

MAPPING OF YOUTH POLICIES AND IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING SUPPORT AND GAPS IN FINANCING OF YOUTH ACTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA



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Title: MAPPING OF YOUTH POLICIES AND IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING SUPPORT AND GAPS IN FINANCING OF YOUTH ACTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS - NORTH MACEDONIA REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
CHAPTER 1: YOUTH POPULATION DATA	8
1.1 Age and gender	8
1.2 Education and employment	8
1.2.1 Education	9
1.2.2 Neither in employment nor in education or training	9
1.2.3 Unemployment rate	10
1.3 Migration	11
CHAPTER 2: ECONOMY YOUTH LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK	13
2.1 Constitution	13
2.2 Law on Youth	13
2.3 Strategy on Youth	14
2.4 Action Plan on Youth	15
2.5 Additional youth-related laws and policies	16
2.6 Institutions dealing with Youth	18
2.6.1 The Government of North Macedonia	18
2.6.2 Agency for Youth and Sports	18
2.6.3 Local authorities	19
2.7 Other sectors impacting youth	19
2.8 Critical assessment of legal and policy framework on youth	20
CHAPTER 3: YOUTH FUNDING FRAMEWORK: YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS	24
3.1 Youth policy funding	24
3.2 Youth project funding	25
3.3 Key Youth Programmes and Instruments	26
3.3.1 Youth Guarantee	26
3.3.2 Youth Card	27
3.3.3 Other youth programmes and policies	28
3.4 Critical assessment	29
CHAPTER 4: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLICY AND DECISION- MAKING PROCESSES	32
4.1 Youth engagement and participation in policy: Key mechanisms and processes	32

4.1.1 Participation at the central level	33
4.1.2 Participation at the local level	35
4.2 Evidence-based youth policy	36
4.3 Establishment and functioning of Youth Councils and umbrella organisations	36
4.4 Platforms of youth cooperation at the economy level	37
4.4.1 Youth Council of North Macedonia	37
4.4.2 SEGA –Platform of Youth Organisations	38
4.4.3 Union for Youth Work	38
4.5 Regional platforms and networks	38
4.6 Critical Assessment	39
CHAPTER 5: MAPPING OF DONOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH	42
5.1 Key donors in the field of youth	42
5.2 Donor Coordination	47
5.3 Priority areas for the future in the field of youth	48
5.4 Critical Assessment	50
CHAPTER 6 GOOD PRACTICE AND GAP ANALYSIS	53
6.1 Good Practice	53
6.2 Gap analysis	54
6.3 Recommendations	55
REFERENCES	58
ANNEXES	64
Annex 1 - Overview of stakeholders in North Macedonia	64
Annex 2 – Key contents of LYPYP	65
Annex 3 – List of Tables	66
Annex 4 - List of interviews	67

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APERNM	Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship in North Macedonia
ALMM	Active Labour Market Measures
AP	Action Plan
AYS	Agency for Youth and Sport
CYAP	Club on Youth Affairs and Policies
EC	European Commission
ESA	Employment Service Agency
EU	European Union
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession for Rural Development
LYPYP	Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MP	Member of Parliament
AEEPM	Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility
DINM	Democratic Institute North Macedonia
NEET	Not in employment, education, or training
NYCM	Youth Council of North Macedonia
YS YA	Youth Strategy
YA	Youth Assembly
YPAB	Youth Policy Advisory Body
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
UNDP	United Nation Development Agency
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for Inter Development
YACO	Youth Actively Create Opportunities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive review and evaluation of the existing framework for youth policy, as well as the programmes and mechanisms for youth participation in North Macedonia. Additionally, it highlights the available support and financial gaps in youth initiatives. This document has been prepared based on both desk research and in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders in the youth sector, including public administrations and youth civil society organisations. The desk research primarily involved the examination of legislation, economy strategies, action plans, and youth programmes. Vital sources of information on the state of youth sector in North Macedonia included statistics from diverse sources and the most recent reports from both local and international organisations. In-depth interviews were conducted with various stakeholders from local and international institutions and organisations. These stakeholders represented entities such as the Government, Assembly of North Macedonia, Agency for Youth and Sport (AYS), different civil society organisations, such as the Youth Council of North Macedonia (NYCM), and the Union for Youth Work.

In North Macedonia, youth face a spectrum of challenges that are closely tied to the absence of meaningful participation mechanisms and dialogue on policies that directly and positively influence their futures. The lack of platforms for youth to engage in decision-making processes means that their voices often go unheard, leaving them without a say in policies and programmes. While there are some established practices on engaging and consulting youth in policy, these are often dependent of the will of the institution and young people's feedback is not always implemented.

The adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies (LYPYP) in 2020 is a significant milestone in North Macedonia. LYPYP is the first legal solution in North Macedonia that guarantees youth participation and recognises young people and the forms of youth organisations. As such, the law makes a distinction between youth organisation, organisation for youth, and youth umbrella organisation, and delegates the obligation to the Agency for Youth and Sports to keep a Register of the forms of youth organisation. The law also defines for the first time the terms *young person*, *youth policy*, *youth participation*, *youth work* and *youth worker*. In addition to this, the law foresees the establishment of youth participation mechanisms and youth policy at both economy and local level, and youth services in every municipality, and most importantly foresees allocations from the economy-level and municipal budgets for the implementation of youth policy. While LYPYP carried great promise, its implementation has been very slow. Youth organisations, such as NYCM monitor its implementation, and its conclusion is that the implementation is the weakest at municipal level, and that the vague phrasing in LYPYP¹ makes it impossible to track where the spending for youth policy takes place, and if the legal provisions on the funding are met. It is positive to note that the Agency for Youth and Sports has taken these comments in consideration and launched a public debate on amendments to the Law in order to advance its implementation and resolve uncertainties arising from the current legal text. Some aspects of the Law, such as the establishment of the Youth Assembly of North Macedonia and the Advisory Body on Youth Policies are not finalised due to lack of will from the youth civil society sector, further indicating distrust between young people and institutions.

1 *Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies*, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.
<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>



Another significant development is the adoption of the new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027 in September 2023. AYS implemented an open and transparent process that spanned over a year, including various working groups and conducted consultations both at local and central level. The Strategy was adopted alongside an Action Plan for 2023-2025. While these documents carry promise for the youth sector, it is imperative that the authorities monitor and evaluate their implementation, unlike the case with the previous YS 2016-2025. These expectations will fall on the shoulders of AYS, which is the primary youth institution in North Macedonia. Unfortunately, AYS is faced with a disbalanced budget in favour of sporting activities and has very limited capacities. Support from additional stakeholders, such as the Government of North Macedonia and the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies in the Assembly are trying to fill this gap, but it is not enough.

Moreover, funds for the implementation of youth policy are allocated from the public budget, but financial support by donor community in this area is considerably higher. It is imperative to note that while legislation guarantees youth funding, the cross-sectoral nature of youth policy makes tracking the funds very challenging. Therefore, a wider and multisectoral approach needs to be promoted in order to ensure the success of youth policy.

In terms of youth funding, a more effective donor coordination mechanism should be established at an economy-wide, and in the future, at the regional level since the current approach has some limitations. These limitations are due to a lack of a cross-sectoral approach that engages a wide spectrum of stakeholders from economy-level authorities, donors and international organisations, as well as civil society organisations. Potential priority areas for funding are: engaging youth in the EU accession process, youth policy monitoring and evaluation, rural youth, promoting youth activism in a multi-ethnic context, youth radicalisation and extremism, Roma youth and other minority groups, addressing youth unemployment, green and social entrepreneurship, tackling brain drain, inclusive youth work, young people's health, strengthening youth civil society organisations, youth data, and wider European youth cooperation. Overall, there is the need for an integrated, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach to the issues of young people's development. The mainstreaming of youth issues traditionally addressed by programmes related to education, training, health and employment should continue but the aforementioned areas should be prioritised in the context of North Macedonia.

The report consists of six chapters, focusing on different youth-focused areas – from general youth population data, to legal and policy framework, funding framework, including key youth programmes and policies, mechanisms for youth participations, donor interventions in youth field and identified best practices and gaps. The report concludes with recommendations offered to all stakeholders involved in youth policymaking processes.



CHAPTER 1: YOUTH POPULATION DATA

This chapter presents statistics regarding youth age, gender, education, employment, and migration.

1.1 Age and gender

The total population of North Macedonia based on the 2021 census is 1,836,713, divided by males (49.6%) and females (50.4%). The census also indicates that 28.7% of the population is concentrated in the capital of the economy, the City of Skopje (including all of its municipalities)².

Table 1: Population figures 2015-2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2021
15-19	100,805	99,224	96,517	95,657	104,035
20-24	178,538	172,260	166,755	161,056	106,553
25-29	161,173	160,662	158,524	155,266	116,145
Total youth	440,516	432,146	421,796	411,979	326,733
Total population	2,070,226	2,072,490	2,074,502	2,076,217	1,836,713

Source: Statistical Office of North Macedonia

Based on data from 2021 census, and compared to data from previous years, it can be concluded that the youth population of North Macedonia is gradually decreasing, indicating that the population in the economy is ageing. Specifically, the total number of young people, as per the definition of youth in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies which defines a young person as someone aged 15-29³, has dropped to 326,733 in 2021. Compared to the total population, youth population constitutes 17.8% of the total population. Regarding gender distribution, as per census data, there are 167,284 (54%) young males and 159,449 (46%) young females.

1.2 Education and employment

The educational system in North Macedonia is consistently undergoing reform. Such a situation of continuous reform hinders the possibility of a thorough evaluation of the effects of specific educational models and their effectiveness, which might narrow the space for all stakeholders to encourage the process. It is particularly difficult to distinguish between positive and negative effects for direct users of this process, i.e. youth.

2 State Statistical Office, 2021, Census 2021, Government of North Macedonia, accessed 11 September 2023. <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2022/POPIS_DZS_web_MK.pdf>

3 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023. <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>



A notable advancement occurred with the establishment of University Student Assemblies and Faculty Student Assemblies through the 2018 amendments to the Law on Higher Education, serving as mechanisms for youth participation in higher education institutions⁴. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges in implementing effective educational reforms, particularly in light of the frequent turnover in leadership within the Ministry of Education and Science. Over the past three decades, data indicates that there have been 19 different Ministers of Education, resulting in a new minister approximately every 1.6 years on average, with only one successfully completing the term⁵.

Youth employment also remains a very important issue for the economy. A key problem relating to youth position in the labour market remains the insufficient quality of education outcomes; the relevance of education outcomes in terms of labour market needs; a still-weak relationship between industry and the working environment; and secondary school curricula that do not yet integrate career orientation⁶.

1.2.1 Education

Since 2008, compulsory education in North Macedonia comprises primary, lower, and upper secondary levels. Between 2000 and 2015, upper secondary education's gross enrolment rate increased from 67% to 80%. As per the 2022 EU report, 90.8% of children were enrolled in primary education (90.6 % male, 91% females) and 78.9% in secondary education (Females 79.8 % Males 78.1 %) in the 2020-2021 school year⁷. The total amount is 71.811 students. Significant progress was made in boosting VET education at secondary level: the rate of student's participation in the secondary VET system is marked by a constant increase: 64% in 2021, compared to 62.1% in 2020 and 61.8% in 2019. In higher education, the overall enrolment remains low. The number of university students enrolled in the first year of studies has been declining in the last three years⁸.

The economy's higher education system has expanded rapidly in the past two decades. In 2017, there were 22 higher education institutions, compared to only five in 2003/2004, including 14 universities and 5 professional educational institutions. By 2023, the total number of public and private universities in North Macedonia increased to 18, along with 9 accredited professional educational institutions⁹. In 2016/17, 58,083 students were enrolled in all institutions of higher learning. For the academic year 2022/2023 53,821 students were enrolled in higher education, which is an increase of 4.2% compared to 2021/2022¹⁰.

Based on statistics provided by the Statistical Office of North Macedonia, there was a 2.2% rise in the number of graduates from higher vocational schools and faculties in North Macedonia in 2019, as

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- 4 Law on Higher Education, 2018, accessed 8 September 2023, <<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20visokoto%20obrazovanie%20NOV.pdf>>
 - 5 Jovanovski, Z. On Strike, Education, Students and Teachers from a different perspective, Ekonomija i Biznis., accessed 20 September 2023, <<https://ekonomijaibiznis.mk/News.aspx?IdNews=25745&fbclid=IwAR39jHAWGGqf9ZLYzNOQW8ssO8lItSlzyZJskDEfeVtaASH5TY4-0cXUnKc>>
 - 6 UNESCO, North Macedonia, accessed 8 October 2020, < <http://uis.unesco.org/economy/MK> >
 - 7 European Commission, 2022, 2022 North Macedonia Report, accessed 15 September 2023, <<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/North%20Macedonia%20Report%202022.pdf>>
 - 8 European Commission, 2022, 2022 North Macedonia Report, accessed 15 September 2023, <<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/North%20Macedonia%20Report%202022.pdf>>
 - 9 Ministry of Education and Science, Accredited higher educational institutions, accessed 21 September 2023, <<https://mon.gov.mk/page/?id=2047>>
 - 10 State Statistical Office, 2023, Enrolled students at the higher vocational schools and faculties in the North Macedonia in the academic year 2022/2023 (first cycle of studies), accessed 20 September 2023, <<https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooptstanie.aspx?id=29&rbr=14387>>



compared to 2018. Among these graduates, female students accounted for a majority, constituting 57.7% of the total. In 2022, 7,483 students graduated and completed a Bachelor's Degree, a number which constitutes a decrease by 3.5% compared to 2021. Over the years, the majority is of full-time students, which is consistent at around 80%, and the share of graduated female students was 57.1%.¹¹ The table below examines the number of graduates in different levels of educational degrees – from Bachelor's Degree to PhD.

Table 2: Graduation figures 2019-2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Obtained a Bachelor's Degree	7.874	6.907	7.753	7.483
Obtained a Master's Degree	1.916	1.758	1.976	1.883
Obtained a PhD	204	174	201	197

Source: Statistical Office of North Macedonia

1.2.2 Neither in employment nor in education or training

There is a lack of available data regarding young individuals who are not engaged in either employment or education. According to Eurostat, the number of young people neither in employment or in education from 20 to 34 years in 2018 was 31.4 %, and in 2020 it was 26.2%. Eurostat lacks data on NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth in North Macedonia from 2020 onwards¹²; however, ILO data indicates an additional decline in 2021, to 24.2%¹³.

Table 3: NEET youth percentage 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of NEET youth in North Macedonia	31.4%	26.7%	26.2%	24.2%

Source: Eurostat, ILO

1.2.3 Unemployment rate

In contrast to the broader definition of youth as individuals aged 15-29, the Statistical Office, following LYPYP, defines youth unemployment within the narrower age range of 15-24. The table

11 State Statistical Office, 2023, Student Graduates in 2022, accessed 20 September 2023, <<https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooptenie.aspx?rbtxt=28>>

12 Eurostat, 2023, Young people neither in employment nor in education Data Browser, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_22__custom_7645221/default/table?lang=en>

13 International Labour Organisation, 2022, Young People not in education, employment or training (NEET), accessed 25 September 2023 <https://northmacedonia.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/MKD_NEET%20Mapping%20and%20Policy%20Proposals_EN.pdf>



below illustrates the trends in youth unemployment, clearly showing the influence of policy implementations on the sustained decline over the years.

Table 4: Youth unemployment rate 2018-2022

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)	45.4	35.6	35.7	36.4	32.5

Source: Statistical Office of North Macedonia

According to the EC progress report for 2022, youth unemployment in North Macedonia, while still high at 30.9%, has been consistently decreasing. This marks a noteworthy 13% decrease when compared to data from 2018. Specifically, in 2018, the unemployment rate was at 45.4%, which dropped to 35.7 by 2020, and continued decreasing to 32.5 by 2022. In conclusion, youth unemployment has declined significantly since the government's Youth Guarantee scheme, a programme ensuring that young people receive a good-quality offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within a period of four months of registering as an unemployed person in ESARNM¹⁴, which entered into force in 2018¹⁵.

1.3 Migration

Youth migration is considered one of the most pressing political issues in North Macedonia. When contrasting the data between the 2021 census and the previous one in 2002, a noticeable decline in the youth population becomes evident, plummeting from 24% to 18%, signifying a 6% decrease. Moreover, the census underscores a population decrease of 200,000 individuals, suggesting that a substantial segment of the population has migrated abroad

According to a youth study, the most desired destinations for migration among young people are Germany, Switzerland, and Austria¹⁶. No data are available isolating only youth migration from total migration. When deciding about emigrating, young people do not research macroeconomic indicators, but are instead led by personal motives created by these indicators in everyday life¹⁷. The impact of macroeconomic landscape on an individual's life at the micro level serves as a significant driving force in migration flows. Cross Sectoral Youth Assessment conducted in North Macedonia showed that nearly half of young people cited the improvement of their standard of living as the main reason for migration; almost 18 per cent cited higher salaries and 11.3 per cent better employment opportunities. Youth do not see themselves as part of the change, which adds to their inclination to leave¹⁸.

14 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, Youth Guarantee, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://av.gov.mk/garancija-za-mladi.nspk>>

15 European Commission, 2022 North Macedonia Country Report, accessed 15 September 2023, <<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/North%20Macedonia%20Report%202022.pdf>>

16 Zivets, L., 2019, Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment, USAID, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WB77.pdf>

17 Zivets, L., 2019, Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment, USAID, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WB77.pdf>

18 Zivets, L., 2019, Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment, USAID, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WB77.pdf>



A more recent study conducted in 2021, focusing on socio-political participation of young individuals, reveals compelling statistics. Only 30% of young people express optimism about the economy's future, believing it will improve in the next 5 years. In contrast, a significant majority, accounting for 58% of the youth surveyed, express willingness to emigrate from North Macedonia if presented with the opportunity. Out of this group, a mere 6.9% would consider returning. Interestingly, when examining young people from other ethnic backgrounds, this percentage surges by an additional 10%, reaching a total of 68% of those who would contemplate leaving North Macedonia if given the chance.¹⁹

Key development over the years:

Table 5: Key developments in youth population data 2018-2023

	By 2020	2021-2023	Critical Assessment
Youth Population	411,979 young people out of 2,076,217 citizens	326,733 young people out of 1,836,713 citizens, as per 2021 census.	Youth population of North Macedonia is gradually decreasing. Compared to the total population, the youth population currently constitutes 17.8% of the total population.
Youth Unemployment Rate	In the period between 2018 and 2020 it decreased from 45.6% to 35.7%.	The decline persisted through 2022, with the current employment rate standing at 32.5%.	Over the years, the government's commitment to addressing youth unemployment has resulted in a gradual decrease in the youth unemployment rate. Notably, the implementation of the Action Plan on Youth Employment (2016-2020) and the introduction of the EU Youth Guarantee in 2018 have yielded tangible policy outcomes.
NEET Youth Rate	Over the period 2018-2020, the NEET rate dropped from 31.4% to 26.2%, based on Eurostat.	Based on ILO, in 2021, the rate dropped to 24.2%.	Once more, policies targeting youth unemployment have effectively reduced this rate. Nevertheless, there is a need for the government to systematically collect and map data concerning NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth, as this aspect currently lacks comprehensive information.

19 Gjorgjiovska, J. and Galevski, M., Socio-Political Participation of Young People 2021, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, accessed 9 September 2023, <<https://mof.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Studija-Socio-Politicko-Ucestvo-na-Mladi-2021-MK-sml-1.pdf>>



CHAPTER 2: ECONOMY YOUTH LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

This chapter focuses on the youth policy framework of North Macedonia, as well as the relevant legislation and related strategic documents, action plans, and bylaws.

2.1 Constitution

Even though not explicitly, the Constitution of North Macedonia regulates some key rights of youth. For example, the right of young people to vote (Article 22), the right of all people to education (article 44), the right of people to participate in decision-making on issues of local relevance in all units of local self-government (article 115), and others.²⁰ Overall, legal and strategic documents on youth policy are also adopted based on the Constitution's fundamental values of North Macedonia, including LYPYP.

2.2 Law on Youth

In 2018, following an initiative of the Club for Youth Affairs and Policies in the Assembly of North Macedonia, a process for drafting a Law on Youth was initiated. This was the second time this process was initiated, after 2011, when at the request of youth sector, the government withdrew the then Draft Law on Youth. At the economy level, during the process of drafting the law, an expert Working Group composed of representatives of the youth sector was established in order to contribute to the drafting of the content of the law, based on their experiences from working with young people, both at the economy and local level. MPs from the governing parties and the opposition, representatives of youth wings of political parties and representatives of international community and youth civil society sector participated in the expert working group. On 14 January 2020, the Assembly of North Macedonia passed the law under the name Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies.

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies is the first legal solution in North Macedonia that guarantees youth participation and recognises young people and forms of youth organisation²¹. As such, the law makes a distinction between youth organisation, organisation for young people and youth umbrella organisation, and delegates the obligation to the Agency for Youth and Sports to keep a Register of the forms of youth organisation. The law also defines for the first time the terms young person, youth policy, youth participation, youth work and youth worker. In terms of youth participation, the law foresees mechanisms at the economy and local level for the inclusion of young people in policy-making and decision-making processes, namely the Advisory Body for Youth Policies and local youth councils in all municipalities. From the perspective of youth policies, the law itself covers the adoption of a **Youth Strategy of North Macedonia** and local youth

20 Constitution of the North Macedonia, 1991, accessed 2 September 2023, <<https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Odluki%20USTAV/UstavSRSM.pdf>>

21 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023. <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>



strategies as key strategic documents for youth activities planned and implemented by institutions and municipalities. The Youth Strategy of North Macedonia is a strategic document that establishes mid-term goals and priorities for the development of youth policies and promotion of interests of young people, and it is adopted for a period of five years. The **Local Youth Strategy** is a strategic document that, in accordance with the Youth Strategy, establishes mid-term goals and priorities for the development of youth policies and promotion of interests of young people at the local level. The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies includes provisions for the delivery of services to young people. It establishes mechanisms to facilitate closer engagement between institutions and young people, fostering their growth and development. As such, youth offices and youth centres are defined within the law, and with respect to economy-level institutions and municipalities it foresees the appointment of a youth officer, i.e. a person responsible for the operation of the aforementioned youth office, as well as for coordinating, implementing and monitoring issues of interest to young people within the scope of the institution's competences. Within the Youth Services chapter, the Agency for Youth and Sports is envisaged to establish a research centre for topics related to youth. The Law itself foresees that, from the central budget of North Macedonia, 0.3% of the budget is allocated for the implementation of LYPYP annually, while 0.1% is allocated from the budgets of municipalities for youth on an annual basis²². Illustratively, considering the Annual Budget of North Macedonia was 324.810.000.000 MKD (5.272.660.968 EUR)²³, 0.3 from the budget would be 974.430.000 MKD (15.817.982 EUR).

2.3 Strategy on Youth

A Youth Strategy of North Macedonia (NYS) 2016–2025, adopted on 2 February 2016, predates the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies. Despite the existence of this Strategy, the new Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies provides for adoption of a new Youth Strategy, specifically within 18 months from the adoption of the law. The legal deadline for this expired on 14 July 2021.

The Youth Strategy of North Macedonia is a strategic document that establishes mid-term goals and priorities for development of youth policies and promotion of interests of young people, and establishes organisational, financial and administrative measures for their attainment. The Youth Strategy of North Macedonia of North Macedonia (2016-2025) covered the following thematic areas: youth participation, youth information, local youth work, education, employment and pre-employment support, culture, sports, health and quality of life. The basis for initiating this process was the youth trend survey conducted by the Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research in the period from September to December 2014. The responsible institution for the process was AYS. UNDP supported AYS in North Macedonia during the entire consultation process. The Strategy is no longer in force, as a new one has been adopted.

In order to prepare the new Youth Strategy, the Agency for Youth and Sports in November 2021 published an announcement for public procurement²⁴ to conduct research on youth trends. The

22 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.
<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>

23 Government of North Macedonia, 2022, Annual Budget of North Macedonia for 2023, accessed 23 October 2023,
<https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/budzeti/budzet_2023.pdf>

24 E-Nabavki, 2021, Call for Public Procurement, accessed 12 September 2023,
<<https://e-nabavki.gov.mk/PublicAccess/home.aspx#/dossie/75a6ee24-db90-4828-a159-ceaa28f58bc6/14>>



results of the research were presented in May 2022, and the study is available online on AYS website²⁵. In August 2022, on International Youth Day, the Agency for Youth and Sports officially announced the start of the process for development of the new Youth Strategy, and the process received support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), OSCE mission in Skopje and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The new Strategy focuses on the following strategic priorities: youth participation, youth information, youth work, education, culture, health, employment and entrepreneurship and security. In contrast to the prior strategy, the text now incorporates security as a new strategic priority²⁶. The process of preparing the strategy included consultative processes, as well as organisation of events and thematic working groups in the period from October to December 2022. Youth policy stakeholders such as economy-level institutions, youth organisations, educational institutions, donor community and municipalities were involved in the process. For the purposes of the strategy, experts were also engaged for various strategic priorities. At the end of February 2023, the draft text of the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia was published on ENER for comments. The final version of the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia was presented in May 2023. The new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027 was officially adopted by the Government of North Macedonia on 26 September 2023²⁷. A total of 1,303 participants were engaged in the creation process²⁸.

2.4 Action Plan on Youth

The initial YS (2016-2025)²⁹ had been followed by one action plan only – the Action Plan (AP) to implement YS for the period from 2016 to 2017. After the expiration of this Action Plan, a new one has never been adopted. With the introduction of LYPYP in 2020, its provisions emphasized development of a new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia (NYS), shifting the focus from addressing the absence of existing Action Plans to the development of a fresh NYS. It is worth noting that the Action Plan 2016-2017 is no longer accessible on the official website of AYS.

The upcoming Youth Strategy of North Macedonia for 2023-2027 will be accompanied by two subsequent action plans, covering the periods 2023-2025 and 2025-2027, respectively. The Action Plan for 2023-2025 was adopted by YS on 26 September 2023, and outlines specific measures and activities, in line with the strategic goals³⁰. Compared to the last, the new Action Plan includes more strategic priorities, such as the addition of security and non-violence. It is also imperative to note that in the area of health, the new Action Plan includes measures related to young people and mental health – something that was lacking in the previous one. According to NYS, the process of development of the Action Plan engaged a total of 70 participants³¹.

25 Stamenkovska, Z., 2022, Youth Trends Study, Agency for Youth and Sports, accessed 26 September 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/istrzhuvane-ams-2022.pdf>>

26 ENER, 2023, Draft - Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 23-27, accessed 15 September 2023, <<https://ener.gov.mk/Default.aspx?item=newdocumentdetails&detailid=48>>

27 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027, accessed 26 September 2023: <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/nsm23-27-sluzhben-vesnik.pdf>>

28 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027, accessed 26 September 2023: <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/nsm23-27-sluzhben-vesnik.pdf>>

29 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027, accessed 26 September 2023: <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/nsm23-27-sluzhben-vesnik.pdf>>

30 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, Action Plan for the implementation of the Youth Strategy, accessed 26 September 2023 <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/akciski-plan-2023-2025.pdf>>

31 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027, accessed 26 September 2023: <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/nsm23-27-sluzhben-vesnik.pdf>>



2.5 Additional youth-related laws and policies

In addition to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies and the Youth Strategy, there are additional youth-related laws and policies, such as the following:

Law on Higher Education³²: This law regulates the university's autonomy and academic freedom, conditions and procedure for the establishment and termination of higher education institutions, system for ensuring and evaluating the quality of higher education, foundations for organisation, management, development and financing of higher education occupation. In terms of youth-relevant areas, with the latest amendments from 2018, the Law officially regulates the establishment of University Student Assemblies, as well as Faculty Student Assemblies, as representative bodies of students within the universities.

Law on Student Standard³³: The Law on Student Standard regulates and defines the student standard, as well as the establishment, organisation, functioning and management of the institutions for student standard as part of the educational system. Based on the legal provision, its primary focus is regulation of student housing and student scholarships.

Law on High School Student Standard³⁴: Similarly to the Law on Student Standard, the Law on High School Student Standard regulates the same areas as the Law on Student Standard, however only referring to high school students. Primarily, the law deals with student housing and scholarships for high school students.

Law on Internships³⁵: The law regulates the procedure and conditions for implementation of an internship, rights and obligations of the intern and the employer which implements the internship, internship contract and the record of internship. The Law defines interns as unemployed young people up to 34 years of age, who are offered the opportunity to work in real conditions, and thus acquire knowledge, skills and qualifications in order to integrate more successfully into the labour market. Young people have the opportunity to gain practical work in companies for a period of six months and to be paid for it, and employers in turn are able to recognise talent in staff who could then be permanently employed. The Law defines that remuneration for interns has to be between 42% and 74% of the minimum net salary. The Law, per se, protects young people from unpaid labour in line with current developments in the EU, such as the decision of the European Parliament to adopt a report calling on the European Commission to propose a directive on Quality Traineeships and to update the existing Quality Framework for Traineeships in efforts to set minimum quality standards, including rules on the duration of traineeships, as well as on remuneration and access to social protection in accordance with economy law and practices. However, there are still employers which go around the legal provisions of this Law by engaging interns on service contracts instead of internship contracts.

32 *Law on Higher Education*, 2018, accessed 8 September 2023, <<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20visokoto%20obrazovanje%20NOV.pdf>>

33 *Law on Student Standard*, 2013, accessed 14 September 2023, <<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20studentskiot%20standard.pdf>>

34 *Law on High School Student Standard*, 2005, accessed 14 September 2023, <https://mon.gov.mk/download/?f=Zakon%20za%20ucenickiot%20standard_1.docx>

35 *Law on Internships*, 2019, accessed 14 September 2023, <<https://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Zakon-za-praktikanstvo-21-05-2019.pdf>>



While these measures are already in place and enforced, there are also ongoing efforts to develop and discuss additional laws and strategic documents, such as:

Law on Student and High School Student Standard: The process is led by MES-Youth working group and it aims to expand the benefits offered to students and high school students in the current Laws – the Law on Student Standard and the Law on High School Student Standard³⁶. The group initially aimed to develop a large-scale cross-sectoral Law that would encompass various benefits to young people in general, that is, a Law on Youth Standard, as per the Programme of the Government³⁷; however developments so far have led to a draft Law on Student and High School Student Standard, therefore only focusing on young people in the educational process. There is no available information on the timeline of this process as it is still in a consultation phase.

Law on Youth Work: Youth work is currently defined in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, but aside from the definition nothing else correlated to youth work is regulated by the Law. There were several initiatives to start a process to develop a Law on Youth Work around 2014³⁸, and such process was supported by the Agency for Youth and Sports; however there have been very little developments since.

Strategy on Mental Health and Youth: The Draft Strategy on Mental Health for Youth 2023-2026 defines its objectives to include promotion of the importance of mental health and wellbeing among youth.³⁹ The Strategy is a result of WBYL-supported Working Group on Youth Mental Health, and was developed in cooperation with youth civil society organisation, representatives of relevant ministries as well as the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies. The draft version of Strategy was presented at a public debate at the Parliament, organised by CYAP in cooperation with NYCM. An Action Plan is developed along with the Strategy. This Strategy will mark a significant moment in youth policy, as currently there is a lack of strategic document fully targeting youth. The draft versions of both the Strategy and Action Plan are not available online.

Amendments to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy: Three years after the adoption of this Law, in April 2023, a public hearing was held on the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies to discuss the aspects of the Law that are implementable and those that are not implementable in order to determine the areas where there is a need for changes in the Law⁴⁰. The process included consultations with youth civil society organisations and well as relevant institutions and municipalities. Based on a monitoring report of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, implementation of the Law is at a very low level, and one of the main issues is tracking the youth budget. Due to the lack of developments regarding a Law on Youth Work, the Union for Youth Work has proposed amendments to the Law that include further provisions on youth work in North Macedonia⁴¹.

36 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.

37 Government of North Macedonia, 2022, *Programme of the Government of North Macedonia for the period 2022-2024*, accessed 8 September 2023, <http://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf>

38 Union For Youth Work, Recognition, accessed 12 September 2023, <<https://shorturl.at/rwF07>>

39 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.

40 Representative of the Government of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 19 September, Skopje.

41 Representative of the Union for Youth Work, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 17 September, Skopje.



2.6 Institutions dealing with Youth

2.6.1 The Government of North Macedonia

The Government has a primary role in providing opportunities for implementing the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia by adopting and implementing cohesive and coordinated programmes associated with the measures envisaged in the Strategy. There is no Ministry for Youth in North Macedonia. The Agency for Youth and Sport is the key institution that plays the role of a Ministry for Youth, which also has its own budget. The Agency does not fall under any Ministry and reports directly to the Government. Moreover, through the prime minister's advisor for youth and sport, a bridge is created between the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, AYS, and all other institutions.

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Employment Service Agency of North Macedonia:

In the past few years, the Government focused on reducing youth unemployment by implementing youth employment policies, such as the Youth Guarantee. The responsible institutions for implementing youth employment policies and measures in North Macedonia are the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Employment Service Agency of North Macedonia. This commitment was evident by the Action Plan on Youth Unemployment 2016-2020; however since its expiration in 2020⁴², a new one has not been created and adopted. These institutions are also leading the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia. MLSP additionally develops the annual Operational Plans for Active Programmes and Measures for Employment, which includes the Youth Guarantee, as well as additional policies that support youth unemployment. While documents such as the annual Operational Plans refer to the entire population, young people are consistently defined as a specific category of citizens in need of employment support.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) has the leading role in managing educational processes in secondary and tertiary education, legislation, scholarships, and participating in international education programmes. This means that MES is directly involved in creating youth policy, which is crucial for young people's well-being. In order to engage with the youth civil society sector, MES has established a MES-youth working group to develop and consult educational policies and new legislation. One of the processes currently taking place is development of a new Law on Youth Standard, which aims to unite the provisions of the Law on Student Standard and Law on High School Student Standard and expand their application across all categories of youth (15-29).⁴³

2.6.2 Agency for Youth and Sports

Despite the fact that it is not operating at the same level as a Ministry, AYS has its own distinct budget and responsibilities, and is the primary institution dealing with youth issues economy-wide. The Agency's responsibilities extend beyond youth affairs; it also operates within the field of sports. Nevertheless, there is a significant disparity in the budget allocation between the sports sector and the youth sector⁴⁴.

42 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2016, *Action Plan for Youth Employment 2016-2020*, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/word/dokumenti/2016_Akciski%20plan%20za%20vработuvanje%20mladi%202016-2020%20godina_MK%20pv%20-%20Copy.docx>

43 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.

44 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, *Annual Budget of Agency for Youth and Sports for 2023*, accessed 11 September 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/budhet-za-2023.pdf>>



2.6.3 Local authorities

Local authorities are also responsible for implementing youth programmes. Since the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, the municipalities received a clear set of legal obligations they need to complete as per the provisions of the Law. Based on this, the Law envisions that every municipality establishes a mechanism for youth participation, i.e. local youth councils, adopts a Local Youth Strategy and Action Plans for its implementation, including establishing youth services, such as a youth centre and youth office, and appointing youth officers⁴⁵. While implementation of LYPYP has been quite slow, until July 2023, 19 municipalities have established local youth councils, 7 adopted local youth strategies, 1 has established a youth office, 7 opened youth centres and finally, 57 youth officers were appointed⁴⁶.

2.7 Other sectors impacting youth

The civil sector maintains a continuous emphasis on enhancing the abilities of young individuals to achieve independence, proactivity, and active engagement in the socioeconomic and political progress of the nation. Nevertheless, civil sector needs to collaborate and synchronise its efforts with local authorities and business community to formulate a comprehensive strategy for tackling the pressing issues that confront young people.

The business community is regarded as a critical partner in advancing economic well-being of youth. According to NYS, the business sector should actively participate by sharing its resources with institutions and civil society organisations to address youth-related challenges both at economy and local levels. This involvement by the business community is crucial for fostering the long-term economic prosperity of young people.

Assembly of North Macedonia: While the Parliament does not have an official commission that deals with youth issues, it is imperative to note the existence of the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies in the Parliament. This is an informal structure of young Members of Parliament that mainstream youth issues across their work in different commissions. The Club organises stakeholder meetings with representatives of institutions and youth civil society organisations to facilitate dialogue in the field of youth policy; however their frequency is reliant on a variety of factors, such as support from international organisations, and developments in youth policy.

Regarding education, **the Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility (AEEP)** in North Macedonia plays a crucial role in providing additional education opportunities for youth. It focuses on implementing European programmes in education, training, youth, and sports to foster development of a knowledge-based society, sustainable economic growth, job creation, social cohesion, and environmental protection. AEEP serves various beneficiaries, including students, teachers, enterprises, and citizen associations. Their current priorities include green initiatives, digitalisation, youth participation in democracy, and social inclusion. Additionally, AEEP

45 *Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies*, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.

< <https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf> >

46 Kulakov, F., 2023, „*Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2023*, Youth Council of North Macedonia, accessed 4 September 2023,

<https://nms.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring_Izvestaj_Broshura_2023_ENG.pdf>



collaborates with the Agency for Youth and Sports and partners, including youth organisations and researchers to contribute to European Commission's YouthWiki platform.⁴⁷

Other institutions, such as the Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship in North Macedonia, are also implementing employment measures through young people's capacity building. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy offers young farmers opportunities through IPARD Funds, which are originally designed for a broader audience. However, they specifically benefit young individuals by simplifying project co-financing and awarding them additional 20 points in the selection criteria due to their youth status.

2.8 Critical assessment of legal and policy framework on youth

After years of efforts, the first law fully dedicated to youth issues was adopted in North Macedonia. This law addresses crucial issues related to youth participation and policies and is expected to have a positive impact on the overall situation of young people in the economy. The new law stipulates the way YS and local youth strategies are to be carried out, who is in charge, who prepares the action plans, how funds are allocated, and determines organisational, financial and administrative measures for implementation of such plans.

Nevertheless, there are certain weaknesses identified regarding the overall policy framework at economy level. Above all, implementation of the new law (LYPYP) is slow. Covid-19 pandemic crisis has preoccupied the work of the institutions, while the implementation of the law requires a multi-sectoral coordination which is slow due to pandemic. With the adoption of LYPYP, YS 2016-2025 was disregarded, with none of the institutions providing information whether it is still applicable or what will become of it. In addition to this, following the expiration of its first Action Plan in 2017, a second YS Action Plan was not created or adopted.

A new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia (2023-2027) was adopted in 2023. This new strategy is formulated in accordance with the newly adopted LYPYP, the current situation, and the current economic and social policies and programme of the Government. The process of creation of the new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia was conducted through a very open and consultative process, responsive to the feedback of the youth sector. Additional important development is the expansion of areas of the Strategy. The draft text includes the area of security, something which was not included in the previous Strategy, confirming that young people are increasingly affirmed as relevant stakeholders in issues that are not traditionally considered as youth-related. Information from conducted interview informs that the Strategy has been adopted, however no publicly available sources support this claim.

Development of the Strategy on Mental Health and Youth is also important to note, as young people's presence in strategic documents is more pronounced. The process is still ongoing; however, consultations have been conducted and there is a draft version of the Strategy prepared⁴⁸. An adoption of such a strategy would mark a significant milestone in youth policy, as it would be the first youth-centred strategy on a specific topic to be adopted in North Macedonia.

⁴⁷ Representative of the Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 20 September, Skopje.

⁴⁸ Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.



The main gaps found in youth-targeted legal and policy framework are related to their implementation. While the institutions conduct inclusive and transparent processes in the development of these documents, young people rarely experience any of the foreseen benefits as they do not get implemented. The lack of implementation is a result of the lack of financial capacity of the key institutions, specifically the Agency for Youth and Sports.

A recurring issue that was noted regarding the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies is the lack of its implementation⁴⁹. Many of the legally binding deadlines were not respected, and the level of implementation continues to be very low⁵⁰. NYCM started to annually monitor the implementation of the law, and the developments from 2021 onward are presented in the Table below.

Table 6: Implementation of LYPYP 2021-2022

	2021	2022
Youth Participation Mechanisms		
Youth Assembly	0 / 1	0 / 1
Advisory Body on Youth Policies	0 / 1	0 / 1
Local Youth Councils	10 / 81	19 / 81
Youth Policy		
Youth Strategy	1 / 1	1 / 1
Local Youth Strategies	11 / 81	7 / 81
Youth Services		
Youth Offices	11 / 81	1 / 81
Youth Officers	56 / 81	64 / 81
Youth Centres	8 / 81	7 / 81
Funding		
Government Budget	No Data	No Data
Municipal Budget	No Data	No Data

Source: Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2021 and 2022

49 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.
 50 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.
<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>



Table 7: Key developments in youth policy 2018-2023

Institutional/ Legal Instrument	By 2020	2021-2023	Critical Assessment
Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies	Open and consultative process conducted. Law was adopted in January 2020.	Implementation of Law is very low, especially at the local level. In 2023, AYS started public debate on potential amendments to the Law.	While the adoption of the Law is a major milestone in youth policy in North Macedonia, the implementation continues to be a challenge, especially the obligations for municipalities. One of the major issues is the inability to track the budget allocated to youth.
Youth Strategy	YS (2016-2025) was adopted in the period before LYPYP. The adoption of the Law asserted that a new Strategy is to be created and adopted regardless of the already existing one.	In 2022, AYS launched the process for a new Youth Strategy. A consultative process took place. In September 2023, the new YS (2023-2027) was adopted.	The Government and AYS never acknowledged what would happen with the old YS with the adoption of LYPYP. The new YS was created in an open and consultative process. The previous one lacked any assessment whether it brought any results.
Action Plan for NYS	The previous YS has only one Action Plan 2016-2017, and after its expiration, a new one was not adopted.	Along with the adoption of the new YS 2023-2027, an Action Plan has been adopted for the period 2023-2025.	The fact that a new action plan for the prior YS was not adopted showed little commitment from the Government in terms of youth policy. However, the adoption of the new Action Plan for YS is commendable, but the Action Plan is still unavailable publicly.
Data on Youth Issues	AYS conducted a Youth Trends Survey for the development of YS 2016-2025.	AYS conducted another Youth Trends Survey for the development of YS 2013-2027.	Researches on youth issues are done on ad-hoc basis, instead systematically, creating a gap in youth data, and making the development of evidence-based youth policy a challenge.



Institution on Youth (Agency for Youth and Sports)	AYS is the main institution dealing with youth in North Macedonia.	AYS is the main institution dealing with youth in North Macedonia.	AYS lacks capacity to respond to all youth-related issues and processes taking place. In terms of funding, the youth sector of AYS only received under 5% of the institution's budget.
Government of North Macedonia	The Prime Minister has appointed an Advisor to Youth Affairs and Youth Policy, who serves as a bridge between the Government and all institutions that work in this field.	/	The role of the Advisor on Youth Affairs and Youth Policy is a positive example of how the government ensures cross-sectoral cooperation between different Ministries and institutions, but also youth civil society organisations.
Assembly of North Macedonia	The Assembly has constituted an informal body, a Club on Youth Affairs and Policies (CYAP), which mainstreams youth issues across different commissions and legislative debates.	Following the latest Parliamentary election, the Club was constituted again, continuing the commitment to represent youth issues.	It is imperative to note the importance of this informal body as it has been able to initiate important youth legislative processes, such as LYPYP and has been heavily involved in ensuring cross-institutional cooperation among institutions and youth civil society organisation.
Youth Policy Developments and Reforms	Proposed development of Law on Youth Standard and Law on Youth Work.	The process for a Strategy on Youth Mental Health conducted. Draft Strategy is completed, accompanied with an Action Plan.	There are different youth-related processes for new Laws or strategies, since youth issues are of cross-sectoral nature, the communication between different institution presents a challenge. The adoption of a Strategy on Youth Mental Health will mark the first ever strategy on youth being adopted, aside from NYS.



CHAPTER 3: YOUTH FUNDING

FRAMEWORK: YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS

The chapter examines the funding of youth policy and provides an overview of significant interventions and government initiatives in the youth sector. It also offers a critical evaluation of these endeavours.

3.1 Youth policy funding

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies envisages that:

- For the implementation of this law, funds in the amount of at least 0.3% of the Budget of North Macedonia shall be allocated annually;
- Funds in the amount of at least 0.1% of the budgets of municipalities shall be allocated annually.

Youth policy in North Macedonia continues to have no specific budget line in the central budget, which is considered a challenge for tracking economy's spending on youth policy. The budget of the Agency for Youth and Sports, for 2023, is 502,810,000 denars (EUR 8,164,632), out of which only 4.3% (21,750,000 denars) is allocated for the youth sector of AYS, which includes support to youth civil society organisations and youth policy, while the rest is used for sport-related activities.⁵¹ Similarly, in 2019, the budget was app. EUR 401.411,00 (MKD 24,728,000.00) or 4% of the total budget of AYS of app. EUR 9,608,163.00 (MKD 590,902,000.00). In terms of the budget's growth in recent years, it reached its peak in 2022; however, it subsequently began to again decline. This trend is clearly illustrated in the table below.

Table 8: AYS budget and youth funds 2021-2023

Agency of Youth & Sports	2021	2022	2023
Total Budget	8.545.668	9.168.595	8.162.146
	EUR	EUR	EUR
Youth Funding	321.544	374.496	353.069
	EUR	EUR	EUR

Source: Annual Budget of Agency for Youth and Sports

51 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, *Annual Budget of Agency for Youth and Sports for 2023*, accessed 11 September 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/budhet-za-2023.pdf>>



Until its expiration, MLSP allocated financial resources to young people according to the Action Plan for Youth Employment 2016-2020. The total budget was estimated at EUR 30,950,000.00 (1,903,425,000.00 MKD) for five years, excluding the costs for monitoring and evaluation⁵². It is important to note that this youth-focused Action Plan did not develop into a practice of MLSP, as a new one was not developed once it expired in 2020.

In the *Operative Plan for Active Labour Market Measures* (ALMM) for 2023, young people are mentioned several times as target groups; however a budget explicitly allocated for support to youth unemployment has not been defined. The financial frame includes the budget for field work for the Youth Guarantee, which is 50.319 EUR (3.099.800 MKD). In addition to this, the Plan includes the Youth Allowance, budgeted at 2.189.463 EUR (134.876.827 MKD) for 2023⁵³.

3.2 Youth project funding

Due to the significantly small youth budget of the Agency for Youth and Sports, the funds available for youth civil society organisations are limited. On an annual basis, the Agency for Youth and Sports launches a call for grants, supporting projects in line with the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia objectives. Since 2021, one of the criteria for receiving a grant from the Agency is for the organisation to be registered in the Agency's Registry of youth organisations, organisations for youth, and youth umbrella organisations⁵⁴. Based on the Agency's approved budget for 2023, the annual allocated budget for support to third parties in the field of youth is 90.932 EUR (5.600.000 MKD)⁵⁵. Compared to previous years, in 2021, the allocated budget for support to third parties in the field of youth was 64.938 EUR (4.000.000 MKD)⁵⁶, which increased in 2022 to 95.784 EUR (5.900.000 MKD)⁵⁷, before dropping again in 2023.

Occasionally, other institutions launch call for financial support for youth organisations, such as the Ministry of Culture; however it is not as consistent as the Agency for Youth and Sports. Due to the lack of a youth budget line in the budget, there is very little control over youth funding, therefore many institutions and municipalities evade it. As a result, youth civil society organisations have very little access to funding for youth project, and often turn to international and domestic organisations, as well as donors for financial support⁵⁸.

52 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2016, *Action Plan for Youth Employment 2016-2020*, accessed 10 September 2023, <<https://shorturl.at/JMQY9>>

53 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, 2023, *Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures 2023*, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://shorturl.at/kBTZ9>>

54 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, *Call for Financial Support to Civil Society Organisations*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://ams.gov.mk/public-call/oglas-za-finansiska-poddrshka-na-zdruzenija-i-fondaczii>>

55 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, *Annual Budget of Agency for Youth and Sports for 2023*, accessed 11 September 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/budhet-za-2023.pdf>>

56 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2020, *Annual Budget of Agency for Youth and Sports for 2021*, accessed 23 October 2023, <https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/budhet_2021_2-1.pdf>

57 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2023, *Annual Financial Report of Agency for Youth and Sports for 2022*, accessed 23 October 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/godishen-finansiski-izveshtaj-za-2022.pdf>>

58 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.



3.3 Key Youth Programmes and Instruments

Key youth programmes and instruments are the Youth Guarantee project, Youth Card, Youth Allowance and Subsidised Student Meal. These programmes and instruments provide different types of support to young people, ranging from employability support to financial subsidies aimed at improving young people's living standards.

3.3.1 Youth Guarantee⁵⁹

Overall objective: The Youth Guarantee is a set of government measures aimed at guaranteeing the quality services offered to youth in employment, continuous education, retraining, practice, and training.

In its Work Programme 2017-2020, the Government of North Macedonia introduced the Youth Guarantee as a measure for increasing the employability of young people. In 2017, the Master Plan for Youth Guarantee was adopted. The Master Plan defines institutions responsible for implementing specific activities for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. In 2015, NYCM submitted a proposal, within the framework of Objective 2 of the draft version of the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2016-2025 in the Employment and pre-employment support field, to introduce the Youth Guarantee programme by the Government of North Macedonia. The Youth Guarantee is open to all young people 15-29 who are unemployed, have already completed their education, and have not been registered within the Employment Agency. The applicants receive a quality job offer, further education, or an internship.

The Youth Guarantee was also part of the Economic Reform Programme 2018-2020 of the Ministry of Finance to reduce the rate of youth unemployment. The policy coordination body of Youth Guarantee includes the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Employment Service Agency, Ministry of Education and Science, AYS, Youth Council of North Macedonia and Bureau for Development of Education. In February 2018, MLSP, Employment Agency of North Macedonia and NYCM started implementation of the Youth Guarantee pilot project. With the inclusion of NYCM in the implementation of the fieldwork project, the economy included civil society organizations as part of the implementation of a governmental policy for the first time. NYCM is not funded by the Government; instead, international donors have been providing financing for its fieldwork. This funding approach has been ongoing, and it extends into 2023.

According to the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, the first phase (2018-2019) included appropriate political reforms, mapping young people (NEET) and assessment of investment needed for implementation of the Youth Guarantee, extending the scope of available programmes, making partnerships to get in touch with young unengaged people and creating monitoring system. The second phase was carried out from 2020 to 2022, building on the foundation provided by the first phase. The main aim of the second phase was to accommodate institutional arrangements and

59 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, Youth Guarantee, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://av.gov.mk/garancija-za-mladi.nsp>>



coordination mechanisms in order to strengthen the provision of integrated Youth Guarantee services⁶⁰.

Table 9: Youth Guarantee Success Rate 2018-2022

Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of young people (15-29) engaged in Youth Guarantee	5.266	20.248	25.502	19.298	20.185
Percentage of young people with an offer after 4 months in the Youth Guarantee	41,9%	36,8%	34,2%	43,5%	43.1%
Employment Offer	36,6%	31,0%	29,3%	37,1%	36.7%
Other Offer	5,3%	5,7%	4,9%	4,8%	6.4%

Source: Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2026, Annual Report of ESARNM for 2022

According to a statement from MLSP, in 2021, of the total number of people who entered the Youth Guarantee process (19,322), 8,064 young people up to 29 years of age or 41% got a job or acquired skills that improved their employability and became competitive on the labour market. As for 2022, the number of young people up to 29 years of age who entered the Youth Guarantee was 20,185, and of them 8,706 or 43% got a job or acquired skills through training⁶¹.

In 2022, a new Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2026 was adopted. As the previous one, the new plan was developed in a consultative process which included relevant institutions and youth civil society organisations⁶².

Budget: In the *Operative Plan for Active Labour Market Measures (ALMM)* for 2023, the financial frame includes the budget for field work for the Youth Guarantee, which is 50,319 EUR (3,099,800 MKD)⁶³, however there is no explicit information that provides the total budget for the implementation of Youth Guarantee.

3.3.2 Youth Card

The European Youth Card is part of the work programme of AYS, which is also supported by NEEPM. The main goal of the Youth Card is to facilitate the everyday life of every young person, primarily financially. Further, it also offers many opportunities for youth, increasing their ability to be connected, informed, and mobile.

60 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2020, *Youth Guarantee Master Plan 2020-2022*, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/MKD%20YG%20%20implementation%20plan%202020-2022%20za%20na%20Vlada%20na%20RSM.doc>>

61 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2022, *Trenchevska: Successful youth policy – Youth Guarantee surpasses set goals*, accessed 17 September 2023, <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dekemvri-2022-ns_article-trenchevska-uspeshnite-mladinski-politiki-na-delo-garancija-za-mladi-gi-nadmina-postavenite-celi.nsp>

62 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2023, *Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2026*, accessed 21 September 2023, <<https://shorturl.at/kyGH9>>

63 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, 2023, *Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures 2023*, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://shorturl.at/noHJ1>>



The European Youth Card is free for every young person in the economy, aged 15-29. The card's validity period is two years, with the possibility of renewal if the person is within the allowed age limit. As card users, youth have benefits and discounts in various categories including: catering facilities, retail, culture, sports, transport, education centres, training for professional skills, and other entities recognised among young people as those that offer benefits associated with this category. AYS is a partner in this project with the Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility. Since North Macedonia is also a member of the Association of European Youth Card, the youth from North Macedonia, besides the benefits offered at home, will enjoy the same benefits with over 6 million young people in over 30 economies across Europe⁶⁴. Latest developments of this project confirm that by the end of 2023 the Youth Card will be available in digital format⁶⁵.

3.3.3 Other youth programmes and policies

In addition to the aforementioned, the following programmes and policies have also been adopted:

∞ **Support to young farmers**

Young farmers receive up to 600,000 MKD (approximately 10,000 EUR) to be motivated to engage in agriculture⁶⁶. The age range is up to 40 years old, which is not consistent with the definition in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies. According to news reports, the Government of North Macedonia provided support to 841 young farmers⁶⁷ in the period from 2017 to 2022.

∞ **Youth allowance⁶⁸**

Youth allowance is aimed at encouraging the employment of young people in production activities after graduating from high school. The youth allowance is in the amount of EUR 48 (3,000 MKD) per month and is paid to young people up to 23 years of age who have at least completed their secondary education. The coverage through this measure for 2023 is 3,500 young people⁶⁹. This measure also deviates for the definition of a young person in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies.

∞ The Government also presented the project on **personal income tax refund** for all new employees under 3070, whereby, in the first two years, the funds will be returned directly to the employee's account. Based on information in 2023, this policy still has not been

64 Agency for Youth and Sports, *European Youth Card*, accessed 13 September 2023 <<https://mladinskakarticka.mk/>>

65 Representative of the Government of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 19 September, Skopje.

66 Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2023, *Call for Young Farmers*, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/%D0%88%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%20%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BA%208-2023.pdf>>

67 Agrotim, 2023, *Minister Nikolovski announces new open call for young farmers*, accessed 23 October 2023, <<https://agrotim.mk/ministerot-nikolovski-najavi-nov-javen-povik-od-10-000-evra-za-mladi-zemjodelci-za-zapochnuvane-so-zemjodelska-dejnost/>>

68 Government of North Macedonia, 2022, *Programme of the Government of the North Macedonia for the period 2022-2024*, accessed 8 September 2023, <http://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf>

69 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, 2023, *Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures 2023*, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://bitly.ws/Z3pg>>

70 Government of North Macedonia, 2022, *Programme of the Government of the North Macedonia for the period 2022-2024*, accessed 8 September 2023, <http://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf>



implemented; however the Government has noted that the deadline for completion is 202471.

- ∞ **Subsidised student meal**⁷², a systemic solution that is part of the work programme of the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science, which significantly improves the student standard by providing financial support in the monthly amount of 40 euro for 9 months of the year. All full-time undergraduate students at public and private higher education institutions, who are citizens of North Macedonia, can apply for a subsidised student meal. The subsidised meal was 120 MKD (2 EUR) until 2023. As of 2023, student beneficiaries of this measure will receive a card which would allow them a sum of 140 MKD (less than 3 EUR) to spend on meals on a daily basis⁷³.
- ∞ **Recognition of youth.** AYS provides support to exemplary young people in different fields by opening public calls for talented young people, young poets, etc. However, one particulate cooperation is worth noting, the continuation of the Youth Civic Engagement Award since 2022 and onward. This process was initially established by the USAID's Civic Engagement Project as an effort to recognise the contributions of young people, informal youth groups and youth organisations in society. With the completion of the project, AYS partnered with NYCM to ensure longevity of this process, and as of 2022, two ceremonies have taken place. The awards for the individual category are 1,500 EUR, while for informal group and organisations it is 3,000 EUR.

3.4 Critical assessment

The adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy brought faith across the youth sector that young people and youth organisations will get access to funding sources for activities for their development and their participation in decision- and policy-making. Unfortunately, the vague definitions of how the funding is defined in the Law contributes to very slow implementation of the Law itself, and lack of transparency in terms of where the youth funding actually goes. With absence of a youth budget line in the budget, tracking the youth spending is nearly impossible with youth being a cross-cutting issue and several institutions are engaged in implementation of different policies. According to the current wording, the Law is insufficiently clear as to how the funds provided for at the economy level are distributed, that is, whether 0.3% refers only to the Agency for Youth and Sports, or they are provided for other institutions as well. In addition, regarding the funds provided for municipalities, it is unclear whether they are only provided for the implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, that is, for local youth councils, youth centres, youth offices, and youth policies at the local level. For these reasons, according to NYCM monitoring report⁷⁴, the monitoring of the spending of youth funds on local youth is a significant challenge.

71 Nikolov, G., *Meta Fact: There is still no tax refund for newly-employed young people up to 29*, Meta, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://meta.mk/meta-fakt-se-ushte-nema-povrat-na-personalen-danok-za-site-novovraboteni-mladi-do-29-godini/>>

72 Law on Subsidised Student Meal, 2020, accessed 18 September 2023, <<https://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Zakon-za-subvencioniran-studentski-obrok-10-02-2020.pdf>>

73 Ministry of Education and Science, 2023, Call for Subsidised Student Meal, accessed 20 September 2023, <<https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=6259>>

74 Kulakov, F., 2023, „Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2023, Youth Council of North Macedonia”, accessed 4 September 2023, <https://nms.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring_Izvestaj_Broshura_2023_ENG.pdf>



One of the strengths of youth policy implementation in North Macedonia is that it is currently a government's priority to address youth unemployment reduction. Thus, there are funds earmarked for the implementation of active labour market measures for this target group. These funds are increasing every year, as can be seen from the *Operative Plan for Active Labour Market Measures*⁷⁵. While the budget of AYS increases and decreases, over the last 5 years there have been consistent efforts to provide funding to youth organisation, though very limited.

As mentioned, government has prioritised youth employment and active promotion of the Youth Guarantee programme. Additionally, more well-trained staff will be needed to implement the Youth Guarantee in the economy's 30 employment centres for 10,000 young people per year. The measure does identify the lack of physical and human capacities of the Employment Agency as a significant risk and suggests some mitigating actions. It is vital to ensure that the measure's focus is on the most vulnerable, particularly women and less represented ethnic groups living in underdeveloped regions, and on the collection of data.

The funding framework for youth policy in North Macedonia cannot be perceived as an example of best practice in support of the implementation of the youth policies in the economy. The weaknesses in the funding framework for youth policy in the economy are the limited coordination between institutions and limited availability of coherent data related to the funds allocated to youth by institutions other than AYS. In addition, the relative lack of a monitoring mechanism prevents AYS and other stakeholders from having insight into the funding framework's efficiency and effectiveness. The government often uses international support for funding public institutions' projects and activities, which puts sustainability at risk. Public funding for CSOs is very limited, and CSOs are not included in the economic measures.

Key developments over the years:

Table 10: Key developments in youth funding

	By 2020	2021-2023	Critical Assessment
Youth Policy Funding	Before LYPYP, the Government had no defined youth policy funding, only funding allocated to the Agency for Youth and Sports. The Law officially defined that 0.3 of the central budget and 0.1 of the municipal budget will be allocated for implementation of LYPYP.	While the Law defined the specific funding, the lack of a youth budget line makes it challenging to determine if the provisions in the Law are being upheld.	This is another example in youth policy in North Macedonia where regulation is positive, but implementation is lacking. In addition to that, the division between economy-level and municipal funding also creates additional challenges in the implementation. There is lack of understanding among municipal governments about LYPYP and what it entails.

75 Agency for Employment of North Macedonia, 2023, *Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Measures 2023*, accessed 18 September 2023, < <https://bitly.ws/Z3pg> >



Agency for Youth and Sports Budget	<p>In 2019, the youth sector of AYS received only 4% of the overall AYS budget for youth policy.</p>	<p>Similar percentages reoccur for the period 2021-2023.</p>	<p>The contrasting percentage rate between the youth and the sports budget has contributed to youth issues not being prioritised. When operating with only 4% of the institution's budget, AYS's capacities in the area of youth are inevitable to be at a very low level. To overcome this issue, the Agency's budget needs to be balanced between youth and sports.</p>
Youth Projects Funding	<p>AYS is the only institution that consistently supports funding of youth projects; however the budget for the calls is very limited.</p>	<p>Same as before.</p>	<p>Youth organisations are more reliant on donor support rather than AYS, since AYS does not have a significant amount of funds for these types of activities.</p>
Youth Guarantee	<p>Youth Guarantee was launched in 2018 as a pilot project. Success rate by 2020 is 34%.</p>	<p>In 2022, a new Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2026 was adopted. Success rate increased to 43% by 2022.</p>	<p>The implementation of EU Youth Guarantee has proven to be a success story for North Macedonia. The programme targets youth unemployment with special focus on NEET youth, and the numbers are consistently dropping on an annual basis. Partnerships with youth organisations in the implementation of outreach activities have been successful.</p>
Other youth programmes and policies	<p>Additional youth programmes are being implemented, such as the Youth Allowance, Young Farmers, etc.</p>	<p>Over this period, the government launched the subsidised student meal. AYS partnered with NYCM to give out the annual Youth Civic Engagement Awards.</p>	<p>There is an increase in youth policies and youth programmes being implemented, but not a lot of funding is provided. For example, Youth Allowance is available to only 3,500 young people on an annual basis. In addition to this, the subsidised student meal is roughly under 3 EUR per student per day, which is also significantly low.</p>



CHAPTER 4: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLICY AND DECISION- MAKING PROCESSES

The chapter analyses the existing mechanisms of youth participation both at the central and local levels and presents the primary youth organisations and networks at economy level.

4.1 Youth engagement and participation in policy: Key mechanisms and processes

Until January 2020, when LYPYP entered into force, there was no legal framework defining youth participation in policymaking. The new Law, Article no. 3/3 outlines: *“youth participation” is the process that enables young people to participate in joint decision-making on policies and programmes that directly or indirectly shape the lives of young people.*⁷⁶ As explained in chapter 2, the main decision-maker for youth policies remains the Government of North Macedonia. Alongside the government, the second most important institution is still AYS. Other ministries and institutions such as MES, MLSP, EA, the Education Development Bureau, and AEEPM also contribute to policymaking processes.

Regarding the process, in March 2018 the Government held a special session dedicated to youth policies for the first time. Youth organisations had the opportunity to propose different thematic issues as a part of their work. The new law was brought to the Parliament for adoption, thanks to the pressure of youth organisations all over the economy. The process continued and in January 2020 LYPYP was adopted, establishing mechanisms for youth participation at all levels.

Studies indicate that despite these mechanisms, only 29.2% of young people believe that the authorities are familiarised with their problems and challenges, and 83.9% of youth believe their voice has no impact on politics. Additionally, 69.4% of young people indicate they have never been consulted by the authorities, not at central or local level⁷⁷.

Another noteworthy mechanism for youth participation is the EU-supported and RCC-led Western Balkans Youth Lab project, which enhances youth participation at economy level, but also facilitates youth regional cooperation among all involved youth stakeholders. The process was launched in 2020 and has so far produced tangible developments in youth policy in North Macedonia.

76 *Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies*, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.

<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>

77 Gjorgjiovska, J. and Galevski, M., *Socio-Political Participation of Young People 2021*, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, accessed 9 September 2023,

<<https://mof.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Studija-Socio-Politicko-Ucestvo-na-Mladi-2021-MK-sml-1.pdf>>



4.1.1 Participation at the central level

First, Article 10 of the new Law foresees the creation of a Youth Assembly of North Macedonia. The Youth Assembly of North Macedonia is a body of the youth organisation forms that elects youth representatives in the Advisory Body for Youth Policies, sets priorities and policies for the representation of youth representatives, and coordinates and monitors their work. The Youth Assembly of North Macedonia is foreseen to be convened by an initiative board of at least two thirds of the youth organisation forms from the Register of the Agency for Youth and Sports⁷⁸. Based on the data published by the Agency for Youth and Sports by mid 2023, the Registry includes a total of 83 organisations, 10 of which are youth organisations, 70 organisations for youth and 3 umbrella organisations⁷⁹. Since the adoption of the Law, the Youth Assembly of North Macedonia has not yet been established.

At an economy level, under the newly adopted Law, the creation of a Youth Policy Advisory Body at economy level (hereinafter: YPAB) is also foreseen, which consists of a body for cooperation between youth representatives and representatives of the public administration bodies. It has an advisory and supervisory role in the implementation of youth policies and youth activities. YPAB, in which youth directly participate, is essential due to the competencies it has. This body gives opinions and recommendations for youth policies (regulation of implementation); gives an opinion on YS and on the action plan for YS implementation. Additionally, it provides an opinion on the budget funds intended for young people and any proposals, opinions, and recommendations for financing youth-related activities. It also initiates debates on youth issues to the Government and the Assembly of North Macedonia. It proposes establishing mechanisms for evaluation of youth participation and realisation of youth interests in social life. Moreover, it publishes reports (thematic and periodic) on the rights, opportunities, and needs of young people in North Macedonia, follows the EU recommendations for youth and advocates for the improvement of youth policies. As per the Law, the advisory body consists of nine youth representatives elected by the Youth Assembly of North Macedonia and eight representatives nominated by the public administration bodies. One of the representatives of the youth sector is appointed as its president⁸⁰. Since the Youth Assembly of North Macedonia has not yet been established, Youth Policy Advisory Body, was not established. In addition, the Government identified the institutions that will participate in this body, i.e. made a decision and tasked the Agency for Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Local Self-Government, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance to appoint a representative in the Advisory Body for Youth Policies⁸¹.

At economy level, following the trend of the European Parliament and other economies' good practices, the Assembly of North Macedonia, in September 2017, established the Club for Youth Affairs and Policies (CYAP). It is an informal body operating within the Assembly of North Macedonia and is composed of members from all parliamentary parties. The aim of this Club is to support young

78 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.

<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>

79 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, Registry of youth and umbrella organisations of the Agency for Youth and Sports, accessed 11 September 2023 <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/registar-na-organizaczii-zakluchno-so-15.12.2022.pdf>>

80 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.

<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>

81 Government of North Macedonia, 2021, Press statement from the 86th session of the Government of the North Macedonia, accessed 13 September 2023: <<https://vlada.mk/node/25846>>



people's efforts to achieve their goals and it cooperates with youth organisations, informal youth groups, and party youth. Most of the members are up to 35 years old. Currently, the Club does not have a budget, but gets project-based support from various international organisations, such as the Democratic Institute (DI) and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). CYAP is established to respond to young people needs and youth organisations in the economy, but currently there is no official Parliamentary Committee in charge of youth issues where initiatives would be discussed. With the support of international foundations, CYAP has developed an action plan, consisting of youth legislation and policy initiatives⁸².

Additional thing worth mentioning is the establishment of the Council on Youth within the Agency for Youth and Sports. This Council has a purely advisory role and provides opinion to the Director of the Agency regarding youth policy or programmes⁸³.

In terms of youth participation mechanisms at central level, the Western Balkans Youth Lab project utilised the EU Youth Dialogue methodology⁸⁴ and applied it to the context of the Western Balkans. Within this process, working groups were established in North Macedonia consisting of three representatives of the relevant institutions dealing the with youth and the topic, and three representatives of the youth sector. In addition to this, the groups were co-chaired by one representative of the institutions and one representative of the youth sector. In 2020 and 2023, two working groups were established – the first one on Youth Unemployment and the second one on Mental Health. Both processes brought results in terms of youth policy in North Macedonia. The first one resulted in draft amendments to the Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment, which were accepted by the Parliament's CYAP to submit to parliamentary procedure. The process has been delayed by the announced full reworking of the Law, and therefore the amendments have still not entered into the procedure. On the other hand, the Working Group on Mental Health contributed to the development of a Strategy on Youth Mental Health, as well as an Action Plan, which are currently debated in institutions in North Macedonia. The process also included a consultation phase ensuring feedback from all relevant stakeholders. When adopted, this Strategy will be the first central-level strategy that focuses on youth, aside from the Youth Strategy.

In terms of the WBYL process and available instruments, participants in the process, including working group members from both the institutions and youth sector, assess it to be a valuable mechanism that strengthens cooperation between youth and institutions, but also bringing North Macedonia closer to its EU aspirations. The instruments have been quite useful, especially in regard to capacity building of youth organisations, which has contributed towards a new communications strategy for the Youth Council, a revision of its strategic plan, as well as restructuring of its organisational chart. These internal reforms have strengthened NYCM to easily follow, engage, as well as lead in policy-making processes. The Youth Lab also contributed towards affirming the importance of youth among institutions, notably engaging the Ministry of Health in this process, a Ministry that had rarely engaged with youth organisations in the past⁸⁵. In addition to this, the process additionally attracts other stakeholders that have not been initially involved, allowing the working group to expand. It is positive to note the involvement of Parliament's CYAP in both working groups. The entire process

82 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia , (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.

83 Representative of the Agency for Youth and Sports, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 20 September, Skopje.

84 Gojkovic, T., et al, Western Balkans Youth Lab Methodology, Regional Cooperation Council, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/WBYL_Youth%20Policy%20Lab_Methodology.pdf/78fb85b8503d6672370bb582d76c6e28.pdf>

85 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia , (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.



has enabled youth civil society organisations, more specifically organised youth structures as the Youth Council of North Macedonia, to strengthen their internal capacities and affirm themselves as strong partners to authorities by expanding their areas of cooperation and ensuring youth issues are cross-cutting across different institutions. On the other hand, authorities were able to witness the capabilities of youth sector, and their ability to enact positive changes in policy.

4.1.2 Participation at the local level

In the context of North Macedonia, the responsibility for decision-making concerning youth at a local level falls under the jurisdiction of municipalities. In Article 16, the new Law stipulates establishment of local youth councils by each municipality. In fact, even earlier many municipalities had formed local youth councils and have adopted local youth strategies but in practice, most of these were not functional. Local youth councils in particular were not seen as transparent or sustainable.

The local youth councils are bodies of local self-government consisting of young representatives of various forms of youth organisations in the municipality, who have an advisory and representative role to the local self-government regarding the issues of youth interest. The role of local youth councils is to guarantee youth participation at the local/municipal level. The law provides for the creation of a local youth council in all 81 municipalities⁸⁶. Regarding the establishment procedure, the Statute of the municipality that forms the local youth council should be amended or supplemented to determine the procedures for the establishment of local youth council, including its composition, mandate, obligations and responsibilities. Once the Statute is harmonised, the municipality will announce the call for the formation of an Initiative Board, composed of youth organisations recognised by law, which are active in the municipality. The Initiative Board will publish the call for the constitutive local youth assembly, in accordance with the Statute of the municipality. After holding the first constitutive session of the local youth assembly, the Initiative Board will be dissolved. The Local Youth Assembly will announce the public call for members of the local youth council, which will be available on the website of the municipality. The Youth Assembly will elect members of the local youth council through direct elections, where delegates from the local youth assembly have the right to vote. The elected members of the local youth councils will be verified by the municipal councils. This procedure is applicable when it comes to creating a local youth council for the first time. However, there are circumstances where a local youth council already exists or had existed in some municipalities, in which case the transformation of the council is needed in order to comply with the legal provisions.

In order to provide additional support to municipalities and young people at the local level, especially for the creation of local youth councils and taking the necessary steps, the Agency for Youth and Sports and the OSCE Mission in Skopje developed the Manual for Local Youth Councils⁸⁷. All the detailed steps are defined in this Manual.

According to the Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2023, so far only 19 municipalities, representing only 23% of the total number of

86 *Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies*, 2021, accessed 2 September 2023.

<<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/zakon-za-mladinsko-ucestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019.pdf>>

87 OSCE, 2021, *Manual for Local Youth Councils*, accessed 14 September 2023: <<https://www.osce.org/mk/mission-to-skopje/491135>>



municipalities, have established the Local Youth Council in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies.⁸⁸

4.2 Evidence-based youth policy

Institutionalised mechanisms for cooperation of decision-makers and research community regarding youth are very limited in North Macedonia. Research about youth conducted by governmental institutions is not provided continuously but rather occasionally and *ad hoc*.

Occasionally, there have been efforts from governmental institutions to support youth policies with knowledge and evidence from research on youth. Thus, the basis for initiating this process of creating the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2016-2025 was the Youth Trends Survey conducted by the Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research⁸⁹ in the period from September to December 2014. For the preparation of the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027, in October 2021, the Agency for Youth and Sports announced a call for public procurement⁹⁰ for conducting research on youth trends which should provide the necessary information and basis for the preparation of the new Youth Strategy. The results of the research were presented in May 2022⁹¹, and are available on AYS website⁹². The Youth Trends Survey concludes that young people believe they lack opportunities for their development in the economy; that young people perceive their mental health as worse off in comparison to their physical health; and that 77.5% of young people believe they are not adequately engaged in decision-making processes.

Data is gathered mostly by think-tank organisations, international organisations, and youth civil society organisations, such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Youth Council of North Macedonia, Youth Educational Forum, etc.

4.3 Establishment and functioning of Youth Councils and umbrella organisations

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies recognises youth umbrella organisations as one of the forms of youth organisations.

Youth umbrella organisations are organisations in which youth organisations unite to achieve common goals in specific areas of interest to young people. Youth umbrella organisations can participate in the process of creating laws, policy documents, and other strategic documents in the field in which they operate; participate in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of youth policies in the areas in which they operate; and support youth organisation and association in

88 Kulakov, F., 2023, „Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2023, Youth Council of North Macedonia , accessed 4 September 2023, <https://nms.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring_Izvestaj_Broshura_2023_ENG.pdf>

89 Topuzovska-Latkovikj, M. et al, 2015, “Youth Trends in Macedonia”, Agency for Youth and Sports, accessed 20 September 2023, <<https://bitly.ws/Z3q6>>

90 E-Nabavki, 2021, *Call for Public Procurement*, accessed 12 September 2023, <<https://e-nabavki.gov.mk/PublicAccess/home.aspx#/dossie/75a6ee24-db90-4828-a159-ceaa28f58bc6/14>>

91 Public Administration, 2022, *AYS Youth Trends Survey*, accessed 11 September 2023 <<https://javnaadministracija.mk/2022/05/16/ams-istrazhuvane-na-mladinskite-trendovi/>>

92 Stamenkovska, Z., 2022, *Youth Trends Study, Agency for Youth and Sports*, accessed 26 September 2023, <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/istrazhuvane-ams-2022.pdf>>



North Macedonia. They have common goals in the specific areas in which they act in the interest of young people and can propose measures to decision-makers in the areas in which they operate and conduct analyses and research regarding development of young people in the society.

According to the latest update of AYS' Registry of youth organisations, organisations of youth and youth umbrella organisations, there are 3 organisations registered with youth umbrella organisations statut⁹³ – the Youth Council of North Macedonia, Coalition SEGA, and Scout Association of North Macedonia. Although not registered as a youth umbrella organisation, the Union for Youth Work is worth mentioning, as it is a youth network working on advancing youth work in North Macedonia. While LYPYP does not officially recognise any of these organisations as the 'official' Youth Council of North Macedonia, it gives them equal opportunity to engage in policy-making processes through the mechanisms such as the Youth Assembly of North Macedonia and the Advisory Body on Youth Policy.

4.4 Platforms of youth cooperation at the economy level

There are two major youth associations in North Macedonia: NYCM and the Coalition of Youth Organisations SEGA. Referring to their statutes, the first is a union of associations and the second is a economy-wide platform of youth organisations. None of them is formally recognised by law as official body representing youth at economy level.

4.4.1 Youth Council of North Macedonia

The Youth Council of North Macedonia (NYCM) is a youth umbrella organisation - a union of associations and foundations in North Macedonia. NYCM was established on 29 June 2013 by 55 founding organisations. NYCM is a non-governmental, non-partisan, and non-profit organisation. Since 29 November 2015, NYCM is part of the youth organisations' biggest European platform, the European Youth Forum. On 28 April 2018, the NYCM became a Full Member of the European Youth Forum. Currently, NYCM unites 51 organisations, 17 youth organisations, 20 organisations for youth, 1 union, 7 youth wings of other organisations and 6 associate members, in order to promote and advocate for the rights of the youth in North Macedonia⁹⁴. NYCM represents the interests of all young people regardless of their socio-economic position, sex, race, ethnic and cultural background, political and religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other form of distinction. NYCM was mentioned by the European Parliament in the Resolution of 10 March 2016 on the 2015 Report for the North Macedonia in Article 37.⁹⁵

NYCM is supported solely by international donors with no specific budget line in the public budget for its activities. The Council is the most prominent youth representative body and other institutions consult with it (on voluntary basis) regarding youth-related issues and initiatives. There is no structured cooperation with the government. It is an independent, autonomous and inclusive youth sector, representing young people in North Macedonia, even though it is not formally recognised as a economy-wide youth representative body. Despite lacking formal recognition, NYCM continues

93 Agency for Youth and Sports, 2022, *Registry of youth and umbrella organisations of the Agency for Youth and Sports*, accessed 11 September 2023 <<https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/registar-na-organizacii-zakluchno-so-15.12.2022.pdf>>

94 Youth Council of North Macedonia, *About us*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://nms.org.mk/about-us/?lang=en>>

95 European Parliament, 2016, *Resolution of 10 March 2016 on the 2015 Report on the North Macedonia*, accessed, 15 September 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0091_EN.html>



to engage with public institutions on youth-related matters and actively advocates for its formal recognition from the authorities.

4.4.2 SEGA –Platform of Youth Organisations

The Coalition of Youth Organisations SEGA is a platform of youth organisations dedicated to lobbying for needed legislative changes and committed to supporting youth activism, access to information, and participation of young people in activities related to youth issues. SEGA works on developing and implementing youth policies at the local and central level, and connects and strengthens youth organisations aiming to activate youth and improve the conditions for their personal and professional development in the economy⁹⁶.

4.4.3 Union for Youth Work

The Union for Youth Work (UYW) is a network of youth work providers - youth organisations and organisations that work with and for young people, whose mission is to regulate and standardise youth work, support youth workers and raise public awareness of the importance of youth work. The vision of UYW is that youth work is recognised as a profession and a system has been built to support young people and youth workers. The main goal of UYW is recognition of youth work, its monitoring, assessment, promotion and continuous development in order to provide quality, efficient and effective support to young people⁹⁷.

4.5 Regional platforms and networks

There are only a few regional platforms in the youth sector in the economy. The most important regional platforms operating in the economy are considered to be: the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and Connecting Youth Platform, formerly known as the Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform.

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkan participants Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programmes⁹⁸. RYCO is based on the principle of co-management system where the Governing Board, composed of one youth representative (elected by the youth organisations in the respective Contracting Party) and one institutional representative in charge of youth from each Contracting Party, take all strategic decisions on equal basis in order to implement the best possible decisions in the interest of youth in the WB region.

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) leads the WBYL project which was mentioned earlier in this chapter, but in this section, it is worth adding its regional cooperation impact on the youth sector. The entire process has allowed for positive ideas and practices to be shared and replicated in the Western

96 Coalition SEGA, *Official Website of SEGA Coalition*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://www.sega.org.mk/en/>>

97 Union for Youth Work, *Official Website of Union of Youth Work*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://smr.org.mk/>>

98 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, *About*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://www.rycowb.org/about/>>

* *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*



Balkans region in the field of youth policy, through the organisation of conferences. In addition to this, the RCC's WBYL has enabled youth participation in valuable events across the Western Balkans and Europe, including the Berlin Process Summit, EESC's Western Balkans Civil Society High-Level Conference, Prespa Forum Dialogue, etc.

Connecting Youth (CY) is a grassroots regional youth platform implemented by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), together with the umbrella youth organisations of all Western Balkan economies - with the support of Hanns Seidel Foundation. The platform was established in March 2018, and agreeing parties renew their commitment to work together to foster youth connectivity in the region, contribute to the EU integration processes, and further support and advance the role and contribution of youth in the society⁹⁹.

While it is worth mentioning the Young European Ambassadors, as a non-political, activist initiative established in 2020 as part of the EU Regional Communication Programme for the Western Balkans¹⁰⁰, they are not affiliated with any youth organisation or structure and do not aim to represent the voice of young people in decision-making.

4.6 Critical Assessment

The Government and the governmental institutions' readiness to initiate processes based on the needs of youth organisations and young people in the economy is one of the strengths of the youth participation process in the economy. For the first time, the government dedicated one governmental discussion session to youth policies in which youth organisations had the opportunity to present their most important issues. However, since this session took place in 2018, such government session has not be repeated.

At the local level, local self-governments are responsible for decision-making, and in some of the municipalities, local youth councils exist as a form of local youth participation, but their structure within local decision-making processes has not been unified and the level of participation is still low. As mentioned above, there are two wide networks of youth organisations – NYCM and SEGA. As aforementioned, neither of them has been formally recognised as the official representative body for young people and neither of the two networks represents all young people and youth organisations' views and interests even though there have been cases of collaboration. For instance, the cooperation between NYCM and other organisations regarding the implementation of Youth Guarantee programme is a good example of participation, but according to what the youth representatives expressed, despite good cooperation that existed at the beginning of the work, the final products do not always contain the input provided by youth organisations. Cooperation between the two major networks is minimal, but there have been examples, such as the implementation of the field work of the Youth Guarantee.

Youth policy and youth work in North Macedonia is still in a developing phase and mostly depends on political processes and economic situation. In addition to this, the main stakeholders, especially youth NGOs, are not financially independent, and they do not have the capacities to take part and have a bigger role in the decision-making processes. A lack of resources and stable financial support, in addition to the lack of constructive partnerships with other NGOs or other public institutions, make NGOs very fragile and unproductive.

99 Connecting Youth, *About*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://www.connecting-youth.org/about.php>>

100 WeBalkans, "Young European Ambassadors of the WB6", accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://webalkans.eu/en/yea/>>



Key developments over the years:*Table 11: Key developments in youth donor support 2018-2023*

	By 2020	2021-2023	Critical Assessment
Youth Assembly	LYPYP is adopted and its establishment is defined to take place within a year of adoption of the Law.	By the end of 2023 Assembly was not established. As per the Law, it needs to be initiated by the youth organisation registered in the AYS' Registry of youth organisations.	The institutions need to indicate to youth civil society organisations that their participation in policymaking process will be meaningful. The lack of initiative from youth organisations to establish this body suggests that they believe that their participation in these processes will only be tokenistic, and their recommendations will not be considered.
Advisory Body on Youth Policy	LYPYP is adopted and its establishment is defined to take place within a year of adoption of the Law.	By the end of 2023 Advisory Body is still not established as its members need to be elected by YA. The Government however has nominated its own representatives for this body.	Same reasons as in case of YA. The creation of this body is currently reliant on the will of youth civil society organisations, as the Government has already fulfilled its obligations.
Thematic Government Session on Youth	In 2018, the Government organised a Thematic Government Session on Youth, where youth civil society organisations submitted policy proposals that were discussed and adopted.	Another Government Session on Youth has not taken place since.	While the 2018 Government Session on Youth showed promise of North Macedonia adopting the youth dialogue methodology, it was never replicated since.
AYS Council on Youth	AYS did not have such advisory body.	AYS established this advisory body as a response to the existence of the Council on Sports in the same institution. The Council advises the Director and the Youth Sector of AYS on youth issues.	The establishment of this Advisory Council is a positive step that advances the balance between the Sports and Youth Sectors of AYS. The largest youth umbrella organisations have representatives in this Council.
Club on Youth Affairs and Policies	The Assembly has constituted an informal body, a Club on Youth Affairs and Policies (CYAP), which mainstreams youth issues across different commissions and legislative debates.	Following the latest Parliamentary election, the Club was constituted again, continuing the commitment to represent youth issues.	It is imperative to note the importance of this informal body as it has been able to initiate important youth legislative processes, such as LYPYP and has been heavily involved in ensuring cross-institutional cooperation among institutions and youth civil society organisation.



Local Youth Councils	Lack of uniform youth participation mechanisms. Local Youth Councils existed on the volition of municipal governments, but failed to make their work transparent or sustainable. Adoption of LYPYP obligated every municipality in North Macedonia to establish one.	AYS and OSCE partnered to launch a handbook for establishing a local youth council. By the end of 2022, 19 Local Youth Councils were established.	Municipalities lack the understanding of the provisions of LYPYP. Due to the unclear definition over how the services and mechanisms in the Law are funded, the municipalities can get around the implementation of these bodies. The deadline to establish LYCs expired in 2021, and still many municipalities do not have this mechanism established.
Evidence-Based Youth Policy	AYS conducted a Youth Trends Survey for the development of YS 2016-2025.	AYS conducted another Youth Trends Survey for the development of YS 2013-2027.	Researches on youth issues are done on ad-hoc basis, instead of systematically, this creating a gap in youth data, making the development of evidence-based youth policy a challenge.
Youth Umbrella Organisations	LYPYP officially recognised youth umbrella organisations as networks of youth civil society organisations.	By the end of 2022, only 3 organisations were registered in AYS' Registry of youth organisations as youth umbrella organisations – NYCM, Coalition SEGA and Scouts Association of North Macedonia. The Union for Youth Work is also worth mentioning as an umbrella organisation working only in the field of Youth Work.	Youth umbrella organisations are generally recognised as relevant stakeholders in policymaking processes when it comes to youth issues. In addition to this, NYCM and Coalition SEGA are implementing outreach activities for mapping NEET youth for the purposes of Youth Guarantee. These partnerships between institutions and youth organisations are a meaningful way for cooperation and building trust between youth and institutions.
Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)	RYCO was founded in 2016, and works on promoting reconciliation, trust, cooperation and dialogue in the Western Balkans through supporting and funding youth projects.	/	RYCO plays an importance role in facilitating reconciliation, cooperation and peacebuilding among youth in the Western Balkans. It also utilises co-management structure, where young people sit alongside decision-makers in its Governing Board.
Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)	Western Balkans Youth Lab (WBYL) project launched in January 2020, and formed Working Group on Youth Unemployment.	Work of the Working Group on Youth Unemployment concluded. Established Working Group on Mental Health.	The EU-supported and RCC-led WBYL project brought the EU Youth Dialogue to the Western Balkans, and enabled participation of youth on equal basis as policymakers in addressing key youth issues. The working groups strengthened the competencies of youth organisations to engage in policymaking processes, while government institutions were sensitised on the importance of engaging and consulting the youth sector. At regional level, it strengthened regional youth cooperation and facilitated exchange of best practices in youth policy.



CHAPTER 5: MAPPING OF DONOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH

This chapter presents programmes and interventions of key donors in youth-related issues. It also outlines how donor coordination works in North Macedonia and what are priority areas for the future in the field of youth.

5.1 Key donors in the field of youth

In North Macedonia, international organisations and foreign embassies have been active in implementing programmes focused directly on youth and youth-related areas such as employment, social inclusion, education and training (VET), digital skills and democratic and civic participation.

The key donors in North Macedonia that are working in the field of youth are: European Union; U.S Embassy in North Macedonia; USAID North Macedonia; OSCE Mission in Skopje; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; British Embassy Skopje; UNDP North Macedonia; German Agency for International Cooperation; UNFPA, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), and SOS Children's Village.

Every year, North Macedonia receives a significant amount of foreign aid, including funds from the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The EU's Foreign Direct Investment in North Macedonia reached €288.8 million in 2021. For 2014-2020, IPA II funding allocated for North Macedonia amounted to €633 million. For 2021-2027, IPA III funding for the whole enlargement region is €14.162 billion. It is based on EU thematic priorities rather than pre-defined envelopes. This will allow the instrument to reward performance, progress towards key priorities and have increased flexibility to respond to evolving needs. The Annual Action Plan 2021 for North Macedonia of €90.45 million focusses on supporting actions in rule of law and anti-corruption, fight against organised crime, trade, environment and clean air, green economy and the green agenda. The Annual Action Plan 2022 for North Macedonia amounts to €72.5 million and focuses on enhancing the EU accession process and supporting the economy's reforms in the areas of border/boundary and migration management, public administration, environment, health, social protection and gender equality. The EU pays special attention to youth, education and innovation and is helping the Western Balkans implementing Youth Guarantee schemes to support youth employment¹⁰¹.

One of the main programmes that North Macedonia was engaged in as part of the EU Programmes was Youth in Action (2007–2013). The main goals of the Youth in Action programme were to promote active citizenship, as well as European citizenship among young people, mutual understanding between young people on contributing to the development of quality systems to support the activities of young people, as well as strengthening the capabilities of citizens' associations operating in the field of youth, etc. Taking the necessary measures to ensure smooth running of

101 European Commission, 2023, *EU Factograph on North Macedonia*, accessed 25 September 2023
<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-03/factograph_north_macedonia_1.pdf>



this Programme at the economy level , as well as ensuring the participation of stakeholders in accordance with economy practice led to the establishment of the Agency at economy level, as a necessary institutional precondition for proper implementation of the Programme at the central level. A positive example of EU support to the youth sector is the Call for Proposals: IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2020 - Support to Civic Youth Initiatives, Activism and Volunteering in Local Communities – North Macedonia launched in 2021¹⁰². The call specifically targeted youth civil society organisations and provided 1,300,000.00 EUR in funding, and 4 projects implemented by youth consortia were supported.¹⁰³

Special attention should be given to the EU-supported and RCC implemented Western Balkans Youth Lab Project which aims to provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making. The project is covering Western Balkans economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia). The Western Balkans Youth Lab Project (1.5 million EUR) strives to create a longer-term structured regional dialogue between youth organisations and administrations focused on jointly developing policies which will increase youth participation in decision-making to improve the overall socio-economic environment for and mobility of youth in the Western Balkan economies through different types of activities¹⁰⁴. The project enabled establishment of two working groups in North Macedonia, a Working Group on Youth Unemployment, which delivered a set of Amendments to the Law on Employment and Security in Case of Unemployment that enable and enhance young people's access to employment support measures, and secondly, a Working Group on Mental Health and Youth, which delivered a draft Strategy on Mental Health and Youth 2023-2026. Aside from these, the process enhances overall regional cooperation among youth structures by encouraging signing of MoU among youth stakeholders and additional joint project applications.

A very attractive initiative founded by the Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia is the Europe House (formerly EU Info Centre). The main aim of this initiative is to attract youth sector and stimulate innovation, providing space to individuals, groups, communities and organisations to organise various events and activities in line with EU youth values.¹⁰⁵ By 2023, Europe House has expanded in Strumica, Kriva Palanka, Bitola and Veles.¹⁰⁶

The **U. S Embassy in North Macedonia** has established its own Youth Council. The Youth Council of the US Embassy brings together youth from different disciplines, interests, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. The Youth Council seeks to generate creative ideas and projects to empower youth in North Macedonia and strengthen youth's voice by advising the Embassy on essential youth issues. The Youth Council establishes cooperation with other civil society organisations, Government and inter-governmental agencies, and for-profit corporations to advance their mission-related objectives.

102 European Commission, 2021, *Call for Proposals: IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2020- Support to Civic Youth Initiatives, Activism and Volunteering in Local Communities – North Macedonia*, accessed 18 September 2023,

<<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/prospect/internal/noauth/externalDocumentDownload.htm?id=1354892&lang=en>>

103 European Commission, 2021, Publication of Grant Awardees, accessed 18 September 2023,

<<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/prospect/internal/noauth/externalDocumentDownload.htm?id=1354924&lang=en>>

104 Regional Cooperation Council, Western Balkans Youth Lab Project, accessed 18 September 2023,

<https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/48/western-balkans-youth-lab-project>

105 Europe House, Europe House: The Place of the New Generation, accessed 18 September 2023,

<<https://www.euhouse.mk/europe-house-the-place-of-the-new-generation/>>

106 Europe House, Official Website, accessed 18 September 2023,

<<https://www.euhouse.mk/europe-house-the-place-of-the-new-generation/>>



The Council does not have a formal structure, but serves as a space for young activists to jointly work on different initiatives.

USAID North Macedonia puts special focus on youth, according to its 5-year development strategy. According to the Development Cooperation Strategy, 2020 – 2025¹⁰⁷, a special objective is Youth Contributions to Society Increased. The Strategy priorities are to accelerate youth contributions to society, both economically and socially. USAID will prepensively engage in resource partnerships with the government (including educational institutions), private-sector enterprises, youth organisations, and youth to enable youth to increasingly contribute to society and the economy to secure a prosperous, vibrant, and stable future. Development Cooperation 2 will set in motion expanded opportunities in the private sector to prepare youth for employment opportunities. USAID will also work with the government to intensify nascent public initiatives to enable youth participation in the economy and society so that they are expanded and gain momentum. Currently the largest US-supported youth projects are YouthThink¹⁰⁸ and Youth Actively Create Opportunities (YACO)¹⁰⁹.

YouThink is a 5-year (2021-2026), USD 4.4 million programme. The programme enables youth to distinguish high-quality, fact-based information from that which is biased, poorly researched, false, or malign. The programme integrates critical information engagement and media literacy competencies in the economy's primary and secondary school curricula in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Development of Education, and higher education institutions, including pre- and in-service teacher training institutions and journalism schools. To support media literacy and critical thinking through non-formal education, the programme works with a network of youth clubs to provide peer-to-peer training, online courses, and blended learning opportunities. The programme provides youth the opportunity to practice these new skills and use information to form, present, and defend positions on issues of concern to them through constructive participation in decision-making processes. Youth also produce high-quality, appealing media content and reach audiences through digital short film festivals, municipal debates, and competitions. The programme enhances the quality, quantity, and relevance of media information targeting youth by strengthening training offered to journalists, both through the economy's journalism schools and by honing the skills of young practicing journalists¹¹⁰.

YACO is a 5-year (2023-2028), USD 7 million programme, which is based on strategic principles to: work with youth, for youth; act upon windows of opportunities that arise to make society more prosperous and democratic; and ensure that North Macedonia is a better place to live in. USAID will partner with the private sector, youth groups, civil society, and governmental institutions to (1) support economic opportunities that are attractive to youth; (2) help strengthen youths' competencies for modern and future jobs, progressive careers, and civic life; and (3) promote the experiences that cultivate values for participation and taking responsibility, ethical conduct, civic engagement, and striving for personal and collective accomplishments¹¹¹.

107 USAID North Macedonia, 2020, *Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2020-2025*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/CDCS_North_Macedonia_External_2025.pdf>

108 USAID, 2022, *YouThink Factsheet*, accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/YouThink%20JULY%202022%20%281%29.pdf>>

109 USAID, 2023, *YACO Factsheet*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/YACO%20March%202023_1.pdf>

110 USAID, 2022, *YouThink Factsheet*, accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/YouThink%20JULY%202022%20%281%29.pdf>>

111 USAID, 2023, *YACO Factsheet*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/YACO%20March%202023_1.pdf>



Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is supporting capacity building of local youth councils to strengthen youth decision-making at the local level as a key priority area. By engaging with young people economy-wide in developing their capacities to influence economy-wide and local youth policies, the Mission works to respond to the real needs and priorities of youth. To enhance meaningful youth participation in policy dialogue and decision-making processes, the Mission supports the AYS, municipalities, Local Youth Councils, and the local branch of Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). The Mission works with youth activists to help raise awareness among young people of the corrosive social effects of hate speech and to build resilience to radicalisation that can lead to violent extremism. It provides training courses and capacity building activities for law enforcement to help them work better with young people and increase young people's trust in the police¹¹². In partnership with AYS, OSCE helped develop a handbook for establishing Local Youth Councils, and supported the creation of the new Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The overall goal of Swiss cooperation is to support North Macedonia in its reforms to meet European standards and build a socially inclusive democracy and a market economy, while ensuring the sound governance of natural resources. Some of the significant projects of the Swiss cooperation in North Macedonia are:

- Youth Guarantee (a measure introduced by the Government, with Swiss support), providing funds for vocational skills development, and development of new products in companies (details can be found in chapter 3).
- Support to Electoral Reform project, implemented by IFES, was a 4-year programme (2019-2013) aimed at strengthening technical and human capacities and resources involved in all levels of electoral processes and making elections more credible, inclusive and representative. The programme put focus on youth wings of political parties, as well as young activists and youth organisations to serve as community mobilisers and hold governments accountable¹¹³.
- Education for Employment in North Macedonia (E4E@mk) from 2016 until 2027. The E4E@mk project aims to increase the employability of the unemployed, especially young people, by improving the Vocational Skills Development (VSD) system. The programme's anticipated support is EUR 13.4 mil for the programme's overall duration. According to the SDC implemented projects, their priority themes regarding youth are employment, VET, and education¹¹⁴.

British Embassy Skopje aims to work in the field of youth in North Macedonia by partnering with the Youth Council of North Macedonia and supporting the MladiHub space and platform, which support young people's access to the labour market. In its latest extension, the programme also addresses equal opportunities between young men and women, and works on mental health issues¹¹⁵. The MladiHub space was established by NYCM in cooperation with the Cabinet of the President of North Macedonia with support from the British Embassy Skopje.

112 OSCE, "Youth", accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://www.osce.org/mission-to-skopje/youth>>

113 IFES, "Support to Electoral Reform", accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://www.ifes.org/programs-initiatives/support-electoral-reforms-north-macedonia>>

114 Education for Employment in North Macedonia (E4E@mk), Official website, accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://e4e.mk/en/home/>>

115 Youth Council of North Macedonia, MladiHub Project, accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://mladihub.mk/>>



UN Agencies have concentrated their greatest efforts in recent years on supporting the Government's commitment to reducing unemployment as an essential step in increasing social inclusion. Much of UNDP's support for social inclusion has been focused on developing measures to promote self-employment, helping train the long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups such as members of the Roma community, women living in rural areas, and victims of domestic violence to start their own sustainable businesses. It is important to note that UNDP does not have a specific programme for youth, but that youth is crosscutting in all organisation's portfolios. Special note should be given to the UN-support regional project Youth for Inclusion, Equality and Trust, funded by the United Nations Peace Building Fund, implemented by the United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA, in partnership with the Youth Educational Forum¹¹⁶. The project focuses on partnering with young men and women to address divisive narratives and hate speech – increasingly pernicious threats to sustained peace in the region – to enhance social cohesion within but especially across the zones involved. It aims to promote constructive narratives and counter hate speech and patriarchal gender norms in order to increase inter-group dialogue, mutual understanding and gender equality. It will build on and leverage the existing capacities, organisations and mechanisms as much as possible to reach marginalised youth.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy office in North Macedonia is implementing the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (WBDI), which works with eight parliaments, public institutions, political parties and civil society organisations across WB economies. WBDI in North Macedonia is working to improve representation of youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups in political processes and supports democratisation of political parties and improvement of democratic policies and practices¹¹⁷.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has been actively engaged in North Macedonia since 1992. Since 2008, GIZ has been present with a representative office in Skopje. Additionally, since 2007, GIZ has been implementing projects that are focused on fostering regional cooperation and integration in the Western Balkans region. The three focus areas are: Economic Development and Employment, Governance and Democracy, and Sustainable Infrastructure. In this respect, international cooperation is promoting regional and local economic development and supporting the autonomous implementation of EU-compliant policies geared towards balancing regional development in the economy.

SOS Children's Village in Skopje also works in the field of youth. It creates programmes for young people who are ready to leave their SOS families so that they can move into shared accommodation while attending further education or training. The social and economic situation of North Macedonia often makes it difficult for young people to secure their future. The SOS Youth Programme helps them make the transition into adulthood; with the support of qualified staff, they learn to shoulder responsibilities and make their own decisions¹¹⁸.

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by 6 participants from Western Balkans to promote the the spirit of reconciliation and

116 UNFPA North Macedonia, *Youth for Inclusion, Equality, and Trust*, accessed 25 September 2023,

<<https://northmacedonia.unfpa.org/en/news/youth-trust-intercultural-dialogue-and-youth-participation>>

117 Westminster Foundation for Democracy in North Macedonia, North Macedonia, accessed 25 September 2023,

<<https://www.wfd.org/where-we-work/north-macedonia>>

118 SOS Children's Villages, Skopje, accessed 20 September 2023

<<https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/where-we-help/europe/macedonia/skopje>>



cooperation among the youth in the region. AYS supports the Branch Office in North Macedonia. The Agreement on the Establishment of RYCO was signed by WB Prime Ministers at the WB Summit held in Paris, on 4 July 2016. RYCO also supports youth civil society organisations with projects that facilitate regional cooperation and dialogue¹¹⁹.

5.2 Donor Coordination

Donor coordination is the key provision for more consistent assistance. Better programming also relies on increased cooperation with other donors, international and financial institutions at a strategic level, agreeing on policy priorities and a clearer division of roles and interventions. Improved coordination with the donor community is a key condition enabling (co-)financing of agreed Sector Support Actions contributing to the policy objectives, thus moving away from purely grant-financed projects, and instead increasing the share of assistance through support at the sectoral level.

The Secretariat for European Affairs is the main institution coordinating European funds in North Macedonia. The Secretariat's mission is to provide professional support and coordination of the work of public administrative bodies and other organisations and institutions to prepare North Macedonia for membership in the European Union. Within its institutional structure, the Secretariat has a sector for coordination of European funds and all other foreign funds. Consultation with other stakeholders in the relevant sectors is also organised, as well as more generally with civil society organisations (engagement with civil society being an essential crosscutting obligation of IPA II programming) and other stakeholders, as appropriate. Multi-economy coordination meetings take place regularly throughout the year either in Brussels or in the Enlargement region and allow for discussion on the status of current and future programming, as well as implementation.

In North Macedonia, most of the donors directly support young people, or young people are amongst their target groups in crosscutting interventions. The donor community cooperates with the economy's institutions at the central and local levels. Apart from the Secretariat, another important institution that directly cooperates with the international community in projects related to youth is AYS, which is the highest central-level institution for youth policy and project implementation. The support is diverse, and donors support activities on education (VET, higher education, citizen science), youth employment and skills, ethnic integration, innovations for youth, social enterprises, digital education, and so on.

Currently, there is an initiative among institutional levels to establish a donor coordination mechanism, but it is still in process. Comments from interviewees indicated a need for coordination between the authorities of North Macedonia and international organisations and donors in order to avoid duplication of activities and ensure a uniform approach to addressing specific strategic priorities¹²⁰.

119 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, *About*, accessed 17 September 2023, <<https://www.rycowb.org/about/>>

120 Representative of the Government of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 19 September, Skopje.



5.3 Priority areas for the future in the field of youth

Donors have been assisting and supporting youth policy creation processes. Their support has been focused on key governmental and municipal authorities, youth structures, formations, and civil society organisations in the economy, while developing relevant youth policies at the local and central levels, and building paths for sustainable cooperation on issues related to youth participation.

To respond to the needs of youth, and based on donor mapping, key priority areas for future programmes and projects would be the following:

Engaging Youth in the EU Accession Process: Young people are vastly excluded from the EU accession process. 2021 public opinion poll, conducted by IRI¹²¹, finds that joining the European Union enjoys 79% of public support. However, knowing the long history of the EU accession process and North Macedonia, 32% of citizens believe it will never happen. In addition to this, based on a study conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy regarding the socio-political participation of youth, only 30.5% of young people believe that in 5 years North Macedonia will be a better place for living. Based on the same study, 60% of young people are hopeful and strongly believe North Macedonia will enter the EU, and the year they predict it will happen is 2026¹²². Engaging young people in the EU accession process would contribute towards building trust with the institutions both at economy and EU level.

Youth Policy Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms: Donor focus is oftentimes placed on policy development, but policy monitoring is often overlooked. North Macedonia has plenty of adopted strategies and laws that focus on youth, however their implementation is severely lacking, such as the example of LYPYP. To that end, a special priority should be given to policy monitoring and holding stakeholders accountable.

Rural youth: Statistics show that specific disparities exist between urban and rural areas, with rural youth facing distinct challenges relating to poverty, education, training, or employment opportunities.¹²³ More projects supporting young people from rural areas to channel their energy, creativity, and aspirations in the areas where they live would be beneficial.

Promoting youth activism in a multi-ethnic context: Taking into consideration the multi-ethnic composition of the economy's population, it is of paramount importance to engage youth from all ethnic communities and increase their access to projects promoting intercultural dialogue, peace-building, and social cohesion between ethnic communities to combat discrimination and exclusion.

Youth radicalisation and extremism: Following the above priority area, it is also important to highlight the need of future interventions in the youth radicalisation and extremism phenomena. Radicalisation and the associated use of violence are frequent among young people from different ethnic communities. While extremism and radicalisation leading to violence are not new phenomena

121 IRI, 2021, *Public Opinion Poll – Residents of North Macedonia*, accessed 1 September 2023,

<https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/iri_n_macedonia_march-april_2021_poll_june_2021.pdf>

122 Gjorgjiovska, J. and Galevski, M., *Socio-Political Participation of Young People 2021*, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, accessed 9 September 2023, <<https://mof.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Studija-Socio-Politicko-Ucestvo-na-Mladi-2021-MK-sml-1.pdf>>

123 State Statistical Office, 2021, *Census 2021*, Government of North Macedonia, accessed 11 September 2023.

<https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2022/POPIS_DZS_web_MK.pdf>



per se, their implications for young people and for the youth sector should be highlighted in future actions.

Roma youth and other minority groups: 2021 census indicates 46.433 Roma citizens¹²⁴ live in North Macedonia, roughly around 2.5%, but some reserachs claims the number to be between 80,000 and 260,000 Roma in North Macedonia, or approximately 4 to 12% of the total population. The municipality of Šuto Orizari is the only municipality in the world with a Romani majority and the only municipality where Romani is an official language alongside Macedonian. All this data shows that the number of young people from this community have many needs that should be further addressed.

Addressing youth unemployment. Economy policies on active labour market measures have not been as successful as expected. In this regard, more projects should be focused on channelled training of young people and supporting them in education and career development and, in particular, consolidating linkages between educated youth and the labour market. Help is needed for young people to gain work experience through internships, volunteering, and part-time work before they even start looking for full-time jobs. All of these would be priority areas, which would decrease the emigration of young people.

Green and Social Entrepreneurship: Over the years, youth entrepreneurship initiatives have often included a green or a social aspect, signalling young people's commitment to sustainability, addressing pressing societal problems and maintaining the environment. North Macedonia and the Western Balkans, as one of the most polluted areas in Europe offer a promising landscape to build on the capacities of youth in addressing these pressing needs. Prior regional projects have contributed towards establishing a favourable environment for such initiatives, such as the EU-support BY LEAP¹²⁵ which has strengthened the participation of grassroots CSOs and youth initiatives in regional network, towards sustainability of young entrepreneurs (student/youth) companies through demonstration, and training/mentoring activities.

Tackling Brain Drain. While the issue is cross-sectoral, more innovative approaches are to be considered in addressing the devastating youth brain drain in North Macedonia. Such approach should address young people's engagement in public life, recognising young people as active and relevant stakeholders, but also provides measures that ensure their economic stability and independence. Young people name the quality of life as the reason for migration, as this includes the rule of law, anti-corruption, addressing pollution and recognition of human rights¹²⁶.

Inclusive youth work: Youth work, through its values and practices, also represents a means of supporting young people's inclusion and participation in society. Priority areas to focus on to increase participation of young people with disabilities and promote inclusive youth work would include: fostering active participation, gender equality, and combating all forms of discrimination in the labour market.

124 State Statistical Office, 2021, *Census 2021*, Government of North Macedonia, accessed 11 September 2023. <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2022/POPIS_DZS_web_MK.pdf>

125 BY LEAP, *About the Project*, accessed 19 September 2023, <<https://by-leap.com/about-the-project/>>

126 Zivets, L., 2019, *Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment*, USAID, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WB77.pdf>



Young People's Health (Both Physical and Mental). Health as a topic is often overlooked when considering youth issues. The pandemic had a strong impact on both young people's mental and physical health. There is a lack of available resources or services that support young people's mental well-being.

Strengthening youth civil society organisations. Young people's right to association is primarily exercised through participation in youth organisations. Due to the decreasing access to funding for youth organisations, donors should explore operational grants for youth organisations and youth structures that engage in policy-making processes to ensure their stability and longevity.

Youth data: While youth issues are deemed a priority by all stakeholders, there is lack of youth-specific data. LYPP envisages the establishment of a research institute on youth policy with the Agency for Youth and Sports to conduct youth-related research; however implementation is lacking. In addition to this, given the challenges that AYS faces with staff, other options are to be explored. In order to develop and design sound youth policies, they need to be based on concrete evidence, and tap into the potentials of the research capabilities of youth civil society organisations.

Wider European Youth Cooperation: While there are mechanisms and processes established for regional cooperation, there is currently a momentum for bilateral and multilateral youth cooperation in North Macedonia with neighbouring EU member states, Greece and Bulgaria. The Prespa Agreement resolved the North Macedonia and Greece name dispute, but it also opened doors towards establishment of new youth cooperation mechanisms, such as the initiative for a Bilateral North Macedonia-Greece Youth Cooperation Office¹²⁷, also outlined in the Action Plan for the Implementation of Prespa Agreement¹²⁸. In addition to this, growing tensions between North Macedonia and Bulgaria can also be alleviated with youth cooperation initiatives.

5.4 Critical Assessment

International community working in North Macedonia is investing significantly in projects where youth can benefit directly or indirectly. Donor support has had a significant impact in the process of adoption of LYPP, as well as NYS. Donor-supported projects initially focused on addressing youth unemployment, addressing social inclusion and cohesion, and promoting VET, however these topics have expanded over the years into participation in policymaking, digitalisation, sustainable development and environmental protection, electoral reform, media literacy, etc.

Sharing their values and priorities towards human rights, good governance, and the rule of law, donors have involved youth in many projects that are also beneficial for most of the population or for other groups targeted. Though, there is still a pressing need to increase youth engagement and participation in policy processes. Moreover, young people living in rural areas and suburbs must be involved to a larger extent.

Furthermore, youth career orientation, including labour market measures is important, and would minimise emigration of young people. Other priority areas include projects that would contribute to

127 Cooperation For a Common Future, *Initiative for a Bilateral Youth Cooperation Office between North Macedonia and Greece*, accessed 25 September 2023, <<https://www.c4cf.org/>>

128 Government of North Macedonia, 2019, *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Prespa Agreement*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/PrespaDogovor/1.2_action_plan_-_final_agreement_-_english.pdf>



an easier school-to-work transition through better vocational skills development and would mobilise them to become more active in addressing local and central level issues. In addition, particular focus is needed towards Roma youth and other minority groups in order to engage youth from all ethnic groups, and to increase their access to projects promoting intercultural dialogue and peace building, among others.

Support to youth issues is generally given in line with donor priorities; however there is little focus on providing operational support to youth organisations, and specifically youth structures such as umbrella organisations and youth councils which engage in policy-making processes.

In terms of donor interventions, there is very little support towards providing youth data, and supporting youth-led research initiatives, making it a challenge for youth organisations and young people to advocate for youth policy when there is lack of evidence.

Current donor coordination, which is done through the Secretariat for European Affairs, seems to fall short of the expectations of all of the parties concerned. The suggestion put forth is that donor coordination structures, such as multi-donor trust funds, be part of facilitating joint approaches in recipient economies. More consistent assistance and increased cooperation should be provided. Furthermore, stronger agreement on policy priorities and a clearer definition in the share of roles and interventions should be a focus as well in order to avoid duplication of projects and activities. Building trust in collaborative partnerships is also important. On one hand, donors have to show more trust when building partnerships with domestic partners as grantees, partners, and CSOs. On the other hand, domestic partners must enhance their capacities to bring coordination to another level.

Besides the urgent need of an improved donor coordination tool, the regional dimension must not be forgotten. Encouraging regional learning and exchange opportunities for youth is an essential strategy for change. An even larger number of donors seem to agree and call additional attention to joint youth problem solving to address the many problems that extend beyond individual economies in the region, and donors and CSOs need to lead the way as pioneers in this sort of cooperation.

Finally, in terms of grant applications, due to a lack of youth-targeted calls, youth organisations often compete with already well-established organisations with years of experience in developing grant proposals. Youth organisations are often unsuccessful in these calls, therefore donors should adapt the application packages. This is also in line with the Youth Manifesto of the DG REGIO, calling for simplification of rules and better communication via digital tools.¹²⁹

129 European Commission, 2020, *Youth Manifesto for young people by young people to shape the European cooperation policy*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/brochure/youth_manifesto_interreg_en.pdf>



Key developments:

	By 2020	2021-2023	Critical Assessment
Large-Scale Youth-Focused Projects	Several donors had implemented large-scale youth projects and 2020 marks the launch of the EU-supported and RCC-led WBYL project.	This period marks the launch of 2 large USAID programmes, YouThink and YACO project, the launch of the regional UN project Youth for Inclusion, Equality and Trust.	Over the years, more and more international organisations and donors have been focusing on youth in North Macedonia by providing youth-focused donor support and implementing large-scale youth-focused projects. This type of support oftentimes includes funding youth organisations, which is a pressing need, considering the limited access to funds in North Macedonia.
Youth-Focused Donor Support	Europe House established in Skopje; USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy, 2020 – 2025 includes Youth Contributions to Society Increased as a special objective .	Expansion of Europe House to Strumica, Kriva Palanka, Bitola and Veles; Youth-targeted CFP launched by EU (Call for Proposals: IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2020 - Support to Civic Youth Initiatives); OSCE, UNDP and UNFPA support development of the Youth Strategy of North Macedonia 2023-2027.	A positive example is the Youth-targeted CFP launched by EU (Call for Proposals: IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2020 - Support to Civic Youth Initiatives).



CHAPTER 6 GOOD PRACTICE AND GAP ANALYSIS

6.1 Good Practice

In the last years, the economy has progressed in creating youth policy by focusing on consultations with various stakeholders, including young people, youth organisations, ministries, institutions, and donor community. Development of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was inclusive and interactive, as stated by youth organisations during the interviews. None of the processes described are without flaws, but they represent the start of good practice that should be further developed and improved. The Law provides a solid basis for youth policy, youth participation mechanisms and services, defines funding and determines deadlines for implementation of the Law. Another positive aspect from the implementation of LYPYP have been the establishment of youth centres in municipalities, and the adopted practice of municipal governments to establish partnerships with local youth organisations to operate the centres. To date, the youth centres in 7 municipalities are funded by the municipality and youth organisations implement their programmes¹³⁰.

To further indicate the focus on youth issues, the Prime Minister of the Government has appointed a special Advisor on Youth and Youth Policy that works with all institutions on issues related to youth. In October 2017, the Assembly of North Macedonia established CYAP. The Club also initiated the creation of the Law on Youth by forming a working group consisting of youth representatives, MPs, and governmental representatives. CYAP often organises coordination meeting involving young people, youth organisations and relevant ministries and institutions.

In 2018, the Youth Guarantee programme was implemented for the first time. This programme was perceived as the most successful youth programme in the economy by many institutions. The measures were created based on the findings of the International Labour Organisation's research on NEET group in the economy, and it was designed with the needs of NEET in mind. The Youth Guarantee is the first example of implementation by a non-EU Member State. With the involvement of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, the government, for the first time, engaged civil society organisations in the implementation of a Governmental Policy. In line with this, it is imperative to note that the cooperation between MLSP and NYCM continued both in the implementation of the outreach activities and in the design of the new Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan¹³¹.

In 2021, AYS along with the Youth Council of North Macedonia continued the implementation of the Youth Civic Engagement Award, recognising young people, informal youth groups and youth organisations for their contributions to society. This a positive example of partnership between a public institution and a youth organisation that enabled sustainability and continuity of a donor-established practice.

130 Kulakov, F., 2023, „Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies for 2023, Youth Council of North Macedonia, accessed 4 September 2023, <https://nms.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring_Izvestaj_Broshura_2023_ENG.pdf>

131 Representative of the Youth Council of North Macedonia, (2023), Interviewed by Filip Kulakov, 24 September, Skopje.



6.2 Gap analysis

Even though there are many good practices highlighted above, there is still the need for improvement regarding the policy framework and, in particular, funding of and support for youth organisations. In terms of financing, AYS has a limited budget for the implementation of its activities and the support of youth organisations. Funding in the youth field is far from sufficient. The gap must be filled by central and local authorities including: AYS, relevant Ministries, Secretariat of the Government, and local municipalities. The lack of transparency in terms of youth funding, due to the lack of a youth budget line, further strengthens the distrust between youth organisations and the authorities, as they are unable to track the spending of the Law-obliging youth funds. The Law also lacks clarity as to the institutions which are to receive this youth budget. In addition, cooperation between institutions appears to be missing which is reflected in analysis, budget for implementation, and cross-sectoral cooperation. There is room for improvement of cross-sectoral and inter-institutional cooperation. In addition to this, youth policy lacks monitoring and evaluation.

In terms of youth participation, YA and YPAB have still not been created, even though the law was adopted three years ago. Besides the fact that youth are included in the broad consultation process to create policy documents (law, youth policies, programmes, and others), it is necessary to actually incorporate their input and to strengthen follow-up mechanisms, and, for instance, offer an explanation as to why some of the input was not included.

In terms of local youth participation, there are many municipalities which still lack youth participation mechanisms, youth services or youth policies. Youth organisations and young people do not feel any effects from the adoption of Local Youth Strategies.

Gaps are also present in the capacities of public bodies and youth organisations to support youth participation processes. The relevant public bodies have enough human capabilities, but they are not always prepared to the extent required to implement the policy framework.

Meanwhile, human resource capacities of youth organisations are weak and often not sufficient to meet the needs for the organisations' own project activities. Existing programmes should be upgraded and revised to improve specific measures envisaged by the programmes and to establish new ones that will enable young people to become the primary decision-making factor in North Macedonia.



6.3 Recommendations

Based on the data gathered from interviews with different stakeholders, as well as the desk research, this report summarises the recommendations into the areas listed below while considering the overall recommendation, which should be permanently taken into consideration by all stakeholders involved:

There is a need for an integrated, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach to the issues of young people's development and the mainstreaming of youth issues within economy goals and programmes including, but not limited to, programmes in education, training, health and employment.

Policy makers

- A successful implementation of the new law, LYPYP, should be a priority of the public institutions to develop more opportunities for the youth in the upcoming years and to institutionalise different mechanisms for youth participation.
- Enhanced focus should be placed on consolidation of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for youth policies and foreseen activities. Annual report on Youth Policy should be prepared and published.
- Increased transparency of tracking youth spending across all relevant ministries and institutions.
- The disbalance in the budget of the Agency for Youth and Sports in terms of youth budget and sports budget should be overcome. More funding to the youth sector should be provided.
- A more comprehensive approach and better coordination among different relevant ministries and governmental institutions should be reinforced. For example, coordination among line ministries on youth-relevant policies needs to engage young people.
- In addition to the existing political will, public institutions need to understand the need for development of new policies. Public institutions should accept and fully implement the innovative proposals of youth organisations to ensure significant youth participation in the decision-making processes.
- The public funds for the support of youth organisations should be considerably larger. Youth organisations would be strengthened significantly by the provision of guaranteed public funding and/or tax benefits for organisations and other private sector stakeholders interested in supporting youth initiatives.
- Local youth councils should be actively engaged and local governments should take into consideration their contributions in order to increase youth participation in the decision-making at a local level.
- AYS, as the voice of and the bridge between the government and other decision-makers, should increase its influence and balance the linkage between young people's aspirations and the resources of the governments.



- It is necessary to create flexible mechanisms for the implementation of youth-driven ideas and a mechanism to speed up the implementation of new emerging ideas and actions.
- Youth policy must be promoted in order to reach all major stakeholders and continually increase awareness among general population. Innovative means to mobilise and garner support from young people should be further developed.
- Youth policy should take into account all categories of youth, including marginalised and minority youth groups.
- Implementation of a Youth Impact Assessment tool to measure the impact on youth in all policies.

Civil Society and Youth Organisations in particular

- Civil society sector should prioritise youth and youth-related issues in their field activities while conceptualising and implementing projects by ensuring youth participation in both the planning and implementation of projects.
- Encourage youth civil society organisations to engage in processes related to LYPYP, such as registering in AYS's Registry and establishing Youth Assembly of North Macedonia and Advisory Body on Youth Policy.
- Strengthen capacities of youth coalitions/CSOs and youth advocacy platforms at the municipal level on policy dialogue and engagement with local government for local planning, budgeting and monitoring, including in emergencies.
- Youth organisations should clearly prioritise areas of intervention while requiring local or international funding.
- Youth organisations should monitor the work of the institutions dealing with youth issues.
- Capital-based organisations should extend their outreach to young people in rural areas to ensure access to opportunities for all young people.
- Civil society organisations should implement models of youth consultation to include youth voices in their daily work.

Donor community

- A more effective donor coordination mechanism should be established at an economy level and additionally a supportive mechanism at regional level.
- Donors should continue to reinforce their willingness to further support youth and youth-related issues by providing direct support to the projects of youth organisations.
- To respond to the needs of youth, and based on the donor mapping, key priority areas for future programmes and projects should be considered. Both project grants and institutional support for capacity building are recommended. Increase institutional support for capacity building in order to increase institutional capacities of youth organisations and other institutions operating in the youth sector. Project grants would support them expand



their activities and respond more closely to the priority areas. Proposed areas for support include: *engaging youth in the EU accession process, youth policy monitoring and evaluation, rural youth, promoting youth activism in a multi-ethnic context, youth radicalisation and extremism, Roma youth and other minority groups, addressing youth unemployment, green and social entrepreneurship; tackling brain drain, inclusive youth work, young people's health, strengthening youth civil society organisations, youth data, and wider European youth cooperation.*

- Develop mechanisms for young people to be involved in decision-making about establishing new operational programmes and grant plans.
- Besides the engagement of young people, major donors should promote inclusion as a good practice in partnership negotiations with other members of donor community.

Youth

- Youth should initiate youth-driven ideas, projects and activities through fostering communication and cooperation with each other.
- Young people should engage in the established youth participation mechanisms, such as the local youth councils and Youth Assembly of North Macedonia and provide their input in policymaking processes at both local and central level.
- Youth should utilise the existing opportunities offered by youth civil society organisations and institutions aimed at their development.
- Youth, through activism, should aim to prioritise youth issues in media and on the agendas of policy- and decision-makers.



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ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Overview of stakeholders in North Macedonia

CENTRAL LEVEL

Responsible authorities for overall implementation of NYS

- Agency for Youth and Sport – government agency responsible for youth

Other authorities at central level

- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Employment Service Agency
- Club on Youth Affairs and Policies
- Ministry of Culture
- Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship in North Macedonia
- Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility

Non-governmental organisations at economy level

- Youth Council of North Macedonia
- SEGA Coalition
- Union of Youth Work

International organisations and donors at central level

- USAID North Macedonia
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia
- UNDP North Macedonia
- UNFPA
- British Embassy Skopje
- OSCE Mission in Skopje
- Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility

LOCAL LEVEL

Local level authorities

- Local Municipalities



Annex 2 – Key contents of LYPYP

LYPYP's aim and objectives include the following:

1. Creating and implementing youth policy at all levels through multiple sectoral approaches, starting from the needs and interests of young people;
2. Strengthening the participation of young people in the policymaking processes for youth, active information, promotion and protection of the interests of young people, as well as raising awareness of the importance of young people and their social role;
3. Promoting intergenerational partnerships to support youth participation in the decision-making and policymaking process;
4. Support and promotion of youth organisation;
5. Encouraging structural dialogue at the central and local level;
6. Encouraging volunteering, youth activism, and youth work; and
7. Encouraging personal, professional, and social development of young people.



Annex 3 – List of Tables

Table 1: Population figures 2015-2021 (Page 8)

Table 2: Graduation figures 2019-2022 (Page 10)

Table 3: NEET youth percentage 2018-2021 (Page 10)

Table 4: Youth unemployment rate 2018-2022 (Page 11)

Table 5: Key developments in youth population data 2018-2023 (Page 12)

Table 6: Implementation of LYPYP 2021-2022 (Page 21)

Table 7: Key developments in youth policy 2018-2023 (Page 22)

Table 8: AYS budget and youth funds 2021-2023 (Page 24)

Table 9: Youth Guarantee Success Rate 2018-2022 (Page 27)

Table 10: Key developments in youth funding 2018-2023 (Page 30)

Table 11: Key developments in youth donor support 2018-2023 (Page 40)



Annex 4 - List of interviews

No.	Institution	Sector	Contact Person	Position
1	Youth Council of North Macedonia	Non- gov	Mariana Angelova	Secretary General
2	Union for Youth Work	Non-Gov	Dragan Atanasov	Secretary General
3	Agency for Youth and Sport	Gov	Gordana Cekova	Head of Youth Sector
4	Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility	Gov	Marko Gjorgievski	Director
5	Assembly of North Macedonia	Gov	Monika Zajkova	Member of Parliament
6	Government of North Macedonia	Gov	Gjorgi Tasev	Youth and Sport Adviser to the Prime Minister



WBYL

WESTERNBALKANSYOUTHLAB



Regional Cooperation Council

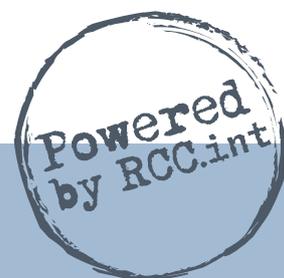


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