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Project 101051759
Initiating activities to implement the European Social
Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalisation (EFAD)
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National action plan on Digitalization in Macedonia for the period 2024-2026

When we are talking about digitalization basically we are speaking about encompassing the transformation of information into digital formats, use of digital technologies, connectivity, software applications, data management, cybersecurity, and the development of digital skills. Digitalization is a multifaceted process that influences various aspects of society, economy, and governance.

Macedonia, started to witness the initial developments in information and communication technologies in the late 20th century. It was started with establishing the basics of the ICT infrastructure as well as introducing the computer systems as well as telecommunication and networks as a new way of working.

In the begging of 21st century Macedonia started to take steps towards e-government initiatives to improve public services. Efforts were made to digitize government processes, making them more efficient and accessible to citizens. This period marked the beginning of the country's digital transformation journey. In the next years' government continued its efforts in digitizing public services and enhancing the overall e-government framework. Investments were made in improving digital infrastructure, including internet connectivity and data centers.

When it comes to the private companies, Macedonia has made significant progress in establishing a legislative framework as well as a strategic one that allows companies to embrace digitalization. Several approved laws in 2019, such as the Law on electronic documents, electronic identification and fiduciary services and the Law on electronic management and electronic services, allow individuals and legal entities to regulate their electronic signatures and seals and thereby obtain electronic confidential services. Furthermore, the Law on electronic commerce establishes the conditions for providing information services related to electronic commerce, the responsibilities of the providers of information services, commercial communications and the rules for the validity of contracts in electronic form. A key prerequisite to ensure that businesses, especially SMEs, can take full advantage of digital transformation is improved alignment and cooperation between regulatory bodies in Macedonia.

Like all the other countries, Macedonia also faced big challenges regarding the cybersecurity, digital skills gaps, and the need for a more robust regulatory framework to support the growing digital ecosystem. On the other hand, opportunities emerged for leveraging digital technologies in areas such as healthcare, education, and public administration. In the following period our country is continuing its efforts to strengthen digital infrastructure, enhance cybersecurity measures, and further develop e-government services.

Digitalization is a transformative force that can propel Macedonia into a new era of economic growth, efficiency, and societal well-being. This comprehensive National action plan on digitalization outlines the steps required for a successful national digital transformation. It encompasses key areas such as infrastructure, education, governance, innovation, and international collaboration.

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However, the effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws is a prominent challenge in the effort to digitize Macedonia, primarily in terms of stronger enforcement of these laws. Although Macedonia has established a solid legal framework, there is often an inadequate level of oversight by the competent authorities, resulting in challenges faced by consumers, especially in the domain of e-commerce. Moreover, compiling with EU regulations is another key obstacle. Although steps have been taken to align the legal framework with EU standards, certain gaps and inconsistencies exist that require resolution.

Macedonia, aspiring to join the European Union, aligned its digitalization efforts with EU standards and frameworks. But, nevertheless, we as a country haven't done much in that direction. First of all, the European social partner's framework agreement on digitalization hasn't been translated into Macedonian language, even though it is signed almost 4 years ago. Regarding that we cannot see any implementation of it and the social partners have big difficulties to implement any part of the agreement.

Furthermore, the national ICT strategy, which contains key pillars aimed at encouraging the digital transformation of businesses, is in the process of being drafted and harmonized since 2020. However, its finalization and formal adoption have yet to be realized. In addition, the imperative to strengthen public awareness and education regarding digital rights and responsibilities is emphasized. To effectively address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a multifaceted strategy that combines robust policy development with comprehensive implementation, ultimately fostering an environment in which digitization truly empowers businesses and benefits society as a whole.

Based on all that, the social partners decided to adopt the following National action plan on digitalization in Macedonia, for the Period 2024-2026.

The social partners will work on the following fields:

- Informing about European social partners' framework agreement on digitalization (EFAD)

- Right to disconnect (R2D)

- Digitalizing the work and communication of the social parners

Informing about European social partners' framework agreement on digitalization:

As we point out previously almost nobody knows about European social partners' framework agreement on digitalization, especially the social partners in Macedonia. We as social partners, signing this National action plan about digitalization in the next 2 years, will work on informing bigger audience about EFAD. To inform relevant audience about the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalization, we will undertake a series of targeted activities. The aim is to raise awareness, facilitate discussions, and engage relevant parties. Here is a suggested plan of activities:

- Informational sessions about EFAD:

  o Include sessions about promotion and information about EFAD in current activities, which will be consisted of explanation about the key provisions of the framework agreement, where broader audience can be reach but also experts can present information and engage in sessions with questions from the present participants.

  o Facilitate discussions to address questions and concerns, where relevant representatives from the social partners or government officials will be present.

  o Promote the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalization through partners' informational channels, such as websites.

  o Organizing debates to discuss the practical implications of the framework agreement and how it can be implemented at the national level.

  o Create informational materials such as brochures or social media posts to explain key points of the agreement.

  o Proposing initiatives for amendments to key laws for the application of digitization in the current law or collective agreements

By combining all of these activities, we can create a comprehensive and inclusive information campaign that ensures stakeholders and relevant people at various levels to be well-informed about the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalization.

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Right to disconnect

"Right to Disconnect" is not existing in any legal framework in Macedonia and therefore employees are not familiarized with this therm. In short, "Right to Disconnect" is a labor right concept that acknowledges employees' right to disengage from work-related communications and tasks outside of their regular working hours. The idea is to establish a clear boundary between work and personal life, especially in an era where digital technologies have enabled constant connectivity. And when we are talking about the key aspect of R2D we can say that they include: work-life balance, mental health and well-being, legal protections, collective Agreements, company policies, flexibility, global trends and many more. The parties signing this National action plan will stimulate activates like:

- o Increasing awareness about Right to disconnect in a way that promote a healthier work-life balance by preventing excessive work demands beyond regular working hours and that the continuous digital connectivity can contribute to stress, burnout, and negatively impact on employees' mental health.

- o Submit proposals that Right to Disconnect needs to be part of the new Labor law. Since the new law is not passed yet, when there will be official time for amendments to it, the parties that signed this NAP will propose changes to it, and the R2D to be included in the law, more precisely to be explained what it is and the employees can use it as their right.

- o Foster communications with the employers that the Right to disconnect to be included into the Collective agreements or the institutions legal documents.

- o Organize seminars and workshops to inform and educate about rights under the Right to Disconnect policy. Emphasize the importance of work-life balance and mental well-being and explaining them that Right to Disconnect does not necessarily mean a complete disconnection for everyone. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of establishing clear expectations and providing employees with the flexibility to manage their work schedules responsibly.

- o Promotional activates about the Right to disconnect, where social partners will use various channels such as emails, websites, posters, etc. to inform employees and employers about the Right to Disconnect.

The overall goal of this is to strike the balance between the demands of the modern workplace and the well-being of employees

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Digitalizing the work and communication of the social partners.

Digitalizing the work and communication of social partners can enhance efficiency, transparency, and collaboration. Parties that has sign this National Action plan on digitalization in Macedonia believes that digitalizing the work of social partners will be in favor for the members and introduce in the same way long-life learning because only in that way the employees can educate themselves, gain new skills but also have some requalification so they can keep their current jobs. According to that bellow are steps to achieve this digital transformation:

o Train members on digital skills, which will be consisted of conducting training programs to familiarize members with digital tools and platforms. Moreover, implementing programs like this will enhance digital literacy and skills among the workforce and general population and promote life-long learning.

o Foster the use of social media, where well established social media presence will happen and moreover we will maintain it for outreach and communicate with members.

o Collaboration with international trade union organizations and international employers' organizations, as well as neighboring countries, and the European Union to share best practices, lessons learned and leverage support for digitalization efforts.

o Discuss, research and gather information about creating a database of the trade unions or employers' organization which signed this NAP. The conducted research will be shared among the signing parties and will help them to find appropriate funding to create database which will be used to keep track of members, their profiles, and engagement levels, etc.

o Initiate the creation of National strategy on digitalization. With all the info, activities and work done before, the parties signing this NAP will have good ground for proposing the creation of National strategy on digitalization.

By embracing digitalization, social partners can adapt to the evolving landscape, enhance member engagement, and foster more efficient communication and collaboration. Regularly reassessing and updating digital strategies will help organizations stay agile and responsive to the needs of their members.

Implementing this action plan requires strong leadership, coordination among various stakeholders, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Regular reviews and adjustments will be made to adapt to changing technological landscapes and emerging and arising opportunities. By embracing digitalization, Macedonia can

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position itself as a competitive player in the global digital economy, driving sustainable economic growth and improving the quality of life for its citizens.

The parties that have signed this National action plan on Digitalization in Macedonia will monitor the implementation of it with having continuous reports on every 6 months. Moreover, a meeting will be scheduled among signing parties after one year of the signing to review the implementation of it.

The National action plan on Digitalization in Macedonia was agreed, accepted and signed by social partners' organizations:

Organization of employers of Macedonia President Dr. Vladanka Trajkoska	Confederation of free trade unions of Macedonia – KSS, President, Blagoja Ralpovski

January, 2024

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Aim 2: Raising awareness about Right to disconnect		
Result	*Activities*	*Timeframe*
Improved legal framework that it is in line with EU laws	- Submit proposals that Right to Disconnect needs to be part of the new Labor law. Since the new law is not passed yet, when there will be official time for amendments to it, the parties that signed this NAP will propose changes to it, and the R2D to be included in the law, more precisely to be explained what it is and the employees can use it as their right	2024-2026
	- Foster communications with the employers that the Right to disconnect to be included into the Collective agreements or the institutions legal documents	
Higher number of population has knowledge about Right to disconnect	- Promotional activates about the Right to disconnect, where social partners will use various channels such as emails, websites, posters, etc. to inform employees and employers about the Right to Disconnect	2024-2026
	- Increasing awareness about Right to disconnect in a way that promote a healthier work-life balance by preventing excessive work demands beyond regular working hours and that the continuous digital connectivity can contribute to stress, burnout, and negatively impact on employees' mental health	
Members of the social partner are informed and educated about their rights concerning R2D	- Organize seminars and workshops to inform and educate about rights under the Right to Disconnect policy. Emphasize the importance of work-life balance and mental well-being and explaining them that Right to Disconnect does not necessarily mean a complete disconnection for everyone. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of establishing clear expectations and providing employees with the flexibility to manage their work schedules responsibly	2024-2026

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Aim 3: Digitalizing the work and communication of social partners		
Result	**Activities**	**Timeframe**
Improved lifelong learning within social partners	- Train members on digital skills, which will be consisted of conducting training programs to familiarize members with digital tools and platforms. Moreover, implementing programs like this will enhance digital literacy and skills among the workforce and general population and promote life-long learning	2024-2026
Enhanced cooperation on international organizations	- Collaboration with international trade union organizations and international employers' organizations, as well as neighboring countries, and the European Union to share best practices, lessons learned and leverage support for digitalization efforts	2024-2026
Bigger use of digital tools	- Foster the use of social media, where well established social media presence will happen and moreover we will maintain it for outreach and communicate with members	2024-2026
	- Discuss, research and gather information about creating a database of the trade unions or employers' organization which signed this NAP. The conducted research will be shared among the signing parties and will help them to find appropriate funding to create database which will be used to keep track of members, their profiles, and engagement levels, etc.	2024-2026
Improvement of the legal framework about digitalization in Macedonia	- Initiate the creation of National strategy on digitalization. With all the info, activities and work done before, the parties signing this NAP will have good ground for proposing the creation of National strategy on digitalization	2024-2026

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