of the 18,146 secondary school students, 1,949 were adults (10.8%).

The participation rate in education and training, of the total number of persons aged 18 – 69 in North Macedonia in 2022 was 27.7%, out of which 35.8% participated in formal education. (SSO, 2022).

The reform of the current system of remedial education in the country – aiming to contribute to educational, economic, and social inclusion – by supporting early school leavers, individuals with a low level of qualifications and those in need of upskilling and reskilling, was supported by the EU-IPA funded project: ‘Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and Adult Education’ up until 2024, whose sustainability in terms of the output should respond to the existing challenges.

Non-formal adult learning provision

Adults can be engaged in non-formal AL provision through a variety of programmes offered by public and private providers, companies, citizens’ associations, local and international NGOs, Chambers, etc.

There are two types of programmes offered in non-formal AL:

1. Verified non-formal AL programmes - in line with the legal arrangements for the Verification, adults may participate in two categories of state-verified programmes:
 - a. Firstly, the ones leading to the acquisition of a partial or full vocational qualification from Level II to Level V of NQF.
 - b. Secondly, the ones leading to gain knowledge, skills and competences but not awarding a final qualification (only a certificate of completion).

An insight into the number of learners who participated in these programmes in the period 2018-2024 can be obtain in the [Annex IV](#).

One crucial challenge of the verification process is that at the stage of application, the labour market responsiveness of the respective programme is not taken in account as it should be, which in turn makes this policy relevant only for quality assurance purposes, without contributing to meeting labour market needs and thus contributing to better employment and job opportunities.

2. Non-verified non-formal AL programmes

Although the verification is not legally mandatory, non-verified AL programmes are equally legitimate and are offered by the same array of actors as verified programmes are. It is important to underline that unless organised in the scope of donor’s or State funded projects most programmes on the market are self-financed by participants by paying fees.

Companies’ initiatives to provide training for their employees, typically rely on existing internal programmes, not subject to any evaluation or verification. Only some very active companies offer training through verified AL programmes, and upon completion of such trainings, a state-recognised

certificate is issued. These companies may arrange for an external training provider (for example, for forklift operators) to train their staff thus providing a certification of attendance of such programmes.

Programmes for improving skills, qualifications and employability

1. Support program of the AEC for completion of secondary vocational education for adults

In cooperation with the MoES, the AEC has been implementing the project “Shaping of secondary education of adults” (2010 – up to date), for individuals with primary education as highest educational level, to ease their access to the labour market. The curriculum is developed in accordance with the programmes in the formal secondary education. Through this project, in the period 2010-2025 a total of **5,368** adults has completed secondary education.

2. Operational Plan for active employment programmes and measures and labour market services

The ESARNM Operational Plan (OP) for active employment programmes and measures and labour market services²³ has been offering possibilities for participation in AL programmes to unemployed.

OP 2025 Training Component²⁴ includes the financing of AL programmes to **2,735** individuals, and offers the following measures: (i) on-the-job training for a known employer; (ii) Training for professional qualifications based on employers’ needs; (iii) professional training upon employer request; (iv) Training for in-demand occupations; (v) basic skills trainings – foreign languages; (vi) basic skills trainings – IT, business and entrepreneurial skills. These measures are implemented by accredited providers of verified special AL programmes. In addition, **1,352** unemployed individuals with completed secondary education up to the age of 29 have the opportunity of undertaking paid traineeships. The budget allocated for these measures is available in [Annex VII](#).

Support measures and services to adult learners

Information and outreach

In order to disseminate information on existing AL programme opportunities and also to raise awareness on AL and LLL opportunities, the AEC has set up and maintains a database of non-formal AL providers and programmes²⁵. The initial idea was to provide up-to-date information on both verified and non-verified programmes. While the verified AL programmes have been updated on a regular basis, it is not the case of the non-verified ones. The providers of these programs have shown little to no interest in providing such information about their activities in AL, so the database does not reflect the current provision. Therefore, this database can be considered only partially up to date.

The AL awareness raising concept envisaged in the action plan of the National Education Strategy has not been developed yet. Therefore, activation of adults for AL and LLL opportunities is rather low and is made upon individual’s decisions in most cases.

VNFIL

As mentioned above, the introduction of the VNFIL process aims at enabling individuals without or with a low level of qualifications to acquire formal qualifications, thereby easing their participation in the labour market, contributing to reduce the unemployment rate, and motivating adults to engage in AL and LLL.

Given the low level of information and awareness raising about VNFIL, there is still low interest by adults for entering into a process that makes possible the Validation of knowledge, skills and

²³ The *Operational Plan for active employment programmes and measures and labour market services* is part of North Macedonia’s employment policies and is established by the Government, developed by the MEL and managed by ESARNM. It is grounded in a series of other strategic initiatives and follows international strategic agendas. It aims to support the creation of new jobs, to increase employability, and to enhance the competitiveness of the unemployed, with special emphasis on youth and socially vulnerable individuals - www.av.gov.mk

²⁴ <https://av.gov.mk/operativen-plan.nspx>

²⁵ <https://cov.gov.mk>

competences, thereby hindering the efforts and resources invested in the conceptualisation of this policy.

Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are included as a novelty into the *Law on the NQF* (MK) 2024/08-6453/1 and the *Adult Education Law* (MK) 2024/08-6455-1 and are acquired upon completion of courses designed to enable participants to gain specific knowledge, skills and competences that correspond to societal, personal, cultural, or labour market needs. Micro-credentials can be standalone or combined into broader micro-credentials. Their quality is assured through the established standards in the relevant sector or field of activity. The scope of micro-credentials is determined to be up to a maximum of five ECVETs.

The CDVE participated in the EU Erasmus+ supported project 'Beyond Europe with micro-credentials' (2023-2025)²⁶ in the frame of which, five micro-credentials courses were developed in five different qualification sectors: (i) electro-technical, (ii) traffic, (iii) personal services, (iv) chemical/technology, and (v) economy, law and trade.

Career guidance and counselling of adult learners

Career guidance and counselling services have been an integral part of the national strategic framework for education, employment, and social inclusion of MK in the context of combating unemployment and improving social inclusion. Although conditions for introduction of career guidance and counselling were created through the project Youth Employment Skills – YES (2011), funded by USAID, this service for adults is not efficiently implemented and delivered in practice.

The recently amended *Law on Secondary Education* (MK) 2024/8-21931 of the Parliament of MK, 8 April 2025²⁷ foresees legal innovations related to the introduction of a career counselling team, led by a career counsellor, in each secondary school, thereby supporting adult learners attending formal secondary, post-secondary and/or special AL programmes.

In addition to the abovementioned novelties, in the scope of the project of the Euroguidance Centre within the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility (NAEPM), in cooperation with the ETF, career guidance standards were developed including a competence profile, a career management skills framework defining the specific learning outcomes, and ethical codes of conduct. Currently, these materials are being reviewed by the MoES. Two by-laws that will regulate such said services have already been adopted.

The 30ESARNM Employment Centres countrywide aim to offer career guidance and counselling services to adults as part of their planned activities but only provided upon individual request and as needed. The agency and its centres do not possess sufficient human resources and competences to be able to offer comprehensive and sustainable guidance and career counselling services.

To a large extent, the provision of career guidance and counselling services for adults through ESARNM depends strongly on donors' support. Therefore, some of the planned activities are implemented only during the project duration and as such the services are neither systematic, comprehensive, nor sustainable.

²⁶ <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/projects/beyond-europe-with-micro-credentials/>

²⁷ *Law on Secondary Education* (MK) 2024/8-21931 of the Parliament of MK, 8 April, 2025, Official Gazette No 132/25

Conclusions

Strengths

- The country developed career guidance standards including a competence profile, a career management skills framework defining the learning outcomes, and ethical codes of conduct for fostering the role of career guidance counsellors.

Challenges

- VNFIL legal framework is not yet complete, its systemic implementation has not started yet and capacity building is lacking. For instance, there is strong need for further informing, raising awareness building the capacity of the staff of the institutions which will become VNFIL providers.
- The verification of programmes does not take in account their responsiveness to the labour market needs, but rather their compliance with some administrative quality criteria, and with Occupational and Qualification Standards.
- Statistical data gathering, analysis and dissemination related to the AL provision, in a regular and standardised format is lacking.
- Information on the non-verified non-formal AL programmes is not systematically collected, updated and made publicly available for adult learners.
- Low motivation and interest of adults to enrol in AL programmes – both for the acquisition of a formal qualification and for upgrading their knowledge, skills and competences, as well as for embracing lifelong learning opportunities in general – which may be also related to lack of information and public campaigns valuing adult learning pathways, and low economic gains from skills development.

State of play²⁸

- The system offers remedial education as well as verified non-formal AL programmes leading to acquisition of qualifications and skills mainly serving to improvement of labour market competitiveness whereby the labour market responsiveness of the programs is not a requirement for verification.
- There is a strong focus of the policy makers on the verified AL programmes, and the overall non-formal AL market (consisting also of non-verified programs) is to a certain extent out of sight. There is an existing need for improvement and further development and strengthening of links and networks in non-formal AL sub-sectors.
- AL provision only partially matches the needs of different groups of adult learners, addressing the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (scarcity of data does not allow for a more in-depth analysis on enrolled and graduated adult learners in all types of programmes. On the other hand, there is no coordinated action of the non-verified providers to articulate their needs.
- AL provision in MK is **moderately attractive**, though a lot needs to be done to further inform and raise the awareness of the different types of provision, including VNFIL.

²⁸ This section is built around the guiding questions presented in [Annex I](#).

CONCLUSIONS

Taking in account all the information gathered and analysed for the purpose of development of this factsheet, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Dimension I: Strategic and legal framework

North Macedonia has been actively reforming its AL sub-sector in order to align it with European standards. The country has established a comprehensive legal framework, though it has not yet been completely adopted as secondary legislations is still pending. Significant implementation challenges persist, particularly in aligning the efforts of strategic planning with concrete and feasible action plans. Regular and better monitoring of the adopted strategies and actions plans, as well as of 'predictive' indicators of AL participation (e.g. PISA results), are needed for mitigating risks and introducing corrective measures, as needed.

Dimension II: Governance and institutional arrangements

At the operational level, the high level of centralisation is not accompanied by sufficient coordination of the landscape of actors and mechanisms involved in AL implementation. This impacts the efficiency of the implementation of the policies and takes the responsibility out of the other levels of administration and governance. This centralised governance and administration approach, combined with the lack of autonomy in managing local level institutions, slows down the processes and leads to inefficiencies in daily operations.

One of the most crucial and persisting challenges is the funding of AL sub-sector. Current mechanisms and practices need to be reviewed in terms of functionality. There is a lack of a systemic and sustainable mechanism of both budgeting and data collection for financial allocations related to AL, from across all relevant sectors, which results in the absence of a comprehensive approach into the overall financing of this sector. Especially challenging is the lack of funding of public non-formal AL providers.

Dimension III: Provision and programmes of AL

The need for information, awareness raising and capacity building for introduction of the procedures related to the provision of VNFIL services represents an ongoing challenge.

The absence of AL awareness raising mechanisms reinforces the need for outreach activities targeting adult population, especially to the most vulnerable groups. This would be essential for improving the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning, keeping in mind the low level of motivation of adults to engage in AL.

There is a lack of a comprehensive, continuous and systematic data collection about AL provision, and especially in regard to the participation of adults in AL programmes delivered by the various providers in both formal and non-formal settings.

ANNEX I – ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

Chapters	Guiding questions [1]	Sources/ methods
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country context (governmental and administration features over education and training affairs, main legal frameworks, placement of AL sub-sector within the wider education & training system) ▪ Specific elements related to the country political situation, constitutional arrangements, territorial/regional autonomies and jurisdiction over education sector ▪ Presentation of the country paper structure and objectives 		Desk review
<p>Chapter 1. AL Strategies & Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AL National and regional Strategies (existing, past and present, or under preparation and expectations on its adoption) – approach to AL (broad, narrow), main strategic objectives, results obtained to date, and targets to be achieved, comparative analysis with EU policy priorities alignment, existing legal framework; level of priority attributed to AL, plans for reforms or large-scale programmes) ▪ AL National policies (overview of the main policy objectives, national and regional policy measures implemented or under implementation, target-population, equity and inclusiveness gaps identified, sources of funding, stakeholders’ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main priorities of existing AL national/regional strategies? Where do they intend to bring AL in the country? Currently, is AL a priority, does the government intend to advance AL, do social partners and/or other non-state actors advocate for progress in AL? 2. Is the legal framework adjusted to the national/regional strategies and policy objectives? Do they correspond to specific needs of regions? Is there mismatching between the different levels of policy definition (fully/ partially/ not aligned at all)? 3. What is the level of fragmentation of AL policies within the wider education and training system of the country (highly fragmented/ fragmented/ not so much fragmented)? 4. What are the main indicators in use and related targets for AL sector (e.g., participation rates, skill levels, employment outcomes). 	Desk-review Interviews Data Analysis

<p>participation, monitoring & evaluation mechanisms)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National targets vs EU targets (analysis of the five key indicators of NEAAL and UoSkills 2030 at national level, plus indicators related to AL from Growth Plans/ National Reform Agendas) 	<p>5. Where relevant and possible, compare with EU policy objectives in the NEAAL 2030 and the Communication on the Union of Skills, as well as benchmarking indicators and other national targets (fully match/ partially match/ do not match at all).</p>	
<p>Chapter 2. AL Institutional arrangements & Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Institutional arrangements (responsible institutions at national and regional levels, roles and responsibilities, coordination bodies, type of providers (public/private/others), coverage of the territory and gaps in the AL supply and demand, participation of employers and other players from the world of work, funding sources and financing models) ■ Adult learning governance models (key-features of the governance model, i.e. centralised/decentralised, participative, co-decision (diversity of actors, autonomy of the providers), supervision and coordination processes, relation to NQFs) ■ Monitoring and Quality Assurance, data collection and analysis on AL, including evaluation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which institutions are responsible for the coordination and implementation of AL policies, and how are roles and responsibilities divided among ministries, agencies, and other relevant actors? Which coordination mechanisms are in place (e.g. AL council. Inter-ministerial committee on AL. Economic and Social Council, etc.) and their roles i.e. advisory, consultative, decision-making? 2. What are the main sources of funding of AL provision? Are there public-private partnerships related to AL funding, e.g. Training Funds, Tax exemptions, Levies, etc? Are the financing model and the funding sources sufficient and adequate? (very adequate/ moderately adequate/ not adequate at all) 3. Which stakeholders (for example employers, trade unions, civil society, learners) involved in the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring of AL initiatives and to which extent there is a wide participation of relevant players in the different areas of AL governance? (high diversity of stakeholders/ somehow diverse/ not diverse at all) 4. How well coordinated is the management of AL policies implementation as per the country's institutional arrangements? Are they corresponding to the adopted legal frameworks and do they correspond to a more centralized or decentralised model? (very centralised/ to a certain extent centralised/ decentralised) 5. How far the recognition, portability and integration of AL outcomes/qualifications are integrated/linked to national qualification frameworks/national qualification systems? (fully 	<p>Desk-review Interviews</p>

	<p>integrated/ to a certain extent/ not integrated at all)</p> <p>6. What mechanisms (at national/ regional/ at provider level) are in place to ensure the quality of AL provision? How is the monitoring of results implemented and what type of programmes are covered? How quality of trainers/ facilitators ensured? (fully covered/ to a certain extent/not covered at all)</p>	
<p>Chapter 3. AL Provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AL Programmes (main existing formal and non-formal programmes, complementary services such as outreach, coaching, career guidance and Validation of skills including the broader range of learners, objectives and relation to upskilling and reskilling initiatives, types of provision, recent initiatives in the AL domain for specific target groups, skills acquisition) ■ AL Provision (Size of the provision, number of enrolled learners, completion of the programmes) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What types of AL programmes are currently available (formal and non-formal), and what are their primary objectives and target groups? To which extent the AL provision matches the needs of different groups of adult learners, addressing the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion? (fully match/ partially match/ not matching at all) 2. Which are the current providers of AL and is there significant differences between formal and non-formal provision? How attractive are the existing programmes (formal and non-formal)? Are there significant gaps in AL provision? (highly attractive/ moderately attractive/ not attractive at all) 	<p>Desk-review Interviews Statistical data analysis</p>
<p>Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Main findings ■ Main successes, what is working well, as well as challenges identified at each level (chapters 1, 2, 3) ■ Specificities of AL findings, perspectives in AL, source of policy learning. ■ 1 to max 3 conclusions to be highlighted. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify main findings in each of the three dimensions. 2. What is indicating progress (a new law under preparation, more funding for AL, government calling non-state actors to mobilise and contribute to AL, very successful programmes, etc.)? 3. What remains as a (old) challenge, or which emerging challenges? 4. Do findings in 1, 2 and 3 support the study assumption that AL is recognised as priority and there is progress? 5. What are the sources of 'policy learning' (who is a source of inspiration: neighbours, EU countries, international practices, etc.) 	<p>Expert's own analysis, based on key qualitative and quantitative information collected through desk research and interviews.</p>

[1] These guiding questions were used as check list for the authors to use while drafting the different sections of the reports, in particular in the Conclusions boxes of each Chapter – 'State of play' section.

ANNEX II – LIST OF INTERVIEWS

List of focus group interviews

Institution	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
Regional VET - Center Kiro Burnaz – Kumanovo	Director	AL Coordinator
Regional VET - Center Kole Nedelkovski – Veles	Director	AL Coordinator
Regional VET - Center Kole Nehtenin – Stip	Director	
Regional VET - Center Nikola Karev - Strumica	Director	Associate Director
Regional VET- Center Mosa Pijade – Tetovo	Director	Head of Department for non-formal education
Regional VET- Center Vanco Pitoseski – Ohrid	Director	AL Coordinator
Regional VET - Center Gjorgji Naumov – Bitola	Director	Associate Director
Community Development Institute	Director	
Open Civic University for LL Vanco Prkje - Stip	Director	
Specialised school for primary education of adults A.S. Makarenko	Director	Pedagogue

List of individual interviews

Institution	Interviewee 1
Adult Education Centre.	Head of Department for advancement of Adult Education.
Ministry of Education and Science.	Head of Department for Secondary Education, Adult Education and Lifelong Learning.
Institute of Pedagogy, University Goce Delcev – Stip.	University professor.

ANNEX III – ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Priority	Measure	Indicator	Result
1. Increasing the qualifications of adults.	<p>1. Setting up of a VNFIL-system.</p> <p>2. Support the completion of secondary education of adults.</p> <p>3. Awareness raising on importance of AL.</p>	<p>1. The VNFIL-system is set up and piloted on at least 3 qualifications and 30 candidates.</p> <p>2. At least 1000 adults enrolled in secondary education through this measure.</p> <p>3.1. Developed Awareness Raising Concept.</p> <p>3.2. At least 4 regional and 1 national awareness raising campaign per year.</p>	<p>1. Legal framework of VNFIL has been approved in 2025. In 2024 IPA funds have supported capacity building and preparation to deploy the system.</p> <p>2. In the period from 2021 to 2023 832 adults have completed secondary education.</p> <p>3.1. /</p> <p>3.2. Awareness raising activities took place under the project 'Raising attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and AL'.</p>
2. Improving the content and quality of AL.	<p>1. Revision and improvement of the procedures for Verification of non-formal adult education providers.</p> <p>2. Revision and improvement of the procedures for monitoring AL and external quality assessment mechanisms.</p> <p>3. Operationalisation of a National system for training of trainers of adult learners.</p>	<p>1. Approved and introduced reviewed procedure for verification of service providers of non-formal adult education.</p> <p>2. Revised system for monitoring quality in AL.</p> <p>3.1. Legally introduced system for training of trainers in AL.</p> <p>3.2. Adopted Occupational Standard for trainers in AL.</p> <p>3.3. Adopted programmes for training of trainers in AL.</p> <p>3.4. At least 50 trainers successfully completed the training.</p>	<p>1. Bylaw for Verification of programmes and providers of non-formal adult education programmes is developed and is currently in a procedure of review for adoption.</p> <p>2. Arranged in the Adult Education Law with a chapter Quality Assurance.</p> <p>3.1 Provided by the Law on Adult Education.</p> <p>3.2. Occupational Standard for trainers has been developed.</p> <p>3.4. 18 certified trainers of adults.</p>
3. Improving legislation, organization, and governance of AL.	<p>1. Improvement of the plans for financing AL.</p>	<p>1. A separate budget line for AL in the state budget with at least 1,5% of the total budget planned for Education.</p> <p>2. Setting up a basis for introduction of incentives for employers' investments in education and training of adults.</p>	<p>1. In 2023, the budget of the AEC, is 0,09% of the total budget for Education (MoES), the same as in 2022.</p> <p>2. /</p>

ANNEX IV – STATISTICAL DATA ON SPECIAL PROGRAMMES FOR NON-FORMAL AL/ ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE

Year	Number of accredited programmes	Number of trainings	Number of learners
2018	87	94	965
2019	134	60	753
2020	66	83	1062
2021	98	122	1073
2022	136	135	1231
2023	91	380	3457
2024	102	177	2158

Source: Adult Education Centre

ANNEX V – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN AL

Institution	Responsibility
MoES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopts an AL Strategy Accredits AL institutions for programmes in formal education Adopts special programmes for AL Provides state Budget for financing AL Provides funds for research and development in AL
AEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposes development policies in AL Develops and monitor the AL Develops European orientation of the national AL system Develops and monitor VNFIL Develops and manage the Verification Verifies special non-formal AL programmes and accredit their providers Develops public special non-formal AL programmes Supports social partnership and links between AL and companies in a lifelong learning context Monitors the implementation of the AL Strategy Proposes amendments of existing and development of new Occupational and Qualification Standards
AE Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops and propose an AL Strategy Proposes AL programmes for state budget financing Proposes amendments of existing and development of new Occupational and Qualification Standards
CDVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts programmes for secondary VET of adults Proposes standards for accredited providers of special non-formal AL programs Supports and supervises over formal AE programs Adjusts programs for general subjects in secondary VET for adults
BDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts programmes for primary AE Proposes standards for accredited providers of special non-formal AL programmes Supports and supervise over formal AE programmes Adjusts programmes for general subjects in secondary VET for adults
MEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in implementation of AL policies Assesses up- and reskilling needs Proposes up- and reskilling needs to AEC Participates in preparation and alignment of Vocational Qualifications Initiates development of new Vocational Qualifications Proposes amendments of existing and development of new Occupational and Qualification Standards Adopts new Occupational Standards
ULSG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposes special AE programmes Analyses local labour market needs Reports to AEC on local labour market needs Establishes public AL institution Provides funding to public AL institutions Maintains a municipal register of public AL provider Develops and finances special non-formal AL programmes
Chambers/ Employers' Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose special AE programmes Propose amendments of existing and development of new Occupational and Qualification Standards Prepare analysis of labour market needs and publish them on website

	Propose amendment and supplementation of existing special AE programsh an AE institDevelop and finance special non-formal AL programmes
Trade Unions	Establish an AE institution Develop and finance special non-formal AL programmes Propose improvement of conditions for practical training
ESA	Collects and disseminates labour market related information Advises on employment and career guidance Finds a job for active job seekers Implements the Operational plan for active programmes and measures and labour market services
NQF-Board	Assesses policies in Education, Employment and lifelong guidance Recommends improvement of links of education with companies Approves Qualification Standards for AE programmes Approves applications by providers for implementation of courses and issuing micro-credentials
NQF Sectoral Committees	Analyse labour market developments and trends Propose sectoral qualifications for the levels II-Vb Analyse and propose amendments of existing qualifications and propose new ones Evaluate Qualification Standards Analyse existing Professional Standards, propose amendments and development of new ones

* Responsibilities highlighted with the same colours are shared between different institutions.

ANNEX VI – INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNANCE, STEERING AND COORDINATION BODIES IN SUB-SECTOR AL

Participating institution	Steering board of Adult Education Centre	AE Council	National NQF-Board	Sectoral NQF committees	Coordination of NQF Implementation
Ministry of Education and Science	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adult Education Centre	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Centre for Development of Vocational Education		✓	✓	✓	
Ministry of Economy and Labour	✓		✓		✓
Bureau for Education development		✓	✓	✓	
Employment Service Agency		✓			
Ministry of Finance		✓			
Economic Chambers	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Chamber of Crafts	✓	✓		✓	
Association of Employers		✓	✓	✓	
Association of self-government units (municipalities)	✓	✓			
National Agency for European Educational			✓		

Programmes and Mobility ²⁹					
Trade Unions		✓	✓	✓	
Universities			✓	✓	
Agency for support of Entrepreneurship		✓			
Adult Education Experts		✓			

²⁹ The country is actively participating in European educational programmes in AE and VET: Erasmus+ and EPALE, thus supporting international professional development of AE providers and professionals.

ANNEX VII – FUNDING SOURCES, TYPES AND VOLUME

Source of funding	Type of programme	Funding volume
The Budget of MK covers – (legally mandatory)	<p>1. Programmes for completion of primary education of adults</p> <p>2. Programmes for completion of secondary education for adults with completed primary education</p> <p>3. Functioning of the institutions founded by the state (AEC, RVETs, specialised school for primary education A. S. Makarenko)</p> <p>4. Monitoring, fostering and supporting the development of AL</p>	<p>1. This budget line is newly introduced. Amount in this budget line is not pre-defined.</p> <p>2. The budget for this activity for 2024 was EUR 96.230,00.</p> <p>3. AEC budget, in 2023, 0,09% of the budget for Education. In 2024, the budget of AEC was EUR 314.804,00 Specialised school A.C. Makarenko – EUR 157.900,00 for 2025 for programmes for completion of primary education for adults. To be increased in 2026.</p> <p>4. Ongoing research. Budget will be planned based on findings.</p>
The Budget of MK may /can cover (not legally mandatory)	<p>5. Teaching, and other types of equipment for the public AL institutions</p> <p>6. The costs for VNFIL, leading to acquisition of an NQF Level I qualification (primary education)</p> <p>7. Cost for implementation of special adult education programmes</p> <p>8. Development and implementation of adult education programmes</p>	<p>By 2024, the AEC has not spent any funds for the items 5, 6, 7 and 8. Exception is item 7, where EUR 6.625,00 from fees collected for verification, were spent for verification commissions (which review the programmes submitted by providers).</p>
The Budget of ULSG	<p>Costs related to the implementation of adult education programmes offered by the public adult education providers founded by the local self-government</p> <p>Regular maintenance of the public adult education institutions founded by the local self-government</p> <p>Investments in the public adult education institutions founded by the local self-government</p>	<p>No data on budget allocation of municipalities</p>
Operational plan for active labour market programmes and measures	<p>Segment 3 – Trainings, Segment 4 – Digital skills and Segment 5– Traineeships</p>	<p>Total amount for 2 and 3 and 4 of approx. EUR 5,6 Mil (approximately 14,6 % of the total amount of the whole programme of EUR 39 Mil)</p>

ACRONYMS

AE	Adult Education.
AE Council	Adult Education Council.
AEC	Adult Education Centre.
AL	Adult Learning.
BDE	Bureau for Development of Education.
CDVE	Centre for Development of Vocational Education.
EAAL	European Agenda on Adult Learning.
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe.
ESARNM	Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia.
ESRP	Employment and Social Reform Programme.
ETF	European Training Foundation.
EU	European Union.
ICT	Information and communication technology.
LL	Lifelong Learning.
MEL	Ministry of Economy and Labour.
MK	Republic of North Macedonia.
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science.
MQF	Macedonian Qualifications Framework.
NAAEPM	National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility.
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training.
NQF	National Qualifications Framework.

OCULL	Open Civic Universities for Lifelong Learning.
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
SEI	State Education Inspectorate.
SSO	State Statistical Office.
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.
ULSGs	Units of Local Self - Government.
VET	Vocational Education and Training.
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning.
WBL	Work-based learning.

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