

Distinguished Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation for this opportunity to attend this Conference organized by the International Labor Organization, as the representative of the Government Republic of North Macedonia, together with the social partners, and to deliver an address.

Participating in this conference is of special importance, since it takes place in the year when the 100th anniversary of the International Labor Organization is marked. The celebration of this jubilee should remind us of the achievements thus far in the field of labor, thanks to the membership in this organization with a unique tripartite character. Nevertheless, we should also use the 100th anniversary as a motive for looking ahead towards resolving the dynamic relations that the modern development and technology bring.

On this occasion, let me address the question of youth unemployment, which, being a global issue, is also present in my country.

Unemployment is one of the gravest long-term problems that the Republic of North Macedonia faces. It affects almost all age groups of population, and especially the vulnerable categories of unemployed persons such as single parents, young people aged 15–29, the Roma community, the social welfare beneficiaries, and so on. Young people experience a series of problems preventing them from entering the labor market, including: non-correspondence between the knowledge and skills acquired in the formal education process and the actual labor market demands, average school-to-work transition period of about two and a half years, insufficient number of vacancies, and so on.

What poses an even grater problem is the large number of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Bearing in mind the high youth unemployment rate, which amounted to 36% in the last quarter of 2018, as well as the striving of the Government to rise to the challenge, we decided to adopt a systemic approach to solving the problems that young people in the Republic of North Macedonia face, that is, to introduce the Youth Guarantee following the revision of the *Action Plan for Youth Employment*.

The Youth Guarantee is part of the European main initiatives, which aims to provide young people with a quality offer for employment, continuing education and training, or for internship, within four months from the date of registration in the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The Youth Guarantee was first piloted in 2018 in three municipalities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I would like to underline that the introduction of the Youth Guarantee was enabled with the technical

assistance of the International Labor Organization, and that we are the first country in the region to implement such a program.

Initially, an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee was prepared, which contains specific activities divided into three pillars:

- (1) early intervention, which means including young people in formal education and training;
- (2) outreach activities aimed at attracting young people who are either not registered in the employment centers or are inactive; and
- (3) services for activation in the labor market and active measures and programs for labor market integration via employment policies and programs.

We set an objective, and decided that the pilot phase of the Youth Guarantee would be considered successful if at least 30% of the young people covered with the Youth Guarantee exit the program within four months from their respective date of registration, and are either included in the adequate employment programs and measures or become employed in the regular labor market.

On this occasion, I would like to inform you that the set objective has been exceeded given that the share of the aforesaid young people has amounted to 41.7%, as well as that this year the program has been implemented throughout the country.

For the purposes of our commitment to faster youth inclusion in the labor market, we adopted a special *Law on Internship*, thus providing young unemployed people with the possibility to do practical work in an actual workplace for a certain period of time in order to increase their employability.

The introduction of the Youth Employment, that is, the creation and implementation of employment policies, is of immense importance and provides significant support to the social protection system reform,

aimed at redesigning the social protection system and cash benefits for protection of children by introducing guaranteed minimum assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, as we celebrate the centenary of the International Labor Organization, I assure you that the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia shall continue to work on improving the working conditions, and reducing the gender gap and the inequality in the labor market, aware of the importance of the social dialogue and the joint fight of all stakeholders for decent work, in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity.

Thank you for your attention.

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