



FECH

Forum for Educational Change

CLEAN PAGES

Academic Integrity, Transparency and Resilience

Policy Proposal

**Marina Klimoska
Stefan Atanasovski Trajkovic**

Supported by



**©2026 Forumi për Ndryshime në Arsim; Форум за образовни промени
(Forum for Educational Change), National Endowment for Democracy (NED)**

Publisher:

FECH - Forum for Educational Change

Author:

Marina Klimoska, Stefan Atanasovski Trajkovic

The research “Clean Pages” has been produced with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) as part of “Promoting Youth Engagement in Accountability of Public Institutions” project.

Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of NED. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this publication lies entirely with the author(s).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Analysis of the Current Situation_____	3
2. Proposal of Strategy and Policy Measures_____	7
2.1 Objectives_____	7
Desired changes in the approach to policy_____	8
Effects of these changes_____	9
Measurable indicators_____	10
2.2 Strategy_____	11
2.3 Policy Measures_____	11
1. Legal and Regulatory Reform_____	12
2. Institutional Governance_____	12
3. Transparency and Digitalization_____	13
4. Student Empowerment and Protection_____	13
5. Research Integrity and Support_____	14
3. Implementation_____	15
3.1 Timeline_____	15
3.2 Implementation plan_____	16
PHASE I (6 months - 1 year) - Building Foundation_____	16
PHASE II (12 months - 24 months) - Approval and Full Implementation____	16
PHASE III (24 months - 36 months) - Sustainability and Evaluation_	17
Resources Needed and Sources_____	18
4. Conclusion_____	20
5. References_____	21

1. Analysis of the Current Situation

The policy proposal Clean Pages is the final publication of the informal student-led initiative, Clean Pages, supported by the Forum for Educational Changes (FECH). The initiative is addressing corruption in North Macedonia's higher education system, specifically the practice of **under the table transactions** required by university professors selling their textbooks as a condition for progressing in their studies.

North Macedonia's higher education system operates under a legal framework that provides limited specific guidance on textbook publishing and mandatory literature policies. **The Law on Higher Education**¹ establishes university autonomy and academic freedom, but does not explicitly regulate professor-authored textbooks or their mandatory purchase requirements. This creates a regulatory gap where individual universities and faculties maintain discretionary authority over textbook policies without clear legal constraints.

The **Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest**² provides the primary anti-corruption framework applicable to universities, requiring disclosure of conflicts of interest and establishing measures to prevent corrupt practices. However, its application to textbook publishing remains inconsistent across institutions. The **Law on Scientific and Research Activity**³ regulates basic research and publishing requirements, but lacks specific provisions for academic publishing in higher education related to this issue.

UKIM's digital library infrastructure⁴ provides access to over 200 open-access e-books and the e-Library UKIM Access⁵ to multiple electronic databases including EBSCO, Cambridge Core, and OpenEdition. The university participates in the COBISS (Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services) platform, which enables shared cataloguing across Macedonian libraries and provides students with access to over 18,000 full-text journals. But these resources don't cover most of the mandatory literature, which students usually end up getting through shady under-the-table deals with the professor.

¹ [Закон за високо образование](#)

² [Закон-за-спречување-на-корупцијата-и-судирот-на-интереси.pdf](#)

³ [ЕНЕР | Закон за научно-истражувачката дејност](#)

⁴ [Дигитална библиотека - Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ во Скопје](#)

⁵ [e-Library UKIM Access - Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ во Скопје](#)

Student testimonies describe practices where professors require purchase of their own publications as a condition for receiving signatures, additional points, or exam opportunities.⁶ In our **Clean Pages online survey** submitted by 150 students from UKIM, 43% of the students say that they were required to buy an original professor-authored textbook for some of the courses, while 18.8% of them for most of the courses, in order to progress in their studies.

Current anti-corruption frameworks lack specific enforcement mechanisms for textbook-related conflicts of interest. While the Law on Prevention of Corruption requires disclosure of financial interests, its application to textbook royalties and mandatory student purchases remains unclear and inconsistently enforced.

UKIM's internal quality assurance mechanisms do not systematically address textbook publishing policies or monitor potential conflicts of interest in literature requirements. Faculty-level autonomy in curriculum development includes discretionary authority over mandatory literature without centralized oversight of potential ethical concerns. The university's publishing council oversight focuses primarily on academic quality rather than ethical considerations related to mandatory purchases of faculty-authored materials.

Insufficient public funding for higher education creates pressures that may contribute to textbook-related corruption. The 2024 World Bank Public Finance Review⁷ noted that education spending in North Macedonia remains below regional averages, creating financial pressures on both institutions and students. Additionally, public investment in research remains significantly below the EU average (0.38% of GDP in North Macedonia compared to 2.27% of GDP in the EU)⁸

The education system lacks systematic transparency in textbook policies and purchasing practices. Universities do not publish comprehensive data on textbook requirements, costs, or policies regarding faculty-authored materials.

⁶ [Корупција во високото образование: Продажбата на книги од професори е најчеста коруптивна појава* | Meta.mk](#)

⁷ [World Bank: North Macedonia Public Finance Review](#) p. 133

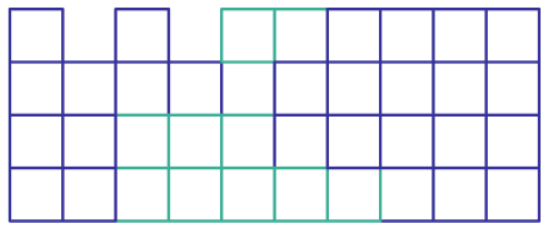
⁸ [Aligning North Macedonia's Higher Education with European Research & Innovation Trends](#)

Student protection mechanisms remain inadequate, with limited formal channels for reporting textbook-related conflicts of interest without fear of retaliation.

Inconsistent quality standards across university units affect both textbook selection criteria and evaluation processes. While new quality assurance bodies have been established, their focus on textbook policies and ethical considerations in literature selection remains underdeveloped.

The following sections of this policy proposal present a strategy with concrete policy measures and an implementation framework designed to address these challenges in a comprehensive and sustainable approach.

Combating Textbook Corruption in North Macedonia



2. Proposal of Strategy and Policy Measures

2.1 Objectives

This proposal aims to **eliminate corruption textbook-purchasing practices** in North Macedonia's higher education by establishing transparent, student-centred rules for literature selection and access. It seeks to ensure that students can progress academically without being pressured to buy professor-authored materials, to establish clear conflict-of-interest rules around academic publishing, and to guarantee affordable access to required literature through libraries, university digital platforms, and free open-access sources.

Equally important, the proposal aims to foster a culture of research with integrity. Professors and researchers must be supported to produce high-quality textbooks and academic works without relying on informal or corruption practices. This means discouraging the production of plagiarized or low-value texts and creating conditions where publishing is affordable, properly reviewed, and aligned with European standards of quality and ethics.

Desired changes in the approach to policy

At present, textbook policies are decided by individual faculties or universities with little oversight, while national anti-corruption rules do not explicitly cover textbook practices. This leaves space for abuse. The desired change is a move toward a transparent and accountable system where:

- Conflicts of interest are declared and monitored whenever a professor requires their own textbook.
- All existing mandatory textbooks currently in use are digitized and made available through secure university digital platforms, ensuring that reforms apply not only to new publications but also to the materials professors continue to use year after year.
- Students always have a choice — every required book must be available either in the library, on the university's licensed digital platforms, or in a free open-access version online.
- Independent oversight bodies review textbook rules instead of leaving decisions entirely in the hands of professors.
- Universities publish clear information each semester on required books, their costs, and the available access options.
- Research quality is supported — professors are encouraged to publish with integrity through institutional support for editing, proofreading, and open-access publishing.
- A unified approach is established across all faculties and universities, ensuring that positive practices such as digital access systems are applied consistently, so that students in one faculty are not disadvantaged compared to those in another.

Effects of these changes

If implemented, these changes will replace unclear, professor-controlled practices with transparent and fair systems. Expected effects include:

- More integrity and trust. Students will no longer feel forced into informal payments, and universities will align with European standards of honesty in education.
- Equal access. All students, regardless of income, will be able to meet course requirements through legitimate and affordable options.
- Better learning. With less stress and clearer rules, students can focus on studying instead of worrying about costs or pressure.
- Stronger institutions. Universities will gain consistent procedures and oversight mechanisms, reducing risks of corruption.
- Improved research culture. Professors will be recognized and supported for producing quality materials, discouraging plagiarism and encouraging genuine contributions to knowledge.
- A unified approach across all faculties and universities will reduce inequalities in student experiences, ensuring that best practices such as full digital access are not limited to specific faculties, but become the standard everywhere.

Measurable indicators

- 50% fewer students reporting they were required to buy a professor's book in the first year, 80% fewer in the second year, and elimination of the practice in following years.
- 100% of mandatory textbooks available either in the library, through university digital platforms, or in free open-access versions.
- Increasing share of student complaints about textbooks resolved fairly without retaliation each year.
- 100% of faculties audited annually for compliance with textbook rules.
- Decreasing average annual spending by students on mandatory textbooks.
- Increasing number of professors supported with proofreading, editing, or open-access publishing grants each year.
- Increasing share of students who believe they can report corruption without fear.
- Decreasing number of plagiarized or low-quality textbooks identified through university review commissions each year.
- Increasing number of high-quality, peer-reviewed, or open-access academic works produced by professors each year.
- Increasing national public spending on research from the current 0.38% of GDP toward at least 1% in the medium term, with a long-term goal of approaching the EU average of 2.27%.

2.2 Strategy

The strategy for tackling corruption in higher education will focus on creating a transparent and fair system of textbook policies through coordinated legal reforms, institutional changes, and public engagement. The approach combines national-level policy updates with reforms inside universities, supported by digital tools and wider advocacy efforts. Implementation will rest on four pillars: aligning laws and policies with clear conflict-of-interest rules, introducing stronger quality assurance and review mechanisms within universities, expanding digital access to textbooks through libraries and open-access platforms, and providing financial and institutional support for professors who publish with integrity. These measures will be accompanied by broad awareness campaigns targeting both students and academic staff, ensuring that rights and responsibilities are well understood. After adoption, the proposal will be followed by an advocacy effort engaging universities, student bodies, NGOs, anti-corruption agencies, and international partners such as the EU and UN, in order to ensure long-term enforcement and alignment with European standards.

2.3 Policy Measures

To effectively address corruption in textbook practices, the measures are grouped into five categories: legal and regulatory reform, institutional governance, transparency and digitalization, student empowerment and protection, and research integrity and support. Together, they create a system-wide response that applies to all public universities and aligns with European standards of fairness and integrity.

1. Legal and Regulatory Reform

- Amend the Law on Publishing Activity to define coercive textbook sales as a violation, require professor-authored mandatory textbooks to be deposited in university libraries (both digital and physical), and mandate plagiarism and originality checks before approval. Include sanctions for violations.
- Amend the Law on Higher Education to require universities to adopt uniform rules on textbook policies, conflicts of interest, and sanctions, ensuring equal application across all public universities.
- Aligning University Statutes, Ethical Codes, and disciplinary procedures with these laws, embedding anti-corruption rules in foundational university documents.

2. Institutional Governance

- Establish independent textbook commissions at each faculty, including professors from other departments, library staff, and student representatives, to review and approve mandatory literature.
- Expand the mandate of university quality assurance bodies to monitor textbook policies and conflicts of interest, not only teaching quality.
- Require faculties to publish yearly reports on textbook practices, conflicts of interest, and sanctions applied.

3. Transparency and Digitalization

- **Public textbook lists.** Each semester, universities must publish lists of all mandatory textbooks, their authors, prices, and available access options.
- **Digitization of existing textbooks.** Launch a national program to scan and digitize mandatory textbooks, prioritizing those used in high-demand courses.
- **University login access.** Provide password-protected digital access to mandatory textbooks (for the digitization process of existing textbooks) through university accounts (student email + login), respecting copyright.
- **Fair student contribution.** Cover costs of digitization and licensing through public funding or a small fixed annual student fee included in existing administrative charges, ensuring affordability and replacing informal cash payments.
- **Mandatory email responsiveness.** Professors are required to respond to student emails sent from official university accounts within a reasonable timeframe (e.g. three working days), ensuring fair communication.
- **Pre-semester communication.** Professors must send all enrolled students an email, before the start of each semester, with the subject outline, mandatory textbooks, and access details for all required materials. This ensures students know what is expected in advance and can prepare without last-minute surprises.

4. Student Empowerment and Protection

- Establish independent reporting channels at university and national levels, with strong protection against retaliation.
- Provide training and resources for student assemblies and unions to monitor textbook practices, advocate against corruption, and promote ethical academic conduct.
- Strengthen student ombudsman offices so they can investigate textbook-related complaints and enforce remedies.
- Introduce workshops and modules for students on proper citation, plagiarism prevention, and research ethics to build a new generation of researchers with integrity.

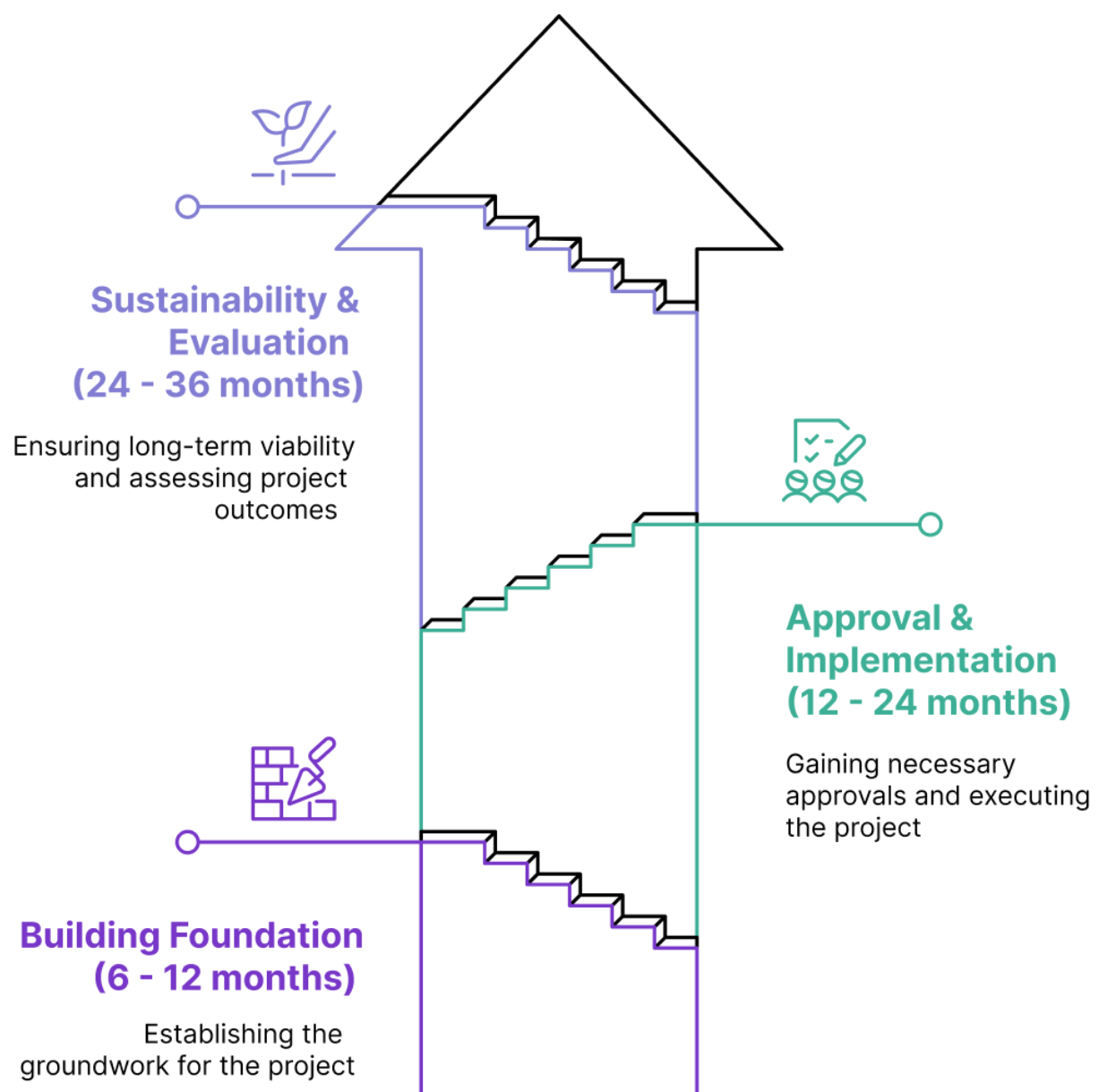
5. Research Integrity and Support

- Require originality screening for all professor-authored textbooks before publication, with strict rejection of plagiarized works.
- Provide grants for proofreading, editing, and digital or open-access publishing, reducing the costs faced by professors.
- Recognize peer-reviewed and ethically published textbooks in career promotions, discouraging mass production of low-quality works.
- Increase public spending on research from the current 0.38% of GDP to at least 1% in the medium term, with a long-term goal of approaching the EU average of 2.27%.

3. Implementation

3.1 Timeline

The proposed implementation of this policy proposal follows three phases, which will ensure that change is being made and sets up a momentum for implementing short term and long term solutions. The timeline is quite flexible, so it can accommodate the uncertainties regarding the politics and institutions' way of work in the Higher Education System in North Macedonia.



3.2 Implementation plan

PHASE I (6 months - 1 year) - Building Foundation

The first phase will establish the **Coordination Council for Academic Integrity**⁹ and begin the implementation of key reforms. Universities will start digitizing existing mandatory textbooks and uploading them onto secure university platforms, while all new professor-authored works approved as mandatory literature will be published in digital format. Independent textbook commissions will be formed at faculty level to review mandatory literature and address potential conflicts of interest. Anonymous reporting mechanisms for students will also be introduced. Drafting of amendments to the Law on Publishing Activity and the Law on Higher Education will begin, together with the preparation of changes to university statutes, ethical codes, and disciplinary rules.

PHASE II (12 months - 24 months) - Approval and Full Implementation

In the second phase, the drafted legal amendments will be adopted by Parliament, and universities will harmonize their statutes, ethical codes, and disciplinary rules in line with the new framework. Every public university will be required to operate a unified digital platform covering all faculties, where both newly published and digitized older textbooks are available to students through their university login. **Independent textbook commissions**¹⁰ will become fully functional across all faculties, overseeing fair textbook policies and monitoring conflicts of interest. **Plagiarism and originality screening systems**¹¹ will be introduced for professor-authored works. Transparency measures, such as pre-semester communication of course requirements and mandatory responses to student emails, will become binding standards across the higher education system. Student assemblies and ombudsman offices will receive systematic training to strengthen their roles in monitoring and student protection.

⁹ In the interest of proper implementation and to eliminate risks of undue influence, the **Coordination Council for Academic Integrity** will be established as the central body guiding the process. It will include representatives of universities, student assemblies, ombudsman offices, the Ministry of Education, the State Anti-Corruption Commission, civil society organizations such as the Forum for Educational Change, and independent academic experts. Its role will be to coordinate activities, monitor progress, and ensure accountability across all universities.

¹⁰ **Independent textbook commissions** are faculty-level committees that review and approve mandatory textbooks. They include professors from other departments, library staff, and student representatives, ensuring decisions are transparent, fair, and free from conflicts of interest.

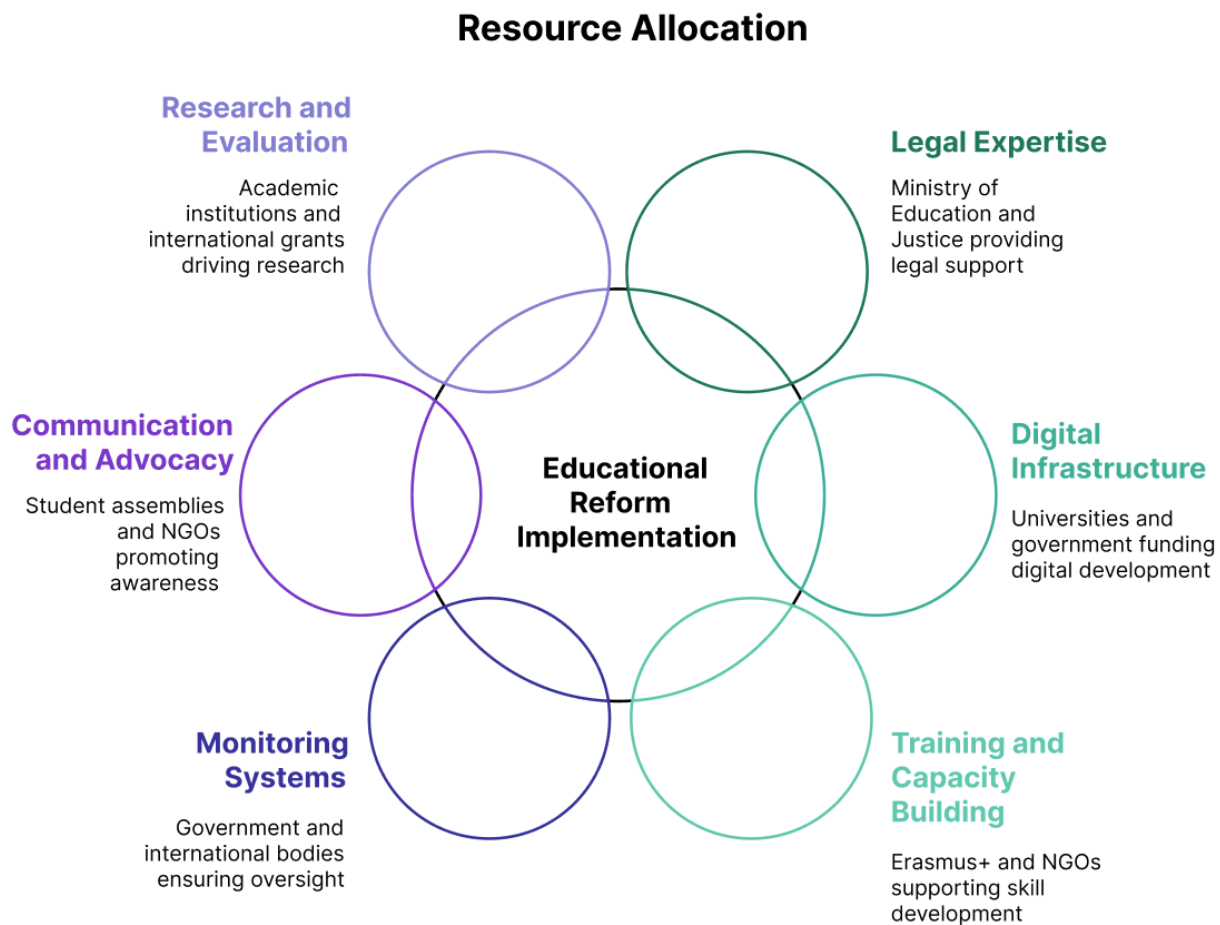
¹¹ **Plagiarism and originality screening systems** are software and review procedures used by universities to check professor-authored textbooks against global academic databases. They ensure that works are original, properly cited, and of sufficient academic quality.

PHASE III (24 months - 36 months) - Sustainability and Evaluation

The final phase will ensure that reforms are fully enforced and sustainable. Faculties are required to submit annual reports on all mandatory textbooks and access measures, which will be verified by universities and the Coordination Council. Compliance will be monitored at both the institutional and national level. A national evaluation will be carried out to assess the reforms' impact on reducing corruption, improving student access, and strengthening research integrity. Public spending on research will be increased toward 1% of GDP, providing long-term support for high-quality academic publishing and reducing pressures that drive corrupt practices. All digital platforms, laws, and university rules will be periodically reviewed and updated, ensuring that students remain protected from corruption in the long term.

At the conclusion of this phase, the Coordination Council for Academic Integrity will publish a comprehensive evaluation report on the three-year implementation, detailing achievements, challenges, and recommendations for future action.

Resources Needed and Sources



The implementation of this proposal requires a combination of legal, technical, institutional, and financial resources. These can be secured through existing government budgets, university allocations, and international support programs:

- Legal expertise will be provided by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice, with technical assistance available through the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) and the Council of Europe.
- Digital infrastructure and platform development will be financed by universities with government support, and complemented by EU Growth Plan funds for digitalization, Horizon Europe programs, and potential World Bank assistance for education digitalization.
- Training and capacity building for student assemblies, ombudsman offices, and textbook commissions will be supported through Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects, OSCE, UNDP, and local NGOs.
- Monitoring systems will be funded from the government budget for the State Education Inspectorate and the State Anti-Corruption Commission, with possible EU and OECD technical support.
- Communication and advocacy will be carried out by student assemblies and NGOs, with support from Erasmus+ and UNDP projects that fund civic engagement and anti-corruption awareness.
- Research and evaluation will be led by academic institutions with national funding, complemented by EU Horizon Europe research grants and occasional support from OECD or World Bank programs.

This mix of domestic and international sources ensures that reforms are both financially sustainable and aligned with the EU integration process.

4. Conclusion

The Clean Pages policy proposal addresses one of the most persistent and damaging forms of corruption in North Macedonia's higher education: the requirement for students to purchase professor-authored textbooks as a condition for academic progress. This practice undermines academic integrity, creates financial pressure for students, erodes trust in universities and negatively affects universities in global rankings.

Our proposal offers a comprehensive solution through three interconnected processes: digitization of existing and mandatory digitalization of new textbooks, legal and institutional reforms to close regulatory gaps, and investment in integrity and quality in academic publishing. With 5 categories of supportive measures, these processes can establish a transparent and accountable system where access to knowledge is guaranteed, corruption is prevented, and research is supported.

The expected impact is clear. Students will have equal and affordable access to learning materials, universities will operate with stronger rules and oversight, and professors will be supported and controlled to publish high-quality academic works with integrity. In the long term, higher education in North Macedonia will be more transparent, credible, and aligned with European standards.

This proposal is timely and urgent. With EU integration high on the national agenda and digitalization shaping education across Europe, now is the moment to act. Clean Pages provides a roadmap that benefits students, strengthens institutions, and restores public trust in higher education. It is not only a step toward eliminating textbook-related corruption, but also a step toward building a fairer, more resilient academic system that serves the whole society.

5. References

Law on Higher Education — Official Gazette of North Macedonia. Available at: [Закон за високо образование](#)

Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest — Official Gazette of North Macedonia. Available at: [Закон-за-спречување-на-корупцијата-и-судирот-на-интереси.pdf](#)

Law on Scientific and Research Activity — Official Gazette of North Macedonia. Available at: [ЕНЕР | Закон за научно-истражувачката дејност](#)

Digital Library of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM). Available at: [Дигитална библиотека - Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ во Скопје](#)

e-Library UKIM Access of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University. Available at: [e-Library UKIM Access - Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ во Скопје](#)

META.mk “Corruption in higher education: The sale of books by professors is the most common corrupt phenomenon.” Published 22.09.2024, Available at: [Корупција во високото образование: Продажбата на книги од професори е најчеста коруптивна појава | Meta.mk](#)*

World Bank. North Macedonia Public Finance Review. Available at: [North Macedonia Public Finance Review](#)

Interreg Europe. “Aligning North Macedonia’s Higher Education with European Research & Innovation Trends” Published 12.03.2025, Available at: [Aligning North Macedonia’s Higher Education with European Research & Innovation Trends](#)

