



**Citizen Association Youth Educational Forum**

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## Youth Educational Forum's Operational Strategy

2020-2023

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## **1. Social Context of the Operation of the Organization**

### **Youth Priorities and Challenges**

Through various projects and initiatives, youth organizations on both local and national level try to improve the situation of youth in the country, however, they often fail to levy support and cooperation from other institutional actors. At the same time, in past years, one cannot see visible action and impact of measures and mechanisms adopted by the State as to improve social and economic inclusion of youth. This analysis reviews the predicament of youth in society in several policy areas: education, youth unemployment, migration, youth participation in decision-making and youth inclusion.

### **Education**

For decades, education in the Republic of North Macedonia has been coping with the flaws in the quality of teaching, accessing basic learning conditions, inconsistent educational policies and unskilled teaching staff that negatively impact the quality of education. The situation is additionally aggravated by the fact that the State invests limited resources in improving the quality of the educational process on all levels. Consequently, such a situation directly affects students in primary, secondary and higher education. The research of World Bank (2019) shows that every child born today in the Republic of North Macedonia will be only a 53% productive adult compared to a child with fully fledged education. Furthermore, the results show that 70% of the students have below basic level knowledge in Mathematics, whereas in terms of reading skills, two-thirds of the 15-year old students in North Macedonia are functionally illiterate.

According to the research performed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2019), young people in North Macedonia have high aspirations for their education (more than 80% strive to acquire an university degree), but almost half are dissatisfied with the quality of education in the country.

Important to note is the fact that the situation in field of education deteriorated with the occurrence of the pandemic as the institutions failed to respond to the challenges faced by the educational system. Many students did not have learning devices and faced a dysfunctional educational system unadjusted to the digital ways of teaching and learning, with teachers lacking knowledge to teach on-line. This reality will leave lasting consequences to an entire generation of young people who lacked access to quality education, while in some rural areas students had no access to education at all during the crisis.

## **Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment is one of the key problems affecting young people in the Republic of North Macedonia. Youth unemployment rate is one of the highest in Europe (36%), twice as high as the general unemployment rate in the country (17.5%) (State Statistical Office, 2019). In some municipalities, youth unemployment rate is 80% (Reaktor – Research in Action, 2012). The current worldwide findings warn that high level of youth unemployment has far-reaching consequences to the well-being of young people. This situation was significantly aggravated with the occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic whereby a large number of young people lost their jobs.

## **Migration**

One of the main problems of Macedonian society is youth migration. Although no reliable brain-drain data exists, international studies and surveys provide an insight into this frightful situation. The last World Bank report titled “Migration and Brain-Drain in Europe and Central Asia” indicates that one fourth of the Macedonian population (approximately 500.000 inhabitants) has already left the country (World Bank, 2019). According to the same report, the immigration of highly-trained workers from North Macedonia is one of the highest on the Balkans and in Eastern Europe, and almost 40% of those who have migrated have completed higher education. A research of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2019) shows that the main reason for the majority young people (48.30%) of the respondents leave the country in order to improve their living standard, 17.50% leave for higher salaries, 11.30% for better employment opportunities and 7.80% for better education.

## **Youth Participation in Decision-Making**

The first free and democratic elections for student representatives of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University took place in 2019. Although elections were organized on almost all universities in the country, information on youth participation in decision-making on university level does not exist. Important to note is that the Law on Secondary Education has not been revised yet and does not regulate high school participation in decision-making processes through the organization of high school communities. In addition, local youth councils are not operational and do not reflect youth municipal needs. Finally, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation research (2019) showed that 61% of the young people believe that politicians don't care about their opinions, whereas 73% believe they should have more opportunities for raising their voice in politics.

## **Youth Inclusion**

Inclusive systems enable better quality education for all and play a major role in overcoming discriminatory practices among youth. Inclusive curricula avoid binary narratives, bearing in mind the contribution of marginalized and minority groups in the local environment and adjusting the curricula to the learning styles of children with special educational needs. These systems are left out from the Macedonian educational system thereby negatively reflecting young people with disabilities. In order to improve the situation in the country, significant resources need to be invested in teacher and staff training: infrastructure, improved teaching materials and equipment and revised curricula leading to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

## **2. Vision, Mission and Strategic Priorities**

### **YEF Vision**

Young people are active citizens in a free democratic and integrated society with good quality education.

### **YEF Mission**

Youth Educational Forum (YEF) is a youth community enabling debate capacity-building, legal literacy, personal and professional skills; research and policy analysis, securing media space and information, supporting activism, self-organization and participation for social development of young people.

### **YEF Strategic priorities:**

P1. Contemporary education for the prosperity of young people

P2. Engaged and self-organized young people influencing the improvement of society

P3. Informed young people who think critically and express themselves freely

P4. Advanced social status of young people by means of good quality youth and educational policies

## **P1. Contemporary education for the prosperity of young people**

In the period 2020-2023 YEF will work towards **recognizing and appreciating informal education by the institutions**. With that in mind, YEF will work to promote and adapt formal education by means of informal educational actions through organizing teacher and staff training for the purpose of sharing informal education practices, including positive experience from day-to-day work of these persons. With campaigns, events and activities, YEF will work to promote benefits from the introduction of informal education. In this respect, it is important for YEF to partner with the schools and in general with the institutions competent for educational policies and processes, but even more important and more significant is the partnership with youth-related bodies and structures.

By creating an online platform for informal learning and peer education, YEF will make structuring and digitalization of informal educational content and possible along with better accessibility for interested high-school students. Youth trainers will be trained on online education and mentorship. In this respect, aiming towards **increasing the level of knowledge of young people by means of technology and contemporary methods** - which is also safe in view of the Covid-19 crisis - YEF will enable the creation of new digital and educational contents, and open space for youth involvement and interaction at the same time.

The Debate Programme will work towards developing critical thinking in formal education by including contents of the debate curriculum within project activities, elective subjects and “reading and writing” classes. In order to **advance the quality of formal education**, apart from including elements of the debate curriculum, YEF will revisit the current contents for formal education development.

In the next years in the field of youth unemployment, the organization will work to **improve the conditions and competitiveness of young people on the labour market**, initially by building employability skills and their involvement in entrepreneurship, not only by designing new modules, but also by ongoing advocacy for quality youth employment policies. In addition, YEF will connect youth with the business community, local self-government and educational institutions as to influence the promotion of youth employment climate. At the moment, a gap between educational programmes and labour market needs persists, and that is why YEF will address the issue through its activities.

## **P2. Engaged and self-organized young people influencing the improvement of society**

Young people in our country believe that it is not their personal obligation to make a change to improve their primary environment. For the purpose of keeping young people active in their communities, YEF through the Youth Clubs will secure support and mentorship of youth actions, campaigns and initiatives. The goal of YEF youth club activities is to create conditions to support youth integration and inclusion and to encourage young people to use youth activism as means of addressing specific youth issues. In this regard, by engaging its membership in digital and performing arts, YEF will encourage young people to be vocal, involved and visible.

In an environment where the legal framework recognizes youth bodies as a form of youth representation form for the very first time, YEF will contribute in the democratic establishment of such bodies. By means of training, consultancy, joint actions and performance monitoring, the organization will support the processes of establishing the bodies, promoting and monitoring their operation. Primarily, but not reduced to the activities of the Research, Analysis and Youth and Educational Policymaking Programme, YEF will advocate for **Democratic independent representative bodies that represents its constituency effectively**.

### **P3. Informed young people who think critically and express themselves freely**

In addition to the significant role in informing young people on current events and changes in societal life, YEF Radio will create contents and organize workshops and training on Increasing media and digital literacy as well as critical thinking of young people. Although improved critical thinking is primarily covered by YEF debate activities, in order to achieve this specific goal media information content will be created and capacities of young journalist will be strengthened. Due to the fact that a very small number of young people enroll Journalism Studies, YEF Radio will enable space for professional development of young journalists and reporters-beginners.

Institutions having youth as their primary group, as well as educational institutions, don't provide sufficient support for young people in their involvement in processes creating change in their communities. Youth Activism Programme, Debate Programme and YEF Radio will work directly to **Enable space for creative thinking and expression of young people**. In this respect, YEF Radio will organize events and activities for local and national promotion of young activists through its Youth Activism programme. As the target group of YEF Radio, regular communication with youth proved to be a successful example of addressing youth problems in the public discourse. YEF Radio content will be conceptualized to really open timely space for youth priorities and problems in the public discourse. On one hand, this will be achieved by regular information of specific issues, and on the other hand by organizing debates and discussions with key actors in youth policymaking.

YEF Radio will address the need for alternative, widespread and easily available space for promotion of young artists by **Promoting young domestic artist and supporting the alternative cultural scene**. Since young people in our country don't have sufficient spaces, nor are they financially independent, enabling space for creative expression of young independent artists is one way of supporting youth. By monitoring youth policies and the institutional support provided to young people, YEF will work on proposing quality policies and advocate support for the youth cultural scene.

### **P4. Advanced social status of young people by means of good quality youth and educational policies**

In the forthcoming period, YEF Youth Clubs will be focused on encouraging young people to communicate with institutions and to advocate their problems. Furthermore, YEF will organize workshops, lectures and training for young people to encourage them to **Influence the work of the institutions and participate in youth policymaking and implementation**. In the upcoming period, the **Research Analysis and Youth and Educational Policymaking Programme** will work on developing analytical capacities of youth to monitor institutions and develop evidence-based policy papers.

COVID-19 crisis emphasized the shortcomings of the educational system and the need to advocate for digitalization of higher education by modernizing the higher education processes became obvious. YEF followed the situation of the students from the very beginning of the crisis in 2020, and the findings of these analyses showed major under-performance of the University and faculty units. Through direct work with the students, high-school students and student representatives, YEF will monitor digitalization processes in education and develop comparative recommendations for **Modernization and digitalization of higher and secondary education** in the forthcoming period.

In addition to the educational system which was fully stalled by the health crisis, the youth faced numerous challenges in several areas in their daily life. Therefore, YEF will work to **Support youth in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis effects** by organizing activities to promote mental health and build employability skills for young people. By establishing youth networks and common action, YEF will continuously advocate for the improvement of the institutional support for the youth.

### 3. Youth Educational Forum 2020-2023 Strategic Matrix

<i>P1. Contemporary education for the prosperity of young people</i>	<i>P2. Engaged and self-organized young people influencing the improvement of society</i>	<i>P3. Informed young people who think critically and express themselves freely</i>	<i>P4. Advanced social status of young people by means of good quality youth and educational policies</i>
<p><u>G1. Informal education improves youth opportunities and is recognized and appreciated by the institutions</u></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><u>A1. Promotion and adaptation of formal education by means of informal educational approaches and experience:</u></p> <p><u>A2. Promotion of informal education benefits</u></p> <p><u>A3. Creating partnerships and networks with educational institutions and youth representative bodies</u></p>	<p><u>G1. Young people act in their communities</u></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><u>A1. Support and mentorship of youth initiatives, actions and campaigns</u></p> <p><u>A2. Use of visual, performance and digital art as forms of expression to raise social and youth issues</u></p> <p><u>A3. Promotion and information on youth activism</u></p> <p><u>A4. Creating conditions and support to youth integration and inclusion processes</u></p>	<p><u>G1. Increased media and digital literacy and critical thinking of young people</u></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><u>A1. Workshops on media literacy, multimedia tools and digital communication</u></p> <p><u>A2. Media content focused on education and developing critical thinking</u></p> <p><u>A3. Strengthening capacities of young lawyers</u></p>	<p><u>G1. Young people influence the work of institutions and participate in youth policymaking and implementation</u></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><u>A1. Encouraging young people to communicate with institutions about their problems by means of youth policy education and advocacy</u></p> <p><u>A2. Support and cooperation among the youth and institutions</u></p> <p><u>A3. Monitoring institutions' performance and monitoring youth's needs</u></p> <p><u>A4. Creating evidence-based research, analysis, policy papers and advocacy</u></p>

<p><b><u>G2. Increasing youth's knowledge by means of technology and contemporary methods</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>G2. Democratic independent youth representation bodies represent their constituency effectively</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>G2. Enabling space for creative thinking and expressing of young people</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>G2. Modernization and digitalization of higher and secondary education</u></b></p>
<p><b>Activities:</b></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p>
<p><b><u>A1.</u> Creating platform for digital informal education</b></p>	<p><b><u>A1.</u> Supporting processes of establishing youth spaces and youth representation bodies</b></p>	<p><b><u>A1.</u> Organizing events and activities for promotion and networking of young local and regional activists</b></p>	<p><b><u>A1.</u> Advocating the need for digitalization of higher education</b></p>
<p><b><u>A2.</u> Digitalization of programme content and informal educational activities</b></p>	<p><b><u>A2.</u> Capacity building, cooperation and monitoring of the work of youth representative bodies for youth policy advocacy</b></p>	<p><b><u>A2.</u> Providing opportunities to reflect youth priorities, problems, initiatives and their presentation in the public discourse</b></p>	<p><b><u>A2.</u> Analyzing and monitoring conditions for carrying out digitalization in higher education</b></p>
<p><b><u>A3.</u> Content modernization and including new educational methods and mentor learning</b></p>	<p><b><u>A3.</u> Establishing cooperation, capacity building and connecting political party youth</b></p>		<p><b><u>A3.</u> Monitoring processes and effects of digitalization in secondary and higher education</b></p>
			<p><b><u>G3. Support to the youth for dealing with COVID-19 crisis</u></b></p>
			<p><b><u>A1.</u> Workshops for promotion of youth well-being</b></p>
			<p><b><u>A2.</u> Research on factors affecting the quality of life of young people</b></p>
			<p><b><u>A3.</u> Advocating for availability of institutional support towards improvement of the quality of life of young people</b></p>



<p><b><u>G3. Advanced formal education quality</u></b></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><b>A1. Developing critical thinking by including debate into the formal educational activities</b></p> <p><b>A2. Advancing formal education work methods by cooperation with the teaching staff</b></p> <p><b>A3. Revision of existing and creating contemporary content for development of formal education</b></p>		<p><b><u>G3. Promotion of young domestic artists and support of the alternative cultural scene</u></b></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><b>A1. Enabling space for creative expression of young independent artists</b></p> <p><b>A2. Advocating for institutional support of the independent youth cultural scene</b></p>	
<p><b><u>G4. Improved conditions and youth competencies on the labour market</u></b></p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p><b>A1. Employability and entrepreneurship skills building of young people</b></p> <p><b>A2. Advocating good quality youth employment policies</b></p> <p><b>A3. Improving youth employment climate by connecting them with the business community, local self-government and educational institutions</b></p>			