Digital Convergence USP2030

Talking Interoperability
A dialogue series for advancing interoperability in the social protection sector

North Macedonia: Advancing Digital Transformation and Interoperability in Social Protection

This brief summarises key learnings from the dialogue on interoperability in the Republic of North Macedonia social sector, held on December 10th 2024.

*The keynote was presented by **Elizabeta Kunovska** - Social Services Improvement Project Manager, **Sanja Andovska** - Social Services Improvement Project Procurement Manager and Assistant Project Manager, **Anica Gjurovska** - Social Services Improvement Project IT Manager, and **Natasa Tasevska Stojanovska** - Social Protection Delivery System Coordinator. The discussants were **Ambrish Shahi** – Senior Social Protection Specialist, The World Bank, and **Joe Zaarour** – Digital Social Protection Advisor, World Food Programme. The session was moderated by **Sarang Chaudhary** – Advisor for Digital Social Protection, GIZ.*

Please click here **to access the recording and presentation slides.**

Overview

North Macedonia, with a population of **1.83 million individuals** and **598,632 households**, has made notable progress in poverty reduction, decreasing from **41% in 2009 to 19% in 2019**. The main social protection programmes targeting poor households and individuals include **guaranteed minimum income** (34,095 households with 97,033 individuals), **child allowance** (19,248 families with 40,256 children), **educational allowance** (27,344 children), and **social security for the elderly** (18,875 individuals).

However, challenges remain, as approximately **400,000 people** still live in poverty. The country also faces a persistently low **Human Capital Index (HCI) of 0.56** and a **13.01% unemployment rate**, significantly trailing behind its European counterparts.

To address these issues, North Macedonia has developed a robust **digital infrastructure**, built upon policy-level reforms, that underpins its social protection systems:

- **Civil Registration System** and **Common Identification System** ensure complete population coverage, providing each individual with a **unique Personal Identification Number (PIN)** for tracking across national registries.

- **Social Protection Information Systems** cover **73% of the population**, encompassing:

    o The **Cash Benefits Management Information System (CBMIS)**,

    o **LIRICUS**, used for managing social services

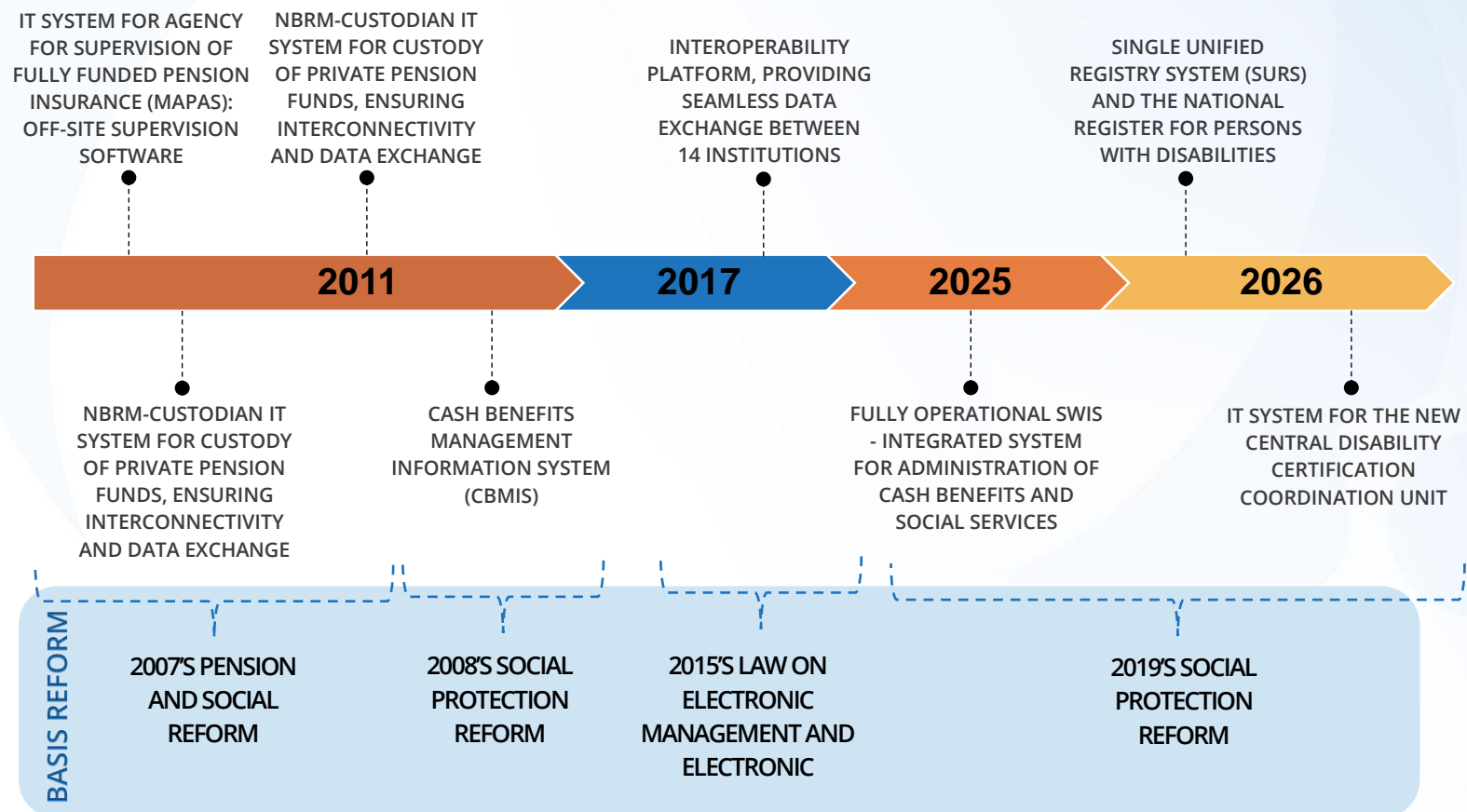   o Further enhancements for **formal sector social insurance MIS and disability registry** are underway.

- The **Social Welfare Information System (SWIS)**, scheduled for full implementation in **January 2025**, will integrate cash benefits, social services, and public authorisations into a unified platform.

- Other registries, such as the **tax information system, land registry, employment status, and pensioner records**, play a vital role in verifying eligibility criteria.

Digitalisation Timeline

IT SYSTEM FOR AGENCY FOR SUPERVISION OF FULLY FUNDED PENSION INSURANCE (MAPAS): OFF-SITE SUPERVISION SOFTWARE

NBRM-CUSTODIAN IT SYSTEM FOR CUSTODY OF PRIVATE PENSION FUNDS, ENSURING INTERCONNECTIVITY AND DATA EXCHANGE

INTEROPERABILITY PLATFORM, PROVIDING SEAMLESS DATA EXCHANGE BETWEEN 14 INSTITUTIONS

SINGLE UNIFIED REGISTRY SYSTEM (SURS) AND THE NATIONAL REGISTER FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

2011   **2017**   **2025**   **2026**

NBRM-CUSTODIAN IT SYSTEM FOR CUSTODY OF PRIVATE PENSION FUNDS, ENSURING INTERCONNECTIVITY AND DATA EXCHANGE

CASH BENEFITS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (CBMIS)

FULLY OPERATIONAL SWIS - INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR ADMINISTRATION OF CASH BENEFITS AND SOCIAL SERVICES

IT SYSTEM FOR THE NEW CENTRAL DISABILITY CERTIFICATION COORDINATION UNIT

BASIS REFORM

2007'S PENSION AND SOCIAL REFORM

2008'S SOCIAL PROTECTION REFORM

2015'S LAW ON ELECTRONIC MANAGEMENT AND ELECTRONIC

2019'S SOCIAL PROTECTION REFORM

How does the SWIS facilitate data exchange?

Since its introduction in 2011, CBMIS has **significantly improved targeting, reduced abuse, lowered applicants' costs, and streamlined administration**. The system has also **automated** financial management, resulting in savings on bank and postal fees.

The **SWIS** aims to address some of the remaining gaps from the CBMIS, enhancing its functionalities, breaking down silos within social services and creating a unified platform with all relevant data accessible. Doing so should allow social workers to assess families and individuals' needs **comprehensively**, integrating services for tailored and timely support, such as financial benefits, counselling, healthcare, and social security, all through a **single platform** that covers the entire lifecycle of social protection processes.
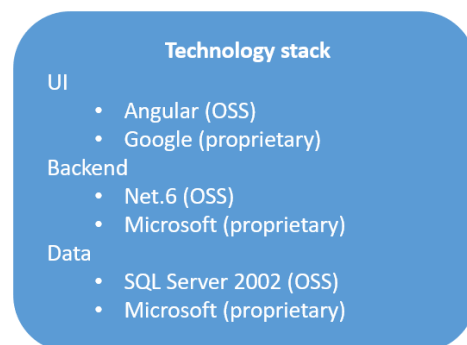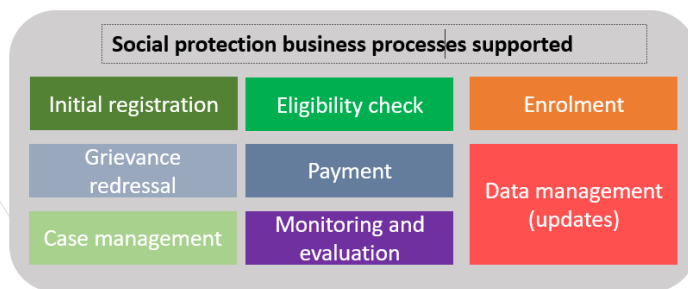
SWIS will support the provision of all cash benefits, social services, including benefits like Guaranteed Minimum Income, Child Allowance, and Social Security for the Elderly. It will also include services like counselling, home care, and foster care. Moreover, SWIS will **integrate**

public authorisations related to family law and child protection, allowing social workers a real-time view of processes, with better oversight and control, including an increased volume of data exchanges between relevant institutions. SWIS aims at providing significant time and resource savings for a more efficient and transparent social welfare system, by:

- Involving **more data exchange institutions**
- Growing the **volume of data exchanged**
- Strengthening **control measures** in the exercise and payment of rights and social services

Overview of the SWIS

- Launch year 2025
- Number of households covered 381.795
- Number of individuals covered 909.855
- Database size 1TB

Technology stack
UI
- Angular (OSS)
- Google (proprietary)

Backend
- Net.6 (OSS)
- Microsoft (proprietary)

Data
- SQL Server 2002 (OSS)
- Microsoft (proprietary)

Social protection business processes supported

Initial registration	Eligibility check	Enrolment
Grievance redressal	Payment	Data management (updates)
Case management	Monitoring and evaluation	

SWIS will be used by **all social protection actors**, including the Centres for Social Work, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth, and licensed social services providers, among others while registering around **70% of North Macedonia's population** in the information system. The system works through the introduction of the role of the "**operator**", responsible for filling in the information from applicants into the system, **freeing up social workers to manage cases rather than being overburdened by administrative procedures**. Furthermore, monitoring and data exchanges are facilitated by the participation of a wide range of institutions and by the **real-time data exchange** once data is included by the operator. This streamlined approach will also save applicants time and money, **reducing administrative costs by consolidating information** within a single system.

The system's reform major role, with the inclusion of SWIS, is to **facilitate the role of the case manager**, responsible for applicants and beneficiaries' families. With SWIS, case managers should be able to gather data from the system and provide **tailored support,** working directly with these families, guiding them to the necessary benefits and services. Households will be provided with **unique numbers** that allow stakeholders to easily access information on the household and on the services provided, while benefits should be processed through SWIS to service providers and **disbursed directly** to individual bank accounts of rights holders on a monthly basis.

Critical success factors and lessons learned

Seamless data exchange is a challenge for involved institutions, which have their own individual systems and platforms, whose adjustments can be difficult. To respond to it, specific funds had to be allocated in order to maintain the existing software and adjust it for SWIS.

Ensuring support and commitment from key stakeholders and decision-makers also requires their involvement from the onset and early in the process. This includes consultations, collaboration, specific allocation of resources, continuous engagement, as well as recognition and appreciation of their contributions.

Future system users, who were accustomed to different procedures prior to the new system's implementation, also required special attention and continuous support. This includes training programmes and workshops for them, developing unified Standard Operating Procedures to ensure consistency across all processes, and establishing ongoing support to assist users in the adaptation process.

Finally, **gaining acceptance of the system by end users themselves is a challenge**. Efforts have been made to involve end users early in the system design and development process, including providing accessible training sessions and continuous support, while using their inputs to improve and adjust the system, therefore building trust in SWIS.

As such, SWIS should have major key benefits and improvements, such as:

- Improved **targeting precision** to reach cash beneficiaries

- **Faster case resolution**

- **Simplified and streamlined access** and application processes with an ID card

- **Data security** with strengthened safeguards

- **Improved efficiency** for professionals, freeing up time on administrative tasks

- **Rapid crisis response**, enabling prompt action

- **Simplified monitoring and evaluation process**

- **Categorization of databases**

- **Data management efficiency improvement**, including data collection, processing and analysis

- Creation and development of **tailored policies**

- **Better sustainability** by eliminating paper usage in administration.