



Western
Balkans
Youth
Cooperation
Platform

Western Balkans Through Youth Lens

Regional Policy Report

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WESTERN BALKANS THROUGH YOUTH LENS

Regional Policy Report

2019

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BHA UN	Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations
CDI	Cooperation and Development Institute
ESA	Employment Service Agency
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
KOMS	National Youth Council of Serbia
KYC	Kosovar Youth Council
MED	Municipal Education Departments
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NYC	National Youth Council / Congress
SCK	Students Council of Kosovo
WB	Western Balkans
WBYCP	Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform
YG	Youth Guarantee

INTRODUCTION

Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform (WBYCP) is a grassroots regional youth platform established in 2017 by Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) in partnership with the youth umbrella organizations of the six Western Balkans countries, namely National Youth Congress of Albania, National Youth Council of Macedonia, National Youth Council of Serbia, High School Students Union of Montenegro, Central Youth Action Council of Kosovo, Kosovar Youth Council and Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations, aiming to promote youth connectivity in the Balkans and to offer a unique and tailor-made space to youngsters from the region where they meet, plan, organize, implement and voice up their actions.

The six partner organizations and CDI have signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation "Working together through the Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform". As per article 2 of this Memorandum, *"the parties commit to work together to get the best results from youth EU and regional cooperation in the region and further support the role and contribution of the youngsters in the society. To this end, the Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform represents a strategic and valuable resource for all the partners, as well as for their youth member organizations. All parties agree to use and to contribute to it."*

With the aim to promote youth connectivity in the Balkans, WBYCP offers a unique and tailor-made space to youngsters from the region where they meet, plan, organize, implement and voice up their action. The bottom-up approach (youngsters – youth organisations (YOs) – National Youth Councils – WBYCP) is used to voice up the top pressing issues of Western Balkans youngsters and our work consists in contributing to advocate in addressing these issues.

In 2018, WBYCP launched an essay competition entitled "Three reasons to stay in my country". The aim of this essay was to get the youngsters opinion on the perspective they have about their future in their country. From this process, three top pressing issues were identified: i) the high rate of youth unemployment, ii) the insufficient space in decision-making processes, and iii) the low quality of education. These three issues constitute the main pillars for WB youngsters to achieve a balanced personal development in a progressive social and economic context.

Taking stock from this, WBYCP partners have conducted in 2019 six country analysis on the priorities of Youth Employment, Participation and Education. Each of the partners selected one priority, and analyzed it based on its specific institutional knowledge and field work. They analyzed the normative framework, gathered statistical data and conducted anonymous online surveys, online questionnaires, direct interviews, as well as used secondary sources, thus guaranteeing an exhaustive coverage and truthful findings that constitute the base for the recommendations coming from this report.

The report seeks to bring greater understanding of the perspective of youngsters themselves on their daily concerns. It identifies key challenges and opportunities in each of the three top pressing topics, but also it brings concrete recommendations on how to achieve higher impact of the existing policies in the Western Balkans.

The report demonstrates that governments in the region must prioritize social and economic policies that are inclusive of youth, invest in their education and professional capabilities, and encourage a meaningful participation of youth in the policy – making. In a regional context where regional and central authorities have limited policy-making capabilities for a qualitative prioritization, planning, implementation and assessment of sustainable measures aiming to invest in human capital, this report aims to constitute a contribution of the youth organizations themselves for better and more sustainable youth policies in the region.

The Joint Declaration

Last year we committed to work together and conduct youth led research focused on the most pressing issues faced by youngsters in the fields of **Education**, **Employment** and **Participation**.

These three pillars have been identified as the back-bone priorities for our youngsters to achieve a balanced personal development in a progressive social and economic context in the region.

It was the youngsters that conducted those studies, under the methodological guidance of WBYCP. We used desk research based on the analysis of normative framework and statistical data, anonymous online surveys, online questionnaires, direct interviews, as well as secondary sources, thus guaranteeing an exhaustive and coverage and truthful findings that constituted the base for our recommendations.

Today, after sharing the results and debating the findings and recommendations, we came with the following recommendations aiming to improve the policy-making design and cooperation together with the relevant policy actors, them being national, regional or at the EU level:

- Advocate meaningful participation of young people in policy-making stages from the beginning. This can be achieved through involvement of national youth councils / congresses / structures and engagement of bottom up initiatives in every stage of policy dialogue;
- Establish, encourage and support the dialogue and cooperation among civil society youth sector and political party youth wings, with the aim of integrating youth agenda issues into the political parties programmes;
- Encourage and support the creation of platforms and mechanisms that aim to better inform and educate young people, by complementing official education dispensed in schools and universities; encourage and facilitate the pedagogical staff to intensify the digitalization and innovation of learning and teaching methodologies all by improving its access, communication and increasing and democratizing the participation;
- Deliver tangible results on enabling, recognizing and standardizing non-formal education and youth work;
- Create a visionary, well-funded and long-term start-up ecosystem for young entrepreneurs.

I. ALBANIA: Tackling Youth Unemployment in Albania

Prepared by National Youth Congress of Albania

Founded in March 2013 in Tirana, NYC is the Albanian youth umbrella organization – a union of 112 youth organizations, informal groups, youth forums of political parties, etc. Its aim is to exchange information, highlight, lobby, advocate and solve youth issues, as well as to provide capacity building for all entities involved in the network.

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I.I Main Highlights of the Chapter

- Young people are dissatisfied with the efforts taken by the governmental institutions to foster Youth Employability.
- Young people in Albania believe that implementation of more vocational training, development of internships and traineeships, and career orientation according to labor market needs, can improve the unemployment challenge.

I.II Capturing Youth Unemployment in Albania through Youth Lens

Developing countries as Albania face major labor market problems. Although the legal framework for investment protection has improved and there have been supporting programs for new businesses, employment remains a problem for the Albanian society. Out of this situation, young people, even though they are the most productive and active part of the population, suffer the consequences of unemployment and above all, the lack of policies that support the empowerment and opening of youth businesses. The analysis of the objectives and results of the strategic documents covering the period 2005 - 2013 shows that, although the improvement of the youth employment situation has been a permanent objective, the implementation of these policy documents has been problematic. The main reason of the poor implementation lies in the lack of a regional / local approach from conception to implementation.

What is evident from these documents is that there are interconnected areas of competence between many institutions regarding employment policies, vocational education and training, youth, economic development, and fiscal policies. This inter-connection has also been a feature of previous strategic documents, which creates grounds for accountability concerns and makes difficult the assessment of each area of competence among the involved public institutions. This raises the need to efficiently coordinate and co-operate among public institutions, in order to achieve joint objectives and outcomes set out above.

The main focus of the National Youth Action Plan 2015 – 2020 is to increase youth employment through effective labor market policies, improve the legal framework, support start-up programs focusing on youth entrepreneurship, expand school-based courses of Vocational Training and the creation of competitions that promote innovative ideas. One innovation brought by the current youth action plan is the recognition of professional internships and internships, and the certification and recognition of professional degrees and skills acquired in places where young people may have worked or emigrated.

I.III Methodology

The methodology for this analysis combines literature research, desk research, information gathered from the field and information requests addressed to the institutions responsible for the design of youth employment policies. Moreover, we have tried to get youngsters opinion on what is lacking in the employment possibilities portfolio in the country from their perspective. Closed-ended questions which generate both qualitative and quantitative data and express numerical values, and relevant information were used. This questionnaire was filled by 1,028 young people in the 12 regions of Albania and the recommendations have been consulted by NYC secretariat. The age of people involved in this exercise was from 15 to 29 years old.

I.IV What youngsters think about Youth Unemployment

According to INSTAT, the age group of young people 15-29 years old group comprises 50.1% of the total workforce in Albania¹. Even though young people represent the majority of the workforce, the unemployment rate is still very high, where the unemployment rate for 15 - 29 year old is 23.1%.

When asked about the reasons why young people today are unemployed, 31% of the young people state that there is low labor demand coming from the public and private sector. Moreover, from the consultations highlighted the issue of the concentration of the job opportunities in Tirana (Capital of Albania) or in other big cities. This has caused inaccessibility and less job opportunities for young people who live in the rural areas. In addition, 23% of the respondents in this study, value the youth employment policies as dysfunctional and not satisfied with the measures taken by the government to tackle the youth unemployment challenges. These inefficiencies in adapting and implementing adequate policies has caused a mismatch between the skills gained through the education system and the skills required in the labor market. 11% of the youngsters emphasized that the young people do not have the right skills to find a job and 19% think that this comes because of the lack of coordination between education system and the labour market.

During the meetings with students and post-graduates, they expressed the need to change the curricula in Universities and to adapt it with the latest developments. The globalization and the

¹ INSTAT, "Labor force participation rate, 2018". Available at: <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/#tab2>

digitalization have enabled new type of jobs in the market and the educational reforms/policies are not changing with the same pace as the market.

Today, considerable gaps in labor market participation and school-to-work transition have not been adequately addressed. The youth unemployment rate in the Albania is among the highest in Europe. Meanwhile, the percentage of youth in the category known as NEET (who are not in education, employment, or training) is rising. Young people and recent graduates are not well integrated into the labor market and their employment level are still below the region's potentials.

The direct linkage with the issue of youth unemployment is the continuing trend of brain drain, including young people with particular skillsets. Given the negative demographic trends, it risks aggravating labor shortages in the future. Hence, unless targeted policies are undertaken urgently, the proper functioning of the public sector and service delivery will be put in jeopardy.

Very high unemployment among young people aged 18-24 (33 percent in 2018), including university graduates, points to a problem in aligning the education and training system with the needs of labor market and a weak business environment still significantly under-developed to generate employment. Overall, young people seem to lack necessary skills to find work. Skills mismatch also hinders a more sustained labor market expansion. The 2018 PISA test results for Albania were far below the OECD average. They show that a large proportion of young people do not have the basic skills to enter the labor market, in addition to other reasons such as low mobility, unattractive wages and working conditions. The latest tracer studies on VET and higher education graduates show that young people are rarely well matched to the jobs they hold in their early career.

When it comes to new trends and solution oriented policies regarding youth employment, young start-uppers and entrepreneurs face trouble due to complicated procedures and un-harmonized regulations. Active measures such as the abolition of numerous fees and charges would underpin young entrepreneurs to start their business.

On the other hand, the employed young people state that they are discriminated because of their age and are underpaid and overloaded with responsibilities. According to them, the employers do not invest enough in building the capacities of the staff and there are no dedicated programs to train young employees.

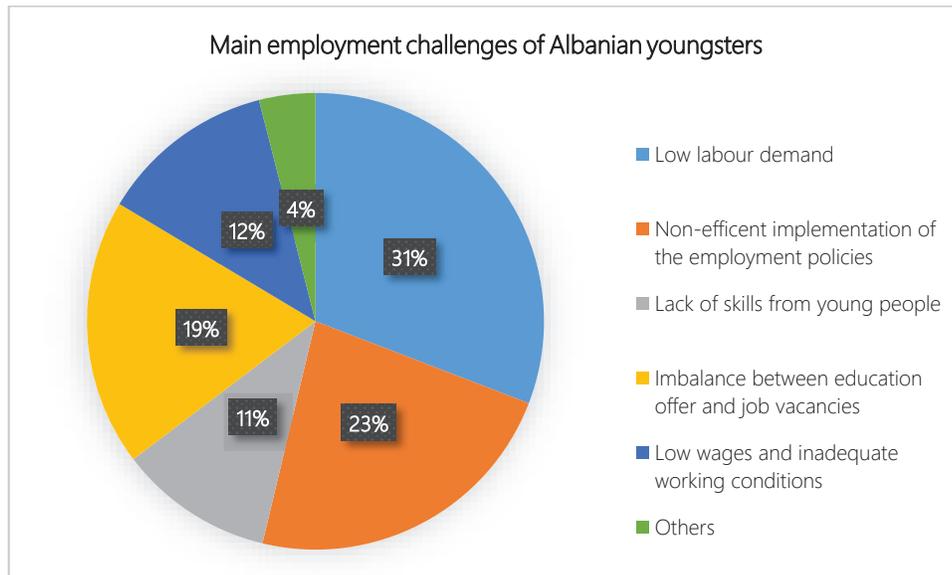


Figure 1. Main employment challenges of Albanian youngsters

Youth employability must be seriously considered as a national priority and therefore it needs a better coordination of local and central policies, dedicated budget and systematic cross sectorial cooperation to achieve it. The current positive momentum of regional cooperation should contribute to the higher mobility and youth employability throughout the region. While more focus should be dedicated to the implementation of the joint regional initiatives that tackle the unemployment challenges (i.e. Recognition of Diplomas), this will substantially open the path to creation of new opportunities and better performance in employability schemes of young people.

I.V Recommendations

- Conduct an impact assessment on the variety of governmental and donor-funded initiatives and programs, by providing factual analysis of the effectiveness of the results.
- Advocate for the establishment of an internship tradition after completing higher education.
- Initiate the establishment and recognition of vocational training courses with credits by the universities.
- Initiate initiatives to improve the working conditions of young people in the private sector, especially in the types of activities where violations have been identified, such as in the industry, tourism, services (call-centers)m etc.
- Introduce concrete measures for career guidance in the 9-year school system in order to promote vocational education.
- Establishment of the Young Professionals' Union.
- Introduce Youth Guarantees, which includes activities to reach out to non-registered NEETs in their direct environment and to connect them to individual services such as counselling, mediation and training.
- Tackle transferable skills in order to conduct a successful school-to-work transition.
- Diverse and accessible adopted training programs for specific target groups shall be fundamental in addressing employment gaps.

II. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: (UN)locking Youth Participation through the Education System

Prepared by Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations

BHA UN is an association established to promote national reconciliation through primarily engaging the youth from the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina, supporting and promoting the values of the European Union, fostering civic engagement in the process of decision-making, bringing the aspect of informal education and youth networking to the attention to relevant institutions. BHA UN is an integrative and inclusive association in its membership background variety.

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II.I Main highlights of this chapter

- Among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aged 15 to 30, only 1 percent participates in youth representative bodies, 5 percent in youth organizations and 6 percent in political parties.
- Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not familiar enough with their rights and duties as youth.
- Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to personally contribute to the improvement of their living standard and opportunities for the future in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite their disinterest for politics.
- Youth would participate more actively if it wasn't for the lack of willingness of decision makers to implement existing and to create new laws and strategies to address youth issues.
- Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina wish to be better educated and believe that the way to achieve this is through improving high-school level education and institutional support.

II.II Capturing participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the youth lens

In the words of revered Hellenic thinker Diogenes, “the foundation of every state is the education of its youth”. Throughout history, youth was seen as an immense potential for the benefit of society, as bearers of change and innovation, therefore investing in such a resource comes as a natural follow up. Education helps to shape the skills and preferences of young people, helps the development of critical thinking and expands their horizons and perspectives of information and knowledge. Yet, very evidently, young people share very negative views on their environments in the Western Balkans, with strong desire to emigrate, perceivable lack of engagement in civic activities and decision-making processes, etc. This alone is indicative that this valuable resource has been either neglected or mistreated.

This chapter aims to address the possible connection between the education that young people receive and the information on how they can contribute to societies and actively engage.

The chapter focuses on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their perceptions of knowledge and information about the decision-making processes, politics and political system of their country. Participation of youth is an important factor for young people to understand how

policies and decisions shape their lives but also their future, and to develop democratic values. Bearing in mind the context specificities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that the democracy is still in the consolidation process, a high degree of interest in both participation and engagement let it be formal, or informal practices, would arguably facilitate the transitory phase of post-war society and state-building. (Turčilo et al, 2019).

Notwithstanding, youth participation is recognized in the European Charter² on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life as valuable in at least three aspects: i) giving young people an access to authorities and voicing their concerns, ii) allowing young people to experience involvement in community life and lastly and iii) offering the opportunity to gain knowledge and access information.

Clearly, young people are to be informed and involved for the mutual benefit of their future but the society they live in as well. The participation of youth in decision-making processes is foreseen by law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bearing in mind that Bosnia and Herzegovina is comprised, in terms of internal political divisions, of three entities: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska and Brčko District, the law on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina exists only on entity levels and not on national level. On national level, these matters are addressed by a coordinating body founded by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, titled "The Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in B&H". Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina are defined as "individuals between the age of 15 and 30" and, according to the opinion of the Commission, participation of youth is understood as:

- 1) young people being informed of their rights and obligations
- 2) to actively exercise and defend their rights, have the ability to voice their concerns
- 3) have their concerns taken into consideration when shaping policies³.

The Commission reports very low levels of participation, with only "5% young people as active members of youth organizations, 6% as members of youth party wings and 1% as members of youth representative bodies". At the same time, only 13% of young people are expressing interest in politics and 19% express sufficient knowledge of politics (in here, politics refers to the simple knowledge of their own rights and obligations as provided to them by entity laws). (Jusić and Lavrič, 2019).

Arguably, these levels of perception and interest remain low, and are also reflected in the low level of participation. Considering that the participation defines information of one's own right and obligations as a precondition for active exercising of these rights, this chapter aims to affirm

² The principles stated in the Charter were developed by Council of Europe, of which Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a member since 1994. (Council of Europe, 2003).

³ Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues, n.a

that the youth are not systematically and through existing curricula either be informed enough or familiarized enough with participation, in order for them to become informed on why they should be more involved in decision-making and policy-influencing.

Education and political literacy in this context refer to “ability to perform their duties as active citizens and the nurturing of values, knowledge and skills needed for political participation”. (Roić, 2013, pg. 11) According to a research conducted with focus groups of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina by professors at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, the youth report a very negative perception of their surroundings and the key reasons as to why they are not keen on contributing to improvement of those surroundings is:

- a) they find politics to be something inaccessible to the general public, and
- b) when faced with the idea on actively contributing towards improving their participation by voicing their concerns and being involved, they lack the knowledge on how changes are to be made, who makes them and what is their role. (Osmić, 2017)

II.III Methodology

The analysis developed in this chapter is an explanatory research and an applied research, with an end goal of offering recommendations on how to address the issue in practice. The report encompasses a mixed method approach. The qualitative portion of the paper is a desk research based on the analysis of information and statistical data, and the quantitative data is gathered through an anonymous online survey conducted on a random sample of a hundred and two youngsters aged 15 to 30. The survey was structured with 13 questions, excluding the questions needed to define the demographic, i. e. the age and gender of the respondents. The age of the sample was determined by the definition of youth according to the law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is 15 to 30. Questions in the survey focused on the perception of youth mainly on the following notions:

- 1) *how* young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina perceive their quality of life and opportunities;
- 2) are they actively involved in youth work, politics or decision-making in B&H;
- 3) *how* would they estimate their knowledge on politics, political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina *and could their knowledge and information be improved.*

The full questionnaire is available in Annex 1 of this report. The analysis contains also statements from members of Youth Council of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Youth Council of Republic of Srpska, Jasmina Banjalučkić and Miloš Kovačević⁴.

The analysis of the perception of youth relates to the topics of political literacy and information available to youngsters, based on a hypothesis that the *lack of knowledge about the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina and overall lack of media and political literacy is in causal relation to the low level of participation of youth in decision making processes.*

II.IV Observations on attitudes of youth towards participation and political literacy

Out of the 102 youngsters that completed the survey, 47,1% are members of a non-governmental youth organization, 9,9% are members of a political party and only 3,9% are involved in a work of youth representative body on an entity level in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is indicative of young people being more inclined towards participation in alternative ways of influencing decision-making processes and being civically engaged, rather than showing interest and willingness for politics in a more formal way. 11,8% of youngsters surveyed do not even know that there is a youth representative body on entity level of which they could be part.

This information is troublesome, for example, if you take into consideration that on the level of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina the Law on Youth of Federation of B&H foresees that the direct involvement of youth in the decision-making processes on youth related topics is in fact achieved through the Youth Council, as a legitimate representative body of youth. (Law on Youth of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Official Gazette" No. 36/10).

Ms. Jasmina Banjalučkić, with her longstanding engagement in the Youth Council of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when asked to comment on participation of young people in decision-making processes highlights two important articles in the Law on Youth of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively Article 14. and 38. which highlight the significance of youth councils, i.e. the commission on youth issues that should facilitate coordination among entity level councils and the involvement of youth council representatives when forming youth-related policies (direct engagement in decision-making processes). Unfortunately, Ms Banjalučkić also stressed that these and similar provisions are not being respected by the government actors on one hand and on the other youth are simply not informed enough in order to make stricter demands on governmental actors to implement existing policies and facilitate creation and adoption of new youth related policies. This clearly indicates that youth

⁴ Disclaimer: The written statements are based on Ms Banjalučkić's and Mr Kovačević's experience with youth work and being a part of the two councils respectively, however do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Youth Council of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Youth Council of Republic of Srpska as such.

participation, despite being envisioned by law, is oftentimes overlooked and that young people are lacking critical information, such as the very existence of mechanisms that would allow them to advocate for the causes they find important.

Mr. Miloš Kovačević, similarly to Ms Banjalučkić, who has had plentiful experience with youth work and youth representative bodies through his engagement with the Youth Council of Republic of Srpska, stresses the importance of having a variety of perspectives in the decision-making process that would involve youth, but not only youth as a demographic factor. In his

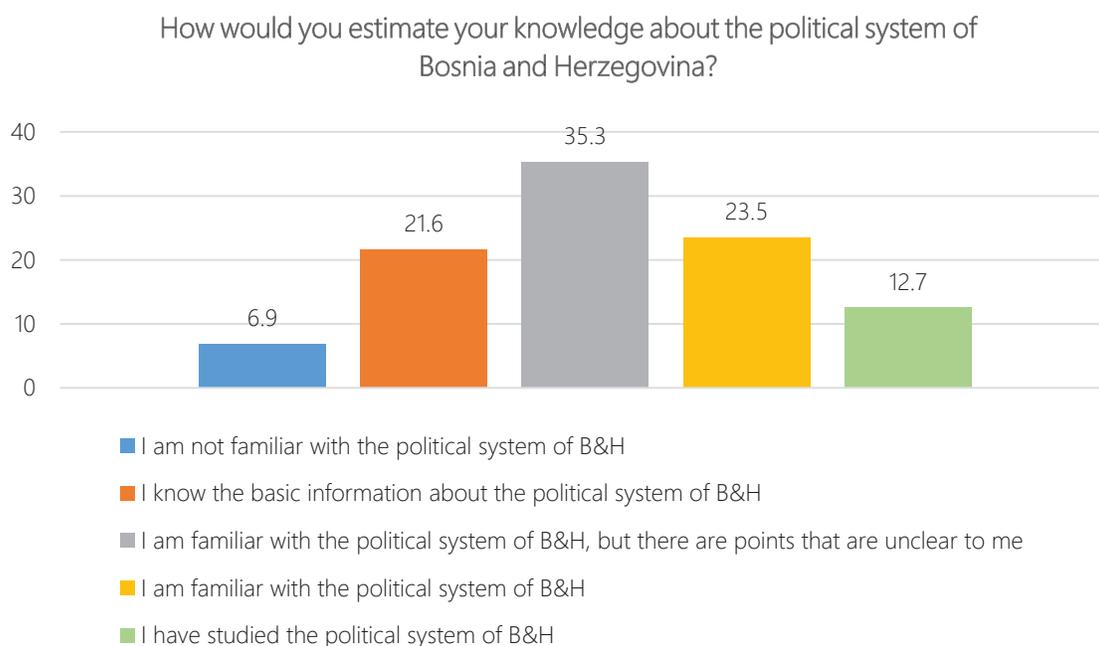


Figure 2. How would you estimate your knowledge about the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

opinion, overrepresentation of any demographic group in a decision-making process would ultimately result in unbalanced policies. In his words, the role of youth councils, or the non-governmental organizations as such, is to strengthen not force the willingness of young people to participate. However, like his colleague, he too, stresses the importance of youth being well informed and educated as a general prerequisite. This takes us to one of the main points in this research, which is the self-assessment of knowledge and information. Almost 66% of young people that took part in this survey report that they do not fully understand the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, only 23,5 % of poll respondents have indicated that they are fully familiar with the internal political structures, whilst less than 13% have studied the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the complexities of entity divisions and a specific balance of power system unique to Bosnia and Herzegovina when compared to other parliamentary democracies or semi-presidential political systems (having multiple youth related bodies, from representative capacity to strictly advisory role and capacity) it is almost incomprehensible to consider that a large number of young individuals would be actively

participating on any level, without being familiarized with the institutional and procedural *modus operandi* beforehand. That would point to the fact that out of a 102 surveyed youngsters, less than 66% are, either, uninformed or do not possess the prior understanding of the overall political system in BiH – and thus, one could say that even if elected or appointed, the efficiency and advocacy of those youngsters could be questionable. Adding to this point, when directly asked whether or not they as a young person are familiar with the rights and obligations of youth, almost 43% answered that they are unfamiliar.

Coming to the question of interest for participation in decision-making processes, the perception of apathy among youth is confirmed by the fact that almost 15% of youngsters who do not wish to engage with any politics-related process in the country. However, the majority of respondents, 32,4% to be exact, reported that they wish to participate in every youth-related process and close to 7% of asked youngsters are already contributing in some way. Thus, we see that the lack of motivation or interest is not the single most prominent issue among the youth, since, overall majority of questionnaires do want to participate, while almost 19% of youngsters directly stated that they do not know how to, regardless of their willingness to be involved.

Furthermore, 68,6% of surveyed youngsters have indicated that throughout the education process in which they are involved, they do not receive the necessary information that would help them improve their knowledge and participatory attitude – while underlining that this is a must. On the other hand, almost 11% have responded that they are not receiving the adequate information. Almost two third of respondents, or 59,8% to be precise, think that the high school level of education includes the appropriate ages, in which this information should be provided to youngsters. The overwhelming number of youngsters surveyed (91,1%) think that this should be systematized as a part of the curricula.

In his statement, Mr Kovačević also argued that political education should be comprehensive and unbiased so that young people would be able to “pick and choose” for themselves and learn how to form their opinion on these processes and to engage with them according to those opinions and preferences.

Adding to this systematization of political education for youngsters, 98% of young people surveyed think that practical experience through representative bodies, in schools, and in local communities increases the knowledge and motivation for participation among young people. Arguably, some provisions, such as a provision on a level of Canton Sarajevo (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) for the mandatory existence of high-school student councils, can be an example of young people being in an advisory position to the decision makers in their schools. Thus, noticing that different changes are being made with their input could potentially

prepare and motivate them to partake in other processes further on. (Law on High-School Education, "Official Gazette CS" No 23/17).

Depending on the perspective an observer takes, the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina have again been confirmed as pessimistic or just realistic towards their living standards and future opportunities with 31,7% of them stating that the current quality is unacceptably low and 58,4% of them say that it requires improving. But, to conclude the statistics on a brighter note, 85 % of youngsters would personally contribute to improvement of their living standards through decision-making.

When summarizing the findings of this survey, it is very evident that the strongest opinions on youth were regarding where, how and when young people should gain access to knowledge on politics. The answer is without a doubt that it should be done in a systematic way to prepare them best for their role as active and responsible citizens.

II.V Recommendations

- Potential of youth participation in political processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains neglected and unused. This research shows that among youth, however, there is a common understanding and wish to be empowered and nurtured. The participation of youth can only be beneficial for Bosnia and Herzegovina as whole and its society. The findings of this research can be summarized best: youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina is keen to acquire knowledge, that knowledge will be their power to (re)act to their surroundings and power to make positive changes and impacts.
- This research shows that among youth there is a perception that education and information about political system and participation in the decision making processes is lacking. This is worrying as the existing research points to information about political system and processes as the most important prerequisite for active participation in political processes.
- The specific context of political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, confirmed by this research as well, points to a need for a state-level cooperation regarding youth. This cooperation should ensure that good practices and developed strategies are in fact being implemented.
- There is a clear indication of insufficient participation of youth in two out of three entity level representative bodies existing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These two organizations face similar challenges and there is a need for stronger and persistent advocacy on youth receiving greater focus at the state level and that would involve these youth councils in a manner that would be representative.
- More should be done to address the need to make information more accessible to youth, as a first step in addressing the inability to influence important questions in a manner that would be favorable for them as youth. This is why, as a second and parallel step, organizations working with youth should advocate for the school curricula to be adapted to allow students for practical experience in political decision-making process. This should aim to encourage youth to make their opinion be seen as valuable and appreciated, so that generations are not educated with an impression that political life and decision-making are reserved for the selected few, but should fulfill an altruistic purpose of guiding the life of a society towards prosperity.

III. KOSOVO: Position Paper on Quality of Education

Prepared by Kosovar Youth Council

The Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) is one of the oldest youth non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1999 in refugees' camps in Albania and registered officially later during that year in Prishtina, Kosovo. KYC striking niche is establishment of the biggest high school's student representative structure – the Student Council of Kosovo – SCK. SCK is active since 2005 and consists of 100 representatives from 30 municipalities in Kosovo, 100 high schools. SCK is a national structure that represents all students of secondary schools of Kosovo and serves as an entity that protects students' interests and cooperates with officials, parents and professors for the benefit of entire education system.

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III.I Main highlights of the chapter

- More work still needs to be done in order to ensure a proper learning process, as well as to provide quality and necessary learning content for students.
- According to pupils' perceptions, the provision of proper learning infrastructure in schools remains one of the main challenges for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as for municipal education directories.

III.II Capturing education in Kosovo through youth lens

Education of new generations remains a priority and simultaneously a challenge for all democratic societies in the world. States, together with other stakeholders, besides guaranteeing educational rights as one of the basic human rights, they also should guaranty the quality of education and proper learning environment to ensure the correct process of education. The Republic of Kosovo is certainly part of the long list of countries which base the state development and emancipation of the population on educational quality.

Since the end of the war in 1999, especially after declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, Kosovo has adopted many laws and regulations on Youth and Education. Thus, a special attention is paid to the establishment of a strong legislative base that would regulate the functionality of the state. In this case, many laws and regulations that regulate educational services are adopted. Nevertheless, education in Kosovo continues to be fragile and not in line with needs of the market.

The top three interventions worth mentioning regarding educational policies are:

- development of the Core Curriculum (that is indulging well-developed but lacks its implementation);
- Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, and
- Education Management Information System – EMIS.

Yet, the question we should be asking is whether these interventions meet the students' needs or whether the students were or not involved during the decision making process.

Since 2001, Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) is engaged in raising the quality of education in Kosovo, mainly by taking into account students perspectives and needs, and by promoting the establishment and function of the Student Councils at schools. Our striking niche is the establishment of the Student Council of Kosova – SCK, which is a national structure that consists of 107 high schools and 107 representatives from 30 municipalities.

KYC has ensured that the results of this survey are based on students' perceptions and has identified key indicators which determine the education quality.

III.III Methodology

To prepare this country report, desk research findings and information gathered from the field prompted KYC to develop an analysis on basic criteria, which would evaluate the quality in basic categories as for example i) content and learning process, ii) quality of learning environment and iii) budget of pre-university education.

KYC has analyzed the educational legislation, curriculum framework, strategies and action plans of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), observed various international studies regarding the quality of education and has elaborated various models for determining the minimal standards in order to provide quality education.

Finally, in each of the three categories listed above (content and learning process, learning environment and budget of pre-university education), KYC has identified the main elements that contribute to the determination of the level of quality of education.

In order to produce the results, KYC has developed and shared with the structure of Student Council of Kosovo a questionnaire containing basic questions. Furthermore, while drafting this report, the working team has consulted the laws and administrative guidelines in effect, which regulate the pre-university educational field.

III.IV Content, learning process and environment

The Curriculum Framework of Kosovo highlights the importance of equipping students with 6 main competences such as Competence in communication and expression; Competence of thinking; Learning competence; Competence for life, work and the environment; Personal competence and Civic competence. These competences are aimed to be achieved by Core Curriculums for each level of education where including are also learning programs.

Learning content together with the learning process are two main factors that determine the quality of education. KYC is monitoring the continuation of the learning process for many years in high schools of Kosovo. Based on our long experience in this monitoring process, we can conclude that a general positive trend of development has been noted.

Regarding the teaching content and implementation of the teaching curriculum, students generally consider them as not very useful and think that they do not provide opportunities in solving the practical problems as well as developing life skills. The current curriculum at this phase, taking into account the discussions with teachers and students, it is being considered as not very practicable as the most of schools in Kosovo do not meet the criteria and conditions to put it in practice. On this case, one troubling issue identified in the field are the textbooks. The review process of the texts leaded by the Government is moving slowly.

A significant number of representatives of Student Council of Kosova still remain unsatisfied with the quality of the textbooks and have stated that the textbooks which they use during the learning process are one sourced (drafted by a single author) and are not updated with current developments. One concrete case in this aspect is represented by computer science books, most of which (mainly mandatory for students) offer lessons on already outdated operating systems and software.

Another identified problem is practical lessons, especially in VET schools. Although most high schools in Kosovo implement the curriculum designed for practical teaching, the whole process is accompanied with great anomalies. Due to lack of infrastructure, practical learning in schools often becomes almost impossible. Most of the schools in Kosovo face the lack of laboratories or working cabinets for practical learning, and even in some cases when infrastructure is satisfactory, students often have no access to them on grounds that they can potentially damage the materials.

Another element that affects the progress of the learning, especially in the assessment of students, is the organization of private courses held by teachers for students whom they already teach in school. This phenomenon is considered very worrying and seriously harms the process and quality of education in the country. Students consider this phenomenon as one of problems that requires immediate consideration, based on the fact that it continues to remain at its peak despite legal provisions.⁵

On the other hand and lately, students complain about the methodology of the assessment regulated by the UA 08/2016 on pupils' assessment under the curriculum framework for pre-university education of the Republic of Kosovo. This specifies that the internal assessment shall be conducted through a continuous and final assessment, whereas the continuous assessment shall be performed through formatives and summative assessment. In this case, summative assessment is divided into three periods. Most of classes in high schools consists of a large number of students per class (in most cases 40-45 students). Teachers and students have informed KYC

⁵ The Administrative Instruction - article 2, no. 40/2005 – specifies the sanctioning procedure that the education inspectorate should exercise within the position for lucrative purposes.

that the aforementioned procedure causes chaos and it is difficult to follow, given that the periods are intertwined because of the large number of the students in the classroom.

Furthermore, the provision of a safe, healthy and friendly learning environment is one of main preconditions for quality education. The environment where the learning process takes place has a significant impact on student achievements and motivation. Providing a suitable learning environment is primarily the responsibility of central and local institutions responsible for organizing and managing education systems with simultaneous participation of students and parents.

According to pupils' perceptions, the creation of proper learning environment in schools remains one of the main challenges for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as for municipal education directories. As part of the discussions held on this issue, KYC is focused on the infrastructure of school premises, the security level in schools, sanitary and hygienic conditions as well as physical and psychological health of students. These are the key factors in evaluating the quality of learning environment.

The very first most important issue for the progress of the learning process, which is directly related to the learning environment, is safety in and outside the school premises. Thus, when we talk about safety in schools, we should take into consideration a number of factors such as the quality of school premises, fences, courtyards and green spaces around the school, traffic regulation around the schools, the involvement of security companies and the prevention of other people movements through the school premises other than students and school staff.

Even though there have been⁶ numerous enhancements and repairs financed by MEST and many various donors, the classes in many schools are not within the necessary size and they often lack desks, chairs and other working tools (or they are inadequate). The quality of windows, doors and floors is not satisfactory, and classes lack libraries, cabinets, labs, gym halls and proper environment for extracurricular activities.

Another important aspect that must be addressed regarding the schools' infrastructures is the safe access for disabled students. Due to the diverse nature of disabilities, this aspect requires environmental changes as a precondition for the fulfillment of human rights. Unfortunately, most schools in Kosovo do not possess proper space and mechanisms for disabled students, such as special entrances, stairs and special toilets, thereby preventing them from being an active part of society.

⁶ Based on the "Student Council of Kosova: Position Paper on Quality of Education"

A very important aspect that guarantees quality of the learning environment is cleanliness. Students spend most of their day in school and hygienic and sanitary conditions should be at the highest level. These factors are important for the progress of the learning process, but also for students and others' health.

The last problem based on surveys conducted in field is the lack of psychologists in vast majorities of schools. Surveys show that there is a strong link between mental health and success achieved in school, therefore every elementary and high school must engage psychologists and implement awareness programs regarding their roles. However, due to legal gaps, the position of a psychologist is often filled by teachers or even individuals who may have eventually graduated in psychology, but are not licensed as psychologists.

III.V Recommendations

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and Municipal Education Departments (MED) must provide the proper infrastructure within schools for conducting practical lessons. This is a very important concern, especially for professional schools where the lack of practice hinders the practical learning process;
- Teachers should use creative and innovative teaching techniques (such as teamwork, role playing, presentations) to enable active participation of students and to stimulate critical thinking;
- MEST, MED and the education inspectorate should undertake adequate measures to stop teachers from teaching private classes, at least for their own students. In order to meet students' need, schools should provide additional classes rather than private courses for all interested students.
- School management should provide teachers with necessary equipment in order to offer theoretical learning, such as manuals, brochures, magazines, diagrams, maps and other relevant materials;
- School management and teachers should ensure that student behavior does not reflect in any way possible in the assessment of the student and not to favor students based on their economic and social status.
- National Institute for Public Health should help in assessment of the current situation in schools in Kosovo and to create minimal hygienic and sanitary standards in every school in Kosovo.
- MEST, MED and school leaders must guarantee minimal hygienic and sanitary conditions in school bathrooms.
- MEST and MED must ensure that during the renovation of existing schools and the building of the new ones to provide sufficient lighting, adequate heating systems, desks, chairs and adequate working tools, labs, libraries and halls for sport activities.
- Each school should establish the necessary mechanisms and devices that enable access and welfare of disabled students.

V. MONTENEGRO: Youth and Non-Formal Education - Guidelines for Further Development

Prepared by High School Students Union of Montenegro

Established in 2015 and is a nongovernmental and a non-profit youth association, which represents the umbrella organization of high school student parliaments. Its goal is to promote the participation of high school students in decision-making processes related to all aspects of life, encourage youth activism, and create sustainable methods of funding.

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IV.I Main highlights of the chapter

The main findings of the research are the following:

- Formal education system in Montenegro does not recognize the importance of non-formal education, and the students often do not feel supported or encouraged by their school staff to participate in the activities of non-formal education;
- High school students in Montenegro are lacking information on non-formal education activities;
- School staff and parents are not well-informed about pros of non-formal education, yet their support is essential for encouraging youth to take part in non-formal education activities;

IV.II Capturing education in Montenegro through youth lens

Non-formal education has become an indispensable part of a learning process of each one of us. However, it is not a substitute for the formal education, but it rather complements it, offering more flexibility, an individual-focused approach, more innovative and interactive learning techniques, and ensuring the continuity of learning (the so-called concept of *lifelong learning*). It is dedicated to the personal development of people, and providing them with possibilities to gain knowledge, skills and competencies that would add to what they learn in schools within the system of formal education.

High School Students Union of Montenegro is a youth organization closely working on development of non-formal education programs and their promotion among young people throughout Montenegro. The organization has been entrusted with the coordination of the Youth Centre in Podgorica⁷, thus interacting with youth on a daily basis, through organizing various seminars, conferences, roundtables, workshops, etc. in its premises, in order to encourage them to get active and take part in more non-formal education activities.

Its professional experience indicates that a high percentage of youth in Montenegro is not interested in non-formal education. This impression is additionally supported by many researches and analysis conducted in the field of educational system in Montenegro so far, stressing out that non-formal education is not sufficiently affirmed in the country and recognized by young people.

⁷ The Youth Centre in Podgorica is a cultural and educational space intended exclusively for young people aged 15-30, with the aim of encouraging them to participate actively in community life, offering them opportunities for non-formal education, and enabling them to spend their free time in a quality manner. Visit also: <http://ocpg.me/>

For instance, the research done among youth in Montenegro within the drafting process of the National Strategy for Youth 2017-2021⁸, indicated that almost half of the youth has never been included in any form of the non-formal education. Considering the fact that non-formal education should not be understood as a choice, but rather as a necessity of life - of both our personal and professional growth, the data presented is a red alarm for all subjects (both state authorities and civil society) responsible for youth policy and education.

Therefore, the High School Students Union of Montenegro conducted a mini research aiming at detecting the reasons for non-participation of young people in Montenegro in non-formal education and defining recommendations for improvement in this field. To narrow it down, we decided to focus on the population of high school students for the following several reasons:

- young people in Montenegro mostly become familiar with the concept of non-formal education in high school,
- high school students are present in each municipality of Montenegro, which enables us to analyze the needs and problems of different environments, and
- High School Students Union of Montenegro's main target group are high school students.

IV.III Methodology

During the process of the research conduction, we used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The most important research method used was the online questionnaire completed by 320 high school students from 17 municipalities of Montenegro, which was compiled in two versions, depending on whether the respondents were high school students who had or had not participated in non-formal education activities so far. The questionnaire consisted of four main parts examining:

- 1) how well high school students are informed about the opportunities for non-formal education,
- 2) if high school students are supported by their parents and school employees to participate in non-formal education activities,
- 3) the opinion of respondents on the reasons for the lack of motivation of high school students to participate in non-formal education activities, and

⁸ The National Youth Strategy 2017-2021 is a national „umbrella“ document, created to define key target outcomes regarding development of youth in Montenegro, and to contribute to strengthening an adequate institutional framework that will be able to deliver these key target outcomes. It was created by the former Administration for Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Education, with the support of United Nations in Montenegro. Visit also: <https://www.un.org.me/Library/Youth-Empowerment/1a%20Youth%20Strategy%202017-2021.pdf>

- 4) the measures that should be taken in order to accomplish some further developments in the field of non-formal education.

In addition to the questionnaire, we interviewed 30 high school students in order to examine and discuss more deeply which steps they think should be taken to recognize and promote non-formal education more in Montenegrin society, especially among young people.

Finally, 20 representatives of non-government organizations and associations (mostly youth organizations), youth clubs, and individuals working directly with youth contributed to this research, giving their suggestions and answering these two following questions:

- Why that many young people are not interested in non-formal education?
- Which concrete measures should be implemented to encourage youth to participate in non-formal education activities?

IV.IV Youth and non-formal education - reasons for non(participation)

The research showed that high school students mostly know what non-formal education is (66,2% online questionnaire respondents), but there is still one third of questionnaire respondents who were not familiar with the concept of non-formal education before reading the explanation in the introductory part of the questionnaire. The ratio of respondents who have and have not participated in non-formal education activities so far is very similar: 68,3% respondents answered they have taken part in some non-formal education activities, and 31,7% have not.

Through both online questionnaire and interviews with high school students, we aimed to find out the reasons for their (lack of) motivation for non-formal education. Namely, those online questionnaire respondents who have participated in non-formal education activities so far stressed out three main reasons why non-formal education is important:

- 1) formal education is not enough for the labor market,
- 2) non-formal education offers more opportunities for personal development, and
- 3) non-formal education is not obligatory, and youth can choose which activities to take part in.

During interviews, high school students also emphasized that the pros of non-formal education are the following:

- 1) it is always interesting and it adjusts to the interests of each individual taking part in it,
- 2) it helps young people get to know themselves better,
- 3) it offers a different perspective on life and knowledge.

On the contrary, the research indicated that high school students who have not participated in non-formal education activities before think that:

- 1) non-formal education would distract them from their formal education duties,
- 2) they do not have enough information on the opportunities for non-formal education,
- 3) non-formal education is not valued enough by relevant institutions.

Moreover, through the interviews, high school students stressed out that the system of formal education does not support or encourages students to take part in non-formal education, which demotivates them and creates fear of failure at school or disapproval by professors, and an atmosphere in which high school students decide to step out of their comfort zones and attend non-formal education activities much harder. Additionally, we wanted to hear what young people who have experienced non-formal education think why their peers are not more interested in this way of learning. They detected the following reasons:

- 1) lack of information,
- 2) lack of support from parents and school staff, and
- 3) fear that non-formal education would be a waste of free time.

Our colleagues from non-government organizations and associations (mostly youth organizations), youth clubs, and individuals working directly with youth who participated in the research have mostly the same opinion as our young respondents. They think that lack of information, an overload of school responsibilities, along with the lack of support from parents and school staff are to blame for young people not being more interested and motivated to experience non-formal education.

When we asked high school students if they think young people in Montenegro are enough informed on the opportunities for non-formal education, 54,3% of online questionnaire respondents who have experienced non-formal education answered that they are not, and 23,8% of those who have not, while 43,6% of them were undecided.

However, when they were asked to suggest ways for improvement of youth awareness of the opportunities for non-formal education, they mostly pointed out that formal education system should be more supportive of non-formal education. This means that young people should more often get information on non-formal education opportunities from school staff (especially professors), on bulletin boards at school, or via roundtables or motivational talks organized in schools, etc. Additionally, this would entail a better link between those engaged in the process of implementation of both formal and non-formal education. According to high school students interviewed, this would not only increase awareness of students on the opportunities for non-

formal education, but would help them feel encouraged and supported through the system of formal education, as well.

IV.V Support of parents

According to these two charts presenting results from online questionnaire, high school students who have experienced non-formal education feel more supported by their parents.

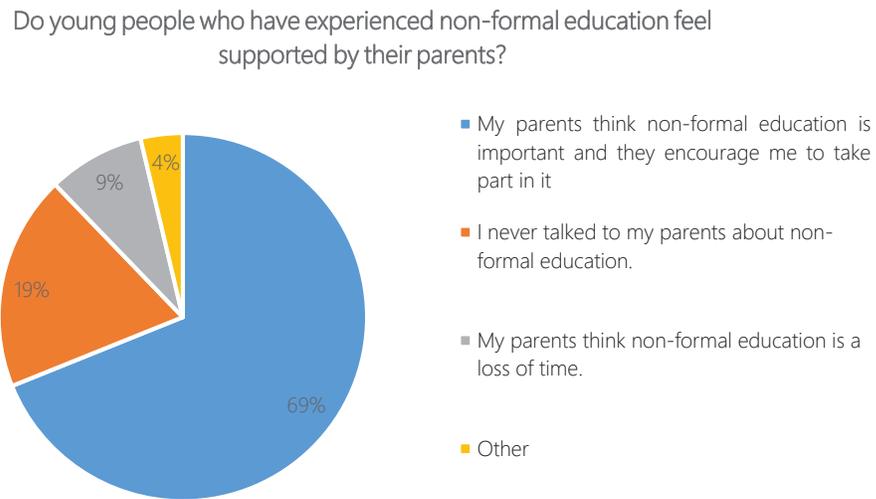


Figure 3. Do young people who have experienced non-formal education feel supported by their parents?

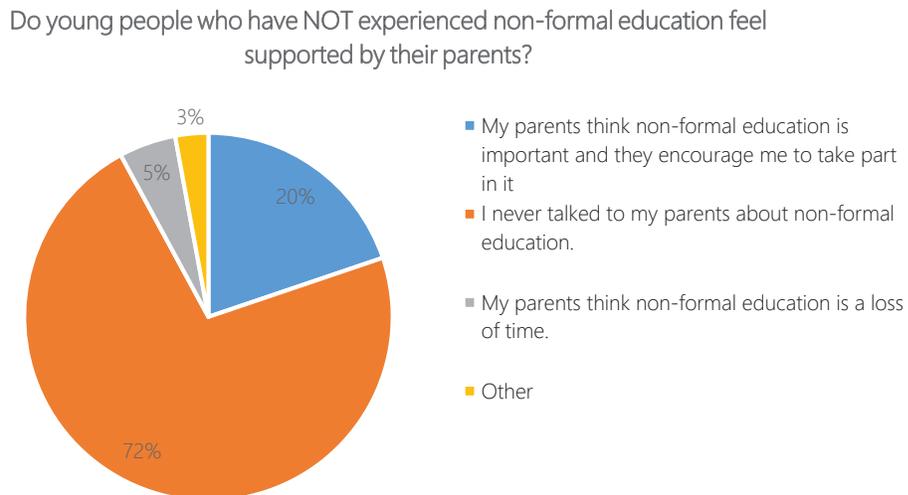


Figure 4. Do young people who have NOT experienced non-formal education feel supported by their parents?

While those who have not experienced non-formal education, mostly do not talk with their parents about it. In the field intended for "other", respondents were mainly saying that their parents think that non-formal education should be allowed only if their children accomplish good results at school, or that non-formal education is a distract from school duties. Additionally, interviews with high school students showed that parents who do not support non-formal education are afraid of the unknown. Here are some statements transmitted in the original:

- *"Parents are usually conservative and strict. When they were of our age, non-formal education did not exist, which is why they are afraid."*
- *"Duties are duties, everything else is a distraction from what must be done. I find that, like my parents, most live in fear for their children not to get out of their way, always choosing a safe road. In that way, they kill our desire to research, see and learn something new."*
- *"I have participated in various extracurricular activities which I did not receive money from, but are very important for my city and my country. My parents think it is a loss of time, and that I can get into trouble for expressing my opinion out loud. They want me to stick to the rest of the herd. Our parents simply teach us wrong. Fear is a miracle."*
- *"Old Montenegrin communist stereotypes are to blame, and the fact that everyone thinks only diploma ensures a workplace."*

IV.VI Support of school staff

After we examined the opinion of our respondents on how supportive their parents are of non-formal education, we wanted to see if high school students get necessary wind in the back from the school staff. Here are the results of online questionnaire:

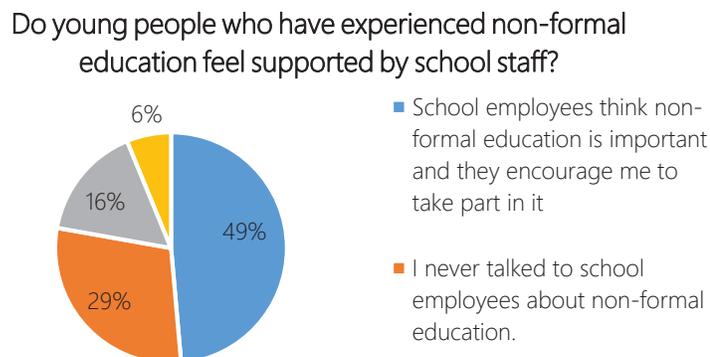


Figure 5. Do young people who have experienced non-formal education feel supported by school staff?

Results presented generally indicate the same as the ones earlier in the section "support of parents" - high school students who have participated in non-formal education activities mainly feel supported by their school employees, while those who have not have mostly never talked to school staff about non-formal education. In the field intended for "other" respondents stated that school employees, especially professors, not only do not support, but often forbid high school students to participate in non-formal education activities, stressing out it is again a distraction from school duties and convinced that high school students misuse non-formal education to skip the class.

On the other side, high school students interviewed generally think that school employees do not support or encourage their students to participate in the activities of non-formal education, which our respondents connect to the previously mentioned lack of link between formal and non-formal education. Here are some of their statements transmitted in the original:

- *"Our professors are not well-informed. When they were growing up, non-formal education did not exist, so they do not approve of anything they do not understand or are not familiar with."*
- *"My professors act as if it is only important to know what is in the book. There are hardly one or two teachers from my school who regularly involve us in various activities. Other professors behave completely uninterested in involving us in anything and often say "you do not need it, it is a waste of time", and things like that."*
- *"Professors mostly think that the non-formal education is a waste of time for a student who wants to become something in life, and in my opinion their way of thinking stems from either insufficient knowledge or an underdeveloped awareness of learning outside of formal education institutions. What is a doctor who has never done with a stethoscope? Well, he's not a doctor. Thus, even a student who only knows about school is not a student, but a "system slave". Non-formal education is one that, in most cases, enables you to learn in an interesting and interactive way and what you really want, not what the curriculum prescribes. However, there are professors who encourage us, but they are really rare."*
- *"I do not talk to school staff about non-formal education, because they are convinced that it is by no means more important than their class. They think that absenteeism is not justified because I participated in a non-formal education activity. That's why I don't usually talk to them, because I know that such an opinion would only make me angry when I see that the people who are supposed to support us in everything, do not support us at all."*

IV.VII Recommendations

After having detected the reasons for young people not being motivated enough to participate in non-formal education activities, we examined what all of our respondents think should be done in order to increase young people's interest in non-formal education. Here are their suggestions and recommendations:

- It is essential to better link formal and non-formal education system.
- Educating school staff on the importance of non-formal education, and encouraging them to support their students' participation in non-formal education activities, b) opening youth corners/clubs in schools, c) creating innovative platforms for informing students about the opportunities for non-formal education while they are at school, etc.);
- It is necessary to institutionalize non-formal education, and find ways to evaluate young people's participation in non-formal education activities by relevant institutions (e.g. by giving extra points to young people involved in the activities of non-formal education when enrolling high school or faculty, etc.);
- In order to better motivate youth for non-formal education it is important to research what they want to learn about on a regularly basis, and to adjust non-formal education activities to what they really need;
- The Ministry of Sports and Youth of Montenegro should continue working on opening youth clubs throughout the country, as they have proven to be very useful for development and promotion of non-formal education;
- The focus should also be on the parents and raising of their awareness of the importance of non-formal education, and the best possible way would be via schools again, since the results of the research showed that parents are mostly afraid that non-formal education activities would affect their child's results in school;

VI. NORTH MACEDONIA: The obstacles to youth employment

Prepared by National Youth Council of Macedonia

Founded in 30 June 2013, NYCM is a youth umbrella organization - a union of associations and foundations in the Republic of Macedonia, which gathers 50 organizations. NYCM is a nongovernmental, non-partisan and non-profit organization. Since 29 November 2015, the NYCM is part of the biggest European platform of youth organizations - the European Youth Forum (YFJ).

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V.I Main highlights of the chapter

- The high rate of unemployment was always one of the biggest issues that the country was facing and according to the latest statistics, even today the number is as high as 46,95%.
- Youth Guarantee program is not achieving its maximal results due to the high migration rates of the young people, which are foreseen as a profiting target.
- Experience shows that the career guidance to the students of the latest education level, is not very used by the students and their parents, because they are not recognizing it as something useful for their future.
- There is a lower level of access to available information on working positions for those young people coming from the rural areas.

V.II Capturing Unemployment in North Macedonia through Youth Lens

Throughout the history of Republic of North Macedonia, the high rate of unemployment was always one of the biggest issues that the country was facing. This problem is especially visible with the rate of youth unemployment, where according to the latest statistics, even today the number is as high as 46,95%. In the past, this problem was often neglected or inadequately addressed from the previous governmental structures.

Subsequently the current government implemented a policy model that was completely focused on youth unemployment and had its trial period the past year (2018). The policy named Youth Guarantee, targeted young people (15-29) by offering them opportunities for employment, continuous education and training, i.e. inclusion in some of the active programs and measures for employment.

But is this measure comprehensive enough to target the versatile youth demographic? In this report we would like to address the results that came out of this policy and focus on the obstacles that young people are facing in the employment process, especially targeting the youth with fewer possibilities and NEET (a person who "Not in Education, Employment, or Training") whose number was as high as 31.2% in 2016.

Besides the institutional barriers, we would like to see if there are other hurdles that the youth need to overcome especially of cultural, social and economic nature.

V.III Methodology

The main information in this report is gathered through detailed desk analysis, targeting all the various data and researches of the institutions and CSOs working in this field. Besides this, in order to build up the available data about the field, we had four interviews with persons directly engaged in the implementation of the active measures for unemployment, coming from different institutions and organizations which are part of the Youth Guarantee. We asked them to share their views about the youth unemployment in the country through the prism of Youth Guarantee, but also from their general perspective. Out of the interviewed, two were field workers, who shared the perceptions of the young people, especially those of the youth with fewer opportunities directly from their everyday field experience. One was a regional coordinator, as a representative from the CSO sector and one person was an employee of the Employment Service Agency representing the main institution of this field.

In regard to protect their identity the interviews are anonymous. For interpreting the information given by the one of the field workers we will use the nickname - field worker 1, for the second interviewed field worker we will use the nickname – field worker 2, for the regional coordinator we will use the nickname - regional coordinator and for the person from the Employment Service Agency we will use the nick name - the person from ESA.

V.IV Current measures

In the operative plan for active programs and measures for employment and services for the labor market for 2019 created by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the measures and programs taken towards decreasing youth unemployment are all listed. However, because this is a plan that targets not only young people, but also the whole population, the need to sort the measures on youth unemployment in two distinct categories arose:

- the first category where young unemployed people are the only target group of the measure, and
- the second category where young unemployed people are one of many target groups.

The Youth Guarantee (YG) is the biggest program taken by the Government of North Macedonia to combat the problems facing the NEET-young people (young people who are not in employment, education or training). The main objective of the YG is to secure an offer for employment, continued education and training for young people between the age of 15 and 29 in period of four months. The planned scope of the YG in the whole country is around 9,500 people. Additionally, the YG provides stimulations for employing young people with disabilities. According to the operative plan, the YG has a budget of around 125,000 euros.

Apprenticeship is a measure towards young people (to the age of 34) with minimal finished primary education who have not had a job in the field they studied. The measure provides a monthly allowance of around 150 euros for a period of three months in which the apprentice will learn practical skills in the field studied. The measure encompasses 1,625 people. For this measure around 730,000 euros are set aside.

Introductory training for IT skills (on line) has an objective of satisfying the needs for basic IT skills of unemployed young people (to the age of 34) with finished secondary education as a minimal requirement. The measure is set to cover 1,000 people of which half will gain skills in Microsoft Technology Associate, while the other half in ADOBE. The budget is 63,000 euros.

Training for advanced IT skills equips 133 unemployed young people (to the age of 34) with advanced IT skills. The budget for this measure is 275,000 euros.

Pilot Trainings for trending digital skills (with co-funding) provide unemployed young people (to the age of 29) with trending digital skills in order to increase their chances of employment. 130 unemployed young people, of which 20 with disabilities are planned to attend the training. 50 of them will gain skills in digital marketing, 50 in information modeling and business intelligence and 30 in web-design. Around 125,000 euros are planned for this measure.

Trainings for advanced IT skills (with co-funding) is set to equip 60 unemployed young people (to the age of 34) with advanced IT skills which will increase their chances of future employment. For this measure, approximately 60,000 euros will be spent.

The aforementioned programs and measures fall into the first category set by us, i.e. where the only target groups are young people. The following programs and measures are in the second category. Support for self-employment (entrepreneurship) is an inter-institutional program providing unemployed people with lump-sum grants in order to start their own business i.e. limited company. The other target groups except unemployed youth are unemployed people with disabilities, unemployed women from marginalized groups and other unemployed. 1,070 will receive the grants which can range from 4,000 euros to 5,000 euros or 10,000 euros if two people from the target groups start their own company. Another potential advantage for young people is that if the people who started their own company employ a person below the age of 29 must employ them for 12 months, while if they employ a person above 29 must employ them for 9 months. The total budget for this program is 6,000,000 euros.

Subsidy for salaries is a measure for employing unemployed people which face difficulties in the labor market. Among other marginalized people, people older than 50 years and long-term unemployed people, the group of people not older than 29 is also included. The measure is set

to provide a monthly subsidy worth around 300 euros for a period of 3, 6 or 12 months. If the employer uses the subsidy, (s)he will have to employ the employee:

- for 9 months, if they use the three-month subsidy;
- for 18 months, if they use the six-months subsidy and
- for 30 months, if they use the twelve-month subsidy.

Also, the measure will encompass 1000 people, on a 3,800,000 euros budget.

Employment and growth of companies. This measure is meant to give support in creating new jobs in micro, small and medium sized companies, social business and associations of citizens. The measure will provide lump-sum grants for employers who will employ unemployed person, with priority given to young people (to the age of 29) and users of the guaranteed minimal help. Another advantage for young people is that the lump sum grant for employing a young person is around 2,500 euros, while the grant for employing a person older than 29, is 1,500 euros. In addition, the employer has to keep a young person in the workplace for minimum 12 months, while a person older than 29 has to be kept for minimum 9 months. The budget for this measure is approximately 1,270,000 euros. 497 people will be employed, according to the operative plan.

Among other programs and measures, two stand out, especially for young people:

- Trainings “Preparation for employment and work” are trainings, which last for multiple days for unemployed young people (to the age of 29). They consist of the following modules: introductory module, personal development, job-seeking skills, communication skills, proper behavior at the work place, team work and leadership, safety, rights and duties at work and financial skills. The trainings will be taught in manner and with methods, close to young people.
- The Communication plan. Unemployed young people (to the age of 29), especially those with innovative ideas are in the center of attention of the communication plan, which has as an objective, promotion of the programs and measures and targeting a larger group of potential users.

The afore-mentioned programs and measures were all written down in the operative plan of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, which had youth as the only, or one of many target groups.

V.V Youth Guarantee and the youth unemployment

In the previous chapter we briefly mentioned each of the measure individually, but in this chapter, we want to put our main focus on the measure that specifically target youth unemployment – Youth Guarantee.

Regarding the youth (un)employment within the country, the Youth Guarantee is the program that is focused on tackling the youth unemployment and increasing the number of the people who will get employment, requalification, traineeship or self-employment.

NYCM has analyzed the information gathered from the interviews with four crucial stakeholders. This section aims to provide a conclusive report of the information from these interviews.

What is specific for the Youth Guarantee as such, is that the eligible persons for the program are all those young people (15-29) who belong in the category of NEET (neither in education, employment or training) and who were not previously registered in the centers of employment within the Employment Service Agency (ESA). YG is indeed a cross sectoral policy that engages many institutions and organizations for its implementation.

In the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Macedonia are encompassed the field work activities as part of the outreach activities. Within the outreach activities the field workers are mapping the young persons who are eligible for the Youth guarantee, give them the relevant information how to enter the program and assist them during the process of registration. The National Youth Council of Macedonia together with the relevant partner organizations is responsible for the implementation of the field activities.

The piloting of the Youth Guarantee started in 2018 in three centers: City of Skopje, Strumica and Gostivar. Regarding the roots of the Youth Guarantee, the person from ESA explained that they have further included the Youth Guarantee within the Economic Reform Program aiming to implement and adapt the Youth Guarantee to the conditions within the country.

The employed persons from ESA were trained by their co-workers about the Youth Guarantee and 2 persons per relevant centers were chosen to work on the Youth Guarantee. (the person from ESA) Actually, these persons are the career counselors who, after the registration of the young persons, do the profiling and their individual plan for employment.

From 2019, the Youth Guarantee is widened to the entire territory of the country with a specific focus of the field activities in the Northeast region, Polog region, Southwest region and the municipalities Gazi Baba, Shuto Orizari and Strumica. The young people from these places have the opportunity to register in the centers of employment and to use any of the available active measures that is appropriate for them.

The entire implementation of the Youth Guarantee requires the continuous communication among the relevant stakeholders. Regarding the field activities, the field workers had a constant daily communication with the career counselors for the registration of the eligible youth for the Youth Guarantee and for their further inclusion within the program. In line with the cooperation between the field workers and the career counselors from the centers of employment, the communication was good, but the experience shows that the increased information among all the employed persons about the Youth Guarantee is desirable.

After the registration within the ESAs` centers of employment, the young people were undergoing the process of profiling and creating an individual plan for employment and have the opportunity to enter in some of the active measures. Among the young people, the most popular measures were the traineeship and self-employment.

As long as there are more active measures, the enthusiasm and the interest of the young people to register within the centers of employment is higher, especially when the most popular measures are opened. The active measures are seen as a good opportunity for the young people to get requalification, improve their skills and practical knowledge and to become more competitive on the labor market. Also, the young people who will enter the Youth Guarantee will have the chance to get employment.

The number of active measures depends from the budget that will be allocated. Even if it is limited, the budget for the active measures has increased progressively. However, this number of active measures is not enough for encompassing all the young persons who showed interest to use them, because there are more interested people than the available active measures.

This discrepancy is a bit demotivating for the young people because the measures are filled very quickly after their announcement and not all of them can enter the desirable measure. Because of the quick fulfillment of the measures, it happens that in a time period between the announcements of two measures, the young people cannot enter immediately in a measure.

The limited number of active measures shows that the active measures have an impact on the limited number of people who are able to benefit them. However, the impact that the measures have on the beneficiaries, is visible. Moreover, within the centers of employment the career counselors offer additional services that are going in line with learning how to write a CV and career counseling.

The specificity of the Youth Guarantee is that the entire program is focused on those NEET young people who are not registered in the centers of employment. These people are usually the ones who are inactive and long-term unemployed and struggle to find a job. Normally, it is not easy to find the NEETs, because from many of the mapped young people, only few are suitable for the Youth Guarantee. Additionally, due to the reason that these young people are long term unemployed, it is a challenge to motivate them to register in the centers of employment and to have the opportunity to benefit from the active measures.

The socio-political context of the country also has an influence on the program. The migration of the young people is affecting the program in a way that many of the people who are suitable for the Youth Guarantee have left the country. Furthermore, because of their previous experiences

with the institutions and the frequent political changes, the mistrust towards the institutions is visible among the young people. Hence, many of them are not believing that they will get a service from the institutions. However, through the offered support and the positive examples of the Youth Guarantee, the field workers are motivating the young people to become a part of the program.

The challenges for inclusion of the young people on the labor market are present in general, but they also exist with regard to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities as a specific group. Namely, besides the active measures, the institutions are making an effort to stimulate and to provide them with the career guidance. The Employment Service Agency, together with some schools is implementing the career guidance to the students of the latest education level. The previous experience shows that this tool is not very used by the students and their parents, because they are not recognizing it as something useful for their future.

Similarly, the Employment Service Agency in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social policy are having informative sessions for the students of the four universities within the country, aiming to equip them with knowledge about the labor market.

The access to the relevant activities and opened working positions is a key factor for the future employment. The access to information aspect is pointed out also by the regional coordinator. The potential reasons for the challenges that persons with fewer opportunities face aiming to get employed or to continue their education, were shared by the regional coordinator:

"[...] They are maybe not informed on what they can do or where to continue, or [they] do not know where to find those sources [...]"

The accessibility of the relevant activities and working positions are not very visible for those young people who are coming from the rural areas. The largest number of job opportunities are placed in the central part of the urban areas. Because of the (dis)connectivity aspects, the young people from the rural areas working in the central urban parts, have a clear difficulty to go to their work and bear rent costs for the eventual accommodation nearby.

Among the young people with less opportunities are the ones who have a disability or are living in families with lower income and financial obstacles too. They have a real problem to access the centers of employment and to get the job as well. For example, the persons with wheelchair cannot independently access the center of employment and are not easily employable. The ones who are living in families with lower income have an access problem to the centers of employment, because of the transportation costs which are expensive to be sustained.

V.VI Recommendations

The Youth Guarantee program is one of the most popular programs that is providing services for activation of the young people in the labor market. Through field activities youngsters are provided information on how to activate themselves on the labor market and to get the possibility to use the available active measures, as well as assistance during the process of registration in ESA and in this way increase the youth accessibility to the ESAs` services. By including the young persons in some of the measures or the services of ESA, the number of inactive NEET persons has decreased.

However, there are some limitations in the entire process of YG that could be addressed through the following recommendation:

- There should be invested a larger amount of money in the active measures, because the number of the active measures is not proportional to the interest of the youth, i.e. the demand is much higher than the supply.
- Besides the Youth Guarantee, which has the field activities, all other services should be promoted more.
- There should be increased awareness of the young people about the active measures and the significance of the career guidance within the schools and the centers of employment.
- Improving the accessibility of the centers of employment for young people with fewer opportunities and increasing the awareness for their faster employment. This can be achieved by state-provided transportation services or by moving the centers of employment in the digital space to simplify accessibility to the youth.
- Improvement of the accessibility of the center of employment for those young people who are living in families with low income and financial obstacles. Social workers should directly inform the affected families, especially the children of such surroundings.
- Frequent meetings between the active employment seekers and the career counselors aiming to increase the trust in the institutions and to change the perception of the persons that they can rely on the ESA and getting the counselors support in finding the appropriate job.

VII. SERBIA: Advancing Youth Political Participation in Serbia

Prepared by National Youth Council of Serbia

Founded in 12 March 2011, KOMS is the highest independent representative body of youth in Serbia. KOMS was founded and joined by youth organizations (organizations of young people, which work with youth, for youth, and in the interest of youth). Its general objective is to strengthen negotiation positions of youth in relation to the State, improve the mechanisms for the participation of youth in decision-making, and provide youth with relevant information.

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VI.I Main highlights of the chapter

- This report points to the existence of a low degree of political youth participation and it warns about the distrust of young people in political actors and institutions showing that political stakeholders have alienated from young people, programme-wise. Autonomous and independent youth wings of political parties and strong institutional mechanisms that will support youth participation are needed.
- Young people are minimally interested in engaging in politics and political developments. One third of young people in the Republic of Serbia never vote. 70% of young people think that political parties and candidates do not address youth issues in campaigns and programmes.
- Education and information about the importance of civic and political education is perceived as crucial for the advancement of youth political participation.
- Young people in Serbia generally distinguish parties from movements and feel a bit more supportive of other forms of political participation. Political parties are not and should not be the only choice for political engagement, as protests and single-issue movements are emerging world-wide as the new forms of youth political participation.

VI.II Capturing participation in Serbia through youth lens

Following the Western Balkan Youth Cooperation Platform Joint Statement of 2018 and its major recommendations, in particular the one referring to the need to significantly engage young people in decision-making processes, KOMS has prepared a country research report on the topic – Advancing Youth Political Participation in Serbia.

Political participation can be defined as a voluntary process whereas individuals and social groups initiate, influence decision-making and contribute to the implementation of public policies. Political participation and active citizenship are crucial elements of a democratic political culture in every society. That is the reason why it is necessary to motivate young people to participate in decision-making processes, having in mind that youth as a specific societal group has specific requests that should be considered in the policy making process.

Youth political participation has been recognized as important field of work within key document in the field of youth in Serbia – National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 – 2025. *Supporting the programmes that motivate young women and men to participate in political life and electoral processes* is one of the foreseen activities provisioned by the Strategy within the strategic

goal: Active participation of young women and men in society⁹. This intention was also confirmed with the adoption of new Action Plan for the implementation of National Youth Strategy for the period from 2018 to 2020. Support to programmes aimed at incentivizing young women and men to participate in political life and the electoral process has been guaranteed by the Action Plan and 9.075.000,00 RSD have been allocated for this specific activity¹⁰.

Different researches and public opinion pools which have been conducted in Serbia so far have confirmed the decline of youth voter turnout. Social distrust is present and young people are reluctant to actively engage in the change of political and social climate. This distrust and alienation of young people make them opt out of formal political processes such as voting and engagement with political parties. Poor rates are noted at national level and similar trends are to be found at local assemblies as well. Having that in mind, it is important to follow trends about youth participation in political life in the Republic of Serbia, political participation of young people, but also the relationship of political subjects and political institutions towards young people and vice versa.

Young people in Serbia are underrepresented in the National Assembly, the most representative body at the national level. Slightly more than 16% of the total population are represented by 4 Members of the Parliament, which is only 1.6% of the total number of representatives. If we analyze electoral lists that ran in the last parliamentary elections back in 2016, we can see that 18.3% of the candidates that ran for the parliament were aged from 18 until 30 years, which is the age range of young people in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Youth in the Republic of Serbia¹¹. Their low success rate is indicative of the fact that young people do not take significant role within their parties and do not get a high place on the electoral lists once they get the chance to run for the parliament and get the nomination from their political parties. Compared to previous assembly's convocations, the declining trend of young people as members of the parliament is noticed, the highest percentage was in 2008 - 8.8%.¹²

At the moment there is not any Minister nor a Government member who qualifies as young by the Law on Youth. Based on the provision of the Law on free Access to Information of Public

⁹ National Youth Strategy for the period 2015 – 2025, Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, page 25; available in English: <https://www.mos.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/Nacionalna%20strategija%20za%20mlade%20-%20ENG.pdf>

¹⁰ Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period 2018 – 2020, Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, pages 31 and 32; available in English: <https://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/sport/inspekcija/Action%20plan%20for%20the%20implementation%20of%20the%20National%20Youth%20Strategy%202018-2020.pdf>

¹¹ 2 Republic Electoral Commission, Rodna i starosna struktura kandidata za narodne poslanike Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije, 2016. available at: <http://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/doc/izbori2016/Rodna%20i%20starosna%20struktura%20kandidata%20za%20poslanike%20Narodne%20skupstine-24.%20April%202016.pdf>

¹² National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia; available at: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-.871.html>

Importance, KOMS has sent an inquiry on how many young assistant ministers and state secretaries are currently within the Government, however, such information was not provided by the authorities. When it comes to the highest functions and positions at local level and local governments, only two mayors are considered to be young in municipalities of Bački Petrovac and Požega¹³.

2020 will be an election year in Serbia at all levels – national, provincial and local. The findings of this report will be utilized for future work of youth organizations active in the field of youth participation and their programme design. A research report focuses on identifying current trends, reasons for lack of political interest and apathy among young people and offers recommendations for relevant stakeholders on advancing youth political rights and boost of youth political participation for young people.

VI.III Methodology

Several research techniques were used to collect information and relevant data on the research topic. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in gathering relevant information on youth political participation and relations of youth and political actors. Desk Research was used to examine normative framework and current trends in the Republic of Serbia: relevant documents, available institutions' data, data collected by institutions that are not published based on the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, as well as existing researches and secondary sources.

The focus group method, as a research technique that examines participants' different attitudes and behaviors, was also used to gather data on a relevant topic. Focus groups with relevant subjects were used for qualitative research on specific topics, with selected participants (representatives of youth organizations, organizations for youth, prominent individuals, members of youth wings of political parties, representatives of targeted expert organizations). Questionnaire for the realization of focus group was prepared as a guide for the conversation. This report summarizes the findings of two focus groups held in June:

1. Youth Participation in the Civil Sector - Activism and Social Change (representatives of targeted civic organizations);
2. Youth Political Participation (political parties, political movements, protest organizers; civic organizations).

¹³ Stojanović Boban, 2019, Alternative Report on the Position and Needs of Young People in the Republic of Serbia, National Youth Council of Serbia, page 76

Two sets of conclusions from panels and working groups that gathered relevant representatives at two events in the organization of KOMS also enriched the findings of those two focus groups and contributed to having qualitative recommendations and conclusions.

Research instrument used for the quantitative part of the research was questionnaire. Research technique/data collection technique was an online survey that targeted population of young people from 15 to 30 years (in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Youth of the Republic of Serbia). Two online surveys were conducted: online questionnaire – that had set of questions relevant for this topic incorporated in a larger KOMS' Research – Alternative Report on the Position and Needs of Young People in Serbia; its questionnaire is been adjusted and amended to correspond the needs of this research. Research realization period was from May 21 until July 5, 2019 by 1238 young people and it combined open and closed questions (multiple choice, multiple answer, scales). This survey was also supported by another online questionnaire that got a bit more into details on the relations between young voters and political subjects. This survey offered young people possibility to elaborate more on the reasons behind their attitudes toward youth participation.

VI.IV Advancing Youth Political Participation in Serbia

Interest in political participation

Although aware of different forms of political participation (activism in general or in political parties, movements, individual or collective spontaneous actions of citizens, civically engaged writing, participation at the elections, etc.), young people are minimally interested in engaging in politics and political developments. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - in general not interested, 5 - very interested), average response of young people who participated in KOMS' survey was 3.18. Highest grades 4 and 5 gave a combined 45.51% of the respondents, while not at all interested in politics (grade 1) gave almost one in five young person (18.6%). If the sample is stratified, we notice that young men are more interested in political developments in relation to young women (average grade 3.4 versus 3.0). Young people in their twenties are more interested with an average grade of 3.3 compared to the youngest generation aged from 15 to 19, with an average grade of 3.0. Differences between different regions are not being evident - slightly more interest in politics are displayed by young people from the Belgrade region (3,3) compared to other territory units (with grades from 3,1-3,2).

However, the situation is quite different regarding educational background of survey's correspondents. Young people with higher education are significantly more interested in the political events compared to young people who have secondary education. Comparing the findings from the previous year, the number of young people who are not interested in politics

has increased by more than 8%. The number of young people interested in politics is declining yearly¹⁴.

Apathy is partly caused by belief that young people have no influence on political processes and decisions.

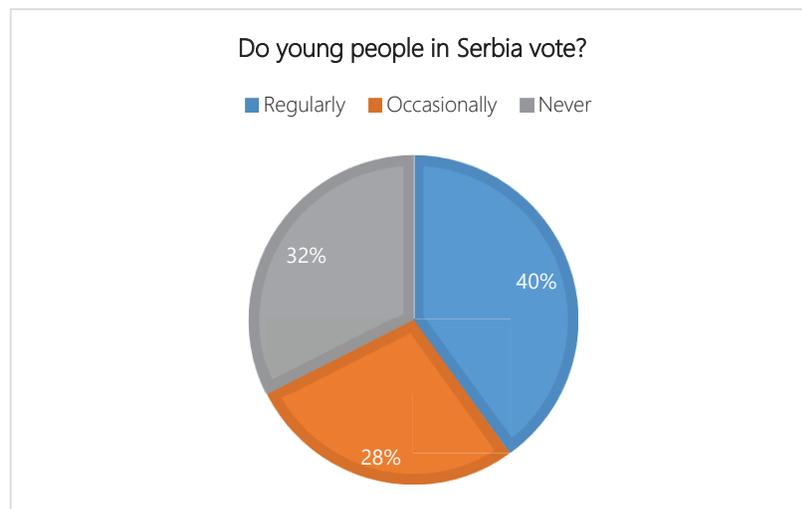


Figure 6. Do young people in Serbia vote?

40% of young people are regularly voting, 27.6% of young people vote occasionally and 32.4% of young people never vote. Influence on political processes and decision is evaluated as very low. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 - I have no influence at all; 5 - I have a significant influence on political processes and decisions), the average response of the respondents is 1.54.

Three key reasons contributing to these poor rates of participation were identified as:

- lack of trust in key political stakeholders: political parties and their leaders, state institutions and decision-makers; young people consider all politicians the same and that they do not work in the interest of the citizens;
- political parties' programmes and campaigns do not recognize youth relevant issues nor do they effectively target problems and offer solutions to the issues young people are concerned about; leading to not having anyone to vote for;
- civic education within formal education is ineffective in transmitting knowledge on political and electoral system and in developing civic awareness and adequate skills to access information.

¹⁴ As analyzed in two KOMS' Alternative Reports on the Position and Needs of Young People in 2017 and 2018.

As a new potential for future participation of young people, world-wide trend of digital participation has been brought to discussion as a potential way of advancing youth political participation. A lot of advancement and attention is being invested in the online world, internet and social media in particular, because the online sphere provides young people with free of charge, creative space where they can use to express and research their interests. However, some concerns were highlighted in particular with regards to the fact that internet sometimes creates passive citizens rather than activists on the field by creating the impression that the problem has been solved if it is a matter of discussion on the social media.

The potential of the Internet and social media in overcoming gaps in political education and information is even more significant bearing in mind that this is predominant source of information to young people. Young people are mostly informed about politics and political events through the Internet and social networks (62.6%). Finding the most suitable communication channels is of highest importance, having in mind that: in comparison with previous year, significantly smaller number of young people responded that they follows electoral activities and campaigns on a daily basis (from 22% in 2017 to 10% in 2019), while there is a significantly higher number of young people who replied that they do not follow at all (from 11,5% in 2017 to 30% in 2019¹⁵).

Since some countries have lowered voting age as a mean to establish higher turnout rates in the future, this possibility has also been analysed in the Serbian context. When it comes to the potential change of electoral system that will lower the voting age to 16, only one third of young people in Serbia supports this initiative. Supporters of this initiative believe that introducing lower voting age creates lifelong voting habits, while those against believe that young people in that age do not have adequate knowledge nor information to make their decision independently and rationally. It was concluded that young people in schools should be further educated and that curricula of the subjects within formal education - Civic Education, Constitution and Citizens' Rights and Sociology should be adjusted to offer adequate political education to youngest generations. It was also pointed out that schools should be prone to modernization of teaching and opened to new methods of teaching and learning, based within non-formal education.

Political parties and young politicians

Lower voting turnouts of young people lead to the situation where political parties and coalition are not perceiving young people as an important part of the electorate during the election campaigns. As stated previously, that only increases the lack of trust in politics and political actors, including in those institutions and organizations that were created with the aim of contributing to better position of young people in the society. The research showed that in Serbia about 70% of

¹⁵ Stojanović Boban, 2019, Alternative Report on the Position and Needs of Young People in the Republic of Serbia, National Youth Council of Serbia, page 87

young people think that parties and candidates do not address youth issues in campaigns. When asked what are the issues that should be covered by programmes of political parties, young people listed unemployment, education, discrimination, corruption and lack of accountability, environment issues, brain drain and migration of young people, but also some specific local challenges pertinent to their respective local communities – infrastructure issues, lack of cultural content in smaller municipalities and rural areas, irregular bus schedules, the need for accessible local transportation and accessible youth spaces, etc. Young people stressed that the way of communication between party officials and young people is inadequate and that more space for voicing up the concerns of young people should be given to them.

One of the possible solutions in overcoming the traditional distrust between party officials and young people is by having strong youth leaders within party structures. However, young people believe that primary motivation for the membership in a political party is getting a job or some other career advancement rather than desire to resolve the pertinent issues society is faced with. Young people do not see parties as catalysts for the change. This statement is also supported by those young people who are enrolled in the work of political parties.

With regards to the position of young people within the political parties, some young members of parties emphasize that young people do have the real opportunity to influence decision-making. However, the low percentage of young people on electoral lists combined with the low position they are holding in cases when they do succeed to be on the lists, shows us that young people are often overlooked as political candidates. Dependence and influence of senior party officials is perceived as one of the key reasons for lack of political trust, and perception that youth leaders as well as youth wings of political parties are not the real representatives of young people and their interests.

(New) forms of political participation – going beyond political parties

Political participation mechanisms are perceived to be much broader than simple election participation and engagement with the political parties. Workshops and focus groups organized for the research purposes concluded that there are different forms of political participation available to young people nowadays, which in some cases are proven to be more successful than traditional ones, like social movements, social campaigns and single-issue movements, individual or collective spontaneous actions of citizens, protests, etc. Some of the participants stated that membership in a civil society organization and non-formal movement is to be considered as political engagement and activism as well as individual endeavors aimed at influencing decision-making and the change of the societal norms and practices.

Young people in Serbia generally distinguish parties from movements and feel a bit more supportive of some movements precisely because of their alienation from parties. Protest as a

way of expression of a political attitude has been practiced recently by the young people in particular, following the presidential elections in 2017 and the one against dictatorship that started in late 2018 and is still been active. Even the youngest generation of young people, elementary and high school students, protested and marched in 2019 in defense of their rights. Their protests were organized via social media networks, in particular via Instagram.

Although above-mentioned initiatives and protests have not finished with major success due to various reasons, they are indicative of the fact that young people feel that their interests are not being adequately represented and that they feel the urge to protect their rights when they are endangered. Some participants argued that young people want to change the system as such, and see protests as a mechanism in achieving that.

VI.V Recommendations

- Improve the curricula of key school subjects that tackle civic education and political participation. Educate young people from early ages to participate actively in the society and influence decision-making for matters that concern them the most.
- Enable significant influence of young people on decision making. Contribute to the development of democratic and participatory culture among young people, education and informing on democracy, democratic values, and political, economic, social and cultural rights.
- Offer non-formal extracurricular activities and programmes to young people on political participation and activism. Educate young people (both young voters and politicians) on meaningful political participation; work on the improvement of specific set of skills in areas such as media and digital literacy. Use digital media and online space to contribute to the development of direct democracy and increased turnouts.
- Increase the autonomy and independence of youth wings of political parties. Support inter-parties' discussions, debates and cooperation on resolving issues and challenges young people are facing.
- Encourage young politicians to engage more with their peers, propose new ideas and suggestions for the improvement of the position of youth instead of following the same patterns of their political leaders. Offer capacity building programmes, opportunities and exchanges should be to young political party members.
- Support political parties to create youth agenda within their respective party programmes and to recognize young people as important stakeholder and audience for their electoral campaigns. Support other forms of political participation.
- Create institutional mechanisms that will guarantee youth agenda and significant number of young people at the highest position in decision making:
 - form a Committee on Youth within the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and on the local levels of self-governance;
 - form a Youth Caucus at the National Assembly, gathering young members of parliament, other MPs interested for youth issues, members of youth wings of political parties and youth organizations in order to mainstream youth issues in the work of the Assembly. Follow similar mechanisms at the local level as well.

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