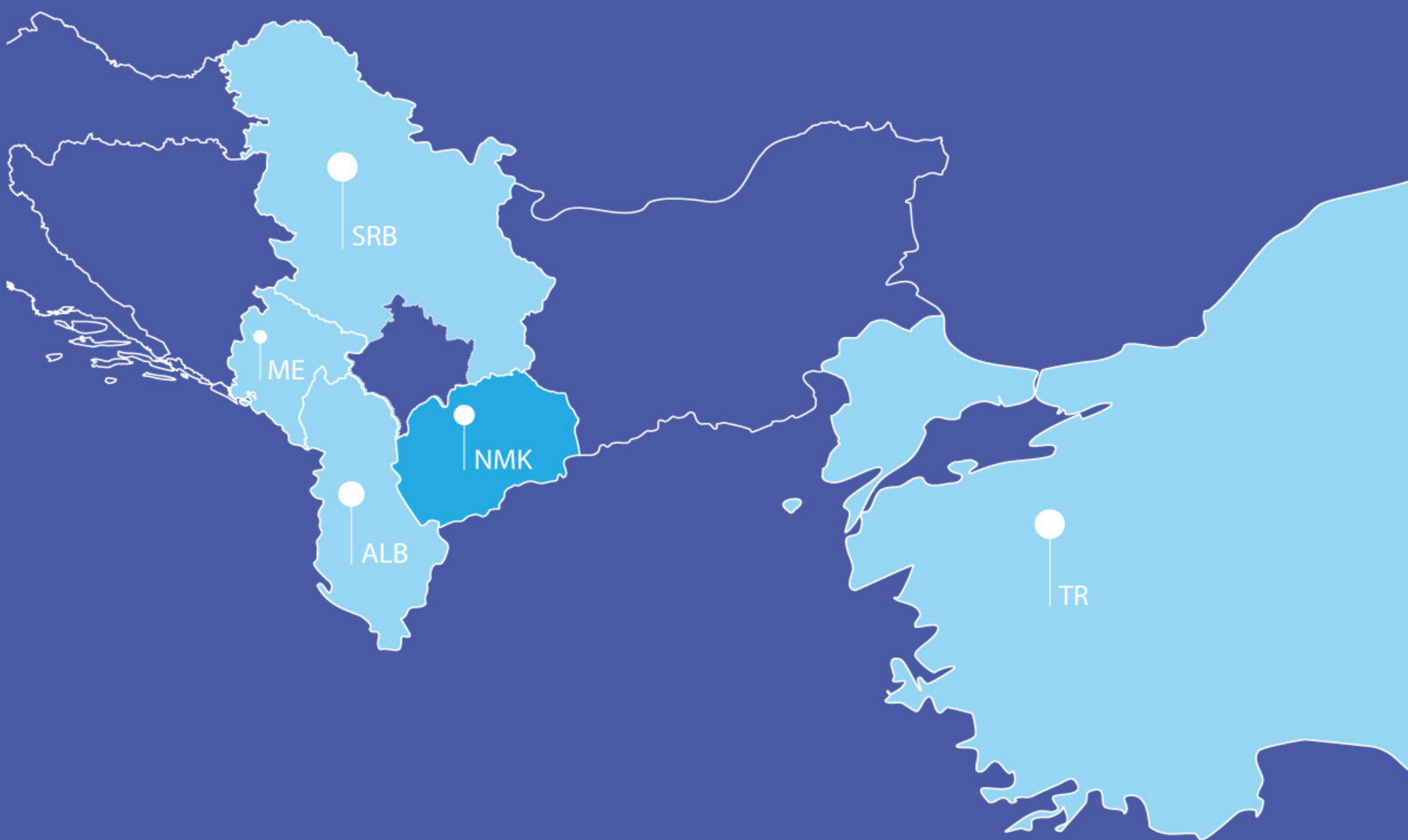


YOUTH (UN)EMPLOYMENT IN NORTH MACEDONIA:

An analysis of NEET and vulnerable youth



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The background of the page features a faded, grayscale image of three young people—two men and one woman—standing in front of a chain-link fence. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and has his arms crossed. The woman in the center is wearing a dark top and light-colored pants. The person on the right is wearing a yellow shirt and dark pants. The fence has some text on it, including "E BOTH HANDS", "MOVING", "CLOSE", "DOOR", and "MOVING".

Abstract

Unemployment among youth is a matter of deep concern for many countries, especially in developing regions. As such, various policies and programmes aiming at its reduction have been proposed and implemented. However, youth unemployment, especially among vulnerable young people remains a prevalent issue in new democracies such as the Western Balkan countries and Turkey. Therefore, many researchers and policymakers have been concerned with the high levels of youth unemployment, especially with long-term unemployment among youth and its effects on migration. Moreover, there are evident discrepancies among the region and its EU counterparts, which burdens the EU integration process for these countries. Following the work of these researchers and policymakers, with further inclusion of primary qualitative research through interviews and questionnaires, this study examines specifically the position of NEET (youth not in education, employment or training) and vulnerable youth in North Macedonia. With the aim to better explore the position of NEET and vulnerable youth, this study examines both the legislative and institutional set-up in tackling youth unemployment and the composition and numbers of NEET and vulnerable youth, offering insights on the current situation of NEET and recommendation on how to better the situation.

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Introduction

Unemployment among young people is a matter of deep concern for many countries, especially in developing regions. Various policies aiming at its reduction have been proposed and implemented. The focus of these policies is dominantly on educational improvements, as these policies are expected to increase the chances for the employment of young people. The issue of young people aged 15–29 that are part of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), is nowadays of particular interest for researchers,¹ as social exclusion has a strong negative impact on the basic needs of youth.²

One of the crucial steps in addressing the issue of NEET and vulnerable youth is the determination of its size and composition. With one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe and low employment rates among youth, the urgency of addressing the issue of the youth position in the labour market in North Macedonia is greater than in its EU counterparts. Those young people identified as NEET are at a very high risk of becoming vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.³ Many indicators are showing which factors influence predominantly specific risk groups and why some young people become part of NEET such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status of their families, special educational needs and cost of education as a risk of disconnection of young people from learning, but also many other risk factors are connected to the specifics of the countries.

In the 2019 Labour Report of the State Statistical Office (SSO) of North Macedonia, data shows that in 2018 the youth unemployment rate (15-29 years) in North Macedonia was at 38.1 per cent, compared to an average of 13.6 per cent in the OECD countries the same year. In this context, the objective of the study is to outline the challenges and opportunities the NEET Youth in North Macedonia encounter in their path toward employment, with a particular focus on marginalised and vulnerable youth, which includes rural youth, Roma people, people with disabilities and various minorities. Although there is available research on youth unemployment and their involvement in social processes, there is still a lack of attempts to identify the overall situation, especially regarding the general state of data on youth, the effects of the programmes and laws in place, the role of the state institutions and the position of vulnerable youth.

This study synthesises collected information intending to map the position of NEET youth in North Macedonia and define the term NEET and its structure - what the Government defines as NEET Youth and what classifies as subgroups within NEET youth, what data is collected related to NEET youth and based on which data the Government defines measures to support young people from vulnerable groups. The data is divided and analysed by gender, ethnicity, age group and educational attainment. Therefore, the study is organised into three sections: the first section focuses on the legal framework on (un)employment and education of youth with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, the second section gives a better insight into the institutional capacity in addressing youth unemployment, and lastly, based on the findings, the study offers a comprehensive description of the position of NEET Youth in the country and offer recommendations on addressing youth unemployment.

¹ Spatarelu, Eliza Mihaela. 2015. Youth Insertion on Labor Market. *Procedia Economics and Finance* 32: 1020–1026.; Vasilea, Valentina, and Irina Anghel. 2015. The educational level as a risk factor for youth exclusion from the labour market. *Procedia Economics and Finance* 22: 64–71.

² Eck, Jennifer, Christiane Schoel, and Rainer Greifeneder. 2016. Coping with or buffering against the negative impact of social exclusion on basic needs: A review of strategies. In *Social Exclusion*, ed. Paolo Riva and Jennifer Eck, 227–249. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

³ Backman, Olof, and Anders Nilsson. 2016. Long-term consequences of being not in employment, education or training as a young adult. Stability and change in three Swedish birth cohorts. *European Societies* 18 (2): 136–157

Methodology

The first phase of the research consisted of collecting and analysing secondary data and literature review, identification of stakeholders and data sources. The aim is to identify the already existing information and data on youth (un)employment in the country, legislative framework addressing youth (un)employment and state measures on youth (un)employment, collecting existing data through desk research. The legislative framework analysis entails an examination of how the Government defines NEET youth; what exactly are the subgroups within NEET youth; what data is collected by the Statistical Office related to NEET youth; and what data set is used to define measures on NEET and vulnerable youth unemployment. These include Strategies, laws and bylaws, programs and international reports. Additionally, an overview of the existing available data and reports produced by Government, non-governmental (youth and other civil society organisations) and international organisations.

The second phase of the research focuses on analysing the institutional capacity in addressing the issue of youth (un)employment; this entails an in-depth analysis of the existing institutional setup in charge of the creation and implementation of measures on youth (un)employment. The focus is placed on analysing the capacity of institutions at the national, regional and local level, including here central government institutions and agencies. Moreover, the analysis also includes youth organisations and CSOs working with NEET and vulnerable youth and assessing their role in NEET and vulnerable youth employment, the extent of the cooperation with state institutions and regional cooperation. Furthermore, in this phase, the research also includes an analysis of the financial resources dedicated to NEET and vulnerable youth employment, including both local and international funds.

The following primary data collection methods are used: questionnaires for 20 youth organisations and other CSOs (working with NEET and vulnerable youth) and seven semi-structured interview institution representatives. Moreover, the following data sources are used: official documents; domestic legal sources; the framework of applied policies in the country; EU regulations and directives; existing literature from the last three years (research studies on similar or related topics, academic writing); policy briefs and studies produced by youth organisations and other CSOs; interview findings from stakeholder interviews and results from questionnaires with CSOs. The data is analysed using qualitative analysis of documents and thematic analysis of primary data to identify common themes, ideas and patterns.

During the research process, we encountered several limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to government restrictions and health concerns, we were not able to conduct two planned focus groups with NEET and vulnerable youth; thus, we were not able to include the perspective of the target group. To compensate, we were able to add data from previous research on the topic by several Youth CSOs and other think-tanks in the country. Moreover, in an attempt to compensate for the lack of youth perspective, an online survey was conducted. However, we were not able to reach the desirable representative sample, and thus, the results were omitted from this study. We urge future research on the topic to include youth perceptions and opinions in the analysis, as we consider it crucial when analysing NEET and vulnerable youth obstacles and opportunities.

Who do we define as NEET?

An analysis of the available literature on NEET recognition and definition

The term NEET - "not in employment, education or training", refers to young people, who do not work (unemployed young people and young people economically inactive, i.e. young people who are not working and not available or not looking for work) and are not in education or training⁴. This term was used for the first time in the United Kingdom, in a 1999 report "Bridging the Gap"⁵ by the Social Exclusion Unit. The Social Exclusion Unit report was connected to a discussion and research conducted in the early 1990s regarding young people aged 16-18 who were disengaged from education, training and the labour market^{6,7}. In the European policy, discussion NEETs were explicitly referred to in the Europe 2020 flagship initiative "Youth on the move", formulated during the economic crisis which had just started to hit young people and the term was broadened to include those young people aged 15-24 and later those aged 15-29⁸.

On an EU level, a definition and methodology for a standardised indicator to measure the size of the NEET population among the Member States was agreed on in 2010 by the European Commission's Employment Committee (EMCO) and its Indicators Group. The following definition of NEET was agreed: "*NEET are defined as youth "neither in employment nor in any education nor Training"*". This definition of NEET includes unemployed persons⁹, not in any education and training, and inactive persons¹⁰ not in any education and training.¹¹" This means that "not employed" includes both unemployed and economically inactive, with "not in any education or training". On the contrary, young people who are employed and/or follow a formal or non-formal education are not considered to be young people in a NEET situation. Among NEETs, five main subgroups were identified according to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions¹² research:

- the conventionally unemployed (the largest subgroup), which can be further subdivided into long-term and short-term unemployed,
- the unavailable, which includes: young carers, young people with family responsibilities and young people who are sick or disabled,
- the disengaged: those young people who are not seeking jobs or education and are not constrained from doing so by other obligations or incapacities, and takes in discouraged workers as well as other young people who are pursuing dangerous and asocial lifestyles,
- the opportunity-seekers: young people who are actively seeking work or training, but are holding out for opportunities that they see as befitting their skills and status,
- the voluntary NEETs: those young people who are travelling and those constructively engaged in other activities such as art, music and self-directed learning.¹³

⁴ Eurofound, NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2012, p.1

⁵ Social Exclusion Unit, Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training, Cm 4405, London 1999

⁶ Istance, D. Rees, G. and Williamson, H., Young People Not In Education, Training or Employment in South Glamorgan, Cardiff: South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council 1994

⁷ Wilkinson, C., The Drop Out Society: Young People on the Margin, Leicester: Youth Work Press 1995

⁸ Eurofound, Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2016, p. 1

⁹ International Labour Organization's definition

¹⁰ International Labour Organization's definition

¹¹ European Commission, Youth neither in employment nor education and training (NEET): Presentation of data for the 27 Member States, EMCO Contribution, Brussels 2011

¹² Tripartite EU agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies)

¹³ Eurofound, NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2012, p. 24

A general view in the literature of the subject is that there is a range of social, economic and personal factors that increase the chances of an individual becoming a NEET. Results of a carried out survey "2008 European Values Survey" shows that the following factors have an impact on the probability of becoming NEET:

- disability: those having some kind of disability are 40% more likely to become NEET compared to others,
- immigration background: those having an immigration background are 70% more likely to become NEET compared to nationals,
- low education level: those with a low education level are three times more likely to become NEET compared to those with tertiary education,
- living in remote areas: residing in remote areas increases the probability of becoming NEET up to 1,5 times,
- low household income: young people with a low household income are more likely to become NEET than those with average income,
- parents who experienced unemployment: having parents who experienced unemployment increases the probability of becoming NEETs by 17%,
- parents with a low level of education: having parents with a low level of education doubles the probability of becoming NEETs,
- parents who divorced: young people whose parents divorced are 30% more likely to become NEETs¹⁴

These studies have identified a general profile of NEET youth, which stresses the importance of positive actions towards vulnerable youth. More importantly, they show that those young people identified as NEET are at a very high risk of becoming vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Many indicators are showing which factors predominantly influence specific risk groups and why some young people are more likely to become part of NEET. In the following sections, we explore these factors and attempt to position NEET and vulnerable youth in the Macedonian society.

1.1. A statistical overview of the position of NEET and vulnerable youth in North Macedonia

This section aims to give an overview of the available information and data on NEET and vulnerable youth unemployment; however, we stress that it represents only the researchers' perspective. Having in mind the current restrictions under the COVID-19 pandemic, as with many research projects, we were not able to conduct focus groups or face-to-face surveys with NEET and vulnerable youth. Therefore, the primary source of information upon which we build the picture on NEET and vulnerable youth unemployment is from the available data reports of the State Statistical Office (SSO), the Employment Service Agency and international organisations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). Although we can have a breakdown of the structure of the population, we do not have a more in-depth insight into the perceptions and perspective of young people on the reasons behind unemployment, which limits the scope of this study.

One of the most valuable sources on labour market trends is the *Labour Force Survey*, which offers the most comprehensive research of the economic activity of the population and its demographic, educational and other characteristics during the inter-census period. The survey is conducted following the methodological recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the recommendations of the Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT)¹⁵. Based on the data of the latest 2017 Labor Force Survey (LFS), this study offers an analysis of the structure of the NEET and vulnerable youth in North Macedonia. According to NEET definitions, there are two main groups of NEET and vulnerable youth. The first is the active youth or unemployed job seekers. In contrast, the second group encompasses the inactive youth or those who do not actively search for a job and who are not currently in education or training, nor have they received any in the four weeks preceding the LFS survey.

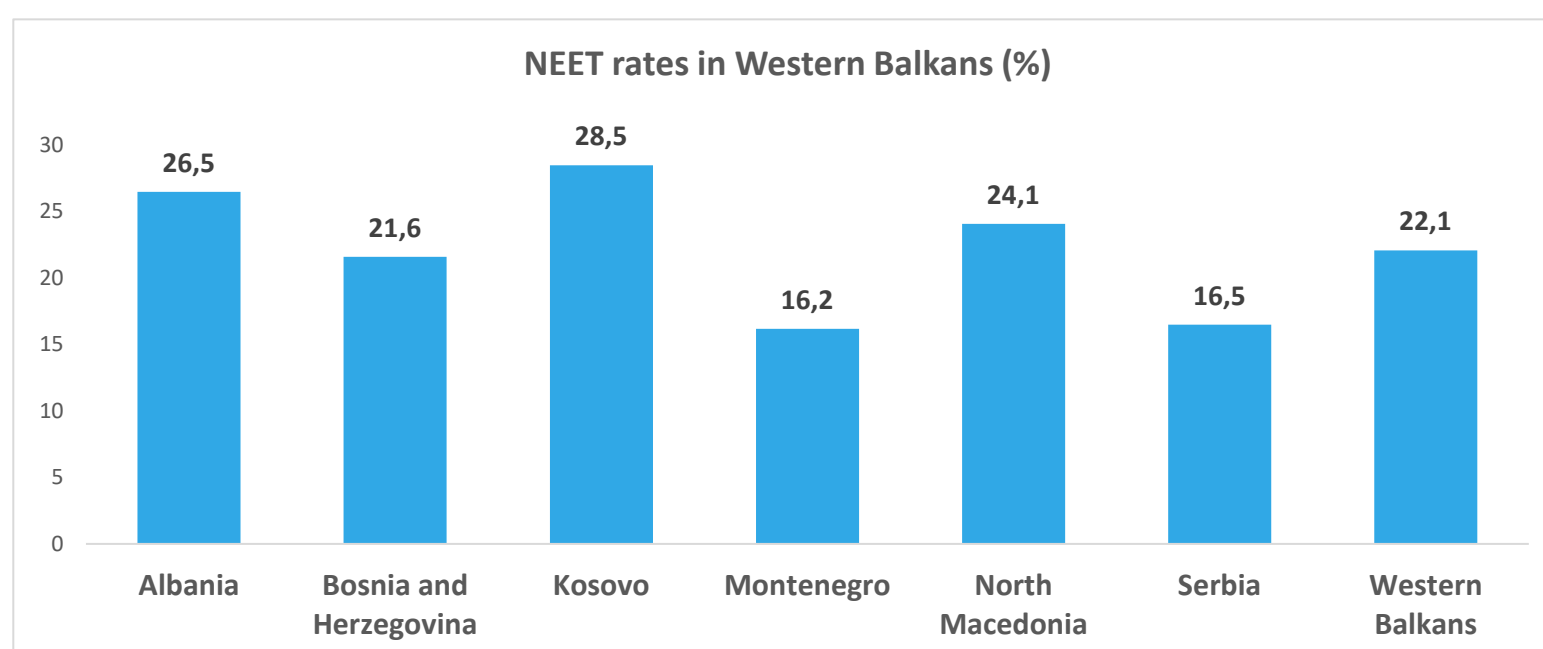
¹⁴ Eurofound, Young people and NEETs in Europe: First findings, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2012, p. 3-4

¹⁵ Labour force survey, 2017, State Statistical Office; available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.18.03.pdf>

According to the 2002 census (last organised census in the country), the population of North Macedonia is 2.022.547 inhabitants. The population of young people aged 15 – 29 is 480.828 inhabitants (which is almost 24% of the population)¹⁶. According to the Labour Force Survey in 2017, the population in the North Macedonia over 15 years of age is 1.679.935 persons, of which 56.8% were active and participating in the labour market, while 43.2% in 2017 were outside the active population, i.e. were inactive¹⁷.

On the other hand, the SSO creates other relevant reports and data collections on labour trends in the country. However, as researchers, we face the challenge of mishandled data, lack of a more general scope on youth labour trends and lack of data on vulnerable youth. The SSO collects data for youth for the following age groups: 15–18, 19–24, 25–29 years. At a thematic level, the SSO collects information on education, labour market (employment), population and social welfare. The following youth indicators are collected at the national level: general unemployment rate; working-age population by economic activity; labour trends by gender, labour force by educational attainment and rural labour trends, among other indicators.

In comparison with the region, North Macedonia does not fall behind. Youth unemployment is generally high in the Western Balkan countries. Although we notice a fall in youth unemployment rates through the years, the 2018 unemployment rate in the country was still twice as high as the EU average, with more than one-fifth of the youth belonging to the NEET.¹⁸ Considering specifically NEET youth in North Macedonia, the country had one of the highest NEET rates of youth (15-24 years) in 2018 with 24,1%, with Kosovo having the highest rate of NEET youth in the region at 28,5% and Albania following at 26,5%. Montenegro performs the best in the region at 16,2%, with Serbia at 16,5% and Bosnia and Herzegovina at 21,6%. The data shows that NEET unemployment in the Western Balkans is higher in comparison with Europe, where NEET rate is 17,2%.¹⁹



Graph 1. NEET youth rates, 2018

Source: The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), 2018

In the interest of having a more recent picture of the state of youth employment in North Macedonia, we thoroughly investigated the SSO 2019 Statistical Yearbook on labour trends. The data shows that around 75,667 youth were unemployed in 2018 or 38.1% of the overall unemployed population, compared to an average of 13.6% youth unemployment in the OECD countries the same year.²⁰ Moreover, of the inactive population, 211,353 were young people or 29,1% of young people from 15-29 years (Table 1 and Table 2).²¹

¹⁶ Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2002, Book XIII, State Statistical Office, 2005, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija.aspx?id=54>

¹⁷ Labor market, State Statistical office, 2019, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/SG2019/07-PazarNaTrudot-LabourMarket.pdf>

¹⁸ Western Balkans Labor Market Trends: 2019, World Bank, 2019, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/labor-trends-in-wb#:~:text=Youth%20unemployment%20was%20high%20and,high%20as%20the%20EU%20average.>

¹⁹ The Jobs Gateway in South Eastern Europe, available at: <https://data.wiiw.ac.at/seejobsgateway.html>

²⁰ World Development Indicators, World Bank, available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SL.UEM.NEET.ZS&country=>

²¹ SSO, Yearly statistical report, 2019, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/SG2019/07-PazarNaTrudot-LabourMarket.pdf>

Age	Labour force		
	Employed persons	Unemployed persons	Inactive
15-19	0.6	3.9	14.9
20-24	5.3	15.0	9.4
25-29	11.0	19.2	4.8
Total	16.9	38.1	29.1

Table 1. Labour force, 2018: Unemployment rate by age
Source: SSO, Yearly statistical report, 2019

Age	Unemployment rate
15-19	61.7
20-24	42.6
25-29	31.4

Table 2. Labour force, 2018: Unemployment rate within age groups
Source: SSO, Yearly statistical report, 2019

To have a better insight into the structure of NEET youth, we utilised the last Labour Force Survey Report of SSO in 2017. According to this survey, the long-term unemployed represent the largest share of NEETs (36.6%), while in 2017, the youth unemployment rate reached 38.8%. These are mostly women aged 25-29 with only primary education and living in rural areas. Discouraged and long-term NEETs are predominantly men, while family responsibilities are mainly borne by young women, as 66% of married women are inactive in the labour market (Table 3).²²

Working-age population by economic activity, gender and age, 2017, structure by age		
Age group	Men	Women
15-19	72.1	27.9
20-24	62.1	37.9
25-29	54.0	46.0
Total youth unemployment, by gender	36.9	42.0

Table 3. Labour Force Survey, 2017
Source: SSO

The disengaged, discouraged or those young people who are not seeking jobs or education are a subgroup of NEETs. This sub-group is composed of youth detached from the labour market, i.e. they are not available and not searching for work because they are discouraged, or because they look after children or relatives, or are temporarily sick or long-term disabled. Other inactive individuals are engaged in travelling and/or artistic activities, hence considered as voluntary NEETs. This category consists of one of the most critical groups, as the differences between inactive men and women are more significant than desired. While 74.2% of women aged from 25-29 are inactive in the labour market, only 25.8 % of men are inactive. In a more in-depth analysis of the position of women in the labour market by the Helsinki Committee on Human Rights based in Skopje concluded that *“the patriarchal matrix and the traditional division of male-female roles, especially in the part around home and family matters, are still a major obstacle, especially in rural areas.”*²³

²² Labour force survey, 2017, State Statistical Office; available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.18.03.pdf>

²³ Stojanovikj Gjorgievikj, Dijana, Tomikj, Tanja. Kunovska, Violeta. Vasilevska, Ana Women in rural areas- more challenges than opportunities, Helsinki committee, 2018, available at: https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Ruralni_Sredini_MK__5_.pdf

Inactive population by gender, 2017		
Age group	Men	Women
15-19	49.2	50.8
20-24	37.8	62.2
25-29	25.8	74.2

Table 4. Labour Force Survey, 2017

Source: SSO

According to education, the majority of unemployed persons, 56% are with 3 and 4 years of secondary education, out of which 37% are men and 19% are women. According to the Labour Force Survey 2017, 20% of the unemployed persons had completed university-level education,²⁴ of which 8% are men and 12% women.²⁵ Some of the main reasons for job termination and unemployment include unsatisfactory work conditions, unpaid wages, end of temporary job, and dismissal due to bankruptcy or redundancy. The youth employment rate is slightly higher in rural areas. On the other hand, family care and marital status are more important reasons for women not to seek employment, while discouragement is a common reason among men.²⁶

Another relevant source on youth and employment is the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (ESA), which collects data by age, gender, ethnicity, but also holds data on youth with disabilities. Of the registered 1282 unemployed persons with disabilities, 202 are NEET youth from 15-29 years old, or 15.7%, while 58.2% of unemployed persons with disabilities²⁷, in general, are without or only with primary education.

According to nationality, the latest SSO reports in 2019, 53,896 Roma people living in North Macedonia. The total number of Roma divided by age and level of education is not readily available from SSO statistics. On the other hand, the number of registered unemployed Roma according to the data from December 2019 on The Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia (ESA) is 9239, most of them are in the category of persons without education or with completed primary education.²⁸ However, the SSO or ESA do not offer a more thorough breakdown of marginalised youth, especially having in mind the high levels of poverty rate among the Roma community and the lack of integration in the system.²⁹

According to the data, in 2018, the rate of poverty in North Macedonia was 21.9%. The Gini coefficient (a measure of income inequality) is 31.9%. Unfortunately, the SSO does not offer a more thorough analysis of the age groups and their level of poverty; nevertheless, it does tell us that in 2018, the poverty of those aged from 0-17 years was at 29.3%, while from 18-64 years at 21.2%. Unfortunately, we are not able to deduce youth poverty rates correctly or poverty rates among NEET youth, nevertheless, poverty and unemployment are considered to lead to social exclusion; thus it is concerning that unemployed and inactive persons face the highest levels of poverty.

²⁴ University-level education includes university-level education, Master's degree and Doctorate (PhD).

²⁵ Labor force survey, 2017, State Statistical Office; available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.18.03.pdf>

²⁶ Annex I

²⁷ Overview of the unemployed people by age, ESA, available at: <http://www.av.gov.mk/pregled-na-evidentirani-nevraboteni-lica-spored-vozrast.nspix>

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Fidman Eben, Integration of Roma People in Slovakia and Macedonia- comparative review, Macedonian center for International Cooperation, available at: <https://mcms.mk/mk/za-nasata-rabota/istrazuvana-i-publikacii/lista-na-istrazuvana-i-publikacii/812-integracija-na-romite-vo-slovacka-i-vo-makedonija.html>

	2018		
	Total	Male	Female
Employed	8.8	10.6	6.0
Unemployed	41.9	46.5	35.2
Retired	7.9	11.5	2.1
Other inactive population	31.1	30.8	31.2

Table 5. Employment Service Agency Report, 2019

Source: ESA

Some general patterns observed in the analysis of the available data from SSO and ESA are a low participation rate of women and young people in the market of labour, a slow increase in employment rates of young people and a high rate of long-term unemployment in young people. The main weakness we encounter in the collection and analysis of the data is the lack of special reports on youth, as no regular youth reports at the national level or other data and analysis are produced or readily available online. While only these two institutions hold relevant data on youth unemployment, other state institutions, including here the Agency on Youth and Sport, mainly use the data provided by the SSO and ESA.

Moreover, even though there are a lot of publications that tackle issues that youth are facing, only a few³⁰ of them are focused on youth unemployment. Namely, out of 20 CSOs which responded on our online questionnaire on the questions, *Is there available and quality research for youth*, the majority of the respondents (55%) think that it is hard to get access to quality research. When they were asked about the *sources from which they obtain data/information* most of them expect from the available international analysis or CSOs publication, they use/request information from the State Statistical Office, MLSP and Employment Service Agency. Namely, one of the respondents considers that *"We use international surveys and researches of our colleagues from the NGO sector. From the state, primary sources are the Statistical Office and some ministries, but they have limited quantitative information. Qualitatively nationwide state-sponsored researches almost do not exist. This presents a real problem as policies that are adopted are not based on data, but on some approximations and successful international practices."*³¹

The lack of data suggests a shortfall in intersectional information on youth unemployment based on nationality, living area/region and disabilities, as such data are not well structured by SSO and ESA and very hard to analyse as the data are not standardised. Institutional surveys on youth are not a common practice and are done rarely and mainly with the support of international donors and in the framework of projects. The challenge we face as researchers in gathering relevant data from the state institutions and with an analysis of the work of SSO, ESA and other pertinent institutions of North Macedonia, we conclude that the institutions lack a comprehensive approach to youth when it comes to data, which stems from lack of capacities, coordination and policies on youth.

As of 2019, the new Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies envisions the creation of a research centre within the Agency of Youth and Sport. This centre has not been established, and from the interview with a representative from the Agency, we are aware that the procedures have stalled, mainly due to general elections and the Covid-19 situation.³² While this research centre has not been established, the legal base exists and is a significant step forward in understanding youth trends in the future, as for its success in addressing the issue of lack of data on youth, that we are yet to see in the following years.

³⁰ Mojsovski Angel, Possibilities and barriers for youth entrepreneurship and employment in the private sector, EPI, available at: <https://epi.org.mk/post/14118>; Petreski, Blagica., Davalos, Jorge. Vchkov, Ivan. Tumanoska, Despina. Kochovska, Tereza. 2019: Analysis of youth underemployment in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, FinanceThink; available at: <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-study-22.pdf>; Ivanovska, Aleksandra. Mojsovski, Angel. Kacarska, Simonida: 2019: Youth employment in Republic of North Macedonia, EPI, available at <https://epi.org.mk/post/13484>;

³¹ Response to the questionnaire

³² Interview with representatives of Agency of youth and sport

The legal and policy framework addressing NEET youth

When analysing the legislation on youth unemployment, we have focused on identifying the most crucial legislation in the field as well as the latest and most relevant: labour legislation, youth legislation, strategies and action plans.

2.1. Relevant strategies and action plans' addressing youth unemployment

National Youth Strategy (2016 - 2025)³³

The National Youth Strategy (2016 - 2025) offers the primary guidelines in the field of youth policies. The strategy was created following international standards and guidelines and encompasses most areas relevant to youth, including (un)employment. It also offers a particular focus on NEET youth, including the importance of vulnerable youth groups. The National Youth Strategy is a solid basis for the Government and other institutions in terms of guidelines and desirable outcomes. However, the Strategy lacks in implementation and functionality; the same has not been implemented since 2016.

Although it formally addresses most of the issues young people face, it has not been revised substantially since it was created. The Action Plan corresponding to the National Strategy on Youth has been adopted only once in a period of two years, while the Action Plan devised in 2019 has not been adopted. Moreover, there is a lack of financial resources for the implementation of the same, while there is no particular state budget focused only on the performance of the Strategy. There is no responsible institution in creating, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy, leaving this task to the CSOs and their capacities.

Further, the process of the creation of the strategy was also criticised by one of the largest youth umbrella organisations in the country, National Youth Council of North Macedonia, which states the process was not inclusive and did not consider the request and remarks of youth organizations. Some of the issues regarding the Strategy stem from the fact that it was devised in 2015-2016, a period when the country was in a great turmoil due to political scandals and mass protests. While the creation of the Strategy was crucial, the same needs to be revised thoroughly in times of stability, especially having in mind the fast-changing nature of youth trends.

Entrepreneurial learning strategy (2014-2020)³⁴

The goals envisaged in this strategy are mainly broad and general and do not envisage specific activities that will lead to the attainment of the goals. While for some measures, there are no fiscal implications provided, for others, there are no responsible institutions envisaged. The strategic document does not envisage special measures for the marginalised population, such as a proactive approach towards people with disabilities, Roma people, rural youth, women. Still, it offers a rather broad strategy to entrepreneurial learning in primary and secondary education, yet, excluding youth not in education. While the goals and broadness of the strategy offer a ground for further development of measures that include NEET and vulnerable youth, such measures have not been taken by responsible institutions, making this Strategy, just as the one analysed above, more of a ceremonial document, rather than a practical one.

³³ National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 available at: <http://strategijazamladi.mk/node/3>

³⁴ Entrepreneurial learning strategy 2014-2020., available at: <https://bit.ly/2XCd9nD>

National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises (2018-2023)³⁵

The National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises (2018-2023), is the most relevant document in the area of entrepreneurship. The strategy does include women and youth as a target group. However, it does not further elaborate on the approach and measures explicitly dedicated to women and youth from vulnerable groups. This Strategy is mainly considered to be an umbrella strategy, as it does not offer guidelines for specialised approaches to different vulnerable groups. Moreover, in interviews with stakeholders from state institutions, we found that the interpretation of this strategy is rather narrow and focused mainly on the entrepreneurial aspect of the strategy and not on inclusion and diversification.

The Strategy for the Roma people (2014-2020)³⁶

The Strategy for the Roma people envisages concrete measures to improve employment among Roma through guidelines for the employment of Roma in specific sectors. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills are not enough accentuated in this policy and thus lack additional measures which would improve entrepreneurship among the Roma population or support for already established informal SMEs, except in two measures, which provide a fund for renewable credit lines and family businesses and grants for starting small family businesses, expanding your own business, self-employment and promotion of opportunities to work from home with particular emphasis on unemployed Romani women. Moreover, there is no centralised approach to data collection for analysis of the achievement of these measures and thus a comprehensive evaluation of the degree of success of this policy.³⁷

Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020³⁸

The Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020 offers a more concrete plan on youth employment based on the goals of the National Youth Strategy. The ultimate goal of the Action Plan is to promote more and better jobs for young people. The specific objectives of the Action Plan mainly focus on the key areas to promote youth employment, such as improve the matching of the supply of skills with the requirements of the labour market; promotion of job creation led by the private sector, facilitating the transition of young people to the world of work. One of the main targets of the Action Plan is to increase the number of youth that work jobs matching their qualifications, in fact the Plan states that they expect that by 2020 at least 85% of the youth will work in places matching their qualifications as opposed to 64,8% in 2014. The plans also focus on having less than 10% of the children leaving education and at least 5% of those with primary education to follow courses in skill development.

These are only a few of the targets envisaged in the Action Plan, which also focuses on the employment of youth, stating that they expect that at least 20% of those employed through government schemes will be young people until 29 years of age. Moreover, this plan includes the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, which analysed more in-depth below. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Labour and Social Work, which is the responsible institution for following the implementation of the plan, did not publish a progress report or a monitoring and evaluation one, and we are not able to measure the success rate of the Plan. It is stated in the Action Plan that it is going to be monitored continuously, nevertheless, there is no clear strategy or detailed plan on how it is going to be conducted. Moreover, there are no available reports online on its success, while we expect that the progress will only be visible in the next Action Plan covering 2021-2024. This leads us to believe that the Ministry does not have a unified and comprehensive plan on following the achievement of the set goals.

³⁵ National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises (2018-2023) , https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/strategii/strategija_za_msp.pdf

³⁶ Strategy for the Roma people 2014 – 2020 <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/strategii/Strategija%20za%20Romite%20vo%20RM%202014-2020.pdf>

³⁷ Overview of the entrepreneurship politics: Specific focus on Roma people, CEA and IRIZ, 2016 , available at: <https://civicamobilitas.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/0.-Pregled-na-politiki-TSEA-IRIZ-za-Veb.pdf>

³⁸ Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020 , available at: http://dit.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2016_Akciski-plan-za-vrabotuvanje-mla-di-2016-2020-godina_MK-pv-.pdf

The revised Operational Plan for active programs and measures for employment and labour market services for 2020³⁹

The operational plan for active programs and measures for employment and services of the labour market for 2020 is the only concrete policy that is implemented nationally and transferred locally. Besides, as with other documents discussed above, the Operational Plan lacks intersectionality and a particular focus on marginalised and vulnerable youth, and NEET youth in general. The Operational Plan includes support for self-employment, support for the creation of new jobs, general trainings, trainings on digital skills, internship programme and the programme for work engagement. It also includes several services offered by state institutions in support for future employment. Although the Operational Plan has a particular focus on youth and support to vulnerable youth employment including women and youth with disabilities, it does not offer relevant information on how they will approach these categories of young people, having in mind that the challenges they face are substantially different from other youth.

Moreover, the plan does not state that state institutions have a particular approach when it comes to vulnerable youth. At the same time, in the interviews with representatives we found out that specialised approaches as such did not exist or were not implemented. When it comes to monitoring and evaluation, the plan sets targets, although it does not state how it is going to measure the same, moreover, it does not provide a comparison with previous years. Thus, we are not able to see if there was a positive change with the implementation of the measures or if there is a need for the same to be revised and advanced.

2.2. The legislative framework addressing the youth position and unemployment

Labour Law⁴⁰

The Labour Law regulates the issues of labour exchange, the rights and obligations of employers, unemployed persons, other job seekers and the state, in terms of employment and in case of unemployment. It is the most encompassing law in the field of labour, from which stem all rights and obligations regarding employment and social protection in case of unemployment.

Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies⁴¹

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies is a new Law on youth adopted in 2020 and the first one since 1991. Even though the Law mainly regulates youth organisation and participation in decision making, it does not tackle major youth issues such as youth unemployment and brain-drain. It is presently a fundamental and only law focused on youth issues, and the same required a lot of advocacy by youth and other CSOs. However, this law is very scarce and narrow, with a focus mainly on youth participation in decision making. Moreover, since the law was adopted last year, due to political instability because of the general elections, many provisions have remained unimplemented, or they are still in the beginning stages and we are yet to know the effects of its implementation.

Law on Social Protection⁴²

The Law on Social Protection is crucial to the work of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection as it offers the most detailed rights and obligations of the state and citizens on social protection. However, it does not encompass a special treatment for youth in case of unemployment but instead it offers general rights of people in need for social protection measures.

³⁹ Operational plan, available at: <https://av.gov.mk/operativen-plan.nspk>

⁴⁰ Labour Law, Official Gazette of RM, n: 62/2005...110/2019, http://www.sonk.org.mk/documents/PT_Zakon_za_Rabotnite_odnosi_158_09122010.pdf

⁴¹ Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, Official Gazette of RM n. 10/2020 <https://dejure.mk/zakon/zakon-za-mladinsko-uchestvo-i-mladinski-politiki>

⁴² Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of RM n. 108/2005..150/2020 http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/precisten_socijala.pdf

Law on Employment of Disabled Persons⁴³

The Law on Employment of Disabled Persons is the only law that addresses the needs for the employment of people with disabilities but, the law does not offer special treatment for young people, as it provides an all-encompassing approach to people with disabilities.

Law on youth allowance⁴⁴

The Law on youth allowance is a new measure introduced in 2020, as a response to the Covid-19 effects on youth employment. Moreover, it was introduced to stimulate enrolment in secondary vocational schools and encourage employment after graduation; the need arose to legally regulate a measure to provide a supplement to young people up to 23 years of age who will be employed or are employed mainly in manufacturing areas.

Law on Student Standard⁴⁵

The Law on Student Standard regulates the establishment, organisation, functioning, management of student standard institutions and student scholarships. However, there is a new law in the making, focused on Youth Standard, with the aim to encompass both university and high school students, as well as student housing under one umbrella law. This law and its creation have also stalled due to elections and the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

As seen from the strategies and legislation analysed above, one very important aspect has been disregarded by state institutions and that is the inclusion of young people from the LGBTQ+ community in the labour force market, both when it comes to legislation and policies, and the data collection. Although the country adopted one of the most advanced laws on anti-discrimination last year, due to procedural mistakes the law was abolished by the Constitutional Court, leaving LGBTQ+ people vulnerable once again, at the workplace, as well as facing other forms of discrimination. An analysis by 'Solidarnost', concludes that LGBTQ+ persons face different forms of discrimination, but most importantly in interviews with people from the LGBTQ+ community, they found out that most of the time they are afraid to disclose their sexual orientation to their colleagues.⁴⁶ Moreover, most of the time Labour Union support is not available to them, as they do not recognise the LGBTQ+ community as a separate group that needs special support since they are most likely to be discriminated against and fired due to their sexual orientation.

A general conclusion from the thematic analysis of strategies and legislation addressing youth and youth unemployment tells us that the governments have acknowledged the problem with high youth unemployment rates, but it lacks in action. While all main documents address youth unemployment, NEET youth is rarely referenced. At the same time, there is a lack of specialised or intersectional approach towards vulnerable youth from rural areas, Roma people, youth with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people and women, who face more significant challenges in employment. The legislation and strategies mainly use broad language when referring to youth. At the same time, action and operational plans do not offer a view on how the situation has changed with the implementation of the devised measures. Moreover, the legislation on youth is only at its beginnings, with institutions struggling to find a leading and coordinating institution in youth matters. Many youth issues, including here unemployment are dispersed in different sectors and institutions, which makes it hard to follow what measures are devised and implemented as well as by whom. We can mainly conclude that while there are laws and measures focused on youth, there is a lack of coordination and specialised focus on NEET and vulnerable youth.

⁴³ Law on Employment of Disabled Persons, Official Gazette of RM n. 44/2000...99/2018 <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/Zakon%20za%20vrabotuvanje%20na%20invalidni%20lica%20konsolidiran%20tekst%202015%20g.pdf>

⁴⁴ Law on youth allowance. Official Gazette of RM n. 18/2020 [http://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2020/Zakon%20mladinski%20dodadok%2018-2020%20\(MKD\).pdf](http://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2020/Zakon%20mladinski%20dodadok%2018-2020%20(MKD).pdf)

⁴⁵ Law on Student Standard. Official Gazette of RM n. 52/2005...20/2019. <http://www.pravo.org.mk/documentDetail.php?id=271>

⁴⁶ Study on the position of LGBT workers and attitude of the unions towards them, Solidarnost 2017, Available at: <http://solidarnost.mk/lgbt-rabotnici-i-sindikati/publikacii>

North Macedonia's institutional set-up tackling NEET and vulnerable youth (un)employment

The institutional framework that regulates the labour market for youth consists of several vital institutions who have responsibilities related to the employment of youth: The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, The Employment Service Agency, The Agency for youth and sport, The Government advisor for youth and sport, The Ministry of Education and Science, The Ministry of Economy, and the Fund for innovation and technological development. Below we offer an overview or a short description of the competencies and duties of the responsible institutions:

The Employment Service Agency

The Employment Service Agency (ESA) is responsible for collecting and disseminating information on the labour market, employment counselling and career guidance, setting up a job for active job seekers and administering passive and active programs on the labour market. ESA presents as one of the most important institutions in tackling unemployment in the country; however, its position is not a decision-making one, but rather an implementing agency. Nevertheless, ESA is a very relevant stakeholder when it comes to data and information, as it holds and creates the most thorough information on employed, unemployed and inactive people in the labour market. As such, the Agency is included in the creation of strategies, action and operational plans, with it being the leading institutions in implementing the Operational Plan. Moreover, the Agency has 30 employment centres across the country, and one central office in Skopje, and as such, it is able to address unemployment on a much larger scale, being able to offer services to citizens both in urban and rural areas.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is the central institution responsible for unemployed persons. Within the Ministry, the labour and employment sector are responsible for planning and implementation of employment policies, labour law and labour relations. Within this sector, there is a particular unit for the labour market that is responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluation of employment policy and the national action plan, analysis of labour market trends, especially concerning groups at risk of exclusion from the labour market, as well as monitoring and evaluation of active labour market policies. The Ministry prepares a National Strategy for Employment in the Republic of North Macedonia and its Action Plan, where all the implemented politics are described, as well as the current statistics of the labour market. The National Employment Strategy 2016-2020⁴⁷ has a general scope and does not apply exclusively to young people, but points out the need to take active employment measures targeted at young people in order to facilitate the transition from education to the labour market, which on average lasts about six years. The MLSP in 2017 has revised the Action Plan, but the objectives remain the same⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ The Strategy is prepared with the support of three international institutions: the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and the UNDP.

⁴⁸ The Government of Republic of North Macedonia and the social partners in cooperation with ILO have developed an Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020. The ultimate goal of the Action Plan is promoting more and better jobs for young people. The specific objectives of the Action Plan are mainly focused on the areas that are key to promoting youth employment such as: 1. Improve the matching of the supply of skills with the requirements of the labour market; 2. Promotion of job creation led by the private sector; 3. Facilitating the transition of young people to the world of work. Available here: <https://bit.ly/2XBSRup>

Additionally, the Ministry prepares a Strategy on poverty reduction and social exclusion that reflects the intention of the country for balancing the degree of inclusion and welfare in all social levels.⁴⁹ The current strategy covers the period 2010-2020, it has a general scope and does not apply exclusively to young people. Nevertheless, among essential processes that should be implemented is the promotion of social inclusion with children and young people aimed at providing conditions for long-term opportunities for the future generation. However, the data used in this strategy is out-dated and thus it is crucial that the Ministry takes the initiative to prepare a new strategy in the near future.

The Agency for Youth and Sports

The agency carries out the activities related to the care for psychological and physical development of the youth and their protection against addiction diseases, prostitution, crime and other socio-pathological occurrences; care for the status of the young people; promotion and assistance for various types of organisations of young people; undertaking activities for creation and development of conditions necessary to keep the capable and talented young people, as well as creating conditions for stimulation of their return in the Republic of North Macedonia; monitoring the sports and recreational sports activities in the field of sport; monitoring the development of the highest sport achievements etc.

The Ministry of Education and Science

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for activities related to education and all types of teaching, at all levels, organisation, financing, development and improvement of teaching, education and science, etc. The Ministry employs several projects for preparation of youth for employment, prevention of dropouts, programmes for adult education and inclusion of vulnerable groups in education. Moreover, it also implements programmes on mentoring of Roma youth and inclusion of youth with disabilities in regular education. As of 2017, the Ministry also implements the principle of Dual Education introduced in North Macedonia with German support. The ultimate goal is to provide qualified staff during the educational process.

The Ministry of Economy

The Ministry of Economy is responsible for the development and implementation of economic and industrial politics, small and medium enterprise, use of natural resources, development of tourism and public-private partnerships. It is the leading institution responsible for implementing the National Strategy on Small and Medium Enterprises (2018-2023), while as of 2019 it is the implementer of a new strategy that focuses on women entrepreneurship “The Strategy for development of Women Entrepreneurship in North Macedonia (2019-2023).

The Fund for innovation and technological development

The Fund for innovation and technological development supports (co-financing and financing) innovative micro, small and medium enterprises. It targets youth talents, provides mentorship for entrepreneurship and gives grants for innovations and businesses. In September 2018, FITR signed agreements on financial support for the opening of three business accelerators (elected by the Committee for the approval of investments) for start-up companies, founded by young entrepreneurs and innovators. With this project, young people who have creative business plans have been offered the opportunity and support for the development of specific businesses and start-up companies. The total budget for all three projects is EUR 2 million, of which the FITR in cooperation with the World Bank provides 1.5 million euros, while the three business accelerators invest half a million euros in their own funds. In the next three years (until 2021), these three business accelerators should provide financial support to at least 100 start-up companies.

⁴⁹ National strategy on Alleviation of poverty and Social exclusion 2010-2020 available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/SocialExclusion%20Strategy%20MK%20final%20word.doc>

The Government of North Macedonia as the main policymaker recognises the support for youth as one of its most important strategies i.e., they aim to improve youth's standard by introducing measures for better access to jobs for the youth. Its commitments are supported by introducing the government advisor for youth and sports position in 2018 (the reasons why there was no advisor before is unknown), and the main aim is to be a kind of bridge among the President of the Government, his/her cabinet and all stakeholders. He/she coordinates and participates in the implementation of activities focused on youth, on behalf of the Government. These activities are organising events, coordinating and participating in meetings with youth, civil society organisations and other institutions. The advisors also participate in working groups, give opinions and prepare materials related to youth issues and initiatives.

3.1. Key findings on the challenges the institutions face in tackling youth unemployment: a qualitative analysis of interviews with stakeholders

For the research, seven government institutions were interviewed in July 2020. The interviews were conducted online in compliance with Covid-19 measures and restrictions. We used a semi-structured questionnaire, to get more insight into the work and practices of institutions and how they address NEET and vulnerable youth unemployment. Following legislation and interviews, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy remains the central institution addressing unemployment in the country, while the Employment Service Agency follows. The Agency for Youth and Sport, stands in the margins, addressing mainly necessities in the field of sport and youth participation. At the same time, other institutions lack both data and a specialised approach to NEET and vulnerable youth unemployment. The most striking feature that almost all institutions share is the lack of data on youth, with most of them using data from the SSO and ESA.

Moreover, most of the policies are general and not focused and designed for youth, such as the National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises (2018-2023) by the Ministry of Economy, or programmes by the Fund for innovation and technological development (FITD). Inadequate government investment in services and programs for employment, regardless of good results; growing dependence on external and international funding to increase the scope of work. Employer services are not yet sufficiently developed; employment mediation is still done on a case-by-case basis at the request of employers; bad database management and job vacancy data; lack of dedicated service lines for the young unemployed.

To the question: *"Does your institution have specific projects, programs and initiatives for NEET and vulnerable youth?"*, four out of seven (57%) institutions declared that they do not have such programmes designed explicitly for NEET youth, while the Youth Guarantee (elaborated below in detail) stood out as a measure by the Employment Service Agency (ESA), Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Agency for Youth and Sport. The Employment Service Agency also recalled the "Chance for all" campaign part of the Operational plan for active programs and measures for employment and labour market services for 2019, which offers several active measures such as opportunities for self-employment, training to acquire new skills, support for employers and other measures and services in order to increase the employment and the employability.

To the question: *"What are the effects of these policies?"*, the representatives from ESA were only able to confirm that the country faces high levels of youth unemployment despite the measures; moreover, the representatives expressed concern on the long-term youth unemployment rate and its effect on brain drain. According to WB data, 29% of highly educated people live or work abroad⁵⁰. The most recent studies⁵¹ show that the key reasons for brain drain are related to the quality of life, career opportunities and general political-economic situation in the country. Brain drain appears as a concern in other institutions as well, mainly by the Agency of Youth and Sport. As seen from their yearly reports,

⁵⁰ World Bank Group, Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016., Third edition (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016), <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/4549025-1450455807487/Factbookpart1.pdf>.

⁵¹ Blazeska, Ana. 2018 As of outflow to inflow of personnel, Centre for Research and Policy, available at: http://www.crpm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Brochure_Youth_A5_MK_WEB.pdf;

in 2019 the total budget of the Agency of Youth and Sport was 590.902.000,00 MKD (app. 9.608.249,58 EUR), of which 24.728.000 (around 402.085,00 EUR) is intended for the youth sector. For comparison, in 2018, the Agency has a budget of 484.413.000,00 MKD (app. 7.871.073,00 EUR), of which 31.386.000,00 MKD (509.981,00 EUR) for the youth sector. It is noticeable that although the total budget of the Agency increased in 2019, compared to the previous year, for unknown reasons the budget for the youth sector has decreased.

As defined by the responsibilities of the institutions, labour laws and measures are mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, while the Agency has mostly a role related to youth participation and sport. Anyway, this has changed more recently, as stated by the representative of the Agency. The Agency has been taking a more central role in the youth policy department, as proven by the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, which identifies the Agency of Youth and Sport as a responsible institution. The representative from the Agency expressed the importance of youth organisations, which is the main driver for the said law.

Moreover, the Law envisages a research centre within the Agency that focuses on youth, which, as shown above, is more than necessary. Although the implementation of the law has had its obstacles due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the technical Government, with the elections in July 2020, its implementation must be ensured to run smoothly. To the question: *"Do you think that the existing legal framework is sufficiently developed, or do you think that improvement is needed?"*, the representatives were reluctant to offer a definite answer, as they considered that the legislation in support of youth employment is relatively new and in progress. However, they acknowledged the importance of the Youth Guarantee and the Law on Student Standard.

To the question: *"Do you have special laws and regulations in support of vulnerable youth groups?"*, representatives from ESA were only able to identify only the Law on Employment of Disabled Persons and the Law on Social Protection. However, the representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) brought to our attention the support scholarships for marginalised youth, such as Roma people and the programmes on adulthood education, which are offered through the Adult Education Centre, both intended to include excluded youth in the education process. Anyway, when asked what their approach was on young people that have not attended school, or have terminated their education, the representatives of MES were not able to identify clear measures or activities it undertakes to tackle this issue.

Having in mind that mainly youth from rural areas, with disabilities and marginalised groups, face the risk from exclusion, we asked the institutions *"What is their approach to young marginalised groups?"*, and while the representatives from ESA were not able to identify a specialised approach for these groups of young people, they mentioned the audio-visual support offered to people with disabilities. At the same time, the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy discussed the importance of the programme Counselling and Motivation service (SIM) which consists of intensive psycho-social support of the beneficiaries before engaging in an active employment measure, as well as mentoring support that is the most intensive in the period when the recipient is involved.

In terms of cooperation with international donors, most of the institutions have an established relationship. The prominent donors mentioned by them include foreign embassies, EU Commission, IPA II funds, UNICEF, UNDP, OSCE, NDI, USAID and SDC. These are the common supranational, international organisations identified by the representatives of the institutions, which acknowledge the importance of these funds. Moreover, most of them expressed that this support is crucial, as at times it represents the primary source of funds of projects and programmes that address inclusion. However, the representatives also stressed that they *"constantly have problems with the lack of specialised human resources,"*⁵² as many times the burden of running these projects falls on the hands of a few people. The institutions also mentioned that they are a part of regional projects supported by the international community, and they find these exchanges helpful, as they can share good practices with colleagues from the region, who have implemented results by giving measures and programmes.

⁵² Interview 4, Institution representative

In terms of data collection, the institutions' representatives mainly get data from the SSO office, with few internal data collection processes. The data collection process is outdated, and there is a lack of capacity in the institutions to create and implement data collection procedures. While there are some advancements in the area, they are still dependent on the support of the international community. There is a lack of intersectional data, which creates difficulties when designing measures, while there is also a lack of specialised reports on youth employment, education and policies. Moreover, there is a lack of central coordination, and although the institutions exchange information, it is mainly on a one-on-one basis, and there is no further joint coordination beyond the Operational Plan. To continue, there is a lack of open sources and many times, relevant information can be acquired only with a request for public data, which further complicates the process for both the institutions and the information seekers. When asked what kind of information tools they use to reach young people, the primary tool mentioned was the institutions' website, few institutions use social media, while some use face to face campaigns through conferences and local events.

Some general conclusions from interviews include: lack of human resources, especially in specialised positions and specialised professional background; poorly developed physical and ICT infrastructure, leading to uneven providing services throughout the country; lack of coordination on a central level on youth policies, the irrelevance of educational outcomes in relation to labour market needs, career teaching directing is not yet integrated into the curriculum high school programs; low level (quantitative and qualitative) of providing adult education, as well as a few lifelong learning opportunities for people who missed the opportunity of education.

Youth unemployment measures: an overview of active measures tackling youth unemployment in North Macedonia

State institutions implement several measures and programmes on employment support. We divide those measures into two groups, one encompassing the active measures and programmes, such as employment services, information on the labour market, public works, employment subsidies; and the other includes the passive measures and programmes (such as social assistance and assistance unemployment)⁵³. We do not analyse the passive measures as these measures are broad without a particular focus on youth and arise from the Labour Law and the Law on Social Protection.

In the Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Programs and Measures 2019⁵⁴, several employment measures were outlined. The following measures are not exclusively provided for young people, but young people up to 29 were one of the target groups. For instance, the Programme for Self-Employment aims to support the unemployed to start their own business, support to creating new jobs as a measure that should influence the promotion of the employment of unemployed persons in micro, small and medium enterprises, social enterprises that are primarily targeted towards social/societal goals, support the employment of unemployed persons who are hardly involved in the labour market, as well as employment and growth of legal entities. The purpose of this measure is to provide support in creating new jobs in micro, small and medium enterprises, social enterprises and civil society organisations. This measure is designed for unemployed persons registered in the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, with the preference of young people up to 29 years of age and persons with disabilities. The measure “Support for job creation” includes several target groups, among which also NEET youth, women, Roma community and people with disabilities.

Another measure that targets young people up to 29 years of age is the Training for the development of digital skills, which also offers a training quota for people with disabilities. The measure Internship is designed for young people up to 34 years of age with a minimum of primary education. From the table below, we identify two more measures specifically designed to cater to young people, the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Allowance. While the Youth allowance is a reasonably new measure that only started implementation in 2020, the implementation and effects of the Youth Guarantee are analysed more in-depth below.

Moreover, as of 2020, the Government has introduced several to tackle the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth; still, these measures are not structural, having in mind the long-term effects of the pandemic on the economy. These measures include money allowance for young people of 6000 denars (around 100 EUR) and a credit card “Buy at home” with 3000 denars (approximately 50 EUR) for buying Macedonian products and services. The second measure presents a more structural approach, as it offers a voucher of 30.000 denars (approximately 500 EUR) for co-financing of trainings and courses on IT and digital skills for young people from 16 to 29 years old. The Government also offered measures for unemployed persons or persons that lost their job due to Covid-19. However, these measures are not devised solely for young people, but encompass the whole population. These measures include money transfer for people that lost their jobs from 11th of March until 30th of April, direct money transfer for athletes and sport workers, support for artists and people in the informal economy.

⁵³ Revised operational plan for active measures and programs for employment and services on the labor market for 2020. , MLSP, available at : <https://av.gov.mk/content/%D0%9E%D0%9F/Rev.OP-2020.pdf>

⁵⁴ Ibid

From the Operational Plan for Active Labour Market Programs and Measures 2019, we find three more services that ESA offers through its regional offices. These measures are worth to be mentioned as they are designed explicitly for NEET and vulnerable youth. The first one is a training programme, named "Preparation for employment and work," which includes conducting multi-day training for young unemployed persons up to 29 years of age, according to the programme which covers topics such as introductory module, personal development, job search skills, communication skills, appropriate workplace behaviour, teamwork and leadership, safety, rights and responsibilities at work and financial skills. The second service is dedicated to unemployed Roma people, which do not mention specifically young Roma people, but the measures still recognised and addressed the high rate of Roma youth unemployment. The measure offers unemployed Roma access to a team of mentors, engaged in local communities. Their role will be to motivate and regularly inform them about employment opportunities or to improve their professional capacities. The third measure is designed for people at risk from social exclusion and users of the minimum guaranteed assistance. According to the programme they will be entitled to the Counselling and Motivation service (SIM) which consists of intensive psycho-social support of the beneficiaries before engaging in an active employment measure, as well as mentoring support which is most intensive in the period when the beneficiary is involved.

Active measures and programmes for employment	Realisation (2019) / persons included
	Annual reports, ESA, Available at: https://av.gov.mk/godishni-izveshtai.nspix
Self-employment support (entrepreneurship)	The training was successfully finished by 1535 persons (out of signed 2148). Of them, 583 (out of 805) were up to 29 years. 547 of them developed a business plan, and 482 of them registered a company.
Support for job creation	1412 persons employed (out of which 768 are up to 29 years) under the wage subsidies measure; 621 persons employed (out of which 387 are up to 29 years) with grants for employment.
Trainings	Training at the signed employer - out of 94 who signed a contract for training 47 are up to 29 years, trainings for professional qualifications, trained 96 persons (37 up to 29 years); trainings for bakers, confectionaries, locksmiths and mechanics were successfully finished by 92 persons (37 up to 29 years), additionally, 542 persons (187 up to 29 years) finished trainings for other requested/ published vocations.
Training for the development of digital skills	193 persons up to 34 years will be part of different kinds of training for IT skills; 60 persons up to 34 years will be trained for advanced IT skills with co-financing; 624 (444 up to 29) will be trained for basic it skills;
Internship programme	1521 out of 1679 interns were up to 29 years.
Employment programme	610 engaged persons for community services, 419 (87 up to 29 years) engaged in projects related to infrastructure and protection of the environment.
Projects for employment with credits	Self-employment with loans- signed contracts with 141 persons out of which 41 are persons up to 29 years; credits for employment to small enterprises - 35 (14 persons up to 29 years) employed.
Youth Allowance	There is still no data on the success rate as the measure was introduced in the year 2020.
Youth Guarantee - Case study	A more in-depth analysis of the Youth Guarantee can be found below.

Table 6. Active measures and programmes for employment

The source of funding for tackling youth (un)employment measures and programmes is the Government budget for the Employment Service Agency (which is under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). The amount of funding of the Action Plan for Youth Employment for 2016-2020 is 30.950.000 EUR for five years, excluding monitoring and evaluation costs. The Master Plan for the Youth Guarantee foresees 40,7 million euros for the implementation of measures for youth employment. On the other hand, the Operational Plan for Active Programmes and Measures for Employment and Services in the Labour Market for 2019⁵⁵ had total funding of 1.195.486.316 MKD, which at the time was 0,5% of the State budget,⁵⁶ which is an increase of 149,691,481 MKD in comparison with the previous year when the budget for implementation of the measures was 1.045.794.835 MKD. Nevertheless, even with the increase, it is essential to mention that this amount is not exclusively intended for youth employment measures, but employment measures for all work-able populations in the country. This makes it harder to assess what's the actual amount from the budget dedicated to addressing youth unemployment.

4.1. In the footsteps of the EU: the role of the Youth Guarantee in tackling youth unemployment

According to the European Council Recommendation of April 2013⁵⁷, the term youth guarantee refers to a situation in which young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. An offer of continued education could also encompass quality training programmes leading to a recognised vocational qualification. Additionally, in EC conclusions on the multiannual financial framework of 8 February 2013, it was decided to create a Youth Employment Initiative amounting to EUR 6 billion for the period 2014-20 to support the measures set out in the Youth Employment Package proposed by the Commission on 5 December 2012 and, in particular, to promote the Youth Guarantee.

This new instrument should be implemented by a scheme consisting of supportive measures and should be geared to national, regional and local circumstances. Those measures should be based on six axes: building up partnership-based approaches, early intervention and activation, supportive measures enabling labour market integration, use of Union funds, assessment and continuous improvement of the scheme, and its swift implementation. As such, they aim to prevent early school leaving, fostering employability and removing practical barriers to employment.

In line with this recommendation, North Macedonia is the first country outside the European Union (EU) implementing this measure as part of the Economic Reform programme 2018-2020⁵⁸ of the Ministry of Finance, drawing on the practices of some of the EU members with similar political and historical backgrounds such as Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia. The concept of the YG is the same as the one of the EU. The YG was adapted to support NEET youth aged 15 to 29 or first time unemployed, in finding decent employment, self-employment, additional qualification or re-qualification. The YG scheme is guaranteed to provide opportunities and increase their employability within four months of being registered at the State Employment Agency system. The Youth Guarantee offers the following services: professional orientation and career counselling, motivational training, individual and group counselling and job search training. The Youth Guarantee foresees the following employment measures: subsidies for the employment of young people, incentives for hiring young people with disabilities, and a self employment program.

The following institutions are included in the implementation of the planned activities of the Youth Guarantee: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (as the main coordinative body for the Youth Guarantee), Employment Service Agency, Ministry of Education and Science, The Bureau for Development of Education Centre for Adult Education, Vocational Education and Training Centre, Ministry of Local Self-Government as well as the National Youth Council of Macedonia.

The Economic Reform Program provides that "With the Youth Guarantee measure, each young person under the age of 29 will be given an adequate job offer, an opportunity to continue education or be included in some of the internship or training measures for preparation for employment."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Operational Plan for Active Programs and Measures for Employment and Services in the Labour Market for 2019 [https://av.gov.mk/content/%D0%9E%D0%9F/Za%20na%20Vlada%20na%20RSM%20Revidiran%20OP-2019%2004%20dekemvri%20kon%20MTSP%202%20\(1\).doc](https://av.gov.mk/content/%D0%9E%D0%9F/Za%20na%20Vlada%20na%20RSM%20Revidiran%20OP-2019%2004%20dekemvri%20kon%20MTSP%202%20(1).doc)

⁵⁶ State budget for 2019 was 28.548.000.000 MKD, <https://www.finance.gov.mk/files/u3/BUDGET%202019%20SOBRANIE.pdf>

⁵⁷ European Council Recommendation, 2019; Available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF>

⁵⁸ Economic reform programme 2018-2020, available at: https://www.finance.gov.mk/files/Macedonia_ERP_2018.pdf

⁵⁹ Ibid

According to the Plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, the first phase (2018-2019) included appropriate political reforms, mapping young people (NEET) and making an assessment for the necessary investment for realisation of the Youth Guarantee, enlarged the scope of available programs, making partnerships to get in touch with unengaged young people and creating monitoring system. The second phase is planned to be implemented from 2020 to 2022 only if the activities from the first phase are already implemented, and there is an appropriate base for continuing with the activities of the second phase. The main aim of the second phase is to accommodate institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms to strengthen the provision of integrated Youth Guarantee services.

4.2. Youth Guarantee: an assessment by state institutions (MLSP and ESA) and CSOs

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy⁶⁰, this measure has positive results. In the first three months of its realisation in the cities/municipalities of Skopje, Strumica and Gostivar, 419 people were hired, 196 began to attend training, and 160 started their practice in a company. According to the information gained from the MLSP, in the first year of implementation (from March to December 2018), the following results were achieved: The total number of young people included: 5,266 (2,694 women, 395 Roma). Out of the total number of young people who become part of the Youth Guarantee, 4,556 (87%) were provided with certain services within the Program (career counselling and professional orientation, preparation for employment and work, elaboration of an individual plan for employment, information on the labour market, profiling, etc.). Out of the total number of young people included, 1,916 young people have been employed in the period of four months from the day of entering the program. Of these, 224 persons were employed through the ESA's employment mediation service; 232 were directly employed by participating in some of the active employment measures; 1,387 were employed after they participated in any of the other services of the Agency; while 281 persons were involved in active employment programs and measures that do not lead to direct employment. According to these data, the performance of the Youth Guarantee in 2018 is over 41%.

In 2019, the Youth Guarantee was applied throughout the whole country (unlike in 2018 when as a pilot project it was implemented only in 3 Macedonian municipalities). According to ESA⁶¹ In 2019, 20,302 (10,501 women, 1,457 Roma) young people became part of the Youth Guarantee, and 6,036 of them got a job in the first four months after their registration within the Agency. Of these, 470 persons were employed through the ESA's employment mediation service; 476 were directly employed by participating in some of the active employment measures; 76 were employed after they participated in any of the other services of the Agency, 3,406 were employed in the first four months while 1,177 persons were involved in active employment programs and measures that do not lead to direct employment. According to these data, the performance of the Youth Guarantee in 2019 is 35%.

Youth Guarantee	total number of people included	total number of women included	total number of Roma included	total number of people employed	performance
2018 (3 municipalities)	5,266	2,694	395	1,916	41%
2019 (whole country)	20,302	10,501	1,457	6,036	35%

Table 7. Source: MLSP and ESA

When assessing the success of the Youth Guarantee (especially in the pilot phase), we noticed a lack of availability of public data, i.e. not having a reliable check from another institution, commission or the youth civil society sector, moreover lack of transparency and inclusion in all phases and finally lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which inherently weakens the effectiveness of the measure. In addition, eight out of 20 other organisations that responded to the questionnaire also suggested that the Youth Guarantee is partially successful and there is lack of qualitative data, lack of promotion and direct

⁶⁰ MLSP: In the first three months of the pilot phase of Youth Guarantee, employed 419 persons

http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-mtsp-vo-prvite-tri-meseci-od-pilot-programata-mladinska-garancija-vraboteni-419-lica.nsp

⁶¹ Annual report for 2019, ESA, available at: <https://av.gov.mk/content/Документи/Извештаj%20на%20ABPCM%202019.pdf>

communication with NEET and need of law regulation. Namely, one of the respondents noticed: *Yes, it is partially successful, but it is necessary to improve access to information and exchange between the parties that are involved in implementation. Furthermore, changes in the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurances are needed as well as budget for field activities/ Revising of the operational plan for employment in order to be accessible for more NEET and considering the possibility of separating the measures for NEET from other measures in the OP, etc*⁶² another one added *‘there is a lack of competent staff responsible for implementing this measure within the ESA.’*⁶³

In line with the responses and analysis of the different sides, it may be concluded that the YG should be improved in different directions:

- A separate budget line for YG should be introduced
- More funds should be allocated for fieldwork, i.e. closely working with NEET and promotion of the measures;
- Better coordination between institutions and cooperation with local authorities, businesses should be established and developed
- Better management within the responsible institutions especially in ESA
- Increasing the number of careers counsellors and their activities on the field is needed
- A higher quote should be foreseen for the measures that seem to be more attractive for the NEET

⁶² Questionnaire responses

⁶³ Questionnaire responses

CSOs role in tackling youth unemployment and addressing the needs of NEETs

Minding the specificity of the research, and the fact that there is no recent research on the topic of the capacities of CSOs, an online questionnaire with 20 representatives of civil society organisations was conducted to get their experience, views, necessities and recommendations on the topic of youth data. More concretely, the questionnaire (Appendix: Questionnaire for CSOs/ CSOs Platforms) was conducted to present the viewpoint of professional and experienced organisations to a) analyse the involvement of CSOs in projects for tackling youth unemployment; b) to assess legal framework and institutional activities and strategies, and, 3) to evaluate the situation with youth unemployment and NEET in the country.

5.1. Involvement of the CSOs/ platforms in projects for tackling youth unemployment

The table below gives a short description of the organisations that responded⁶⁴ to the questionnaire with a brief overview of their projects/ activities undertaken for tackling youth unemployment in the last three years. Four of the organisations (NYCM, Krik, Youth Can and SEGA) were involved in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee with activities for raising awareness and working directly with NEET in the field. Most of the organisations have organised workshops/ training for capacity building and gaining skills of youth with a focus on soft skills and advanced IT skills, several of them focused the activities on people with disabilities or minorities (Roma and women). Regarding the source of the funds, all organisations have used funds from international donors, and only one has received funds from the state budget. According to the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development - Country Report for North Macedonia 2019, 68.1 % of surveyed CSOs there receive funding from foreign donors. Meanwhile, domestic funding levels are still insufficient. Four organisations have never applied for projects for tackling youth unemployment on open calls from international donors, and only three of the respondents have information for open calls for tackling unemployment of youth from marginalised groups.

CSO/ Platform	Key achievements and projects in the last three years
Youth Can website: https://youthcan.org.mk	1. Strategic partnership with the largest German youth foundation Schuler Helfen Leben in the past three years and getting the opportunity to introduce Solidarity action day 2. Introducing the concept of Temporary Banks in North Macedonia (with state support)
Coalition SEGA website: https://www.sega.org.mk/en/	1. Established online platform for career guidance 2. Developed and implemented a methodology for career counselling and early career guidance, 3. Implemented methodology for preparation for employment
CEFE Macedonia website: https://cefe.mk	1. Global youth employment and training (Erasmus +). Results: 200 young people trained in Macedonia, Germany, Chile, Philippines and Jamaica with skills for entrepreneurship and employability, five entrepreneurship training programs created, 100 young people employed or self-employed.

⁶⁴ Birc, Hena Debar, Ljubeznost and Gestalt Centar Mladen Kostic Aspekti are the organisations that responded to the questionnaire but do not have concrete projects and activities and therefore they are not included in the given table, but their opinions regarding the other issues are taken into consideration.

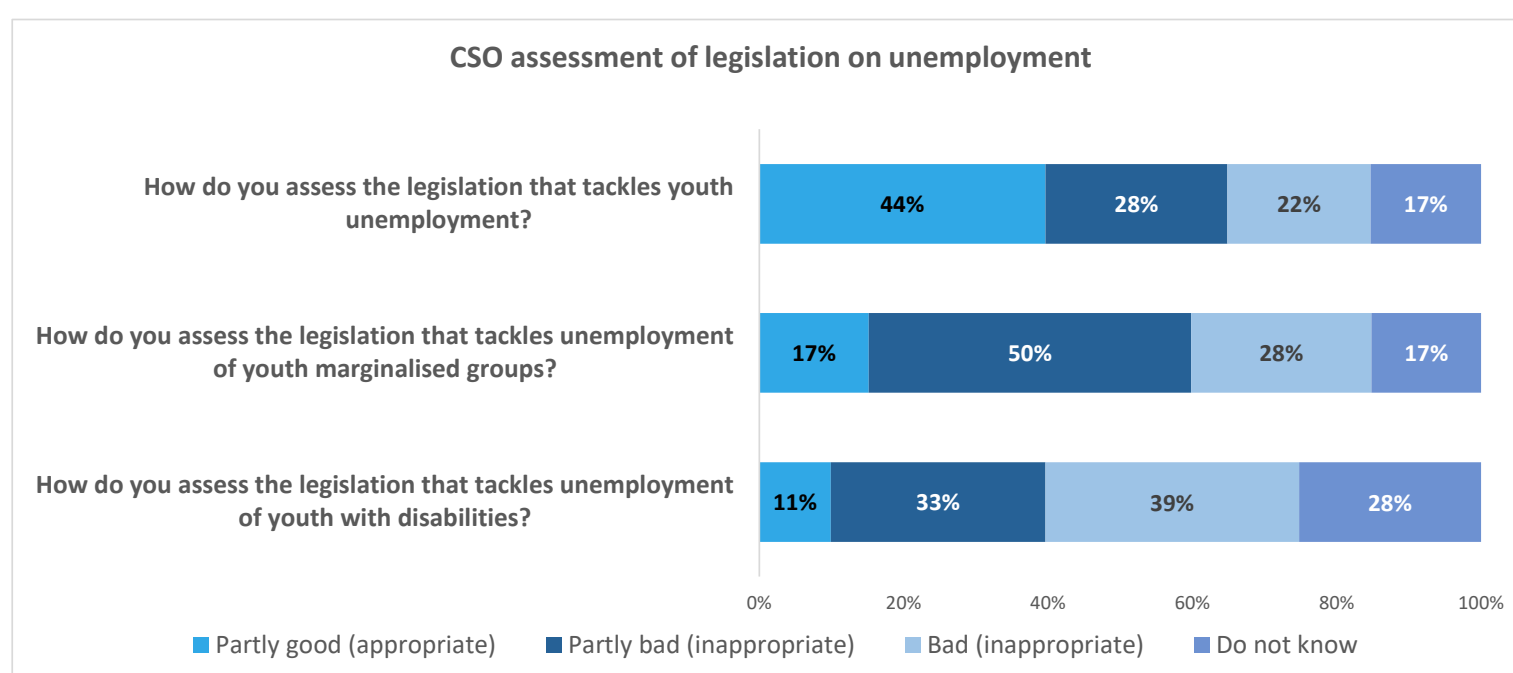
	<p>2. Establishment of regional entrepreneurship centres in Eastern Macedonia (US Embassy in Skopje). Results: 20 entrepreneurship trainers trained according to CEFE Methodology in Eastern Macedonia, two entrepreneurship centres established: CEFE East - Shtip and CEFE Strumica, 200 young people trained in business skills, strengthened capacities of the new centres for planning and development of project proposals, business services, networking with actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country.</p>
<p>Mladiinfo International website: http://www.mladiinfo.eu</p>	<p>1. Eu project- regional project "Youth Banks Hub for Western Balkans and Turkey" - Network of youth Banks focused on youth involvements, employability and employment.</p> <p>2. MYOUTH – Mobile, Young, Opportunity, Unity, Technology, Help. mYouth brings mLearning closer to youth by creating free access to education for everyone. Therefore, as a part of the project, mobile applications have been developed aiming to solve a problem in the community and thereby, make an impact. Each of the participating countries at the project conducted a national coding camp, from which hundreds of youths directly benefited in improving their digital skills.</p> <p>3. “YES, We care!” (Youth Empowerment through Social Entrepreneurship)- The idea behind the project is aimed at developing skills of youth to appreciate the community, the environment and their participation in the social and political processes, as well as to work on sustainable businesses in the field of social entrepreneurship (SE).</p>
<p>The National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) website: http://www.nms.org.mk</p>	<p>1. Youth Guarantee- implementation of field activities for informing NEET and their involvement</p> <p>2. Web4Yes -support to CSOs for addressing youth unemployment by training, meetings and advocacy campaigns. MladiHub- capacity building for youth digital skills and their employment</p>
<p>Centre for educational and development initiatives INNOVA LAB https://www.facebook.com/innovalab.mk</p>	<p>1. From youth for youth (HEIntern<>NGO) in the framework of WEB4YES programme; Municipality according to youth needs, youth activism and participation; Youth counsellors in rural areas; Trainings for employment skills</p>
<p>The Centre for Youth Activism KRIK website: http://krik.org.mk</p>	<p>1. See You Watching Me -10 youth programmes for persons with and without disabilities for soft skills and skills for employment</p> <p>2. Youth Guarantee- field workers who approach to NEET and convince them to apply for some of the measures foreseen within the Youth Guarantee programme</p> <p>3. Step toward inclusion - trainings for youth workers and five programmes for special schools for soft skills and skills for employment</p>
<p>The Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI) website: https://www.adimacedonia.org</p>	<p>1. Civic Engagement Project- ADI financially supported projects from 13 youth organisations from 2017 to 2018 focused on promotions of voluntarism, local actions, youth capacities and skills building, etc.</p>
<p>Youth Alliance- Krusevo website: https://www.youthalliance.org.mk</p>	<p>1. "DIVE 3: Zero to One > 1 to N" is a capacity-building project in the field of youth.</p> <p>2. The third edition of the cycles of the "DIVE projects" ("DIVE 3: Zero to One > 1 to N"), about social entrepreneurship, that Youth Alliance – Krusevo implemented, after "Dive into social entrepreneurship" and "Dive deeper into Social entrepreneurship", represent a step forward by connecting the concept of social entrepreneurship with the "Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, Zero Carbon Emissions" formula.</p>
<p>Humanitarian and Charitable Roma Association "Mesecina"– Gostivar website: http://mesecina.org.mk</p>	<p>1. Increasing participation of Roma woman in the labour market: More than 60 women from Gostivar, Tetovo and Debar gained working skills and experience by working for successful employer</p> <p>2. Increasing participation of Roma in the labour market: 80 women and man were trained, 40 men participated in a two-month course, working for a successful employer, 40 women and man gained skills and knowledge for business registration</p> <p>3. Analysis of the labour market and needs of Roma in Gostivar was made, and recommendations were given.</p>

Ternipe MK Delcevo website: https://www.facebook.com/ternipemkdelcevo/	1. Roma people graduate and have better lives- From 2009 to 2017, 154 out of 162 participants finished their secondary education, and 51% of them got a job in public administration or the business sector. 2. Education path toward employment- During 2017, 230 Roma people, mainly women, benefit from different project activities, i.e. 150, finished their secondary and 80 their primary education.
Sumnal- Development Association of the Roma community in Macedonia website: https://sumnal.mk/mk/	1. Employment of Roma through skills development and sustainable integration in the labour market, especially of the Roma women - a series of workshops on various topics, such as domestic violence, the role of women in society, discrimination and how to prevent them. Additionally training sessions for young people under the age of 30, who visited the trades: hairdressers, make-up artists, caregivers of the elderly, cosmeticians for face and body, through which they acquired practical knowledge of these professions. 2. Advocacy activities for better employment of Roma - at least 100 build up their knowledge about the employment opportunity, and 50 private sector representatives increased the awareness about the benefits offered for the companies within the Government active labour market measures and other employment programmes, and increase their owners' sensitivity for the employment of Roma and other vulnerable groups at risk for social exclusion.

Table 8. Relevant CSOs and their main activities in the field of youth unemployment

5.2. Assessment of legal framework and institutional activities and strategies

On the questions related to the legislation, 44% of the respondent considers that the legislation that tackles youth unemployment is partially good. In comparison, the responders that consider legislation that addresses unemployment of youth from marginalised groups (17%) and youth with disabilities (11%) decreases.



Graph 2. Assessment of the legal framework

Source: Responses to an online questionnaire, own calculation

However, to the question *Have you worked on improving the legislation of youth unemployment in the last three years*, the majority of them (80%) responded with No. Only two organisations have related activity, i.e. one organisation participated in the working groups and was involved in the creation of the Law for youth involvement, Law on youth and student standard and one organisation have shared their experience, and positive practises with the institutions for the improvement of the legal framework for the employment of the marginalised groups.

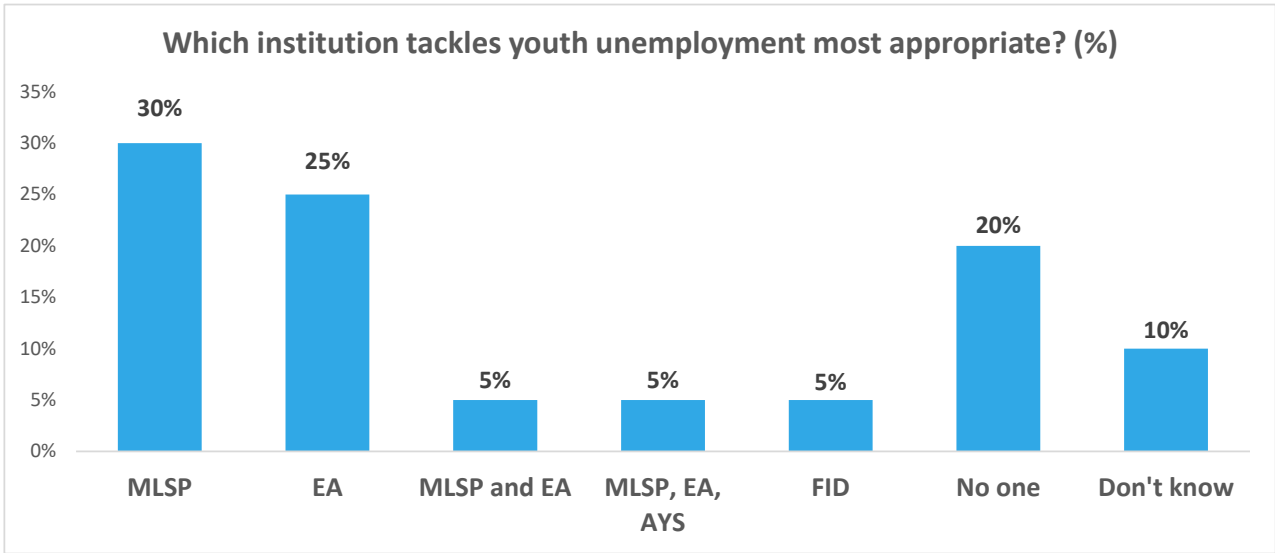
Additionally, to the question *Have you been part of the preparation of national strategies and programs for youth unemployment*, similar to the previous question 13 organisations (65%) respondent with No. At the same time, the two were involved in the development of the strategy for employment of Roma community on a national and local level, one participated in the creation of the operative plan of Youth Guarantee, one was involved in the preparation of the Youth Strategy. Two more participated in the preparation of the Actions plan for employment.

Few of the respondents consider that while the legislation is good, there is a lack in the implementation of the laws and national policies. One respondent suggests that the *Government and other stakeholders should adopt measures that are effective in the other European countries and the other one thinks that there is a necessity of involvement of the youth when decisions are made*⁶⁵.

Regarding the *legislation/ policies that tackle the unemployment of youth of marginalised groups*, all respondents agreed that there is a real need for preparation and implementation of the Programs/ strategies that will be focused on youth from these groups. Still, the majority of them (80%) have never worked/ have not been involved in the preparation of strategies of this kind, and the rest were involved only in the creation of local actions plans that have focused on this issue.

With the aim to assess successful and good practices, on the question *Please identify measures/ programs adopted by Government/ other state institutions that give a positive response*, the respondents mentioned the *Youth Guarantee, Self-Employment by grants, various tax exemptions, training for unemployed youth and programmes for internship and volunteerism*.

Regarding the work of the institutions, every third respondent considers that the MLSP is the institution that most appropriately tackles youth unemployment. At the same time, 20% are not satisfied with the work of the institutions, as according to them, none of the institutions is undertaking the necessary activities for tackling youth unemployment.



Graph 3. Assessment of the institution's work for tackling youth employment

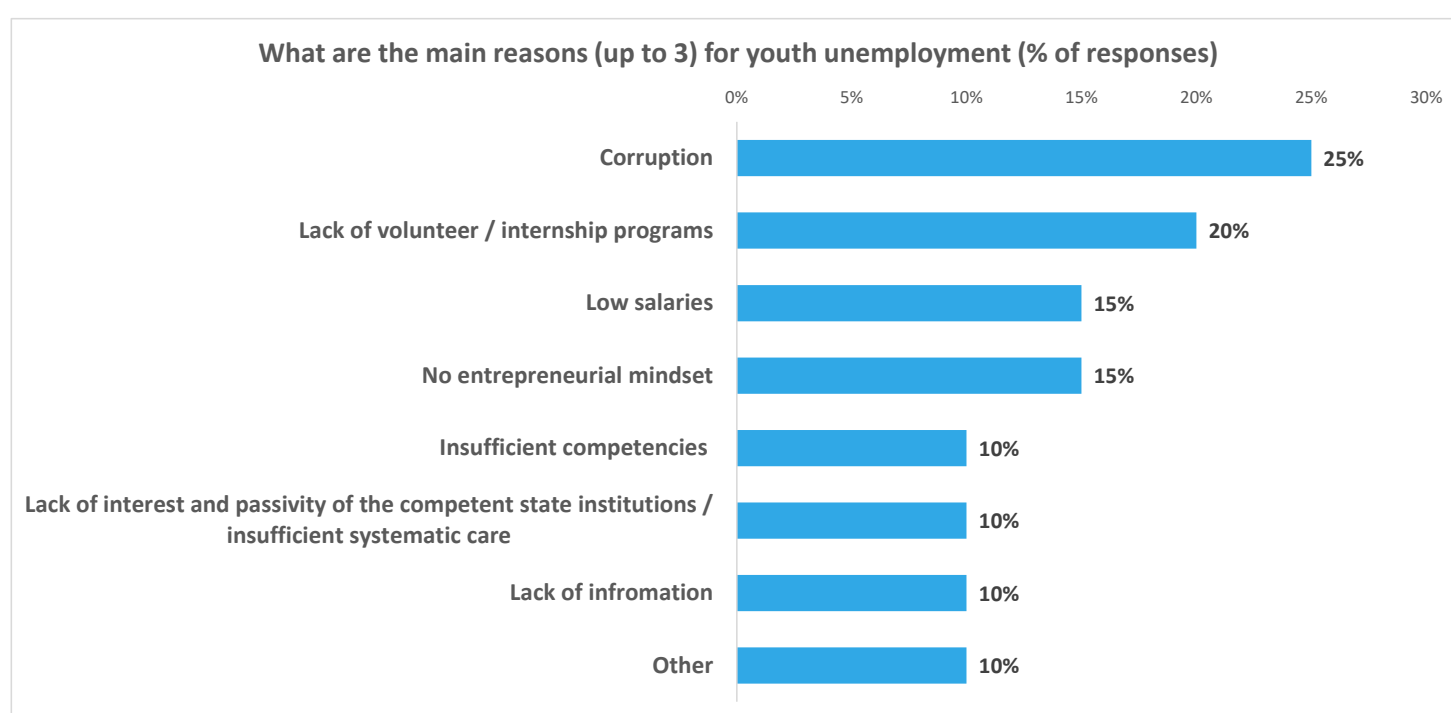
Source: Responses to an online questionnaire, own calculation

Additionally, all the respondents think that the local municipalities have some activities, but they are not on the level of programmes and strategies. When it comes to cooperation between CSOs and institutions/ local municipalities, nearly half of the respondents (45%) answered that they hadn't cooperated with them so far. In contrast, five organisations have had cooperation in the past with local municipalities on educational activities, training and promotion of the active measures for youth. Four organisations had direct collaborations with the Employment Service Agency regarding the employment of youth, and two were involved as participants in working groups.

⁶⁵ Response to the questionnaire

5.3. Assessment of the situation with youth unemployment in the country

Regarding the assessment of the youth unemployment, most of the respondents identified the *poor/ inadequate education (60%)*, *apathy and disappointment of the youth (35%)* and *mismatch of the skills with the needs of the labour market (40%)* as main reasons for the high youth unemployment in the country. Some of the key conclusions of the available reports⁶⁶ suggest that even if the NEET youth have the relevant educational background, never been included in training nor employed. NEET youth would like to find a job but have limited knowledge and information. Regarding the most mentioned reasons/ factors for youth unemployment are lack of quality education and mismatched skills, lack of cooperation and coordination among the key stakeholders, limited access to reliable career-related information.



Graph 4. Main reasons for youth unemployment

Source: Responses to an online questionnaire, own calculation

Focus groups confirm this with young people that suggests that youth are acutely aware of the distortions in the labour market due to corruption in education and hiring systems, purchased grades and degrees, and jobs that rely on family connections and party affiliation.⁶⁷

Additionally, on the question *How do you assess opportunities for finding a job* the majority of the respondents (90%) think that finding a job depends on many factors (sector, education, experience, etc.) and only two respondents believe that it is difficult to find a job. Recommendations⁶⁸ that are given for overcoming the issue of youth unemployment include the need for more aggressive youth employment policies, including internship and traineeship programs, qualification, re-training, and profiling of the youth into sectors and occupations that need (or will need) more workers followed with a central information system from where youth will have all the necessary information for a job and educational opportunities.

Finally, on the question of *whether there are any additional obstacles, challenges that youth from marginalised groups are facing*, all respondents responded positively. Among the most frequent reasons for that are noted *stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and lack of information and jobs*.

⁶⁶ Mojsovski Angel, Possibilities and barriers for youth entrepreneurship and employment in the private sector, EPI, available at: <https://epi.org.mk/post/14118>; Petreski, Blagica., Davalos, Jorge. Vchkov, Ivan. Tumanoska, Despina. Kochovska, Tereza. 2019: Analysis of youth underemployment in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, Financethink; available at: <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-study-22.pdf>; Ivanovska, Aleksandra. Mojsovski, Angel. Kacarska, Simonida: 2019: Youth employment in Republic of North Macedonia, EPI, available at <https://epi.org.mk/post/13484>;

⁶⁷ Cross Sectoral Youth Assessment Report, USAID

⁶⁸ Mojsovski Angel, Possibilities and barriers for youth entrepreneurship and employment in the private sector, EPI, available at: <https://epi.org.mk/post/14118>; Petreski, Blagica., Davalos, Jorge. Vchkov, Ivan. Tumanoska, Despina. Kochovska, Tereza. 2019: Analysis of youth underemployment in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, Financethink; available at: <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-study-22.pdf>; Ivanovska, Aleksandra. Mojsovski, Angel. Kacarska, Simonida: 2019: Youth employment in Republic of North Macedonia, EPI, available at <https://epi.org.mk/post/13484>;

5.4. Financial sustainability of CSOs

In general, larger CSOs have access to longer-term funding from a few donors, while the majority of CSOs depend on one or two donors for short-term financing. CSOs continue to rely heavily on foreign donors for funding. The level of foreign funding did not change notably in 2019, although several programs were initiated or expanded during the year, yet the majority of them are expected to be used for CSOs that work in the areas of good governance, anti-corruption and anti-discrimination, and there is no clear overview of the financial resources dedicated to youth organisation i.e. for tackling youth issues.⁶⁹

From the available information, it is notable that EU has planned financial support for priority sector: education, employment and social policies for the period 2018-2020 is EUR 23.3 million (around 7% of its total support) and for priority sector: competitiveness, innovation, agriculture and rural development is EUR 77.3 million (approximately 24% of its total support).⁷⁰ Planned amount for projects related to vocational training and employment creation under the IPA Action Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia is EUR 16.5 million.⁷¹

The US Embassy at the beginning of 2020 announced⁷² that it is providing \$16 million to help North Macedonia reduce corruption, better integrate youth in society, and increase economic competitiveness. Additionally, in the previous years, the US Embassy and USAID supported different projects related to entrepreneurship,⁷³ factoring projects (growth of MSMEs),⁷⁴ microfinance development⁷⁵ etc.

UNDP funded and cooperated with MLSP on different projects under self-employment programme in the period from 2009-2018 with the total amount of \$19,091,639⁷⁶ that has helped reduce the national unemployment rate by 3%, while in order to support the on-the-ground implementation of the YG, Switzerland supported both the field work of the youth associations of NYCM to reach out to unemployed youth and the strengthening of capacities of ESA to serve interested young people.

Regarding the financial support for associations and foundations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019, according to the government-issued Analysis of the financial support,⁷⁷ the total amount of central government funding budgeted for all nonprofit organisations in 2019 was approximately EUR 12 million (approximately EUR 1 million less than in 2018). Youth Policy does not have a specific budget line in the Governmental Budget and there is no disaggregated data on youth measures. MC, MLSP and the AYS distribute the largest amount of funding to CSOs. MLSP budgeted over MKD 151 million (approximately EUR 2.5 million) while AYS budgeted over MKD 89 million (approximately EUR 1.5 million) for the financial support of associations and foundations in 2019. However, from this amount, AYS budgeted only MKD 4.7 million (approximately EUR 0.07 million), and the rest is dedicated to sport projects, which shows a disbalans in favour of sport projects and neglect of projects on other youth issues.

In addition to the conclusions above, the CSOs also conclude that there is a lack of financial resources i.e. financial dependence of the CSOs that work with youth on international donor programmes, lack of resources dedicated for projects that address youth issues, lack of available data and information on youth and need for closer cooperation between CSOs and state institution and involvement in the CSOs and youth representatives in policy making process.

⁶⁹ A new phase of the Civica Mobilitas program began in 2019; the program will award approximately \$3.6 million in grants over a four-year period. At the end of 2019, DEU awarded operational grants to nine organizations that work in the areas of anti-discrimination, environment, justice and rule of law, anti-corruption, education, and counter-violent extremism. In order to address key priority reforms, in 2019, USAID refocused the Civic Engagement Project to support CSOs and institutions in three key areas: rule of law, anti-corruption, and transparency. Other donors, such as the British Embassy, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and some smaller bilateral donors, are also still present in the country.

⁷⁰ North Macedonia - financial assistance under IPA II, EC, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/north-macedonia_en

⁷¹ IPA II 2014-2020 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/annexes/2019_ad_3_srpc_eu_for_youth.pdf

⁷² U.S government provides \$16 million for anti-corruption, youth, and economic competitiveness initiatives

<https://www.usaid.gov/north-macedonia/news-information/press-releases/may-14-2020-us-government-provides-16-million-anti-corruption>

⁷³ Supporting Entrepreneurial Education in Europe and Eurasia <https://www.usaid.gov/north-macedonia/news-information/fact-sheets/supporting-entrepreneurial-education-europe-and-eurasia>

⁷⁴ USAID's Factoring Project, <https://www.usaid.gov/macedonia/fact-sheets/factoring-project>

⁷⁵ The Microfinance Development Credit, <https://www.usaid.gov/macedonia/fact-sheets/microfinance-development-credit-authority>

⁷⁶ The Self-employment Programme, UNDP <https://www.mk.undp.org/content/north-macedonia/en/home/projects/Self-employment-programme.html>

⁷⁷ Analysis of the financial support of the associations and foundations from the budget of RNM 2017-2019, General Secretariat of the Government of RNM, 2019, available on https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Анализа%20на%20финансиската%20поддршка%20на%203Ф%20од%20бюџетот%20на%20PCM%20%282017-2019%29_0.pdf

Conclusions and recommendations

With the identification of NEET youth as a target group, the Government of North Macedonia has undertaken several measures to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment; however, both legislation and strategies lack a more specialised approach when it comes to vulnerable youth. This next section presents an enumeration of conclusions and recommendations that stem from baseline analysis of the position of NEET and vulnerable youth in North Macedonia.

1

The main issues stem from lack of proper management of data and analysis of the same. It is crucial to introduce a system that integrates all the data on youth unemployment and its interaction with different vulnerable groups.

2

The second most relevant issue is tackling long-term unemployment, which is prevalent in all categories, but especially in NEET and vulnerable youth. The Government needs to be more innovative and proactive in addressing the reasons behind long-term unemployment, offering better programmes for the inclusion of NEET and vulnerable youth in the market, in this manner also tackling brain drain, as a consequence of discouraged youth.

3

The third and one of the most striking issues is the high percentage of inactive women in the labour market. Special measures need to be designed to address the reasons behind the inactivity, including special measures for women from rural areas as well as tackling the main reasons of women as primary family caregivers and marital status.

4

Poor/ inadequate education, apathy and disappointment of the youth and mismatch of the skills with the needs of the labour market are identified among the main reasons for high youth unemployment and youth emigration. An in-depth and substantial reform at all levels of the educational system is needed, based on quality analysis and consultation with all stakeholders, especially with youth. The education system should develop a vision and ability to adapt to the current and future needs of the labour market and stimulate the creation of appropriate staff. Improving the quality of life and providing job opportunities that match the abilities and value the work of youth is essential to make them stay or return to the country. As part of the general quality of life, in addition to a quality education system, the creation of a functional rule of law system is of great importance.

5

There is a need for a more significant promotion of the active measures that are in place through success stories and public events in order to increase the motivation of youth and to restore their trust in the institutions. In addition, regular analysis and updating of the existing measures are necessary in order to lead to jobs that will meet on the one hand the needs of the labour market, and on the other hand the interests of youth and their level of acquired knowledge and qualifications.

6

North Macedonia is the first country outside the EU that implements the Youth Guarantee as one of the most innovative youth policy measures implemented in the country so far. Despite the initial positive results, its successful implementation depends on overall planning and allocation of needed resources. As well as establishing mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation and higher levels of transparency and inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in all phases.

7

The inefficiency of the involvement of CSOs on a national level is noted, so the collaboration and coordination with the civil society organisations should be enhanced by including (in a transparent way) the relevant/interested ones in the working groups, field and raising awareness activities.

8

The municipalities should target youth unemployment and unemployment of youth from vulnerable groups, they should formalise their activities on the level of local strategies, programmes and involve CSOs and youth in that process.

9

The role of the civil society sector is also limited, and thus far, comprehensive research and activities are few. The financial dependence of mostly international donors is shrinking the space for the initiation; thus, the research, data-gathering and their activities are predominantly implemented as part of the project activities. The Government needs to dedicate more finances, and institutional support to the civil society sector focused on youth in order to increase independence and address the needs.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for CSOs/ CSOs Platforms

Name and Surname

Organisation

Position

Region

1. Primary sector (Youth, employment, people with disabilities, marginalised groups etc.)
2. Whether you've had projects related to youth unemployment and/or marginalised groups in the last three years?

Yes

No

1. Have you used state funds for implementation of projects related to youth unemployment?
2. Have you applied for a grant from a foreign donor? If yes, with which donors do you cooperate the most on the topic of youth unemployment?
3. Are you aware of specific donor programs focused on NEET young people and youth from marginalised groups?
4. Please list up to three key projects and achievements:
5. Are you familiar with the youth guarantee?

Yes (if yes, will open 7a and 7b)

No

- 7a. Have you been involved in the implementation of the youth guarantee and how?
 - 7b. Do you think that the youth guarantee is successful and gave results so far? What could be improved?
1. What are the main reasons for youth unemployment (up to three reasons)
 2. How do you assess the opportunities for youth for finding a job

It is very easy to get to a job

It is easy to get to a job

Finding a job depends on many factors (sector, education, experience, etc.)

It is difficult to get to a job

It is very difficult to get a job

1. How do you assess the legislation that tackles youth unemployment?

Good

Partly good

Partly bad (inappropriate)

Bad (inappropriate)

I do not know

1. How do you assess the legislation that tackles unemployment of youth marginalised groups?

Good

Partly good

Partly bad (inappropriate)

Bad (inappropriate)

I do not know

1. How do you assess the legislation that tackles unemployment of youth with disabilities?

Good

Partly good

Partly bad (inappropriate)

Bad (inappropriate)

I do not know

1. What could be improved?
2. Please identify good politics that tackle the youth unemployment, unemployment of youth marginalised groups and youth with disabilities (if any).
3. Have you worked on improvements of the legal framework that addresses youth unemployment in the last three years?

Yes (if yes, please explain)

No

1. Have you been involved in the preparation of programs, strategies for youth (un)employment in the last three years?

Yes (if yes, please explain)

No

1. Which institution tackles youth unemployment most appropriate?
2. Do the municipalities have separate programs focused on youth unemployment, especially unemployment of youth from marginalised groups?

Yes (if yes, please explain)

No

1. Do you cooperate with municipalities and other institutions?

Yes (if yes, please explain)

No

1. Are there any additional challenges that youth from towns, rural areas and marginalised groups facing?
2. Do you think that there should be specialised programmes focused on youth from rural areas and marginalised groups?

Yes

No

1. Have you implemented activities related to laws and programs focused on youth from rural areas and marginalised groups?

Yes (if yes, please explain)

No

1. Is it easy to get data for youth?

Yes

No

1. Which sources do you use?

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