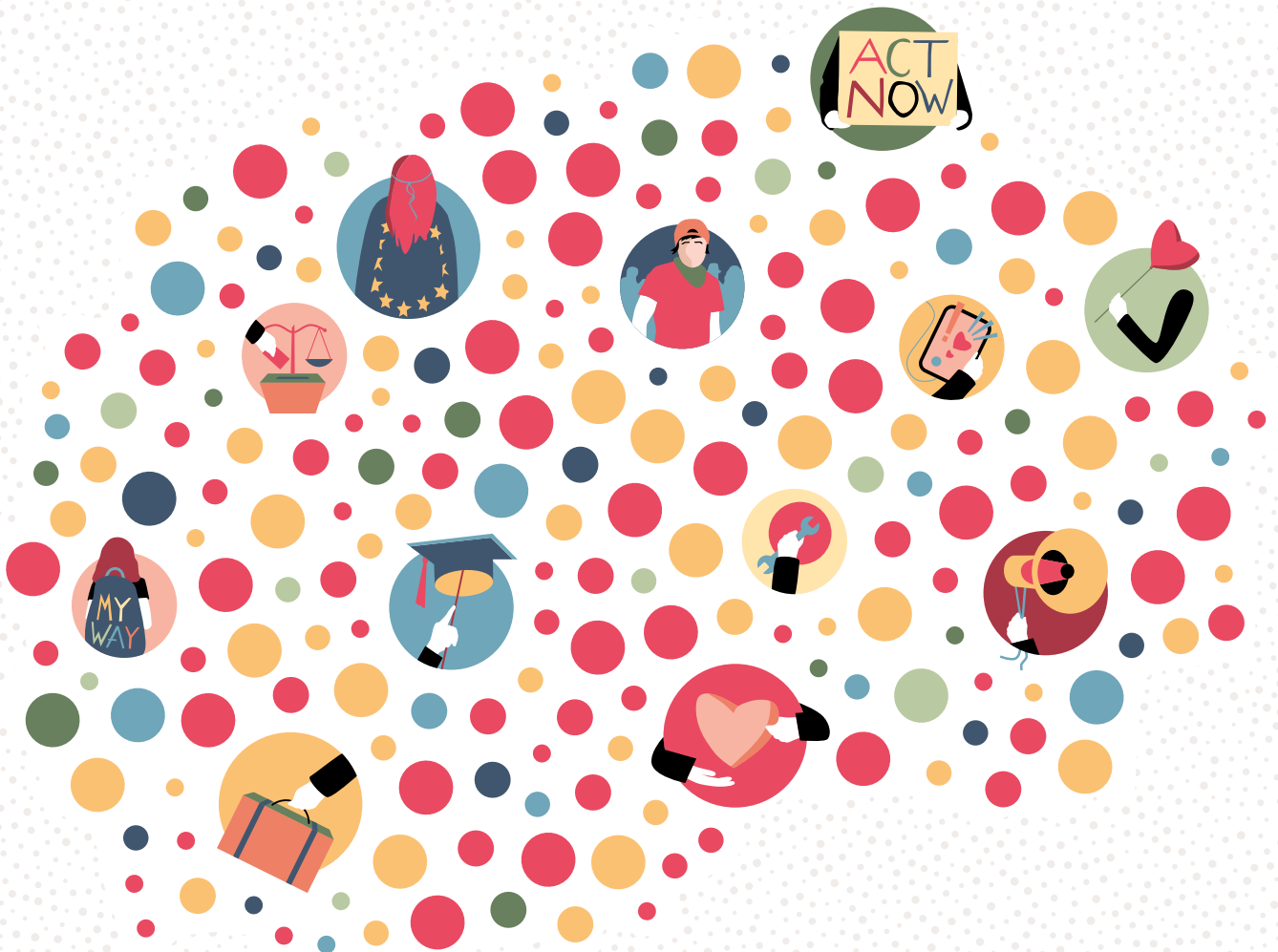


North Macedonia

*Navigating Discontent:
Youth Perspectives on Education,
Employment, and Migration*

2024



Authors

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About FES Youth Studies

What are young people afraid of or hopeful about? In a rapidly changing world that is challenged by the climate crisis and inequalities, and in many parts aging societies and democratic decline, **FES Youth Studies** investigate how young generations perceive the development of their societies and their personal future. Our aim is to foster informed debate about young people's views on politics and democracy against the background of their life circumstances and values. This includes key issues such as education, employment and mobility, family and friends, and their overall attitudes and perceptions. We focus on young people aged 14 to 29 to understand their perspectives on these critical topics.

FES has conducted numerous youth studies around the world since 2009. In 2024, young people in North Macedonia were surveyed along with youth in other Southeastern Europe and Central Eastern Europe countries.

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Executive Summary

Education and employment

Compared to the 2018/19 Study, the current results indicate a decrease in satisfaction with the quality of education in the country, while the perception of corruption in education is on the rise. The long-term exposure of young people to corruption in education in which they are witnesses or participants in this process can lead to a situation where young people perceive corruption as a normal part of life and an acceptable part of the education process, and there is a real danger that they will take this behaviour to their future professions. It certainly has a negative impact on overall morale and encourages the desire to migrate. In addition to these claims, young people consider “having connections with government officials” to be the most important factor to get a job in our country. This suggests that young people are deeply aware that connections and friendships with people who have authority and power are more important than “expertise”.

The assessment of the level of adaptation of the education process to the requirements of the labour market shows that two thirds of the respondents consider that school curricula are not suitable to help young people get ready for work. A significant part of employed young people (45 %) do not work in their profession, which indicates a mismatch between the education system and the labour market. Half of them are faced with underemployment, i.e., they have jobs where they cannot reach their full potential and where their skills and qualifications are underestimated, i.e., the job requires lower qualifications.

An important finding is that the time young people devote to school-related activities has decreased. One of the reasons for the lower motivation to learn is certainly the feeling that the efforts invested are not adequately rewarded, i.e., they are aware of the corruption in education. This may also be due to the lack of interactive methods and inappropriate programmes as well as insufficient training of teachers. Another reason could be the defocus of young people because of the use of social media, since they spend most of their time using them. Regarding the desired sectors where they look for employment, the interest to work in the private sector and international organisations has grown. Based on the mean values, the factor of the “salary” is the most significant, while “working with people” is the least significant factor when choosing a job.

Mobility and migration

Although the majority of young people (over 90 %) have not been abroad for reasons related to education and training, there is a pronounced desire for migration outside their home country, with a mean value of $m=3.25$ on a scale of 1 to 5. Cumulatively, 67.7 % want to migrate (or 73.4 % when excluding those who did not answer the question), while 12.4 % responded that they had no such intention at all. If compared with the 2018/2019 Youth Study, cumulatively 62 % had some desire to migrate, where the arithmetic mean was $m=2.9$, and the percentage of those who had no intention of emigrating was 26 %, which indicates an increase in the tendency among young people to emigrate from the country. The young population in the Republic of North Macedonia has the greatest desire for migration in the region, compared to the other eleven countries in which the study was conducted.

The following stand out as the most significant reasons for migration among young people who have a moderate, strong or very strong desire to emigrate: improving the standard of living (30 %); higher salary (14 %); corruption and clientelism in my homeland (13 %); better employment opportunities (10 %); social and political stability in the country; and “I want to move to ...” (8 %). The reasons for migration represent a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, i.e. some that relate to the improvement of the financial situation and work-related perspectives, and others that relate to certain social phenomena or socio-political characteristics of the Macedonian society, which young people believe to be absent or more positive in the preferred host country.

An interesting finding is that the profile of young people who have the greatest tendency to emigrate is not determined by the usual demographic characteristics such as age and socio-economic status (level of education, employment status, place of residence, financial situation), but mostly by dissatisfaction and a negative attitude towards certain social phenomena in the country and the high level of distrust of institutions.

General values, attitudes and perceptions

The most important thing for young people is to be independent, to eat healthily, to have a successful career, to have children and to take responsibility. The least important thing for them is to be politically active and to wear branded clothes.

They are optimistic about their personal future, and pessimistic about the future of Macedonian society, in the next 10 years. Young people indicate the following as the biggest potential problems for the country in the next decade: corruption (63.2 %); skilled workforce leaving the country (55.3 %); quality of public services (healthcare, education) (51.4 %); and unemployment (51.2 %).

Conditions and phenomena that are the root of the greatest personal fears and concerns among young people are the weak healthcare ($m=2.63$); pollution and climate change ($m=2.43$); not having a job ($m=2.39$); lack of a decent pension ($m=2.37$); and serious illness ($m=2.36$).

Conservatism regarding abortion and homosexuality is also observed among young people. According to the study findings, young people show and possess attitudes of cultural protectionism/ attitudes to protect cultural identity from mixing with other cultures, and a low level of tolerance, i.e. high social distance from persons with a different sexual orientation and/or national and religious background. Although at a general level young people have not expressed a feeling of being discriminated against, additional analyses indicate that young people with a different sexual orientation have been faced with various types of discrimination.

It is positive that young people oppose corrupt behaviour, which is also confirmed by other findings in the Study. Young people show partially developed environmental awareness and a positive attitude towards issues related to environmental protection.

Family and future plans

Most of the respondents live with their parents (75.2 %). More than half of the subsample of young people who responded that they live with their parents responded that it is the simplest and most comfortable solution for them (54.5 %), while more than a third (37.8 %) would like to live alone but cannot because of financial reasons. A high percentage (45.6 %) responded that they get along very well with their parents, and an additional 46.3 % replied that they get along, although sometimes they have different opinions. Such data confirm that the intergenerational differences do not represent a barrier for prolonged living of young people with their parents.

Most of the young people (39.4 %) responded that they can buy some more expensive things, but not as expensive as a car or an apartment; 28.7 % responded that they have enough money for food, clothes and shoes, but not enough for more expensive things (such as a refrigerator, TV, etc.); 10 % responded that they have enough money for basic bills and food, but not for clothes and shoes; 9.3 % responded that they can buy everything they need for a good standard of living; and 4.4 % responded that they do not have enough money for basic bills and food.

The three most significant factors when choosing a partner among the young people are their religious beliefs ($m=3.74$); national background ($m=3.64$); and level of education ($m=3.54$). On average, young people plan to have two children. The age range at which they would like to have their first child is between 19 and 36 (with an average age of $m=27.86$), while the difference between the preferred age for parenthood among men ($m=28.62$) and women ($m=27.23$) is small.

Political views and political participation

European surveys show that the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia are some of the least interested in politics, and this is especially pronounced among young people, which is also confirmed by the results of this Study. Despite the low interest, young people show a high degree of political participation, especially when it comes to direct democracy, although other forms of participation are significantly less present. What is continuously shown is that many young people do not know where to position themselves ideologically, which can be partly due to unclear policies (proclaimed and introduced) by the political parties, which are inconsistent with their ideological determination.

Their need to do something for the society to improve is the most common reason why young people decide to join a political party. A political function is acceptable for every fifth respondent, but young men are more open to such a challenge than young women. Generally speaking, this situation can be due to the low level of trust in the political parties, the Government and the Parliament, and when it comes to the young female population, to the need for affirmative campaigns aimed at encouragement and greater involvement of women in political and in public life overall.

In terms of the political situation in the country, in terms of voting in the elections and feeling an affiliation to the political parties, the prominence of the VMRO-DPMNE party is noticeable, which corresponds essentially to the results from the last two election cycles (2020 and 2024). What deviates from the official results is the support for the Levica party, which is apparently significantly higher among the young population.

Trust in the EU remains unchanged (from the 2018/2019 Youth Study) and, in addition, young people believe that values related to the standard of living, the rule of law and the protection of rights, democracy and security are more present in the EU than in our country. But despite the positive attitude towards the situation in the EU, the attitude of young people regarding the country's accession to the EU is divided, and an increase in Euroscepticism can be observed when compared to previous studies. For the first time since we have started conducting longitudinal youth studies in 2013, the identification with Europe has a mean value of less than 3. Furthermore, young people who do not support the negotiating framework proposed by France, identify themselves to a lesser extent as citizens of Europe or as Europeans.

Key Facts

Desire to emigrate

68 % of young people have a desire to migrate abroad. The most significant reasons for migration among young people are to improve their standard of living (30 %), a higher salary (14 %), corruption and clientelism in their homeland (13 %); better employment opportunities (10 %), and social and political stability in the country they want to move to (8 %).

Do young people in North Macedonia want to join the EU?

42 %
Yes

38 %
No

15 %
Don't know

61 %

of young people are dissatisfied with the quality of education in the country and 69 % believe that grades can be "bought" at the education institutions.

What matters to young people

The most important thing for young people is to be independent (m=4.45), eat healthily (m=4.22), have a successful career (m=4.21), have children (m=4.16) and take responsibility (m=4.13). They mainly want to work in the private sector (37 %).



Not enough rights

Young people believe that poor people have the least rights (72 %), followed by the young people themselves (52 %). Answers that women (49 %) and ethnic minorities (31 %) have been given enough rights prevail. In regard to the members of the LGBT+ community, the predominant answer is that they have too many rights (28 %).

59 %
agree that democracy is a good system of government.

High trust in the Army, low trust in Parliament

The religious organisations and the Army are the most trusted. The Political Parties, the Government and the Parliament are the ones that are the least trusted.

The majority of young people live with their parents (75 % with their mother and 66 % with their father) and siblings (49 %).

Young men would rather go into politics

The interest in taking a political function is low, however, twice as many young men as young women would accept a political position.

17 %
of young people are interested in politics, and only 7 % believe that their interests are represented in politics. 39 % of young people do not know or do not want to position themselves ideologically.

1 ■ Introduction

Since 2013, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has conducted a national youth study in the Republic of North Macedonia every five years in order to measure, describe and explain the main attitudes of the young Macedonian population related to society, politics, education, employment, family, religion and EU integration.

Each time the study is conducted, the same methodology is applied in all countries in the region, which provides additional comparative analyses. The results of the previous studies generated extensive interest in North Macedonia and have been used for developing policy and project proposals over the past few years.

This year the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has once again conducted a youth study. By conducting youth studies simultaneously in each of the 12 countries of the Southeast Europe region in 2024, we have managed to collect, analyse and interpret data about young people's perceptions, their expectations, views and attitudes in regard to current affairs from everyday life. The current youth study offers in-depth views of the country's youth, their desires, hopes and fears, while comparing this data with the data from the previous studies from 2013 and 2018, thus providing a unique comprehensive analysis of what 'drives' this young generation.

The young population covered in the study is aged 14-29 and currently consists of two generational groups known as Generation Y (born between 1981 and 2000) and Generation Z (born after 2000). These young people have witnessed dynamic changes at the global level: the pandemic; the war in Ukraine; the energy crisis; climate change; and rapid technological development, which have resulted in digital transformations in all areas of life, political movements and political instability caused by terrorist attacks, populist wars and an economic crisis. But at the same time, they have been directly or indirectly affected by the turbulent political and social developments in the country: a political crisis; numerous affairs; and corruption scandals; and disappointment with the country's European integration processes, which recently have also resulted in a change of government.

According to the Study results, young people from Macedonia undoubtedly share the general characteristics, values, desires and fears of Generations Y and Z, similar to their peers in the region and in the world in general, but for certain aspects the influence of the national context is noticeable.

The desire to migrate and leave the country in pursuit of a better standard of living still persists among the young people in the Republic of North Macedonia. They live with their parents and strive for independence. Their interest in the political processes is still at a low level, because they believe that they are not sufficiently represented in politics. They are not satisfied with the education system and the level of adaptation of the curricula to the needs of the labour market – worrisome results point to a series of existing challenges that policy and decision makers, as well as the young people themselves, need to address in order to tackle these negative trends.

The Study outlines the challenges and urgent measures that need to be taken to improve the situation of young people in Macedonian society, because we know that they are the future leaders, politicians, educators, innovators, employers and citizens of the EU and the world. The future is in their hands, and they should have the potential to change and improve the country's democracy and economy.

Dr. Peter Hurelbrink,
Director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
in the Republic of North Macedonia

Nita Starova,
Programme Manager at Friedrich-Ebert-
Stiftung and a Researcher in this Study

2. Methodology

All activities related to the field research have been carried out by Ipsos, in close cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (the research centre in Vienna and the national offices). The study was carried out in the period between 09.02.2024 and 25.03.2024, simultaneously in 12 countries of the region.

The survey questionnaire was developed by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and translated and piloted by the Ipsos team. In consultation with the national study teams, a maximum of 10 country-specific questions were added.

The survey sample consisted of representatives of the young resident population in the Republic of North Macedonia, at the age of 14 to 29. The sample was designed based on quotas: by gender, age, statistical regions and language used to complete the questionnaire (Macedonian and Albanian), as well as an additional soft quota related to level of education. The sample's size was $n=504$ respondents.

The data were collected using a combined methodological approach, namely 40 % by Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) using the Ipsos online panel, and 60 % by Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

The distribution of offline and online interviews was based on local recommendations and previous studies of an identical/similar target group. For the underage respondents (14–17), consent from a parent/guardian was required.

Research limitations:

- the CAWI survey required internet access and used pre-registered individuals for the online panel;
- a telephone connection was necessary for the CATI survey;
- a CAPI or F2F (face-to-face) survey was not used, which would have offered the respondents an opportunity to receive additional instructions from the interviewers on certain questions, as well as to respond on specific/sensitive questions completely independently;
- marginal sampling error of ± 4.4 .

The data are anonymous, and privacy is protected, in line with the GDPR/EU Regulation 2016/679.

The authors of the Study were responsible for analysing the data and writing the study report. The analysis is quantitative – the data were analysed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), on a descriptive and advanced-inferential level, using the following statistical procedures: general distribution, crosstabulation, analysis of mean values, bivariate correlation, and non-parametric tests to check for statistical significance.

The study includes a reference literature and secondary data analysis. The unified methodology and the longitudinal character of the study have enabled to do a comparative analysis taking into consideration the previous youth studies from 2013 and 2018/2019, as well as the results of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's research studies conducted in other countries of the region.

The study results are presented using tabular and graphical representation of data, with textual interpretation by the authors.



3 Basic demographic characteristics and trends

According to the official data of the State Statistical Office, as of the last census of 2021, a total of 326,733 young people live in the Republic of North Macedonia, or 17.8 % of the total 1,836,713 resident population, of which 51.2 % are male and 48.8 % are female. In 2023, the unemployment rate among the young population (15–29) was 25.4 %, while the general unemployment rate in the country was 13 %. The percentage of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) young people (15–29) was 22.8 % in 2022 (Stojceska, Dukovska, Topuzovska Latkovikj, 2024).

Fig. 1 Young population description

Source: State Statistical Office, MakStat

	Age	Population
Men	15–19	53,405
	20–24	54,525
	25–29	59,354
Women	15–19	50,630
	20–24	52,028
	25–29	56,791



Sample description

The sample consisted of a total of n=504 respondents, where 42.1 % were male and 57.9 % were female; 25 % belonged to the 14–18 age group; 39 % to the 19–24 age group; and 36 % to the 25–29 age group.

According to the place of residence, 60.2 % were from an urban environment (city) and 39.8 % were from a rural environment (village). According to statistical regions, one third of the respondents (33 %) were from the Skopje region, 15.5 % from the Polog region, 10.6 % from the Pelagonia region, 10.1 % from the Southwestern region, 9 % from the Northeastern region, 7.4 % from Southeastern, 7.3 % from the Eastern, and 7 % from the Vardar region.

78.4 % of respondents filled out the survey in Macedonian, and 21.6 % in the Albanian language.

Fig. 2 Sample description (in %)

Age groups → 1–18	25.0
19–24	39.0
25–29	36.0
Gender → Male	42.1
Female	57.9
Place of residence → Village	39.8
City	60.2
Region → Vardar region	7.0
Eastern region	7.3
Southwestern region	10.1
Southeastern region	7.4
Pelagonia region	10.6
Polog region	15.5
Northeastern region	9.0
Skopje region	33.0

4. Education and employment

According to official data from the State Statistical Office (SSO) from 2022/2023 (SSO, 2024) in the country there are 966 primary schools with 185,099 pupils and 129 secondary schools with 69,227 students. Macedonia has 14 universities and 5 advanced vocational schools with 53,821 students enrolled. The number of students in primary and secondary education in North Macedonia has had a declining trend since 2015.¹ This decline is due to numerous demographic changes, emigration, as well as to other social and economic factors.

Since independence the education system in the Republic of North Macedonia has been faced with significant challenges and constant reforms. The following can be singled out as positive: there is an increased accessibility of primary and secondary education, as well as efforts to implement numerous reforms to improve the quality of education, which includes the introduction of new curricula and training for teachers.

However, the PISA 2018 results (OECD, 2019, PISA results 2018) show that 65 % of the students are below the basic level of reading, with 61 % in mathematics and 54 % in science, which is significantly below the OECD average. These results suggest that a significant number of students do not reach the basic levels of literacy and numeracy.

According to the World Bank (WB) report on improving the efficiency of education financing in the country, significant inequalities in the distribution of resources between urban and rural areas have been established. Rural schools are faced with a lack of modern infrastructure and teaching materials. A need to improve the quality of the teaching staff by improving the training and professional development of teachers has been detected. Education funding as a percentage of GDP is below the average of EU countries, which limits the potential for improving conditions in schools. In both primary and secondary education, there are wide differences in learning outcomes and in remaining in the education process between different regions and socioeconomic status groups (How to Improve the Efficiency of Education Spending in North Macedonia, 2023).

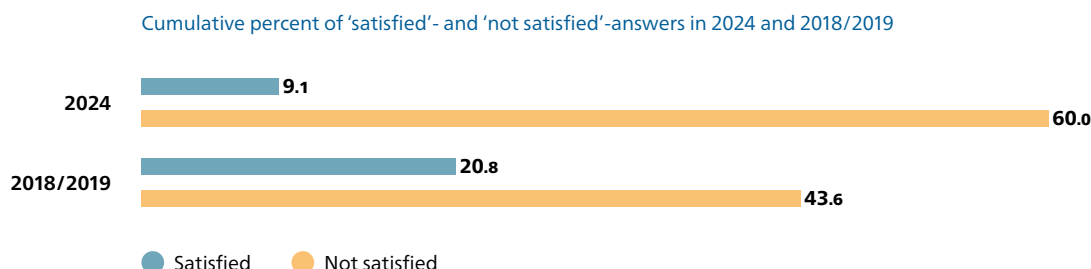
According to the report of the European Commission on Education, Youth and Sport (Education and Wellbeing, 2021), the number of people completing higher education shows the highest degree of convergence, rising from 40 % to 65 % of the EU average (2013-2022). However, participation rates in lifelong learning activities are still significantly lower than EU levels. North Macedonia's low spending on research and development remains a constant challenge for fostering innovation skills. In 2020, research and development expenditures were only 0.37 % of the national GDP, significantly below the EU average (2.32 %).



Views about the quality of education

As for the quality of education, it was rated with a mean value of $m=2.1$, which is for 0.5 points worse than the 2018/2019 Youth Study (Youth Study (2019)), where the quality of education was rated with a mean value of $m=2.6$. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=very dissatisfied, 5= very satisfied), 60.6 % were in the dissatisfaction section of the scale, in contrast to the 2018/19 study when 43.6 % declared themselves to be dissatisfied.

Fig. 3 Satisfaction with the quality of education among youth in North Macedonia (in %)



Furthermore, the percentage of those who stated themselves to be satisfied dropped to 9.1% in contrast to the results in 2018/19 when the percentage was 20.8%. There is no significant connection between the fact of whether someone lives in a rural or an urban environment and their satisfaction with the quality of education.

Corruption

As an indicator of the quality of education one could also point out the perception of whether grades are obtained based on knowledge/invested effort/merit, or with the help of connections, friendships, or bribery. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the mean value is $m=3.8$, i.e., respondents mostly agree that in some cases grades and exams are bought at the education institutions in the country. 72.9% of young people from urban areas are more inclined to believe that grades are bought in comparison to young people from rural areas with 62% ($\chi^2=10.622$, $p<0.05$.031).

69% of young people believed that grades could be bought.

If we compare the summary values of agreement and disagreement from this year with the past studies (2013, 2018/2019) one can notice that the perception of grades being bought has had an upward trend in the last decade in our society. In 2013, 26% of young people believed that grades could be bought; in 2018/2019, 54.9% believed that grades could be bought; and this year 68.8% of young people believed that grades could be bought.

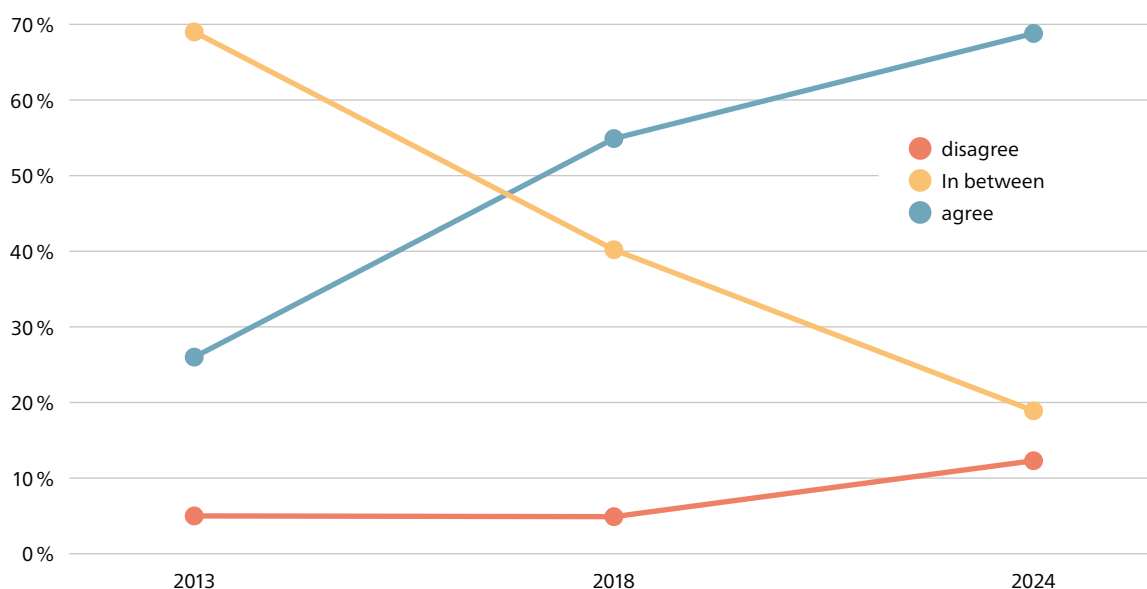
The long-term exposure of young people to corruption in education, where they are witnesses or participants in this process, can lead to a situation where young people perceive corruption as a normal part of life and as an acceptable part of the education process. There is a real danger that they will carry that behaviour into their future lives and especially into their future professions. This can lead to continued and increasing levels of corruption in society. It can also affect the trust in public institutions and the overall development of the country. It certainly has a negative impact on overall morale and encourages the desire to migrate. The chi-square test ($\chi^2=54.579$, $p<0.01$) indicates that there is a statistically significant connection between the perception of corruption in education and the desire to emigrate; for example, those who strongly agree that there is corruption in education have a very strong desire for emigration (62.4%). Young people are aware of the negative effects of corruption and single it out as the biggest problem for the country in the next decade (63.2%). They further point out as problems of the decade: the departure of top-quality personnel (55.3%); decline in the quality of public services (51.4%); and unemployment (51.2%).

Time-use

Young people study on average for about 2 hours a day. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2=24.483$, $p<0.01$) showed that respondents who answered the survey in the Macedonian language spent more time on school-related activities, especially in the "2–3 hours" and "3–5 hours" categories. Albanian-speaking youth show a higher share in the categories "15–30 minutes" and "1–2 hours", but not in the categories with longer periods of time.

Fig. 4 Perception of corruption in education among youth in North Macedonia (in %)

'Agree', 'in between' and 'disagree'-answers to the statement
'In some cases, grades and exams are bought'



This indicates that young people who speak the Macedonian language spend more time on these activities compared to those who speak the Albanian language. No statistically significant difference was registered in regard to the hours devoted to learning in relation to gender; rural or urban environment; parents' education; and family's financial situation.

Looking across the years at the comparison graph made based on grouping the responses from this year, we can conclude that the time spent on school-related activities has changed significantly over the three observed periods. In 2013, the majority of students spent more than 3 hours in learning, while in 2018/19 most of them spent 1–3 hours, and in 2024 there is a significant increase of students who spend 0–1 hour.

The results show a lower motivation and interest in learning, which may be due to lack of interactive methods and inappropriate programmes, as well as an insufficient training of teachers. This claim is consistent with WB reports and PISA test results.

The influence of technology and the use of social media should also be taken into account, since they can rather defocus and affect the student's attention. The results confirm this statement: young people who are active participants in the education process spend a lot of time on social media ($m=5.58$) or about 3 hours, followed by activities related to education ($m=4.95$) or about 2 hours; reading online newspapers and news platforms ($m=3.2$); and performing activities related to paid work ($m=3.17$), or about 30 minutes. Entertainment technology, such as video games, social media, and streaming platforms, can reduce the time students spend on school-related activities and decrease their concentration.

Education and employability

The assessment of the quality of the education process is supported by the assessment of the level of adaptation of the education process to the labour market.

Fig. 5 Hours spent on learning among youth in North Macedonia (in %)

Approximately, how much time do you spend on the following online activities on an average workday?

among share of positive responses to 'I am engaged in activities related to my education'

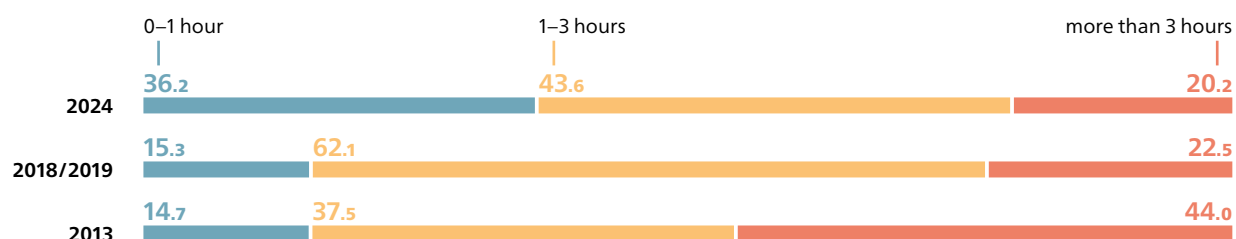
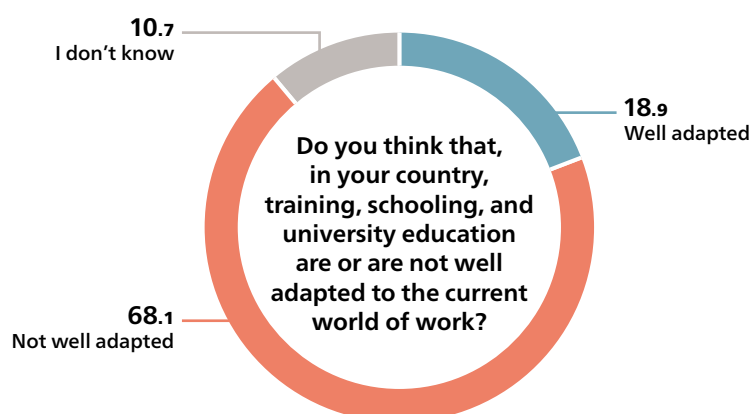


Fig. 6 Adaptation of the education curricula to the world of work – views among youth in North Macedonia (in %)



Employability refers to the *readiness to work*, in terms of possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after commencing employment (Mason, 2009).

Two thirds of the respondents believe that the school curricula are not adapted to the labour market requirements (68.14%), while (18.9%) believe that they are adapted. In comparison to the results from 2018/19, there is no change in attitudes.

Based on the analysis of documents, researches, and studies, the following can be singled out as key problems related to the position of young people on the labour market: difficult transition from school to work; lack of practice for working in a real environment; mismatch of the acquired education experience and the real needs of the labour market; taking undeclared jobs (black work), and low wages.

Data from the SSO (MakStat database, Working Age Population) also show that young people have difficulties in finding work. The lowest employment rate is observed in the 15–24 age group, and it is 19.9 %. The highest employment is observed in the 25–49 age group, and it is 70.8 %, which is typical for persons of working age with accumulated experience.

In our sample, in the 14–19 age group, 14.5 % are actively looking for work, and in the 19–24 age group, 25 % are actively looking for work. 2.4 % in the 14–18 age group and 9.4 % in the 19–24 age group have permanent full-time jobs. In the 25–29 age group 73 % have a full-time job.

Of those who are employed, 30.3 % work in their profession or 14 % close to their profession. A significant proportion of employees (or 45 %) do not work in their profession, which indicates a mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labour market. Those young people who work in their profession, in 73.4 % of cases the education requirements of the given job are in line with their level of formal education. As expected, for those who do not work in their profession (45.3 %), in almost half of the cases (46 %) their job requires a lower level of formal education than theirs, which is an indication that the acquired level of education is underestimated. Namely, this half of employed youth faces the phenomenon of underemployment – namely, they have a job that is not in accordance with the skills, qualifications and aspirations they possess, and the workplace does not allow employees to reach their potential.

Preferred job

Young people mainly want to work in the private sector (36.6 %). The desire to work in the private sector shows a slight increase in 2024 (36.6 %), since in 2018 it was 34 %, and in 2013 it was 29.6 %. Such a change may be due to the increase in wages in the private sector and an increase in the demand for workers in this sector, as well as opportunities for the career development that it offers (especially in the IT industry). Compared by years, the percentage of respondents who want to work in the public sector in 2024 is 30 %, and is significantly lower compared to 2018 (45 %) and 2013 (39 %). The interest in working in international organisations has increased over the years (2024: 16.3 %, 2018: 10.8 % and 2013: 13 %) and indicates that young people have an increased desire for global experience and an international career.

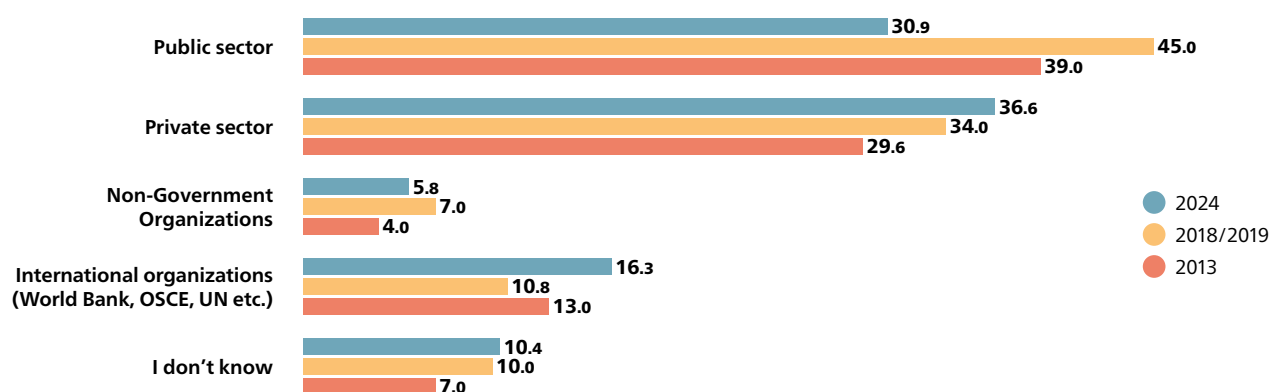
The chi-square test ($\chi^2=21.102$, $p<0.01$) indicates differences in the preferences in regard to the sector of employment between Macedonian-speaking respondents and Albanian-speaking respondents. A higher percentage of respondents who filled out the survey in the Albanian language (35.5 %) prefer a job in the public sector compared to respondents who filled out the survey in the Macedonian language (27.9 %); while a higher percentage of those who speak Macedonian (39 %) prefer working in the private sector, unlike those who speak Albanian (22.6 %). A significantly higher percentage of respondents who completed the survey in the Albanian language (25.8 %) prefer working for international organisations compared to those who completed it in the Macedonian language (12.7 %).

Fig. 7 **Education and Employment alignment among youth in North Macedonia (in %)**

Crosstabulation analysis

	Requires a higher level of formal education compared to yours	Is in line with your achieved level of formal education	Requires a lower level of formal education compared to yours
Yes, I work in my profession	15.6	73.4	10.9
I work in a job quite close to my profession	13.8	51.7	34.5
No, I do not work in my profession	16.1	37.9	46.0
I haven't been trained for any profession	28.6	35.7	35.7

Fig. 8 Preferred employment sector among youth in North Macedonia (in %)

In which of the following sectors would you prefer to work the most?

Factors influencing job selection

When choosing a job, the following three factors are the most important ones for the young people, out of eight offered factors: firstly, "salary"; secondly "job security"; and thirdly "having enough leisure time besides the job". "Having the feeling of achieving something" follows on in the fourth place; "career opportunities" is on the fifth; "working with co-workers they like" on the sixth; "to do something valuable for society" on the seventh; and "working with people" on the eighth.

Statistical significance was established in regard to socioeconomic status, i.e., the household income. One can conclude that there is a difference between those with the highest and lowest incomes. Among those who come from households with the highest incomes, the following factors are more important: "career opportunities", "having the feeling of achieving something", "doing something valuable for society", "having enough leisure time besides the job", than to those from households with the lowest incomes. Salary, a job security and the feeling of achieving something are more important to women than to men.

Based on the theories about generational differences and work values (Eisner, 2005; Twenge et al. 2010), the Millennials and Generation Z are increasingly present on the labour market and will dominate in the next decade. Those results where the "salary" comes first indicate their preferences, i.e., that these generations are focused on financial stability and job security. This preference is probably due to the financial pressure that these generations feel as a result of rapid changes in the economy, politics, and the instability of economies and countries. At the same time, the fact that "working with people" is the least significant factor may indicate that young generations, despite valuing teamwork and good relationships with colleagues, place greater value on factors that affect directly their financial stability.

Factors that play a role in finding a job

Young people consider "having connections with government officials" to be the most significant factor for finding a job in our country. This suggests that young people are deeply aware that connections and friendships with people who have authority and power are more important than "expertise". However, "expertise" is in second place, which means that qualifications and skills are valued. "Party membership" is singled out as a factor in the third place and "experience from abroad" in fourth place.

Fig. 9 Ranking the factors important for job selection

Rank	Factors	Mean value (m)
1	Income/salary	4.6
2	Job security	4.4
3	Having enough leisure time besides the job	4.4
4	Having the feeling of achieving something	4.4
5	Career opportunities	4.3
6	Working with co-workers they like	4.1
7	Opportunity to do something valuable for the society	4.0
8	Working with people	3.8

Fig. 10 Ranking the factors in finding a job

Rank	Factors	Mean value (m)
1	Connections with government officials	3.7
2	Expertise	3.5
3	Party membership	3.5
4	Experience from abroad	2.9

Volunteering

Youth volunteering in the Republic of North Macedonia should play a significant role in developing a democratic society and in building active and responsible citizens. With volunteer activities, young people have the opportunity to acquire new skills, improve their own professional experience and contribute to the advancement of society. Volunteering also teaches young people the importance of solidarity, empathy and social responsibility. These activities not only enrich their personal and professional development, but also help create a more inclusive and just society.

Volunteering is an action based on one's own free decision, involving an investment of one's own free time, with the goal being to introduce new aspects and values in other people's lives without expecting any material benefit, or investments that do not pay off (Wilson, 2000; Puljiz et al., 2005.).

The level of involvement of young people in volunteer activities is 19.7% and is at the same level as in 2018 (20%), in contrast to 2013 when this percentage was only 12.8%.

It is a very low level of involvement in volunteer/unpaid activities. No statistical significance was detected in regard to gender, language, age groups, place of residence and level of education. Taking into account that volunteering represents a kind of preparation for the labour market, since it enables learning and gaining experience and new skills, especially concerning teamwork, communication, initiative, decision-making, this low level of volunteering activities only deprives young people of the opportunity to prepare better for work and life.

Conclusions

1. The quality of education in the Republic of North Macedonia is rated with a mean value of $m=2.1$, which represents a significant deterioration of 0.5 points compared to the 2018/2019 study.

2. The perception of corruption in education has also been on the rise in our society over the past decade. In 2013, 26 % of young people believed that grades were being bought; in 2018/2019, 54.9 % believed that grades were being bought; and in 2024 68.8 % of young people believe that grades are being bought.

3. Satisfaction with education and corruption in education are two factors that are strongly interrelated. High levels of corruption in the education system usually result in low satisfaction with the quality of education, as students and pupils feel that the education process is not fair, and that grades and degrees do not reflect true worth and merit.

4. The high level of corruption can have a significant negative impact on the motivation to learn and make efforts, on their trust in institutions and on their social mobility, i.e., they encourage the emigration of young talent, which in the long run results in an erosion of the social capital. This is also confirmed by the finding that “having connections with government officials” is considered by young people to be the most important factor for finding a job in our country. This suggests that young people are deeply aware that connections and friendships with people who have power are more important than “expertise”. A statistically significant relationship has been established between the perception of corruption in education and the desire to emigrate: for example, those who strongly agree that there is corruption in education have a very strong desire to emigrate. Consequently, the fight against corruption is essential for ensuring a fair and top-quality education system, which will motivate young people and contribute to social progress.

5. A important finding is that the time young people devote to school-related activities has decreased. One of the reasons for this lower motivation to learn is certainly the feeling that the efforts invested are not adequately rewarded, i.e., they are aware of corruption in education. The use of social media that defocus their attention can be singled out as another reason, since they spend most of their time in that way: ($m=5.58$) or about 3 hours, followed by activities related to education ($m=4.95$) or about 2 hours; reading online newspapers and news platforms ($m=3.2$); and performing activities related to paid work ($m=3.17$) or about 30 minutes.

6. The assessment of the level of adaptation of the education process to the requirements of the labour market shows that two thirds of the respondents (68.1 %) consider that school curricula are not adequate to prepare young people for work, while only 19.9 % believe that they are adapted. These positions remain unchanged in comparison to the results from the 2018/19 Study.

7. A significant number of employed young people (45 %) do not work in their profession, which indicates a mismatch between the education system and the labour market. Almost half of them (46 %) are faced with under-employment, i.e., they have jobs where they cannot reach their full potential and where their skills and qualifications are underestimated, i.e., the job requires lower qualifications.

8. Regarding the desired sectors where they look for employment, there is an increased interest in working in the private sector and international organisations. Based on the mean values, the factor “salary” is the most significant, while “working with people” is the least significant factor when choosing a job.

9. Voluntary activities are at a very low level, which necessitates the need to mobilise non-governmental organisations as well as governmental institutions to develop volunteer programmes.

Recommendations

1. The high level of corruption in education has negative effects on the motivation to learn and work, eroding trust in institutions and encouraging emigration of young talents. That is why combating corruption in education should be set as a priority. This fight cannot be conducted in isolation from the general fight against corruption in the whole society. Only by strengthening the integrity and transparency at all levels of government and in the institutions, can conditions be created to deal effectively with corruption in education and ensure a sense of fairness and quality of education.

2. Regarding the relationship between education and the labour market, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between education institutions and industry to ensure that education is in line with the needs of the labour market. Curricula need to be revised and updated to ensure they are relevant and aligned with the needs of the labour market. This will enable students to acquire knowledge and skills that are directly applicable in their future jobs. Curricula need to be revised to include modern and relevant content that will develop critical thinking and problem solving. Curricula that will enable more practical training and internships in cooperation with the private sector and public institutions. Especially in rural areas, it is necessary to improve and modernise the education infrastructure (modern classrooms, laboratories, monitoring tools, digitalisation, textbooks). The continuous training and development of the teaching staff is a very significant factor not only for improving the quality of teaching, but also for the fight against corruption in education.

3. Encouraging parents and the local community to get involved in this process of “improving the quality of education and fighting corruption” will be an added value.

4. Preparing young people for the labour market and for life in general can also be achieved with programmes that encourage the volunteer activity of young people. Strengthening volunteering among young people should be the result of a joint strategy by non-governmental organisations and state institutions aimed at developing youth volunteer programmes and their evaluation for further professional development.

5. Mobility and migration

Mobility can be for education or work purposes, implying that a person temporarily resides abroad for a certain period for reasons related to education or work, while migration can be internal or external and implies a permanent moving out of one's place of residence, within the country or abroad. Educational mobility is encouraged by strengthening and adapting to the European higher education area, as well as through the European education programmes (e.g. ERASMUS+ and CEEPUS), and labour mobility is a need of the global and competitive labour market, especially when it comes to activities and industries such as IT and other creative industries, education and science, construction, healthcare/medicine, transport, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, etc.

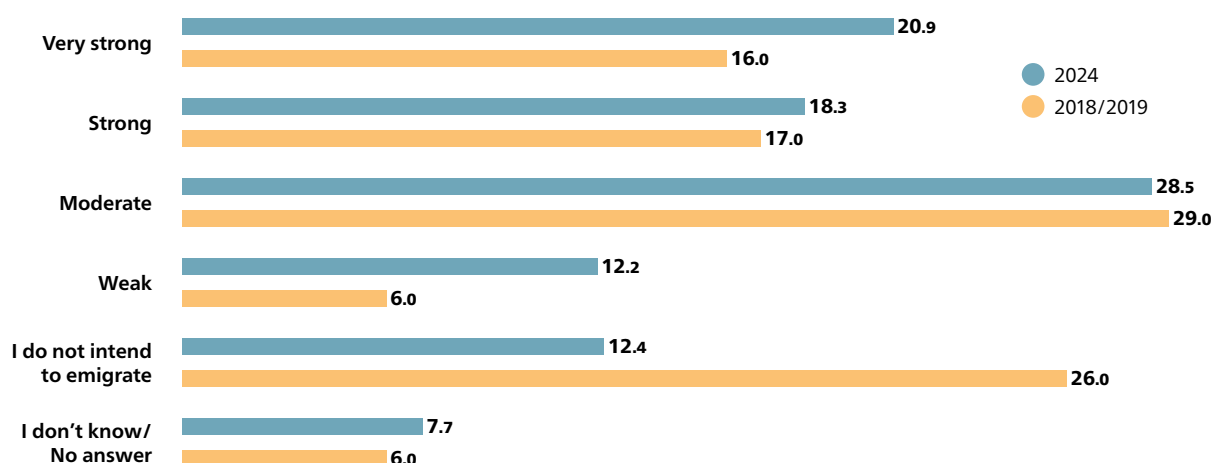
The surveys tend to assume that young people are either dependent migrants accompanying their parents, or, as adults, they are economic migrants themselves (Tienda, Taylor, and Moghan, 2007). Several factors encourage young people to migrate, some of which are direct motives – notably, the search for employment and education – but also, these motives can be rooted in ideological components, such as cultural and psychosocial factors (Massey et al., 1993).

Emigration factors are divided into 'push' and 'pull' factors, some that push the individual to leave the home country, and others that pull the individual to the host country (Lee, 1966).

It was the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Youth Studies (from 2013 and 2018/2019) that helped for more serious attention to be paid to this social phenomenon by the general and expert public as well as by the institutions, media and civil society organisations over the last ten years. The rate of emigration from the countries of the Western Balkans is among the highest in Europe (OECD, 2022). Consequently, the desire of young people to emigrate from the Republic of North Macedonia is consistently high (over 60 %), which is confirmed by several studies (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2018/2019; Gjorgjiovski and Galevski, 2021). When analysing the differences in the 2001 and 2021 censuses, it is noted that a total of 18.2 % of the young people who should appear in the figures from the last census, i.e. 77,274 young people, are no longer residents of the Republic of North Macedonia, even though they were born here and were recorded as live births (Maleski and Barakovski, 2023).

The only strategic document in the country that refers to the brain drain process, even though it does not deal strictly with young people, is the National Strategy for Networking, Cooperation and Prevention of Outflow of Highly Educated and Professional Personnel 2013–2020, which was not extended for the next period. A National Youth Strategy has been prepared continuously and in 2018 the Youth Guarantee measure was introduced, while in 2020 the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was adopted, of which the activities and measures are expected to improve the quality of life and standard of life of young people, and thus to keep them in the country.



Fig. 11 **Desire to emigrate among youth in North Macedonia (in %)***How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months (to emigrate)?*

Going abroad

Most young people have not stayed abroad for reasons related to education and training, i.e. 92.6 % have not studied abroad (higher education); 92.4 % have not attended secondary education outside the country; 90.5 % have not been involved in secondary vocational education or training abroad; and a high percentage (of 39.4 %) answered that they did not even plan to go abroad in the future for reasons related to education and training (this percentage is even higher for the youngest age group of 14–18, and it is 47.3 %). Only 14.1 % of the young people stayed abroad continuously for more than six months, and they belong mainly to the 19–24 (19.1 %) and 25–29 (20.1 %) age groups, in contrast to the 14–18 age group (1.7 %).

Desire to migrate

Young people have a strong desire to migrate outside their home country, with a mean value of $m=3.25$ on a scale of 1 to 5.

Cumulatively, 39.2 % stated that they had a strong or very strong desire to migrate; 28.5 % had a moderate desire (a total of 67.7 % had a desire to migrate, or 73.4 % minus those who did not answer the question); 12.2 % had a weak desire; while 12.4 % answered that they had no such intention or plan. 7.7 % did not give an answer.

From the sub-sample of young people who have a moderate, strong or very strong desire to migrate ($n=342$), a cumulative percentage of 58.2 % imagine that they will leave the country in the next 5 years, and another 15.9 % in the next 10 years, while 39.3 % believe that they would stay forever in the host country.

If compared with the 2018/2019 Youth Study, cumulatively 33 % had a strong or a very strong desire to migrate, and cumulatively 62 % had some desire to migrate, so that the arithmetic mean was $m=2.9$, and the percentage of those who had no intention to emigrate was 26 %, which indicates an increase in the tendency among young people to emigrate from the country over the past five years.

Those findings are also confirmed by the data from the State Statistical Office, according to which there is also a growing trend of young people who left the country sometime between 2018 and 2022.

68 % of young people have desire to migrate abroad.

The young population in the Republic of North Macedonia has the greatest desire for migration in the region, compared to the other 11 (eleven) countries in which the survey was conducted, and it is the only country with a mean value above 3, in the positive interval of the axis.

Profile of the young people with the highest tendency to emigrate

The bivariate analysis indicates that young people who have a stronger desire to migrate outside the Republic of North Macedonia are those who:

- are less proud to be nationals of this country ($r=-.180$, $p<0.01$);
- imagine the future of the Macedonian society would be worse than now ($r=-.263$, $p<0.01$);
- to a greater extent feel like citizens of Europe ($r=.147$, $p<0.05$);
- feel more dissatisfied with the quality of education ($r=-.174$, $p<0.01$);
- to a greater extent believe that there is corruption in education ($r=.136$, $p<0.01$);
- feel more dissatisfied with life in general ($r=-.188$, $p<0.01$);
- have more liberal attitudes towards abortion ($r=.111$, $p<0.05$) and homosexuality ($r=.138$, $p<0.01$);
- believe that the interests of young people are not sufficiently represented in politics ($r=-.097$, $p<0.05$);

- are positioned to the left on the axis in regard to political/ideological beliefs ($r=-.147$, $p<0.05$);
- have more negative feelings towards the Albanian political parties: Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) ($r=-.153$, $p<0.01$) and Alliance for Albanians ($r=-.122$, $p<0.05$);
- have less trust in the Parliament ($r=-.231$, $p<0.01$), Government ($r=-.177$, $p<0.01$), political parties ($r=-.233$, $p<0.01$), local government ($r=-.161$, $p<0.01$), army ($r=-.175$, $p<0.01$), judiciary/courts ($r=-.134$, $p<0.01$), police ($r=-.206$, $p<0.01$), the religious institutions they belong to ($r=-.142$, $p<0.01$), media ($r=-.235$, $p<0.01$), the European Union ($r=-.135$, $p<0.01$), and NATO ($r=-.192$, $p<0.01$).

The young people from the sample who speak Macedonian have a greater desire for migration than the young people who speak Albanian ($m=3.36$, against $m=2.87$, $p<0.01$).

No statistically significant differences or correlations were registered in relation to the desire for migration and the age groups, as well as the socioeconomic status (level of education, financial situation in the family, place of residence, employment status), which does not confirm/repeat the trends from the 2018/2019 Youth Study and the 2013 Youth Study.

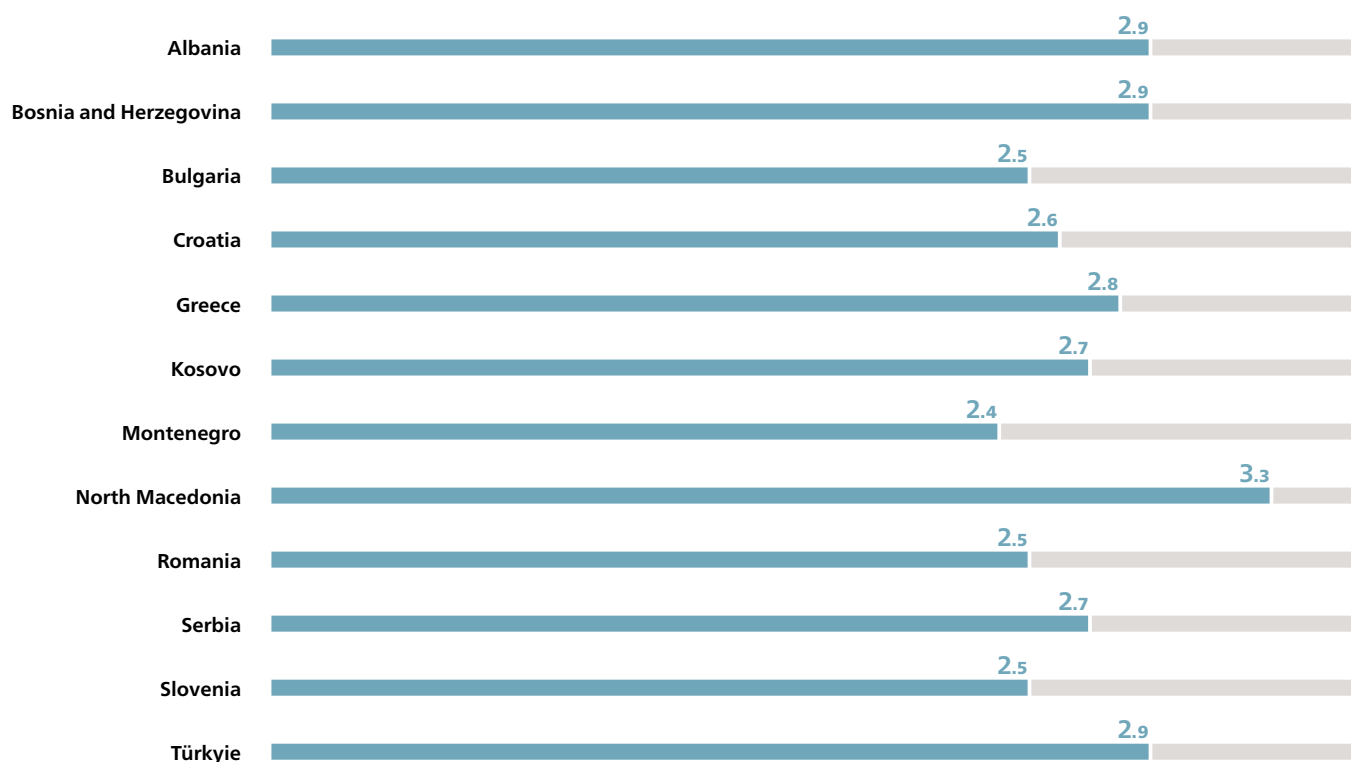
Reasons for migration

The following stand out as the top five (or most significant) reasons for migration among young people who have a moderate, strong, or very strong desire to emigrate ($n=342$):

- improving the standard of living (30 %);
- higher salary (14 %);
- corruption and clientelism in my home country (13 %);
- better employment opportunities (10 %);
- social and political stability in the country I want to move to (8 %).

Fig. 12 **Desire to emigrate among youth, comparative analysis by country***How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months?*

Mean values on a scale from '1 – no intention' to '5 – very strong'



Three of the five stated reasons refer to the improvement of the financial situation and work-related perspectives, while the other two reasons refer to certain social phenomena or socio-political characteristics of the Macedonian society, which young people believe to be absent or more positive in the preferred host country. This tells us that the reasons for migration among the young population represent a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors. Such data complement the OECD report (2022), according to which the main reasons for the migration of young people from the Western Balkans are: high levels of unemployment, relatively low wages, poor results in education, low social security, as well as high levels of corruption.

In a smaller percentage, we also note personal reasons, such as: to escape from an unfavourable situation (3%), and to be closer to the people I care about (4.6%).

With the chi-square test and crosstabulation according to age groups, no statistically significant differences were identified regarding the reasons for migration.

Fig. 13 **Main reasons for emigration among youth in North Macedonia (in %)***What is the main reason for which you would move to another country?*

30.5	Improvement of the standard of living
14.2	Higher salaries
12.9	Corruption and clientelism in my home country
9.9	Better employment opportunities
7.7	Social and political stability in the host country
5.3	Better education
4.6	Being close to people I care for
4.5	Better opportunities for starting my own business
4.0	Experiencing a different culture
3.0	Escape an adverse situation
1.7	More cultural diversity

Taken mobility/ migration related activities

Young people who have a moderate, strong or very strong desire to emigrate (n=342) have taken the following actions to fulfil their intention:

- I contacted the embassy (7.1%);
- I contacted potential employers (17.6%);
- I contacted potential universities/schools (10.9%);
- I secured a scholarship (3.6%);
- I contacted friends/relatives to help me move abroad (29.3%).

As many as 40 % answered that they did not do anything. (The total percentage of those young people who took any action cannot be presented, because it was a multiple-choice question.)

Such results show a weak proactivity on the part of the young people, i.e. only some concrete actions they have undertaken in order to emigrate abroad, which calls into question the determination and plans for such a step. This shows that young people mainly rely on close people who would help them move to another country.

Conclusions

1. Most of the young people (over 90 %) do not stay abroad for reasons related to education and training, and a high percentage (of 39.4 %) answered that they do not plan to stay abroad in the future for reasons related to education and training.

2. There is an increased desire among young people for migration abroad, with a mean value of $m=3.25$ (on a scale of 1 to 5). Expressed in percentages, a cumulative 67.7 % declared that they had some desire for migration, or 73.4 % without those who did not answer the question.

3. The young population in the Republic of North Macedonia has the greatest desire for migration in the region, compared to the other 11 (eleven) countries in which the survey was conducted.

4. The top five, or the most significant, reasons for migration among young people who have a moderate, strong or very strong desire to emigrate are the following: improving the standard of living (30 %); higher salary (14 %); corruption and clientelism in my home country (13 %); better employment opportunities (10 %); and social and political stability in the country I want to move to (8 %).

5. As many as 40 % of the young people who have a moderate, strong or very strong desire to emigrate have not taken any actions to fulfil their intention.

6. The profile of young people who have the greatest tendency to emigrate is not determined by the usual demographic characteristics such as age and socioeconomic status, but mostly by dissatisfaction and negative attitudes towards certain social phenomena in the country and a high level of distrust in the institutions.

Recommendations

1. Continuous improvement of students' standards, as well as investments in education and education infrastructure, which will ensure quality education and the retention of young people in their home country.

2. Creating jobs for young people and supporting youth entrepreneurship.

3. Constant increases of the average salary and improving the working conditions in order to reduce economic migration.

4. Increasing transparency and accountability in institutions through anti-corruption measures and strict controls.

5. Creating a stable and predictable political environment through reform processes and the participation of young people in politics.

6. Introducing mobility programmes that will enable young people to stay abroad for the purpose of education and training, and then return to their home country with the acquired knowledge.

7. Promoting successful examples of young people who have stayed and achieved success in their own country.

8. Continuous mapping of youth needs and adjustment of policies.

6. Family and plans for the future

The research findings so far from the Youth Studies (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2018/2019; Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2013/2014) show that the majority of young people in the Republic of North Macedonia (between 70 % and 80 %) live in the family home, with their parents, mainly for practical and financial reasons, as well as due to certain socio-cultural norms. The scientific literature confirms prolonged residential independence of young people in other European countries as well (Cordón, 1997; Sompolska-Rzechuła & Kurdyś-Kujawska, 2022). The behaviour of young people when leaving the family home is interesting for several reasons: it is one of the main – and often one of the first – components of the transition to adulthood (Schizzerotto & Lucchini, 2004); and has implications on important policy areas, such as housing demand (Ermisch & Di Salvo, 1997) and the risk of youth poverty (Aassve, Iacovou, Davia, & Mazzucco, 2007).

Young people who have higher incomes themselves, or whose parents have higher incomes, are more likely to leave the family home (in terms of being able to afford rent or loan payments, utility bills and other costs associated with independent living). However, this will only happen if young people and/or their parents value independence from the family highly enough to be willing to spend money to achieve that independence.

Namely, if one or both generations value family togetherness more than they value intergenerational independence, they can use their resources to continue living together (Iacovou, 2010).

Whom do young people live with and why?

The majority of the respondents live with their parents (75.2 % with their mother and 65.8 % with their father) and siblings (49.2 %). Grandparents also live in some households (13.4 %). Only 15.4 % live with a partner/spouse, and 6.2 % with minor children. 6.1 % live alone and 2.8 % live with friends or other relatives. There are no significant deviations in relation to the sub-sample composed of the adult young population (8 % live alone, 69 % with their parents, 20 % with a partner/spouse, 8 % with minor children).

More than half of the sub-sample of young people who answered that they live with their parents answered that it was the simplest and most comfortable solution for them (54.5 %), while more than a third (37.8 %) would live alone, but the financial circumstances do not allow it; for 4.1 % their parents do not allow them to live separately from them; and 1.4 % answered other.

A high percentage of 45.6 % answered that they get along very well with their parents, and an additional 46.3 % that they get along, although sometimes they have different opinions. 5.5 % do not get along and often argue, and only 1.2 % have a very conflictual relationship with their parents. Such data indicate that intergenerational differences do not represent a barrier for prolonged living of young people with their parents, but also confirm the financial impotence of young people for self-reliance and independence in terms of housing.

According to the findings, the most important thing for young people is independence, so non-parametric tests were performed, which indicate that there are statistically significant differences according to age groups.

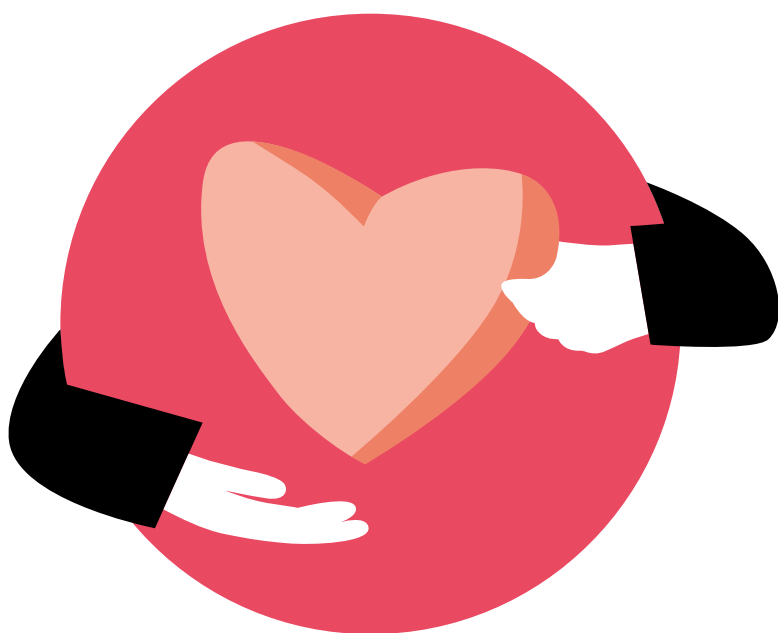


Fig. 14 Young people and residential (in)dependence (in %)

Young people living with:	Reasons for living with their parents:
75.2 Mother	54.5 Simplest and most comfortable solution
65.8 Father	37.8 They would live alone, but financial circumstances do not allow it
49.2 Siblings	4.1 Their parents do not allow them to live separately from them
13.4 Grandparents	1.4 Other
15.4 Partner/Spouse	
6.2 Minor children	
6.1 Alone	
2.8 Friends and other relatives	

More specifically, for the youngest, mainly the minor age group of 14–18, dominantly choose family togetherness as the simplest and most comfortable solution (77.6 % in contrast to 44.5 % among 19–24 age group and 50.5 % among 25–29 age group) and finances are the least problem for housing independence (16.4 % in contrast to 51.6 % for the 19–24 age group and 46.6 % for 25–29 age group).

The answers distribution does not allow additional non-parametric checks for the analysis of statistically significant differences and correlations according to the socioeconomic status of the respondents.

When asked how they would describe the financial situation in the family, most of the young people (39.4 %) responded that they can buy some more expensive things, but not as expensive as a car or an apartment; 28.7 % responded that they have enough money for food, clothes and shoes, but not enough for more expensive things (such as a refrigerator, TV, etc.); 10 % responded that they have enough money for basic bills and food, but not for clothes and shoes; 9.3 % responded that they can buy everything they need for a good standard of living; and 4.4 % responded that they do not have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating, ...) and food. 8.2 % did not give an answer.

Marital status and choosing a partner

In terms of marital status, most young people (or 57 %) are single; 20.9 % are in a relationship, but do not live together; 12.9 % are married; 4.3 % live in an extramarital union; and less than 1 % are divorced or widowed.

The three most significant factors in choosing a partner for young people are the following:

- religious beliefs (m=3.74);
- national background (m=3.64);
- level of education (m=3.54).

In the positive axis interval (on a scale of 1 to 5), the economic situation (m=3.41) and the approval of the family (m=3.31) were evaluated as important factors. Only virginity as a factor in choosing a partner received a negative score (m=2.75).

The findings are based on the rest of the data in the Study, which indicate that among the young population in the Republic of North Macedonia there is a definite difference in attitudes according to religious and national identity.

Statistically significant differences were observed according to gender, with the religious beliefs of the partner (f. 3.89; m. 3.55), national background (f. 3.85; m. 3.34), the level of education (f. 3.69; m. 3.35) and the economic situation (f. 3.74; m. 2.97) being more important to the female respondents than to the male respondents.

Virginity as a virtue is a more important characteristic for the male respondents (m. 2.98; f. 2.56), as well as for members of the youngest age group (14–18 m=3.31; 19–24 m=2.75; 25–29 m=2.39), with statistically significant differences.

Parenting plans

When asked how many children in total they would like to have in their lifetime, the answers ranged from 1 to 7, with the mean value being m=2.48, which means that young people on average plan to have two (to three) children. The age range at which they would like to have their first child is between 19 and 36 (with an average age of m=27.86). Certainly, there are statistically significant differences by gender, with a small difference between the preferred age for parenthood between men (m=28.62) and women (m=27.23). Less than 1 % answered that they do not plan to have children, and cumulatively 27 % do not know or have no answer to this question.

According to the results of the 2021 census in the Republic of North Macedonia, a family with children under the age of 25 has on average four members (mother, father and two children), and the average age of the primipara is 28.1 (State Statistical Office, 2024). Such trends are also confirmed by the Study's survey results.

Conclusions

- 1.** Most of the respondents live with their parents (75.2 %).
- 2.** More than half of the sub-sample of young people who answered that they live with their parents answered that it was the simplest and most comfortable solution for them (54.5 %), while more than a third (37.8 %) would like to live alone but cannot because of financial reasons.

3. A high percentage of 45.6 % answered that they get along very well with their parents, and an additional 46.3 % that they get along, although sometimes they have different opinions. Such data confirm that the intergenerational differences do not represent a barrier for the prolonged living of young people with their parents.

4. The three most significant factors when choosing a partner among the young people are their religious beliefs (m=3.74); national background (m=3.64) and level of education (m=3.54).

5. On average, young people plan to have two (to three) children. The age range at which they would like to have their first child is between 19 and 36 (with an average age of m=27.86), while the difference between the preferred age for parenthood between men (m=28.62) and women (m=27.23) is small.

Recommendations

- 1.** Support for independent living of young people by means of subsidies and favourable loans for young people who want to start an independent life, including social housing and financial support for the first home purchase.
- 2.** Introducing financial literacy education programmes to help young people properly manage their finances and plan for their future.
- 3.** Providing affordable and good quality childcare services.
- 4.** Flexible work schedules and parental leaves that will allow young people to take care of their minor children without jeopardising their career development.

7 General values, attitudes and perceptions

Rokeach (1973) defines values as enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or an end-state of existence is preferred. Values have a significant impact on an individual's future actions and decisions; they define people's beliefs about what is fundamentally right or wrong. Values have both qualitative and quantitative attributes. A qualitative or content attribute says that a particular mode of conduct or end state of existence is important. The quantitative or intensity attribute specifies how important it is. When we rank an individual's values according to their intensity, we perceive their values system or hierarchy. Values lay the foundation for our understanding of people's attitudes and motivations and influence perceptions.

Perception is a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment (Robbins, 2013). However, what we perceive can differ significantly from objective reality. When we judge someone based on our perception of the group he or she belongs to, we often take a short-cut by using prejudices and stereotypes.

Discrimination and intolerance are often based on, or are justified by, prejudices and stereotypes about people and social groups, consciously or unconsciously. Discrimination means differentiating, excluding, restricting and putting a person or a group of persons at any kind of disadvantage.

Attitudes, on the other hand, are sets of emotions, beliefs and behaviours towards a certain object, person or event. We therefore say that they consist of three components (affective, cognitive, and behavioural) (Ostrom, 1969). An attitude can also be described as the way in which we evaluate something or someone, whereby we tend to react positively or negatively. Attitudes are formed as a result of life experiences, upbringing, education and social influences.

The most important values

The most important thing for young people is to be independent ($m=4.45$); in the second place is to eat healthily ($m=4.22$); and in the third place is to have a successful career ($m=4.21$). In fourth place is to have children ($m=4.16$); in fifth place is to take responsibility ($m=4.13$); in sixth place is to do sports ($m=4.11$); in seventh place is to get married ($m=4.03$); in eighth place is to look good ($m=4.02$); in ninth place is to graduate from university ($m=4$); and in tenth place is to be rich ($m=3.6$).

The least important to them is being politically active ($m=2.19$), wearing branded clothes ($m=2.5$), and participating in civic activities/initiatives ($m=3.02$).

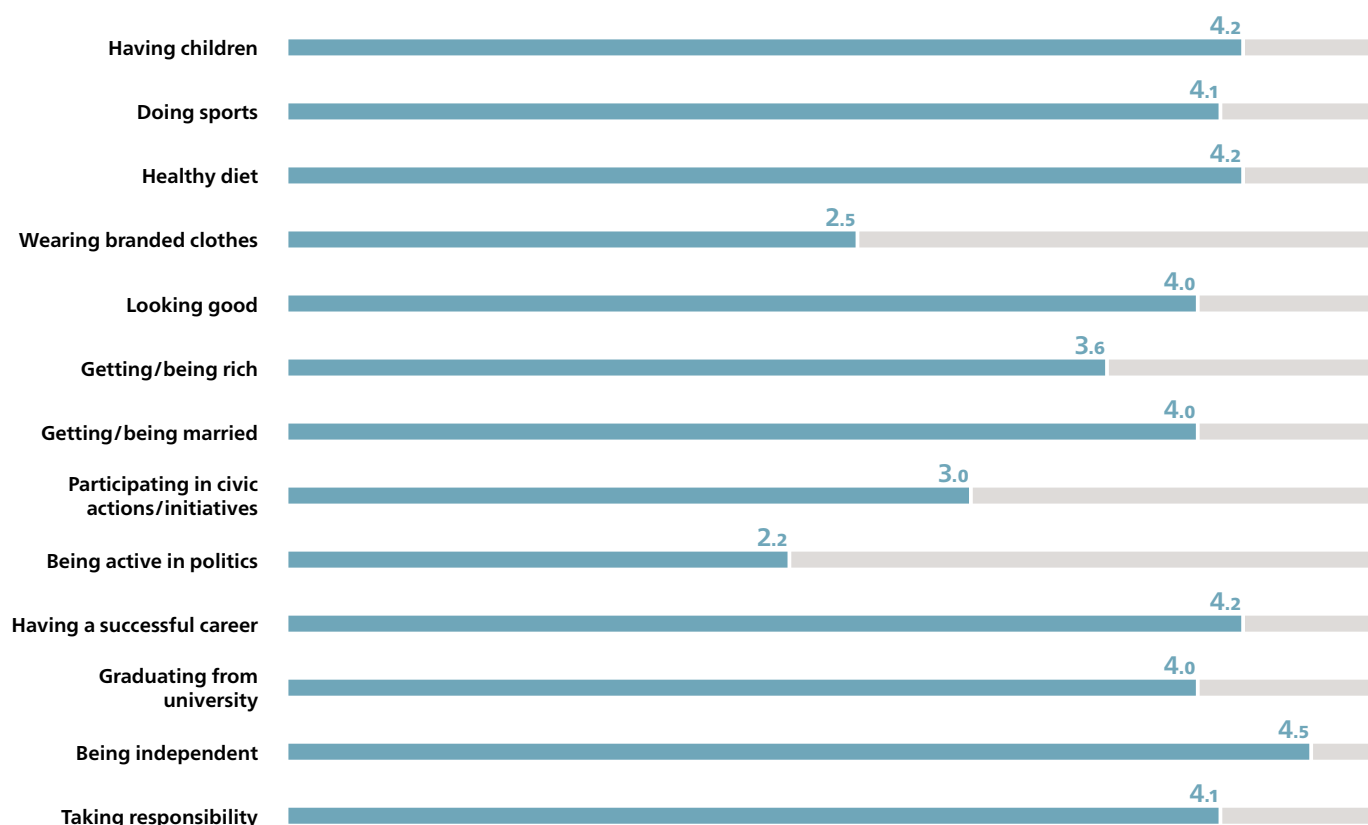
Additional analysis shows that there are some statistically significant differences in values by gender. More specifically, it is more important to girls to eat healthily ($m=4.36$ in contrast to $m=4.04$), to be independent ($m=4.52$ in contrast to $m=4.36$) and to complete a university education/graduate ($m=4.19$ in contrast to $m=3.75$), than to the boys. Boys, on the other hand, find it more important to be politically active than girls ($m=2.38$ in contrast to $m=2.05$).



Fig. 15 **Most important values for youth in North Macedonia**

How much are the following items important to you?

Mean values on a scale from '1 – not at all' to '5 – very important'



Satisfaction with life and projections for the future

Young people are generally satisfied with their own lives, with a mean value of $m=7.11$ (on a scale of 1-very dissatisfied to 10-very satisfied). The greatest satisfaction is observed in the 14–18 age group, for which statistically significant differences were registered. They are optimistic about their personal future, but pessimistic about the future of Macedonian society in the next 10 years. More specifically, 70 % imagine their own future as better than now (5.7 % imagine it worse than now, 11.7 % the same as now), and only 28.6 % imagine the future of Macedonian society as better than now (34.9 % imagine it worse than now, 23 % the same as now).

As the biggest potential problems for the country in the next decade, young people indicate the following six out of a total of twelve listed possible answers:

- corruption (63.2 %)
- skilled workforce leaving the country (55.3 %)
- quality of public services (healthcare, education) (51.4 %)
- unemployment (51.2 %)
- immigration (40.3 %)
- inequality (40.3 %).

The Study repeats and confirms the negative attitude of young people towards corruption, as a key problem, which is present in all social spheres.

Migration is also seen as a real threat that weakens the economy and the labour market, especially given the aspirations of young people to leave their home country. The next anticipated problem is certainly a product of the above, since corruption and lack of qualified labour are expected to have a negative impact on the quality of public services, especially in education and healthcare, as activities that require high levels of competence and knowledge and represent basic social rights. Although unemployment (among the young population and in general) is currently at a lower level, young people predict that it will be a social problem in the future. As other research results show, young people fear an influx of immigrants into the country and, consequently, inequality.

Fears and concerns

Conditions and phenomena that are the root of the greatest personal fears and concerns among young people are: weak healthcare (m=2.63); pollution and climate change (m=2.43); not having a job (m=2.39); lack of a decent pension (m=2.37); and serious illness (m=2.36).

70 % imagine their own future as better than now, but only 29 % imagine the future of their society better than now.

The increased fear for one's own (and other people's) health may also be due to the fact that young people faced a global health crisis, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

For almost all of the answers offered, the mean values are above 2 (on a three-point scale, 1 – not at all, 2 – somewhat, 3 – a lot), i.e., in the positive interval of the axis. Among young people, there is also (subsequently) fear of war (m=2.29); global pandemic (m=2.24); excessive number of migrants and refugees (m=2.23); robbery (m=2.22); terrorist attack (m=2.19); housing problems (m=2.19); negative effects from the artificial intelligence (m=2.17); and physical (m=2.15) and sexual violence (m=2.1).

The lowest rated is the fear or concern of being a victim of domestic violence (m=1.98), which is most likely due to the specific biological age, i.e., to the small percentage of respondents who currently live in a married or cohabiting union.

Mental health

Young people rate highly (on a scale of 1 to 5) their own mental health (m=3.9) and attitude towards life (m=3.77) and show awareness of the opportunities available to them when they need support (m=3.52), as well as openness to discuss the topic (m=3.73). Such data, as well as the low percentage of respondents who did not give an answer, show that there is a high awareness of mental health, and that mental health is not a taboo topic among young people. However, it should be noted that all mean values vary between 3.5 and 3.9, and that no high values between 4 and 5 were recorded.

The bivariate correlation shows that respondents from a family who are in a better financial situation have higher scores for all statements related to mental health.

The nonparametric tests do not register statistically significant differences according to age group and gender.

(Un)justified behaviour

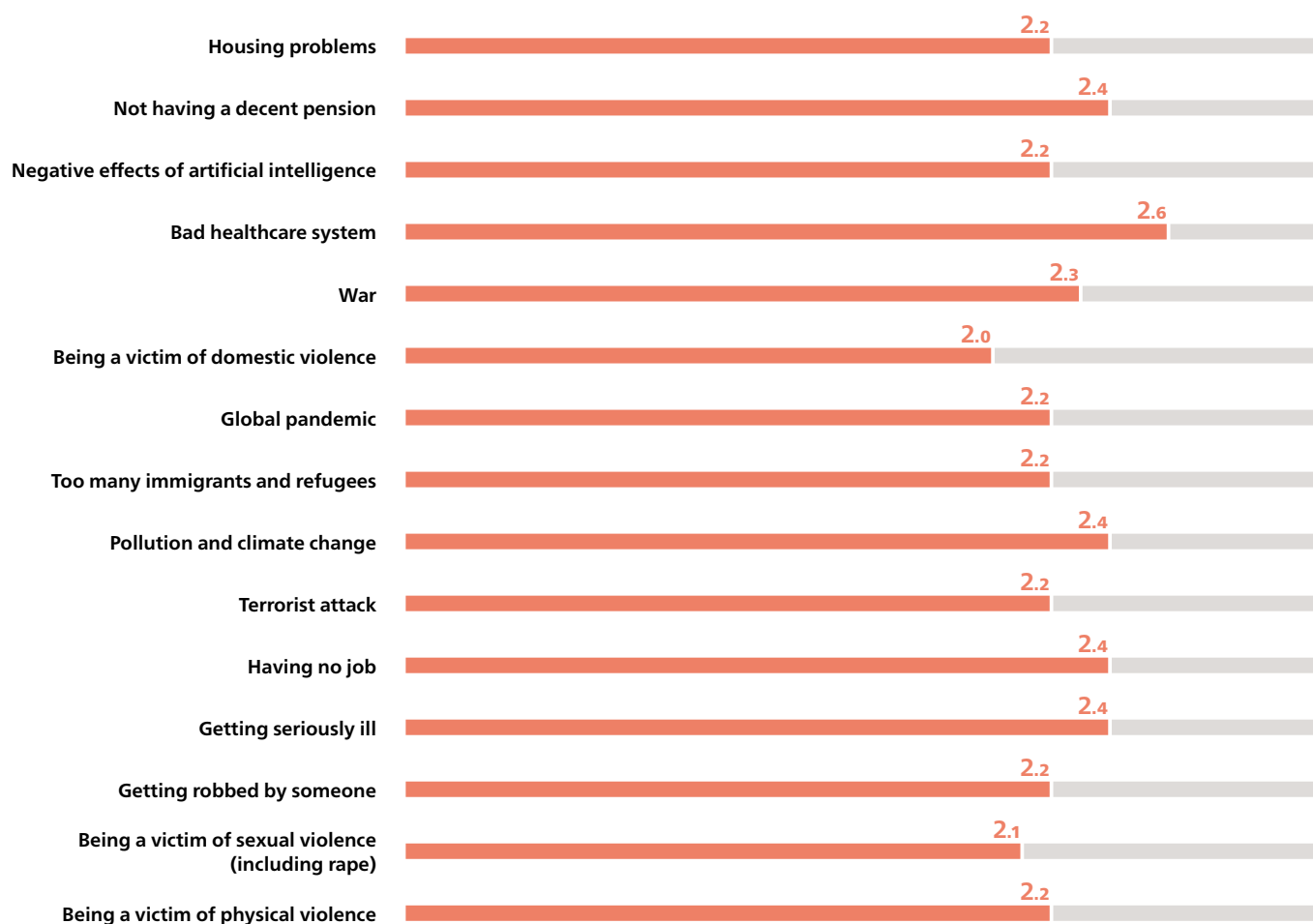
The following types of behaviour are not justified by young people: accepting/giving bribe (m=2.56); tax evasion (m=2.70); homosexuality (m=2.79); abortion (m=4.15); and using connections to get something done (m=4.25). All answers are positioned in the negative section of the axis, considering that it is a ten-point scale (1 – never, 10 – always). From the results it can be concluded that a certain conservatism is observed among young people regarding abortion and homosexuality as human rights. It is positive that young people oppose corrupt behaviour, which is also confirmed by other findings in the Study.

Since the standard deviation is about 3, additional statistical analyses were conducted and statistically significant differences in relation to age groups were recorded.

Fig. 16 Fears and concerns among youth in North Macedonia

To what extent are you frightened or concerned in relation to the following things?

Mean values on a scale from '1 – not at all' to '3 – a lot'



Most of the young people from the middle age group (19–24) justify abortion ($m=4.88$ in contrast to $m=3.27$ among the 14–18 age group and $m=3.96$ among the 25–29 age group); homosexuality ($m=3.28$ in contrast to $m=2.22$ among the 14–18 age group and $m=2.65$ among the 25–29 age group); tax evasion ($m=3.11$ in contrast to $m=2.34$ among the 14–18 age group and $m=2.55$ among the 25–29 age group); bribery ($m=2.95$ in contrast to $m=2.20$ among the 14–18 age group and $m=2.49$ among the 25–29 age group); and using connections ($m=4.83$ in contrast to $m=3.79$ among the 14–18 age group and $m=3.92$ among the 25–29 age group).

As one can see, young people in the 14–18 age group are the ones who justify these types of behaviour the least. No statistically significant gender differences were identified.

In 2019/2020, upon the initiative by several CSOs in the country, in cooperation with international organisations (such as UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, UNFPA – UN Population Fund), the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Education Development developed a draft curriculum for the introduction of comprehensive sexual education (CSE) in schools and an initial Manual for Teachers was developed for its implementation among pupils at the age of 12 to 14.

The model of comprehensive sexuality education was aligned with the latest recommendations by UNESCO (UNESCO 2018) and included seven thematic parts that were proposed to be studied in the education system, adapted to the age and needs of children: (1) Gender, (2) Relationships (3) Body and body image, (4) Sexual and reproductive health, (5) Sexuality, (6) Violence and (7) Civil aspects. The initiative was withdrawn due to strong resistance from certain groups in society, who expressed concern about the content and approach in the education, as well as due to insufficient understanding and support from the general public and institutions.

Religion

Most of the respondents belong to the Orthodox religious community (54.7 %), followed by the Muslim religious community (23.4 %). Every tenth young person does not identify themselves with any religious community. 8.6 % did not answer, and 2.7 % answered 'other'.

72 % believe that poor people have the fewest rights, followed by young people themselves (52 %).

Regarding the degree of practicing religion, one third of the respondents (33.4 %) who belong to one of the religious communities, in addition to weddings and funerals, attended religious ceremonies only on special holy days; 4.3 % do it more often than once a week; 7.1 % once a week; 13.6 % once a month; 11.6 % once a year; 8.9 % less than once a year and 11.9 % almost never.

Social distance

Young people show social distance from persons or families with different sexual orientation and other social groups. When asked 'how would you feel if one of the following families or persons moved to your neighbourhood?', mean values above 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5) or positive attitudes were obtained for the following groups: Christians (m=4.12) and Muslims (m=3.45). There is a neutral attitude (m=3) towards Roma and Jews, and a negative attitude towards members of the LGBT+ community (m=2.31) and drug addicts (m=1.71).

No statistically significant differences were recorded according to age group and ideological position.

Discrimination

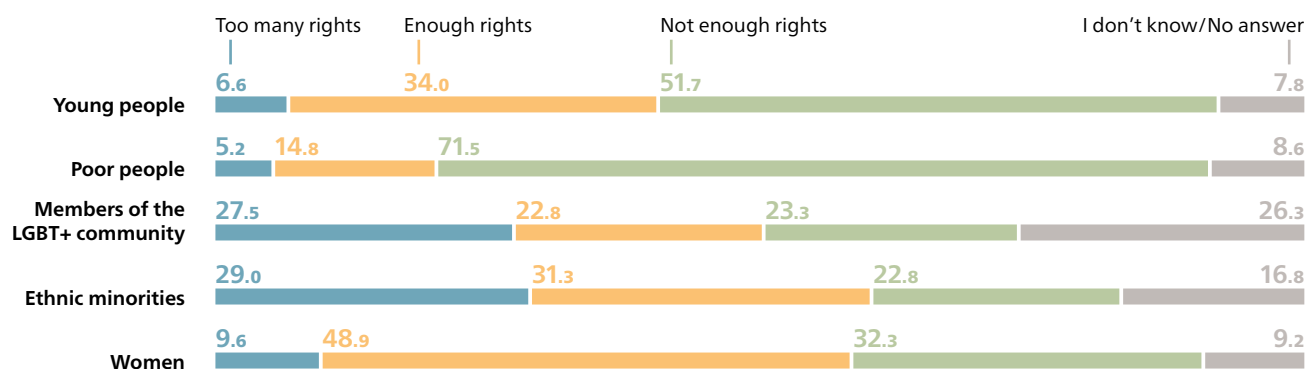
When asked if they ever felt discriminated against on various grounds, young people generally answered negatively. More specifically, all mean values are lower than 2 (on a three-point scale), and accordingly are positioned in the negative interval of the axis:

- Your gender (male/female/other) (m=1.35);
- Your economic background (poor/rich) (m=1.51);
- Your religious beliefs (m=1.42);
- Your ethnic background (m=1.44);
- Your political beliefs (m=1.43);
- Your sexual orientation (m=1.19);
- The language you speak (m=1.48).

The scale has a high degree of reliability and internal consistency ($\alpha=.810$). Therefore, it is important to note that young people who have experienced higher levels of discrimination face more and different types of discrimination at the same time.

Fig. 17 Attitudes toward minority rights among youth in North Macedonia (in %)

Please say whether, in your view, the following groups have not enough, enough, or too many rights in your country?



For example, young people who feel discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, to a greater extent feel discriminated against according to gender ($r=.507$, $p<0.01$), economic background ($r=.305$, $p<0.01$), religious beliefs ($r=.465$, $p<0.01$), ethnic origin ($r=.413$, $p<0.01$), political views ($r=.450$, $p<0.01$), and the language they speak ($r=.373$, $p<0.01$).

Various types of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and related to ethnicity, have also been noted by civil society organisations in the country (Stojanovski, 2016; Mihajlov, 2020).

Group rights

The attitudes and perceptions of the respondents towards the rights of certain groups in society are presented below. Young people believe that poor people have the fewest rights (71.5 %), followed by the young people themselves (51.7 %). Many answered that women (48.9 %) and ethnic minorities (31.3 %) have sufficient rights. In regard to the members of the LGBT+ community, the predominant answer is that they have too many rights (27.5 %).

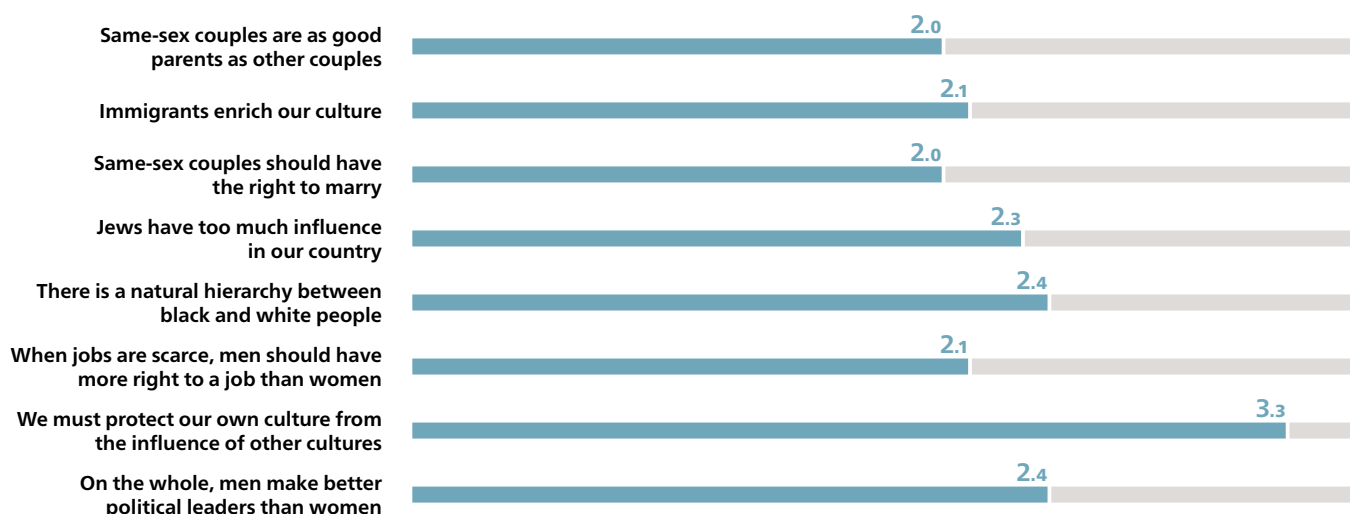
An interesting finding is that young people perceive themselves as the second most marginalised or disadvantaged group. It is also good to note that in the Study young people rank human rights first on the list of the most important values (See Chapter: "Political Views and Political Participation"). Such developed awareness can be due to the activities of civil society organisations to promote youth rights and freedoms and the mechanisms to exercise them in everyday life.

Social and nationalist attitudes

According to the study findings, young people show and possess attitudes of cultural protectionism/attitude to protect cultural identity from mixing with other cultures, and low tolerance, i.e. high social distance, from persons with a different sexual orientation and/or national and religious background.

Fig. 18 Societal views among youth in North Macedonia

Mean values on a scale from '1 – strongly disagree' to '4 – agree'



For each of the statements measuring social attitudes, the respondents responded on a scale of agreement from 1 to 4 (where the midpoint of the axis is 2.5), and the results indicate the following:

- Young people have negative attitudes towards the claims that same-sex couples should have the right to marry ($m=1.98$) and same-sex couples are good parents, like any other couple ($m=1.96$);
- Young people have a negative attitude towards the claim that immigrants enrich our culture ($m=2.05$), and a strong positive attitude that we must protect our culture from the influence of other cultures ($m=3.28$);
- Young people have a negative to neutral attitude that there is a natural hierarchy between "black and white people" ($m=2.37$) and that Jews have too much influence in our country ($m=2.29$);
- Young people do not agree that men are better political leaders than women ($m=2.36$) and that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women ($m=2.05$).

The nonparametric tests did not register statistically significant differences between age groups. But there are statistically significant differences between genders. Female respondents disagree to a greater extent with the statements that men make better political leaders than women do ($m=2.09$ in contrast to $m=2.72$) and that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women ($m=1.88$ in contrast to $m=2.28$), and to a greater extent agree that same-sex couples should have the right to marry ($m=2.07$ in contrast to $m=1.86$) and that same-sex couples are good parents, like any other couple ($m=2.08$ in contrast to $m=1.80$).

One can conclude that the members of the young female population believe to a greater extent in gender equality in the world of work and in politics, as well as that they have a greater sensitivity to topics that cover human rights, in contrast to the members of the young male population.

Young people were asked a set of questions (on a scale of 1 to 5) to measure nationalistic attitudes, and the respondents with mean values above 3 answered that they were proud to be citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia ($m=3.31$) and that those who were not Macedonians, but who live in North Macedonia, should accept the customs and values of the Macedonians ($m=3.50$). On the other hand, with mean values below 3, young people expressed disagreement with the views that it would be best if only Macedonians lived in North Macedonia ($m=2.87$) and that the country should accept/receive more immigrants ($m=1.92$).

The nonparametric tests show that respondents from the youngest age group (14–18) are the proudest to be Macedonian citizens. There are statistically significant differences in the answers in regard to almost all claims according to the religious background of the respondents, which is expected, because the Macedonian society is multicultural, and the questions are related to the Macedonian national identity.

Environment

Young people on a general level show a moderately developed eco-awareness and a positive attitude towards issues related to environment protection, so with a mean value of $m=3.13$ (on a scale of 1 to 5) they answered that the state should limit consumption if that could help protect the environment (e.g. it should be forbidden to drive old cars that pollute the environment), even though opinions were divided. More specifically, a cumulative 41.1 % answered that they agreed or strongly agreed, 31.7 % neither agreed nor disagreed, and a cumulative 27.2 % disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Conclusions

1. The most important thing for young people is to be independent ($m=4.45$); in the second place is to eat healthily ($m=4.22$); in the third place is to have a successful career ($m=4.21$); in fourth place is to have children ($m=4.16$); and in fifth place is to take responsibility ($m=4.13$). The least important to them is being politically active ($m=2.19$); wearing branded clothes ($m=2.5$); and participating in civic activities/initiatives ($m=3.02$).

2. Young people are generally satisfied with their own lives, with a mean value of $m=7.11$ (on a scale of 1 – very dissatisfied to 10 – very satisfied).

3. They are optimistic about their personal future, but pessimistic about the future of Macedonian society in the next 10 years. More specifically, 70 % imagine their own future as better than now, and only 28.6 % imagine the future of Macedonian society better than now.

4. As the biggest potential problems for the country in the coming decade, young people perceive the following: corruption (63.2 %); qualified labour force leaving the country (55.3 %); quality of public services (healthcare, education) (51.4 %); unemployment (51.2 %); and immigration and inequality (with an identical percentage of 40.3 %).

5. Conditions and phenomena that are the root of the greatest personal fears and concerns among young people are the weak healthcare ($m=2.63$); pollution and climate change ($m=2.43$); not having a job ($m=2.39$); lack of a decent pension ($m=2.37$); serious illness ($m=2.36$).

6. Young people positively perceive their own mental health (m=3.9 on a scale of 1 to 5).

7. Certain conservatism regarding abortion and homosexuality is observed among young people.

8. Young people show social distance from persons or families with a different religious background, sexual orientation and other social groups.

9. Generally, young people did not express a feeling of being discriminated against. However, additional analyses indicate that young people with a different sexual orientation simultaneously face multiple discrimination.

10. Young people are against any form of corrupt behaviour.

11. The respondents believe that the poor have the fewest rights (71.5%), followed by the young people themselves (51.7%). Many answer that women (48.9%) and ethnic minorities (31.3%) have sufficient rights. In regard to the members of the LGBT+ community, the predominant answer is that they have too many rights (27.5%).

12. Young people generally show and possess attitudes of cultural protectionism/ attitudes to protect cultural identity from mixing with other cultures, and low tolerance for persons with a different sexual orientation and/or national and religious background. It cannot be generalised as xenophobia because of the expressed desire for emigration.

13. Young people show partially developed environmental awareness and a positive attitude towards issues related to environmental protection.

Recommendations

1. Career centres and mentoring programmes should be established to help young people build successful careers, as well as developing platforms to connect young people with potential employers and mentors.

2. There should be support of training programmes on human rights and tolerance, introduction of comprehensive sexual education in schools for better awareness and reduction of prejudices among young people.

3. There is a need for establishing mechanisms for protection against discrimination and support for victims of discrimination.

4. Eco-initiatives and environmental protection programmes involving youth should be supported.

5. Young people should be encouraged to participate in activities that promote social inclusion and understanding of different cultures and identities.

8 Political attitudes and participation

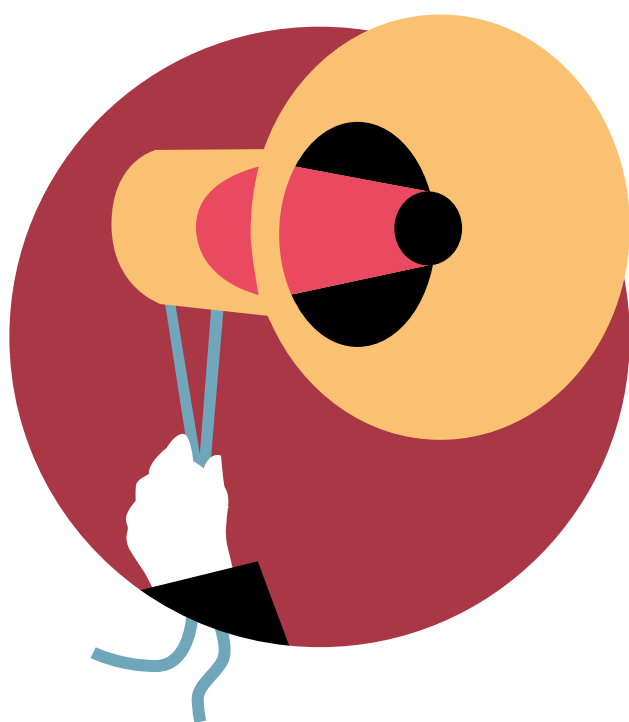
Young people usually develop their political views under the influence of parents, school, media, society and personal experience (Weiss, 2020), but of course the influence of group – peer pressure must also be taken into account, which can lead to conformism in regard to political behaviour (Mallinson & Hatemi, 2018), especially among the young population.

Voting or voting turnout is one of the most important topics in the focus of political science. It is the way in which citizens transfer their sovereignty to their future representatives, and for this process to be democratic, it requires active involvement of citizens in it (Naumovska et al., 2022). Voting in elections is the main process of political participation, although it is also recognised in less conventional forms, such as signing petitions, participating in protests, and other forms of political activism. Political participation implies any form in which citizens express their views, aimed at influencing the policy-making process of their Government (Hague & Harrop, 2007).

Regarding youth political participation, the scientific literature does not make a distinction from the general political participation (Weiss, 2020), but indicates a lower interest of young people in the EU to get involved in the electoral process, compared to other age groups (Barta et al, 2021), contrary to the greater interest in participating in non-conventional (non-institutionalised) forms of political activism (Pickard, 2019). According to some surveys in the Republic of North Macedonia, young people do not tend to talk about political developments and are not informed, nor are they satisfied with the involvement of young people in politics and the way in which they are consulted on important decisions; but, nevertheless, and in a slightly paradoxical manner, a huge number of young people vote (Galevski, 2019, Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2018/2019). Even the small number of young candidates on the candidate lists for the election (Galevski and Gjorgievska, 2020) does not deter young people from voting.

The attitudes of young people regarding the European Union (EU) are also attracting attention, and the data speak of an increase in Euroscepticism. In general, the support for joining the EU has dropped from 80 % in 2014 to 60 % in 2023, but one can note that Euroscepticism is most present among the population aged 18 to 29, i.e. 53 % of this group of respondents, support this process (Damjanovski, 2023).

Regarding the national political context in the last five years, which is particularly important for the personality development of young people and their views, it can be pointed out that although the Republic of North Macedonia in 2018 changed the constitutional name of the country by signing the Prespa Agreement with the Republic of Greece, to resolve the 30-year-old dispute over the name, the EU accession has been obstructed once again. An important benefit of the name change is membership in NATO, which is of particular importance for national security, especially in times of conflicts on European soil.



This situation of inconsistency of the EU's policies towards the country has undoubtedly influenced the lower trust of the citizens in the previous government, led by the SDSM political party.

At the time of drafting this analysis, the country was in a post-election period where the voting for the new parliamentary composition had been completed,² but the Government was not yet formed. Currently, Macedonian citizens are waiting for the new coalition Government to be led by VMRO-DPMNE, and to include the VLEN coalition and ZNAM party. For the first time after more than 20 years, the DUI party should step down from the executive power.

Interest in politics and representation

Over the past years in the Republic of North Macedonia, a series of studies have been conducted on youth and politics, and in all of them the dominant narrative is that young people have a low level of trust in political institutions and have little interest in political processes.

This narrative is also confirmed by the results of the last two youth studies done by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, where an unchanged low percentage of interest in politics among young people in the Republic of North Macedonia is recorded. In 2018, it was 16.8 %, and in 2024, 17 %, which indicates a disconnection between young people and politics.

17 % of the young population is interested in politics.

The weak interest in politics among young people is due to the political context and the series of intense political crises that the country went through in the last 10 years, as well as the distrust in political parties and institutions, which failed to find a solution to the problems related to corruption, rule of law, healthcare and the quality of education.

Interest in politics is closely related to the representation of young people in political processes. Another indicator (as well as a reason for the low interest in politics) is the fact that only 9 % of respondents believe that their interests are fairly well or very well represented in national politics. In the previous studies, this percentage was around 20 %, and the recommendations indicate the necessity of greater involvement of young people in decision-making processes, especially at the local level and on topics that are of their interest.

In the last local elections, only 2.99 % of the candidates for mayors were young people, i.e. according to the legal definition between the ages of 18 and 29, i.e. only 9 candidates out of a total of 301. In the last parliamentary composition of 2020–2024, there were only four MPs aged under the age of 30 (3.33 % of MPs).

The relative absence of young people in politics and political processes is worrying not only because of normative concerns about civic engagement, but also because young people have different preferences for a wide range of policies that affect them directly, i.e., those related to education, unemployment, and newer technologies, but also on long-term issues such as climate change.

Ideological orientations

It is important to note that in the Republic of North Macedonia there is no systematic and organised approach to organising political education in the spirit of democratic values by the state institutions, and the attitudes, perceptions and low interest of young people in political processes indicate the need for the introduction of political education, especially in secondary schools (Damjanovski, Markovikj, Spasov 2023).

Fig. 19 Representation of young people's interests in politics (in %)

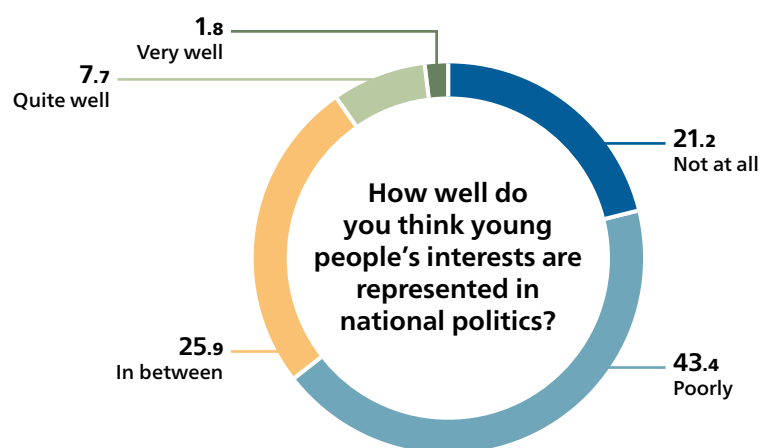


Fig. 20 Ideological positioning among youth in North Macedonia (in %)

When people discuss their political beliefs, they typically refer to left-wing and right-wing.

How would you place your views?

Answers on a scale from 1 to 10 are grouped: left (1–4), center (5–6), and 7–10 right



An additional argument that confirms the above is the results from the survey concerning the ideological orientations of the youth in the country. According to the 2013 Youth Study, 38 % did not know how to position themselves on the ideological scale from left to right (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2013, 105); in 2018 this percentage was almost 50, consisting of those who answered "I don't know" or "I don't want to give an answer" (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2019, 77), while in this year's Study, 39 % of respondents opted for the same answers. The comparative analysis of 11 countries from the region shows that this degree of respondents who do not know/want to position themselves ideologically is the highest in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Such a result can be due to several factors – the high level of lack of interest on the part of young people in politics and following political events, as well as the decreased trust in political parties, but also the confusion created by the political parties by their inconsistency in their ideological commitments. The problem arises from the discrepancies between the political parties' declaration from an ideological standpoint, and the policies and values they advocate in practice.

From the answers of those respondents who decided to position themselves ideologically, on a scale of 1 to 10, from extreme left to extreme right, the mean value of all respondents is in the centre and is $m=5.24$.

Fig. 21 **Ideologically defined attitudes among youth in North Macedonia**

Mean values on a scale from '1 – totally disagree' to '5 – totally agree'



On the grouped variable 1-4 left, 5-6 centre and 7-10 right, 35.3 % chose the left, 33.8 % chose the centre, and 30.9 % chose the right. Compared to the results of the 2018 study, no evident changes have been observed in terms of the ideological positioning of the youth in the country.

The data show that there is a correlation of ideological positioning with the level of family income, with high statistical significance at 0.05 level. This means that the young people who are left-oriented come from families with a higher income, which is interesting to note, considering that the left is ideologically focused on supporting working class families and their rights.

With the question about (dis)agreement with certain ideologically defined statements, we had the opportunity to determine in more detail the declared ideological affiliation from the previous question. From the results, it can be concluded that young people have more pronounced left-wing attitudes, i.e., they think that the incomes of the rich and the poor should be equal ($m=3.57$ on a scale of 1-5); that the government should take greater responsibility to ensure that everyone is taken care of (high mean value of $m=4.25$); and that state ownership of businesses and industries should be increased ($m=3.05$).

No statistically significant differences were found in terms of respondents' gender, place of residence and level of education. No statistically significant correlation was established between the positioning on the left-to-right scale and the three ideological claims.

It was only established that the social status of the respondents, i.e., the income in the family, is negatively correlated with the claim that the state should increase state ownership of businesses and industries. Namely, the respondents from families with lower incomes agree with this statement to a greater extent than those whose families have higher incomes. The situation is different when it comes to the statement that the state should ensure that all citizens are taken care of, i.e., most respondents who agree with this claim come from families with a higher income.

Voting and views concerning political parties

Of the forms of political participation, voting in elections is the most common form, as the data from this study have shown. According to the answers to the question "Did you vote in the last parliamentary elections?", 46.8 % of the surveyed population answered positively; 11.4 % answered that they did not vote even though they had the right to vote; while 37.4 % did not have the right to vote at that moment (4.4 % did not answer this question). If only respondents who had the right to vote are taken into account, it follows that a high percentage of 80.3 % voted in the last parliamentary elections.

Less than 1 % of the surveyed population voted for the other political parties: 26.6 % did not answer this question, and 6 % answered "I don't know".

Regarding the question “If parliamentary elections were held in the coming days, which party would you vote for?”, (although the survey was carried out immediately before the elections) the percentages for the answers “I don’t know” and “I have no answer” dominated with almost half of the respondents choosing them (45.3%). Among the respondents who gave a concrete answer to this question, the VMRO-DPMNE party (for which 15.3% would vote) is mentioned most often; followed by Levica (for which 12.4% would vote); DUI (for which 8.9% would vote); SDSM (for which 6.1% would vote); Alliance for Albanians (for which 3% would vote); and Besa Movement (for which 2.5% would vote). The other parties are mentioned by less than 1%, while 6% answered that they would vote for another party.

Seen in comparison with the final election results, the tendency to support VMRO-DPMNE is also noticeable among young people, but what is more striking is the support for the Party Levica, which obviously received the majority of votes from the young population (according to the final results they won 6.82% of the votes, source SEC).

80 % of the young people who had a right to vote, voted in the last parliamentary elections in 2020.

According to the answers given to the question “Would you be willing to take on a political function?”, more than half of the respondents answered that they would not take such a position (or more precisely 57.2% of the surveyed population), while 22.2% answered positively to this question. 18.5% did not know how to answer this question, and an additional 2.1% did not give an answer. Regarding the age subgroups and the answers to this question, no statistically significant difference is observed, but it exists when this question is considered from the aspect of gender. Almost twice as many young men (30.2%) would take a political function as young women (16.5%) (statistical significance of 0.001).

When asked the same question in the national study of women in the Republic of North Macedonia (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2021) conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 65% of women answered negatively, i.e. that they would not take a political function, while only 7% answered positively. As a reason for not taking a political function, they cited mistrust of political parties and of their way of functioning; lack of clear ideology and values; and discrimination; as well as the fact that they did not believe that they could change anything in the country.

According to the qualitative research “How to ensure equal and fair representation in the Parliament”, the main factors for not having enough women running for office are the patriarchal traditional mentality, as well as the lack of will among women due to the social treatment of marginalisation, discrimination, insufficient respect and inappropriate speech directed at women who are in the public eye, as well as the lack of support from their families (Naumovska et al., 2022).

According to another research that focuses on women in general, domestic responsibilities and care for the family are two of the main factors that influence women not to run for higher positions (Atansov; Naumovska, 2013).

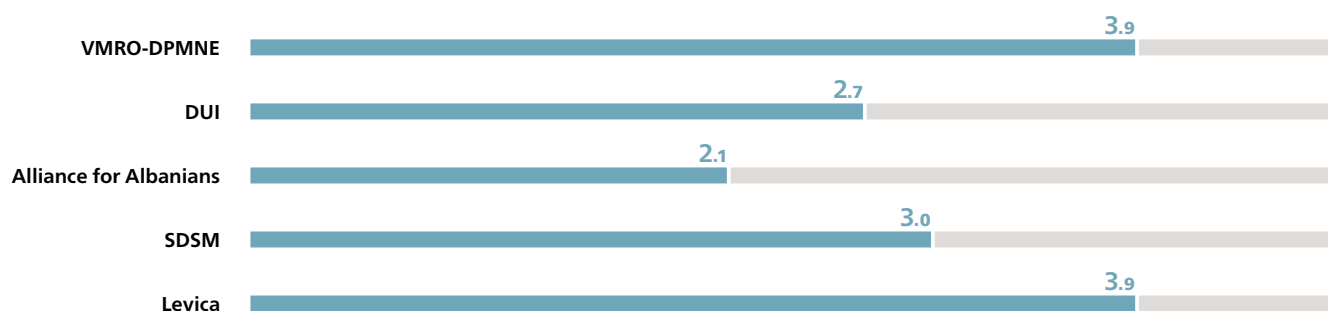
Based on the above, the encouragement of girls and women to get involved in political life more actively should perhaps be stimulated through the support and promotion of women who are already in office (including holding political functions). Building a positive image of women is also extremely important, as well as protecting women who are subjected to hate speech.

The respondents expressed their views about certain political parties, i.e. the feeling they have about them, on a ten-point scale (where 1 means “I don’t like that party at all,” and 10 means “I like that party very much”).

Fig. 22 Feelings towards political parties among youth in North Macedonia

Below is a list of the major political parties in the country.

Rate your feelings on a scale from '0 – strongly dislike' to '10 – strongly like'.



From the mean values, it can be noted that none of the listed parties crosses the mean value of 5, which would mean leaning towards a positive feeling/attitude. According to the mean values expressed, the VMRO-DPMNE party has obtained the highest mean value ($m=3.93$) while the party Alliance for Albanians has the lowest ($m=2.07$).³ The standard deviation ranges from 2.025 to 3.089, which is partly due to the size of the scale; however, it is assumed to be due to the ethnic structure of the respondents. According to the bivariate correlation, young people who have more positive feelings for the political parties VMRO-DPMNE, DUI⁴ and Alliance for Albanians are positioned more to the right on the ideological axis.

In addition to the attitude/feelings about the listed political parties, the respondents were also asked on a four-point scale, "Are you comfortable having close friends who are supporters of a party?" (a separate question is asked for each party). What is most noticeable regarding this question is the high percentage of respondents who did not answer the question. This percentage varies from 52 % of the respondents who did not answer the question regarding close friendships with supporters of DUI, to 74 % who did not answer whether they would be comfortable having close friends who were supporters of Levica. Regarding the answers given, there is only a positive attitude towards the supporters of the SDSM party, i.e., the mean values are: SDSM $m=2.23$; VMRO-DPMNE $m=1.86$; DUI $m=1.8$; Levica $m=1.58$ and Alliance for Albanians $m=1.85$.

7.2 % of respondents are actively involved in political life through membership in a political party, and an additional 13.8 % would become members, while 61.3 % would not be involved in this form of activism. Almost every second respondent did not answer or did not know how to answer this question (or more precisely 17.6 %). Differences in terms of the gender and age group of respondents were not observed. Unsurprisingly, young people who are interested in politics are more often members of a political party or are considering becoming a member of a party (statistical significance $p<0.001$).

Respondents who are, or would become, members of political parties were asked about the reasons for joining the parties. According to the answers, it is positive to note that the most common reason to become a member of a political party is the need to influence the improvement of the society (53.5 %), followed by them getting a job or the employment of a family member (27.7 %), and for personal and material benefits (10.8 %).

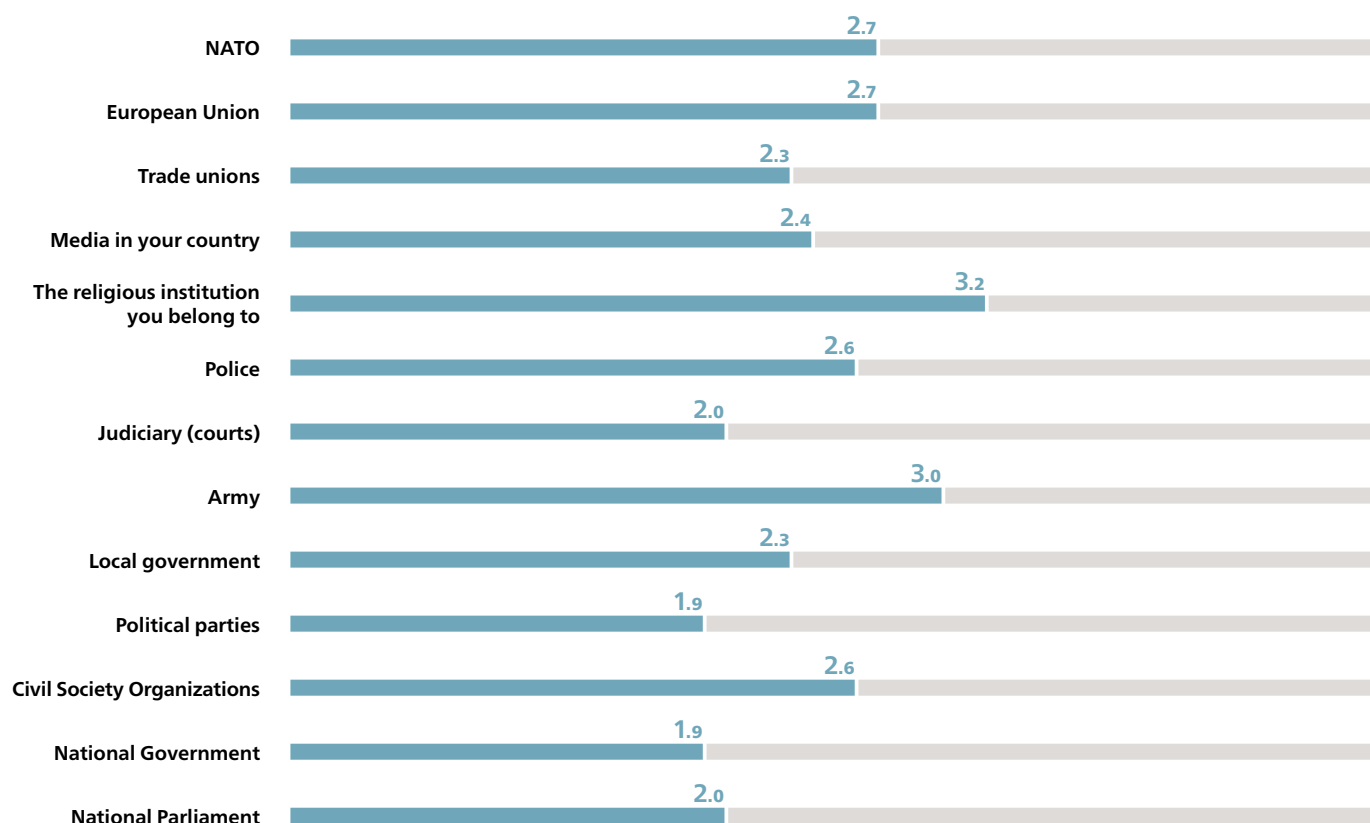
Trust in institutions

When it comes to trust in different political institutions, the surveyed population expressed their level of trust on a five-point scale (where 1 means "I don't trust them at all" 3 means "I trust them somewhat," and 5 means "I trust them completely").

Fig. 23 Trust in institutions among youth in North Macedonia

On the whole, how much do you trust the entities listed below?

Mean values on a scale from '1 – not at all' to '5 – fully'



According to the answers given, young people generally have little trust in any of the offered institutions, because the mean values of the answers are below the neutral level of the scale. The most trust is expressed towards the religious organisations they belong to ($m=3.18$), followed by the Army ($m=3.02$). The surveyed population has the lowest level of trust in the Political Parties ($m=1.86$), the Government ($m=1.93$) and the Assembly ($m=2.00$), with answers ranging from 'I have no trust at all' to 'I have a little trust'. The state of trust in institutions is unchanged in terms of the data from the 2019 study.

When asked "Do you think that the churches and religious organisations in this country have too much or too little power?", the respondents evaluated the power of these organisations on a five-point scale, where 1 means "far too little power" and 5 means "far too much power". According to the given answers, the mean value of the given answers for this question is $m=2.96$, i.e., the respondents believe that religious organisations have enough power in the country.

Political activism

The next set of questions is dedicated to the different forms of political activism and to what extent young people have participated in such processes or have a positive attitude towards them. According to the answers, young people mostly stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons (23.6 %) and they have the most positive attitude towards this form of political activism ("not yet, but I would like to" 14.9 %); 22.3 % volunteered or participated in the activities of civil society organisations; 18.4 % signed a list of political demands/supported an online petition; 16.5 % participated in demonstrations; and 13.2 % participated in political activities online/on social media. The least interest for involvement is observed in relation to engagement in a political party or political group (9.5 %).

Greater involvement of young people in the different forms of political activism or the different forms of political participation is expected if young people acquire adequate knowledge about the meaning of those processes and the control mechanisms they can use, as well as with their greater representation in decision-making processes. The need of political education⁵ for young people has long been asserted in various political-social and scientific discussions in order for young people to learn about the characteristics of democratic political systems and the role of citizens in them, the characteristics of political institutions and their role, and the different ideologies and their responses in solving social problems.

In that way, young people will be able to adopt an informed view, position themselves ideologically and effectively enjoy the right to vote and the right to participate in various political initiatives.

Syndicalism

According to the general distribution of answers, 5.2 % of respondents are union members, while 12.7 % would like to join, and the remaining 82.1 % answered that they are not members. When considering this issue from the aspect of work status, out of the total number of respondents, 18.6 % answered that they hold permanent full-time employment, and of those 15.2 % were members of a trade union, and additional 10.9 % would want to join. It can be concluded that syndicalism, as a mechanism for organised and joint action related to the protection of labour rights and improvement of working conditions, is not present among young people.

Democratic and authoritarian values

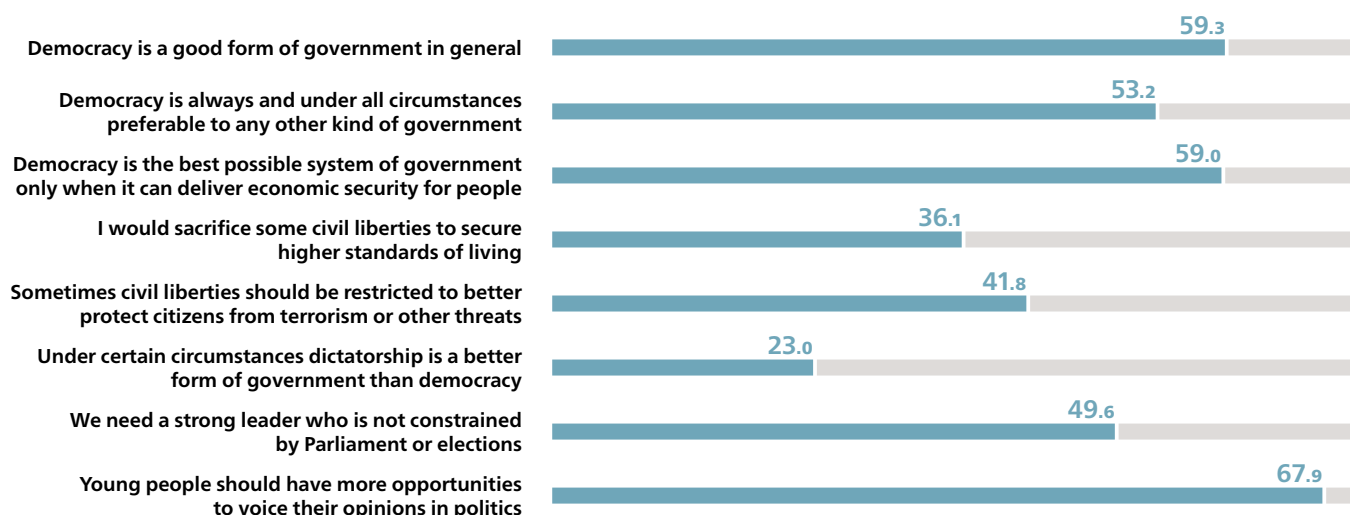
In order to examine democratic and authoritarian values among young people in the Republic of North Macedonia, they were given eight statements related to democratic governance, youth participation in politics, and civil rights.

When analysing these data, it should be taken into account that Macedonian democracy is relatively young and unconsolidated. Freedom House reports in recent years have noted a decline in democracy and point to the hybrid regime as the most dominant form of government in the region covered by the report. Such regimes combine the elements of democratic and authoritarian rule (FH Report, 2022, 2023), so this situation is also observed in the results of the study in this section.

From the data obtained, it can be concluded that democratic views dominate among young people. The majority (or 59.3 %) of respondents agree that democracy is a good system of government, and in any case, it is better than any other system of government (53.2 %). Still, a quarter of respondents (23 %) prefer a dictatorship under certain circumstances.

Fig. 24 Democratic vs. authoritarian values among youth in North Macedonia + C1 (in %)

Cumulative percent of young people who answered 'agree' and 'totally agree' to the following statements:



Young people who support a dictatorship to a greater extent are positioned more to the right of the ideological scale ($r=.121$, $p<0.05$); to a greater extent they believe that men make better political leaders than women do ($r=.195$, $p<0.01$), they have a greater interest in politics ($r=.131$, $p<0.01$), and to a lesser extent they agree that democracy is a good form of government ($r=-.196$, $p<0.05$). More members of the young male population (27.3 % in contrast to 19.6 %, $\chi^2=10.168$, $p<0.05$) and respondents who filled out the survey in Albanian language (35 % in contrast to 19.6 %, $\chi^2=27.022$, $p<0.01$) tend to agree.

There are no statistically significant differences between the age groups and based on the socioeconomic status (level of education of young people and their parents, place of residence, financial situation).

The statement with the highest percentage of support by young people (68 %) emphasises again the need for greater involvement of young people in politics, i.e., respondents agree with the statement that young people should have more opportunities to speak out in politics.

For 36 %, the standard of living is more important than civil liberties, while 29.4 % prefer rights and liberties to be of a higher standard. The percentage is similar for the statement about the restriction of civil liberties for the purpose of greater protection from security risks.

The percentage of support for democratic values and governance is higher in previous studies, in which there is ambivalence in attitudes, which is not the case in the current study.

The most important values

The young people who were part of this study also ranked the listed categories in terms of what were the most important values for them personally. According to the answers given, the most important values among young people are: 1) human rights, 2) the economic well-being of citizens and 3) security. Unlike the data in the 2018/19 Youth Study of North Macedonia, this time security appears as one of the most important values among the youth. Such a change is assumed to be due to the change of circumstances in Europe and beyond, i.e., due to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Fig. 25 Most important values for youth in North Macedonia (in %)

	First rank	Second rank	Third rank	Total for each value mentioned as one of the three most important values
Democracy				14.5
Rule of law				34.6
Human rights	19.8	15.5	16.1	51.4
Economic wellbeing of citizen	13.6	18.5	17.6	49.7
Employment				40.4
Social equality				24.1
Gender equality				15.1
Security	15.1	17.6	14.9	47.6
Individual freedom				22.5

The young people were also asked to evaluate the state of these nine values in North Macedonia and in the European Union on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means very bad and 5 very good). According to the analysis, the assessment of the state of all values is higher when it comes to the European Union in comparison to North Macedonia, i.e. all the values for the country are in the negative interval of the axis, and all the values for the EU have a positive mean value, ranging from good (3) to very good (4). The biggest difference is observed in relation to the value *economic well-being of the citizens*. This value has the highest score in regard to the EU ($m=3.58$), and the lowest in regard to North Macedonia ($m=1.78$). The rule of law in the country is rated as being low with $m=1.81$, compared to the EU with $m=3.22$. The smallest difference is observed in relation to the values *Security* and *Individual Freedom*.

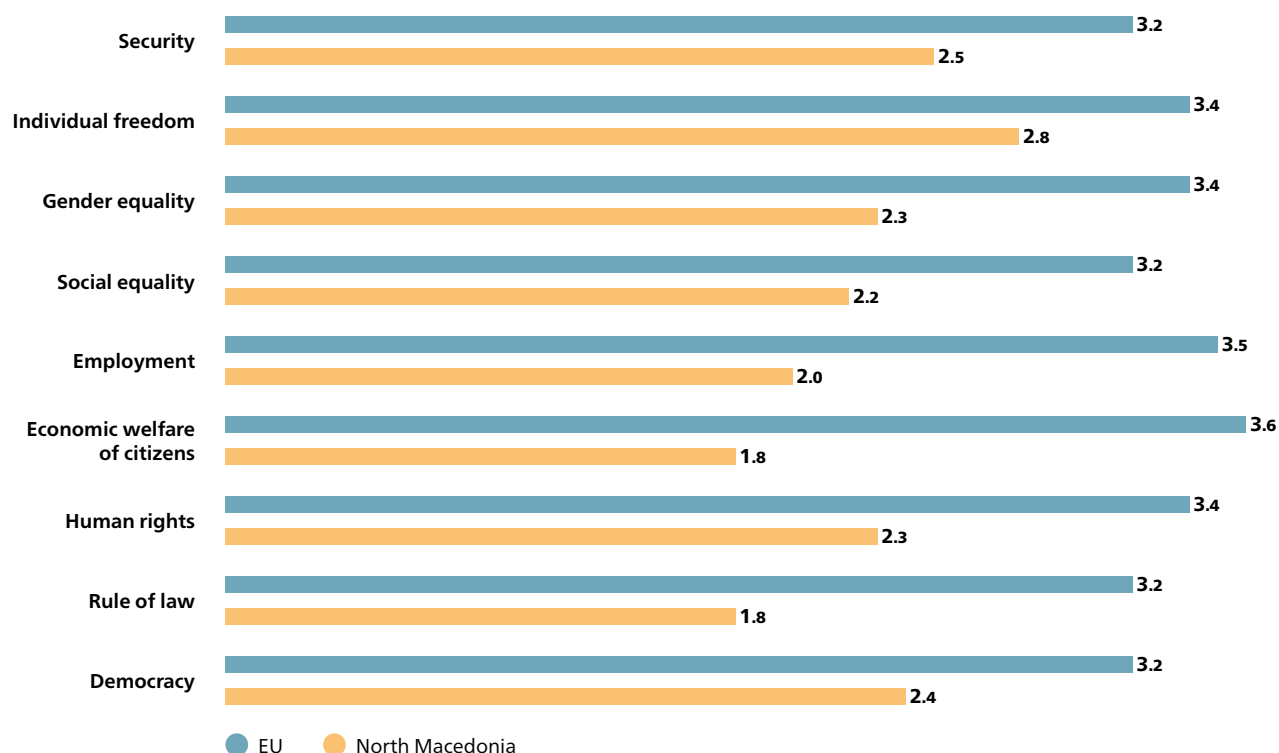
Attitude towards the EU

In regard to the issues related to the country's accession to the European Union, as in other surveys (Damjanovski, 2023), this survey also observes the growing trend of Euroscepticism. According to the answers given, 41.7% of the respondents believe that the country should join the European Union (EU), while 37.9% do not think that this should happen (cumulatively 20.4% did not know or did not give an answer to the question).

Comparatively, in the 2013 Youth Study, 73% had a positive attitude in regard to the accession to EU (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2013), while in the 2018/2019 Youth Study (Topuzovska Latkovikj et al., 2018/2019) as many as 81% of young people supported EU membership.

Fig. 26 **Perceived state of values in their country and the EU among youth in North Macedonia**

How good or bad, in your view, is the status of the following listed values in your country and in the EU? Mean values on a scale from '1 – very bad' to '5 – very good')



Significant differences are observed when the data are viewed from the perspective of age groups, so that the respondents from the middle age group of 25 to 29 (46.2) have the most positive attitude; the most common negative response is among the respondents from 19 to 24 age group (44.9%); and respondents from 14 to 18 age group mainly did not know/or had no answer to this question (32.2%).

With the change of circumstances regarding the country's accession to the European Union and the introduction of the negotiating framework proposed by France as a condition for the continuation of the process, young people were asked whether they supported or opposed this process. Regarding the answers, one should primarily mention that almost one third of the respondents did not know/did not have an answer to this question (31.7 %).

Of the respondents who gave a concrete answer, the opinion is divided, i.e. 50.1 % supported this process (25 % fully and 25.1 % partially) and 49.9 % opposed it (19.7 % partially and 30.3 % fully). According to the bivariate analysis, young people who do not support the negotiating framework proposed by France, identify to a lesser extent as citizens of Europe or as Europeans ($r=-.325$, $p<0.01$). Trust in the EU, however, remains unchanged from the 2018/2019 Youth Study ($m=2.71$ in contrast to $m=2.72$).

Young people feel more like Macedonians ($m=3.71$) than Europeans ($m=2.94$). For the first time since the beginning of the implementation of longitudinal youth studies in 2013, identification with Europe has a mean value lower than 3, i.e., in the negative interval of the axis. The identification with the national identity has also decreased (from $m=4.12$ in 2018/2019).

The data related to the European Union, and the changes detected in terms of young people's attitudes towards it, is assumed to be a consequence of the European Union's attitude towards the Republic of North Macedonia, because after the signing of the Prespa Agreement with the Republic of Greece and the change of the constitutional name of the country in 2018, the majority of the citizens, and especially the young population, expected an unblocking of the path for Euro-Atlantic integration, and a smooth start of the EU accession negotiations, which unexpectedly became problematic again with the demands and veto by the Republic of Bulgaria for new constitutional changes.

Getting informed from the media

When young people were asked questions related to getting informed from the Macedonian media about politics and current events, it seems that young people for the most part do not follow the media, although this question also applies to the contents that are present in the online space, but are produced by the media. According to the answers, Sitel Television is the most watched TV station (47.5 %), followed by Kanal 5 (41.3 %) and Telma (31.6 %). In regard to TV24, Alsat and Alfa TV stations, more than 70 % of respondents answered that they do not have time to watch them. The question refers to the time spent watching content related to politics and current affairs on a weekly basis. The data show that a very small percentage of respondents (1.7 % to 3.2 %) spend more than 5 hours a week following political and current affairs.

As a result of the use of new technologies, the biggest changes in general among the entire population can be seen in terms of the source of their information, so the Internet and social media take the primacy as a source of information. According to the Eurothink research (2023), citizens are mostly informed about political topics online (56.5 %), and this trend is especially noticeable among the youngest population.

If in 2014, 84.35 % of young people watched TV every day or several times a week in order to learn about domestic and foreign affairs, 19 % watched mostly political TV programmes and more than 1/3 spent more than 2 hours watching television (AVMU, 2014), the data from 2022 say that almost 70 % of young people get information from social media, 19 % from internet portals, and 8.2 % from other sources (Agency for Youth and Sport, 2022).

Views on gender equality

In 2022, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the national strategy for gender equality, which was followed by conclusions binding the Assembly to adopt a law on gender equality and establish a Gender Equality Secretariat by the end of 2023. The draft law on gender equality is of exceptional importance not only because of the fact that it strengthens the institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men at both central and local levels, but also because of the value message it carries.

The process was hindered by the gender misinformation that was spread in the public and which caused violent reactions, as well as the involvement of religious institutions and the strong influence by anti-gender movements in the country.

In order to measure the attitude of the young population on this topic, the question "Do you support the initiative for the Law on Gender Equality?" was posed. Consequently, 47.4 % answered positively, and 26.3 % answered that they do not support it. The remaining 28.3 % did not answer or did not know how to answer this question. In terms of gender, there is a partial difference between female and male respondents, i.e., girls are 6 % more supportive of this initiative than boys (50 % in contrast to 43.9 %). The cross-tabulation according to grouped ideological positioning shows that young people who position themselves centrally support the Law on Gender Equality with the highest percentage (61.5 %), in contrast to young people with left-wing (48.6 %) and right-wing (43.6 %) ideological orientations, however, no statistically significant differences were recorded with the Chi-square test.

Conclusions

1. Among young people, there is a weak interest in politics and political processes in the country (17 %), which is closely related to the weak representation of young people in politics. Only 7 % consider that their interests are represented in political processes.

2. A high percentage of 39 % of respondents do not know how or do not want to position themselves ideologically. Out of the remaining people, 35.3 % opted for the left, 33.8 % for the centre, and 30.9 % for the right.

3. The majority or 59.3 % of respondents agree that democracy is a good system of government and is, in any case, better than any other system of government (53.2 %). Still, a quarter of respondents (23 %) prefer a dictatorship under certain circumstances.

4. Among the young people who had a right to vote in the last parliamentary elections in 2020, 80.3 % voted. According to this study, the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE were most trusted by the young people in the mentioned elections, while in terms of voting for the next elections, almost half of the surveyed population "did not know" or "did not have an answer" to this question.

5. Almost twice as many young men (30.2 %) as young women (16.5 %) would take a political function. In general, young people do not have a positive attitude towards political parties, however, the highest mean value among the listed parties went to VMRO-DPMNE $m=3.93$. Young people see the SDSM supporters as the most acceptable to be their friends, unlike the supporters of other parties.

6. Among the young respondents, 21 % are members or would become members of a certain political party, and as the most common reason for joining, they emphasise the need to help improve the society (53.5 %).

7. In terms of political activism, young people mostly "stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons" (23.6 %) and have the most positive attitude towards this activity ("not yet, but I would like to", 14.9 %).

8. In terms of institutions, young people show most trust in religious organisations ($m=3.18$), the army ($m=3.02$) and the EU ($m=2.71$), and in addition, they believe that religious organisations have enough power.

9. For the respondents, the most important values are human rights, the citizens' economic wellbeing, and security. These values, along with democracy, rule of law, employment, gender and social equality, and individual freedoms are rated higher in the EU than in North Macedonia.

10. The views of young people regarding the country's accession to the EU are divided, i.e., 41.7 % support this process, and 37.9 % do not support it. The views are also divided when it comes to the French proposal. Euroscepticism is observed to be growing, especially among the young population, but this process cannot be fully explained by the demands in the new negotiating framework. According to the answers to this question, this issue should be given more attention in the future, but also analysed from several aspects.

11. For the first time since the conducting of longitudinal youth studies that started in 2013, the identification with Europe has a mean value of less than 3. Young people who do not support the negotiating framework proposed by France, identify to a lesser extent as citizens of Europe or as Europeans ($r=-.325$, $p<0.01$). Trust in the EU, however, remains unchanged from the 2018/2019 Youth Survey ($m=2.71$ in contrast to $m=2.72$).

12. The identification with the national identity has also dropped (from $m=4.12$ in 2018/2019 to $m=3.71$).

13. Out of the full-time employed respondents, only 15.2 % are trade union members.

14. Almost half of the respondents support the initiative for the Law on Gender Equality.

15. Young people mostly answered that they don't have time to become informed about politics and current affairs by watching television, including content produced by TV stations which is available online. Out of the young people who still follow these media, they usually spend about 1 hour on a weekly basis, i.e., less than 10 minutes a day.

Recommendations

1. The need for political education of young people arises as the main priority in the country. It is necessary for young people to learn about the democratic system and the role and obligations of citizens in such a system, especially about the possibilities for political participation and influencing decisions that are relevant to them.

2. By introducing the subject of Political Education in secondary schools, it is expected that young people will acquire knowledge⁶ that will result in a greater interest in following politics, a greater level of political activism, recognition of political processes and ideological profiling.

3. In addition, the problem with the ideological positioning of young people indicates the need to introduce political education, which will have, among other things, the purpose of explaining the different ideologies and their approach to social problems. In that way, young people will be given the opportunity to argue for a certain ideology and a party that represents those ideological positions.

4. It is necessary for young people to be involved in consultative decision-making processes, especially on topics that are directly related to them.

5. Political parties should pay more attention to the gender aspect when it comes to proposing/choosing candidates for leading positions for which quotas are not provisioned (such as the positions of ministers, mayors). Greater opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and management processes is expected to have a positive impact on having more women involved in politics.

6. It is necessary for the political parties, as well as the government institutions, to make a serious effort to overcome the problems related to the rule of law, corruption, education and healthcare system as well other weaknesses in the system in order to restore the trust among the young people.

7. It is necessary for the political parties to insist that dialogue and cooperation take place within the institutions (mainly within the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia), which will strengthen the democratic capacity of the institutions, and may also influence reducing discrimination on political grounds.

8. Trade unions need to find an appropriate approach to get closer to young people to present them the advantages of trade union membership and to familiarise them with workers' rights and the labour market.

9. It is necessary for the state to monitor the conditions, priorities and interests of the new generations by means of longitudinal studies (surveys), which will be further used as the bases for youth policies and state strategies.

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- 1 In 2015, 194,000 pupils attended primary education, and 76,000 students attended secondary education. SSO
- 2 The elections were announced on 14 February; the campaign for the Parliamentary Elections started on 18 April; and the elections were held on 8 May 2024.
- 3 The instrument was created in the first half of 2023, when the most important political entities were determined. The Study was carried out in 2024, when the divisions in the Alliance for Albanians Party also happened, which could have affected the respondents' answers in the sense that they might have not known exactly who should be in the focus of their opinion.
- 4 The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) party is a centre-left political party that at the same time uses nationalist rhetoric.
- 5 By the introduction of this subject in secondary schools, young people are expected to acquire knowledge on how to evaluate political processes, what is their role as citizens, what ideology means and how much it is present, what state sovereignty means, to whom it belongs and how it is transferred, as well as to help them understand the structure of the political and party system, the separation of powers, etc. In addition to the above mentioned points, the knowledge acquired should help them in recognising political processes, ideological profiling, independent making decisions during elections, as well as to understand the essence of politics, which should be of interest to the citizens and society.
- 6 The students are expected to acquire knowledge on how to evaluate political processes, what is their role as citizens and what control mechanisms they could use, what ideology means and how much it is present, what state sovereignty means, to whom it belongs and how it is transferred, as well as to help them understand the structure of the political and party systems, the separation of powers, etc.

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