

North Macedonia's Reform Agenda (2024–2027) and the Berlin Process

What They Represent and Why They Matter

The Berlin Process is an intergovernmental initiative launched in 2014 by Angela Merkel to support the EU integration of the Western Balkans through regional cooperation, economic connectivity, and reconciliation.

The EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is a financial and reform initiative launched by the European Commission in 2023 to accelerate economic convergence of the six Western Balkan countries with the European Union before full membership.

● Quick Overview

The Reform Agenda of North Macedonia (RA) 2024–2027 operationalizes the regional cooperation and reform priorities established through the Berlin Process, within the framework of the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

The Reform Agenda represents the Government's roadmap for aligning with EU standards, strengthening institutions, and gaining access to the funds provided under the Growth Plan. The European Commission monitors its implementation, and financial disbursements are made based on progress in the reforms.

The Reform Agenda is important because it directly links domestic reforms with EU accession and financing. Its implementation has a direct impact on governance, the rule of law, economic competitiveness, and the green and digital transition, making it central to the country's democratic resilience and long-term development.

● From Regional Priorities to National Reforms: The Berlin Process and North Macedonia's Reform Agenda through the Lens of Gender Equality

North Macedonia's Reform Agenda (RA) was adopted in October 2024. In line with the recommendations emerging from the Berlin Process, the RA **envisages 37 reforms and 136 measures** to be implemented between December 2024 and August 2027 across five priority areas: governance and public administration, energy and digital transition, human capital, private sector development, and the rule of law. The integration of a gender perspective is mentioned throughout the document; however, **the commitments remain limited and uneven.**

The Reform Agenda (RA) presents North Macedonia as relatively advanced in gender equality legislation and implementation. However, this assessment sharply contradicts the 2025 Country Report of the European Commission, which found no significant developments in the national policy framework for integrating gender equality nor in the efforts to align with the EU acquis and relevant international standards on gender equality. Key structural reforms remain stalled, including the long-pending Law on Gender Equality and the new Labour Law, while implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy is weak. At the same time, anti-gender movements have gained influence, further obstructing legislative and policy progress.

In the area of gender-based violence (GBV), the legal framework is largely underfunded and marked by systemic weaknesses: poor data collection and monitoring, weak institutional coordination, limited survivor support services, ineffective investigation and prosecution, lenient sentencing, inadequate child alimony enforcement, and restricted access to free legal aid. The economic consequences of violence are also insufficiently addressed, leaving survivors without adequate financial support. This gap between government self-assessment and EU findings underscores the need for a more transparent, evidence-based, and structurally grounded approach to gender equality reform.

The most concrete gender-related commitments appear under the Human Capital priority area. The RA promises to increase women's labour market participation through tailored programs and expanded education and training opportunities aimed at strengthening women's economic independence. While these measures are important, they are insufficient on their own. Without a comprehensive legislative and policy framework addressing structural discrimination and countering anti-gender backlash, labour market activation alone will not close the gender gap.

In the Green Transition chapter, the RA acknowledges that crises and socioeconomic shocks risk reversing progress in women's rights. It foresees revision and implementation of the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) and the Just Transition Roadmap, developed with EU support.



The NECP recognizes socioeconomic disparities and vulnerabilities related to climate change and energy transition. Close monitoring will be necessary to ensure that implementation of the NECP and the Just Transition Roadmap adequately accounts for the differentiated impacts on women, girls, and marginalized groups, and that just transition principles are applied in practice.

In the Digital Transition area, the RA recognizes that digital transformation could reduce gender gaps in employment and poverty. However, specific measures targeting women or marginalized groups are absent. Although the RA commits to aligning national legislation with EU digital acquis, it does not explicitly integrate gender concerns, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Alignment with the new EU Directive on violence against women should be ensured as part of digital reforms.

The RA briefly references the fight against GBV in its gender mainstreaming section, but proposed reforms—such as improving judicial integrity—do not specifically address the handling of domestic and gender-based violence cases or strengthening victims' rights. Indicators and targets fail to mention women or gender explicitly. The Agenda also does not prioritize adoption of the long-pending Law on Gender Equality, despite repeated recommendations from the European Commission. In sum, the RA includes limited measures on employment and references to gender aspects in green transition, but it does not tackle structural discrimination or provide a vehicle for adopting key pending legislation. Gender mainstreaming risks remain rhetorical rather than transformative.

● Conclusion

North Macedonia's Reform Agenda includes references to gender equality but lacks the structural depth, legislative prioritization, and financial commitments necessary for transformative change. Without concrete action—particularly the adoption of pending legislation, operationalization of GBV protection systems, and integration of gender equality across all reform pillars—gender mainstreaming risks remaining symbolic. As highlighted by the European Commission and regional civil society actors, there can be no meaningful EU convergence without equality. Gender equality and diversity must become measurable, funded, and enforceable priorities across all reform and accession processes.

● Recommendations: No Convergence Without Equality – What Should Be Done

Gender equality and diversity must be treated as cornerstones of democratic resilience and EU integration in the Western Balkans. Without structural investment in equality, convergence with EU norms will remain stalled.

1. Gender must be mainstreamed across all reform areas

- o Conduct gender impact assessments for all RA reforms.
- o Integrate care economy investments, GBV prevention, and gender-responsive budgeting into Growth Plan, green, and digital transition measures.

2. Pending legislation must be adopted and implemented

- o Prioritize adoption of the Law on Gender Equality and Labour Law.
- o Align national legislation with the 2024 EU Directive on combating violence against women and the Istanbul Convention.

3. GBV Protection must be operationalized

- o Ensure sustainable funding for prevention and protection systems.
- o Train judiciary, police, and public servants in survivor-centered approaches.
- o Guarantee universal access to legal aid, shelters, and psychosocial services.

4. Gender Data Systems must be strengthened

- o Invest in gender-disaggregated data collection at national and municipal levels.
- o Establish monitoring mechanisms to track implementation and outcomes.

5. Inclusive participation must be ensured

- o Institutionalize participation of women's rights CSOs and organizations representing Roma, LGBTQIA+, rural, and youth constituencies in reform processes.

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