



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CROSS- SECTORAL YOUTH ASSESSMENT NORTH MACEDONIA

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSYA	Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labor Organization
IT	Information Technology
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
MCEC	Macedonian Civic Education Center
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NYCM	National Youth Council of Macedonia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PLWD	People Living with Disability
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VMRO-DPMNE	The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
YEF	Youth Educational Forum
YGS	Youth Guarantee Scheme

Executive Summary

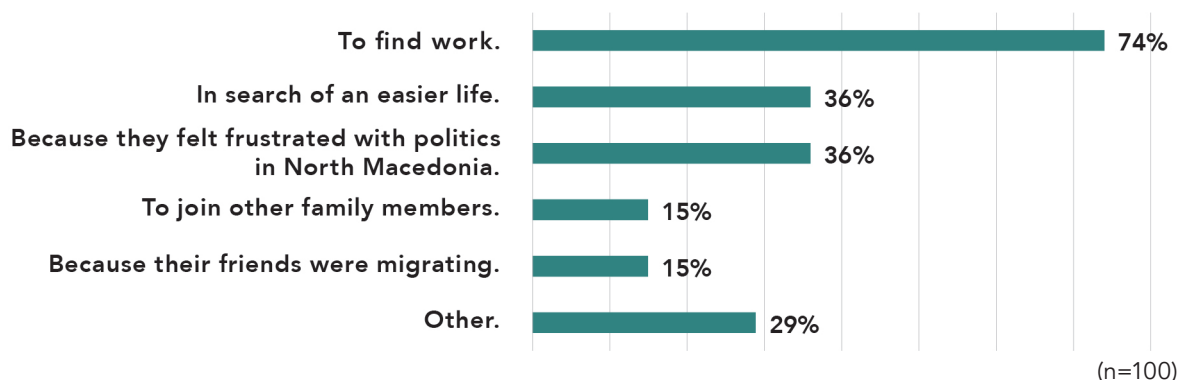
North Macedonia has a long history of emigration. An estimated 22% of the country lives in the diaspora, and it is widely acknowledged that the country continues to lose a significant portion of its future leaders and professionals as well as entrepreneurs and laborers — slowing economic development and leaving holes in the social fabric. Migration of young people is widely recognized as an urgent challenge to North Macedonia's development. Youth are acutely aware that the country has an outdated education system, as well as high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Deeply rooted patterns of corruption and state capture undermine young people's confidence in their government and their willingness and interest to participate in shaping the future of the country. Young people tend to live at home even into their late 20's, and with limited physical spaces to engage socially, spend an average of six hours a day on social media. All of these factors appear to contribute to low grade feelings of exclusion and depression, which are more significant for groups that have been traditionally marginalized—Roma, young people living with a disability, and LGBTI youth. Opportunities for education and employment in other countries are seen to offer greater security and stability. And, while parents appear to encourage young people to temper their ambitions within the country, many also encourage their children to seek better lives outside. As momentum towards EU ascension proceeds, it is likely that youth out-migration will increase unless the country is able to turn these factors around.

USAID in North Macedonia commissioned the Navanti Group to conduct this Cross Sectoral Youth Assessment (CSYA) in order to understand the drivers of youth out-migration and potential incentives to stay or return. The views of young people, age 15-29 are drawn from a national survey and conversations with some 1042 young people, carried out during March-June, 2019. Ethnic minorities, LGBTI, and young people with disabilities were given special attention. A sample of 100 households in which young people had recently already left the country were also included to explore reasons and consequences. The views of educators, politicians, government, academics and international partners help to contextualize the findings.

Half of the young people in the CSYA national survey express the intention to leave the country in the next 1-2 years. The desire to migrate is statistically stronger among young people who are unemployed; those who identify as Albanian and other ethnic minorities; LGBTI youth; and youth who express strong feelings of social exclusion—all findings that are statistically significant. Age and gender do not appear to make a difference in terms of plans to emigrate.

REASONS FOR MIGRATION ACCORDING TO FAMILY MEMBERS

Households with youth 15-29 who have migrated out of North Macedonia in the last five years

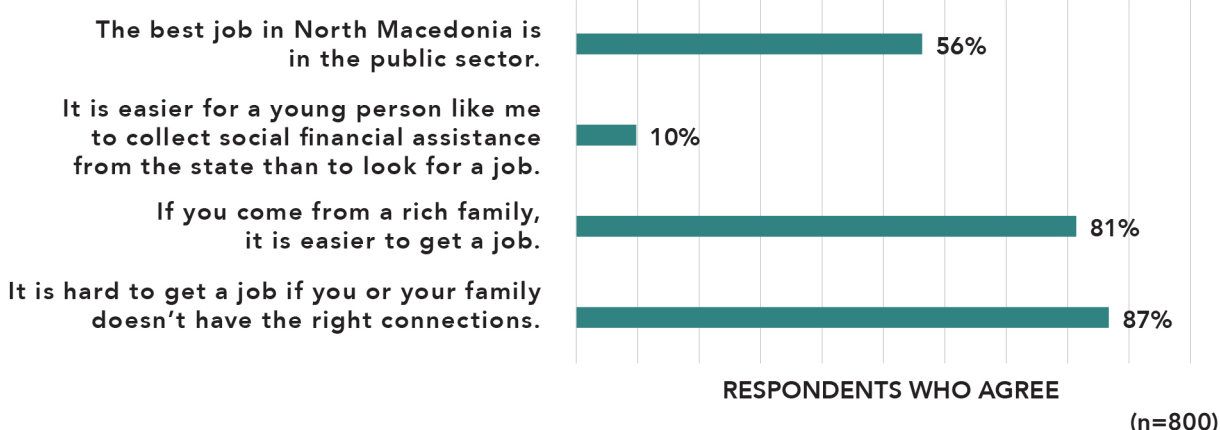


- Other includes (in order of occurrence): to continue their education; because they were bored, to open a business; marriage; left with partner; and better standard of living and increased mobility.

- 44% of households receive money from youth who migrate, a third of these households rely on that income for 50%+ of the household economy.

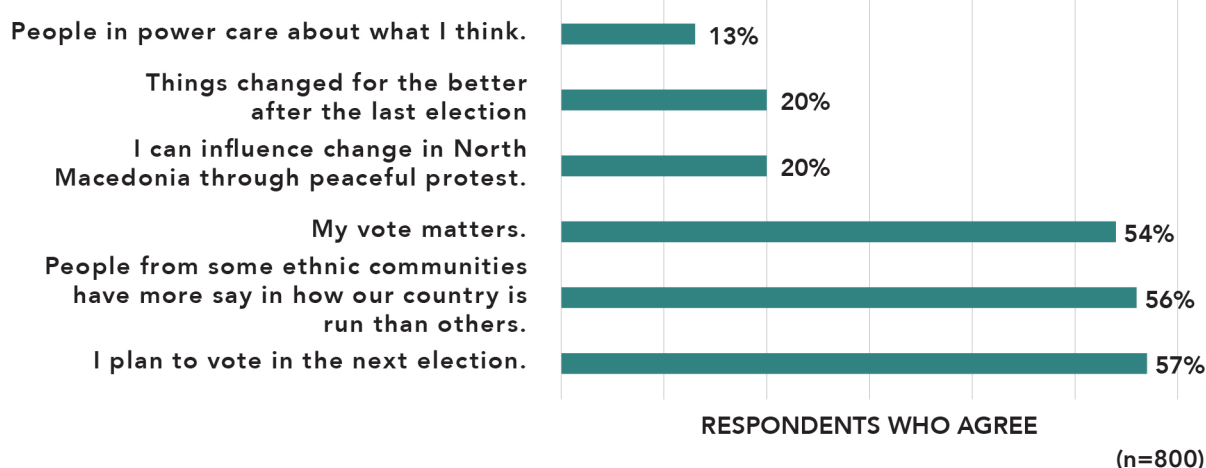
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: GETTING A JOB

National Sample



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: POLITICAL AGENCY

National Sample



Lack of well-paying jobs was the most often cited reason for youth out-migration. Stakeholders across the board believe that the same job can return double the wage in Germany or Malta and bring with it more respect and security than in North Macedonia. Corruption and broader dysfunctions in the political situation are blamed for feelings of insecurity. The situation in North Macedonia is contrasted unfavorably with receiving countries that are characterized by desirable levels of service predictability and quality, political fairness, and functioning institutions of government.

There are already on-going initiatives in many of the sectors of highest priority to youth. Multiple projects to address high youth unemployment and encourage entrepreneurship are underway. Recommendations in this report elevate concerns and recommendations raised by youth in the CSYA. They fill gaps, provide connective tissue, build on emerging opportunities, and/or simply encourage continuation of USAID's already relevant programming.

TABLE 1: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings	Recommendations
Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of enrollment not matched by student attainment. Underinvestment in education contributes to aging infrastructure, outdated materials, inadequate teacher training, supervision, and salaries. School heads politically appointed; rapid turnover. Perception that grades and university entrance can be bought. Pedagogy and curricula mismatched with 21st Century life and jobs. Social norms and education system elevate academics over vocational training. Internships required, desired, but poorly managed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive education reform is an urgent long term need for the country. Short term initiatives to kick start change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-service teacher training in NFE - Infrastructure improvements, including university dorms; computers - Development, demonstration of merit-based performance criteria for educators and students Support in-school career counseling initially in concert with MoL, CSOs, Chambers of Commerce. Reinvigorate internship program with training and performance-based incentives for host agencies; accountability to students. Classroom-based life skills programming, delivered by youth volunteers Mainstream mentoring program for academically struggling students. Mainstream classroom-based sex education Improve school based mental health services Renovate dormitories at public universities Update university materials
Employment and entrepreneurship	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 44% of youth in the national survey who are not in school are unemployed (21% are no longer looking for work). Average of 31+ months from graduation to first job; higher for youth with no tertiary degree (ILO, 2016). Youth cynical about fair access to jobs and a performance-based career path; see employer exploitation of workers. Employers complain that young people lack IT and problem-solving skills. Youth skeptical about entrepreneurship; unaware and unconvinced about government incentives; fear risks. Government, business and donor employment, vocational training and entrepreneurship schemes hold promise. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support public awareness on workers' rights and recourse options, including capacity building for youth section of the Association of Unions. Investigate complimentary extension, training support to ag entrepreneurs with Young Farmer initiative.

Civic engagement

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth in N. Macedonia have moderate to low levels of civic engagement, lower for Roma and youth with a disability but higher for LGBTI youth. 2. Corruption and interference of political parties in all aspects of life blamed. 3. Opportunities limited: municipal Youth Councils and student governments largely dormant. 4. CSOs working to regain capacity and trust under new government. 5. Pending Law on Youth provides framework for productive civic engagement; consultation exposes significant disengagement of youth. 6. National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) has broadest membership base of youth organizations in the country. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Reinvigorate student governments 13. Support to Youth Councils with strong M&E to learn what works under Law on Youth. 14. Support to locally-led youth centers, drawing lessons from American Corners. 15. Support and capacity building for NYCM-led national advocacy on targeted youth issues. 16. Joint capacity building to youth wings of political parties. 17. Youth volunteer scheme to promote civic engagement, inclusion. 18. Media literacy in high school curriculum. 19. Young journalist training and mentorship to promote youth voice. |
|--|--|
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Social cohesion and exclusion

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth express high levels of social exclusion (higher for Roma, youth LWD, and LGBTI) which correlates statistically with low levels of civic engagement. • 72% of youth 15-29 live with parents. • Lack of social space, sports opportunities particularly acute for youth outside of Skopje. • Youth consume an average of 6 hours of social media/day (3 hrs/day more than in 2013) (FES, 2018) reflecting isolation; potential for manipulation. • Dual education system challenges multicultural understanding. • Youth express a greater desire to learn European than local languages. • Observers say politicians flame interethnic tensions. • Insecurity about individual future, limited agency in civic space contribute to "collective depression" amongst youth, though mental health awareness and services limited. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Research and public awareness on youth mental health, with a focus on service delivery in schools. 21. Suicide hot line. 22. Edu entertainment with focus on youth issues. Include youth in production |
|--|--|
-

Other drivers of out migration

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpredictability, quality and costs associated with health care. • Air pollution | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. Health sector reform, with greater quality oversight; retention and supervision of health professionals; transparent implementation of health insurance scheme. 24. Incentives for adoption and development of clean air technology. 25. Public awareness of health risks and mitigation options for air pollution. |
|---|---|
-

Many of USAID's current projects are already advancing innovative strategies that respond to issues that are important to youth, particularly related to civic engagement, social cohesion, government accountabilities, and broader improvements in the business environment. A number merit consideration for scale, and mainstreaming, for instance in schools. A cross cutting recommendation is the need for more rigor in the monitoring and evaluation of projects designed to reach youth, in order to better understand what works and what strategies are reaching youth most effectively. Enhanced programmatic linkages amongst USAID projects and with other government, civil society and business initiatives that address youth concerns will boost synergies and contribute to their impact on youth.

Introduction

North Macedonia has a long history of emigration. An estimated 22% of the country lives in the diaspora, and it is widely acknowledged that the country continues to lose a significant portion of its future leaders and professionals as well as entrepreneurs and laborers — slowing economic development and leaving holes in the social fabric. Migration of young people is widely recognized as an urgent challenge to North Macedonia's development. Youth are acutely aware that the country has an outdated education system, as well as high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Deeply rooted patterns of corruption and state capture undermine young people's confidence in their government and their willingness and interest to participate in shaping the future of the country. Young people tend to live at home even into their late 20's, and with limited physical spaces to engage socially, spend an average of six hours a day on social media. All of these factors appear to contribute to low grade feelings of exclusion and depression, which are more significant for groups that have been traditionally marginalized—Roma, young people living with a disability, and LGBTI youth. Opportunities for education and employment in other countries are seen to offer greater security and stability. And, while parents appear to encourage young people to temper their ambitions within the country, many also encourage their children to seek better lives outside. As momentum towards EU ascension proceeds, it is likely that youth out-migration will increase unless the country is able to turn these factors around.

USAID in North Macedonia commissioned the Navanti Group to conduct this Cross Sectoral Youth Assessment (CSYA) in order to understand the drivers of youth out-migration and potential incentives to stay or return. The study was designed to give voice to young people's concerns and priorities in an actionable format. The views of young people, age 15-29, related to their education, employment options, participation and perspectives on their community and their country's democracy are drawn from a national survey and conversations with some 1,042 young people, carried out during March-June 2019. Youth who are often marginalized—ethnic minorities, LGBTI, and young people with disabilities—were given special attention. The views of educators, politicians, government, academics and international partners help to contextualize the findings. A sample of 100 households in which young people had recently already left the country were also included to explore reasons and consequences.

A number of previous studies, in particular a longitudinal study of youth issues in the region by the Fredrich Ebert Stiftung (Foundation) (FES, 2018) also informed this CSYA. Young people undertook the majority of the data gathering, and the first round of analysis. Partnership with the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) and an active Steering Committee of youth experts helped ground the findings and ensure their relevance.

This report begins with a summary of the methodology (details provided in Annex 1), followed by a presentation of what is known about youth out-migration from North Macedonia. Separate chapters present findings related to education, employment, politics, civic engagement/youth voice, and social issues including exclusion respectively. The CSYA has focused on listening not only for challenges as youth see them, but for opportunities for positive change. Each chapter ends with a summary of opportunities that emerged in the course of the CSYA. These include promising government or NGO initiatives and policies or laws that provide a platform for positive youth programming.

Methodology

The CSYA adopted a sequential approach to data collection. A literature review informed a national survey, followed by qualitative data gathering. Table 1 below presents the sample size and provides an indication of the types and numbers of youth and youth experts who participated in this study.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IN THE CSYA

Participant	Survey	FGDs	KIIs
YOUTH			
Youth (15-29)	702	66 (9 FGDs)	5
LGBTI youth	143	8 (1 FGD)	
Roma youth	98	7 (1 FGD)	1
Youth PLWD	99		
University students		20 (3 FGDs)	
Political party/local governance (youth)		12 (2 FGDs)	5
Businesses (youth)			4
Media (youth)			1
International org. (youth)			2
Sub-total YOUTH	1042	113 (16 FGDs)	18
OTHER			
Households in which youth had migrated	100		
Educators and media		28 (4 FGDs)	1
Government/political party/parliament			6
NGOs			14
Businesses			4
International			4
Total	1142	141 (20 FGDs)	47

The **quantitative component** included a national randomly sampled national survey as well as subsamples of groups typically considered marginalized. The national sample and Roma youth were gathered based on voter lists which are the most current population-

based data sets in the country. LGBTI and PLWD respondents were captured through a snowball approach. Households that included youth who had migrated were identified during the national survey and thus captured at random. Data collection was collected by GaussPoll, a Skopje-based survey agency, and on-line for LGBTI youth. Navanti attempted to include youth living in the diaspora in North America and Europe. However, despite wide dissemination of an on-line survey an insufficient number of responses were received. The survey included questions related to education, employment, attitudes related to community, country and intentions to migrate. It also included two indexes for measuring civic engagement and social inclusion. Data collection was undertaken in the April-May 2019 period. Survey instruments and details are included in Annex 8.

The **qualitative component** comprised focus group discussions with youth and educators as well as key informant interviews with a range of respondents who are knowledgeable about youth issues, policies and programs in the country.

Nine youth facilitators—with both Macedonian and Albanian language skills—carried out focus groups in municipalities in Skopje, Shtip, and Gostivar. Sites were selected to achieve ethnic diversity and economic development representative of the country. Focus groups were carried out with youth who were employed, students (high school and university); unemployed (rural and urban); leaders in a youth wing of a political party (both major parties); as well as with high school teachers and university professors.

In order to capture youth voice, focus group participants created a causality map in response to the statement *Young people want to leave Macedonia because...* The session concluded with a brainstorm of recommendations. Participants generally found it easier to identify problems than formulate actionable solutions. More details about the methodology are presented in Annex 1.

FIGURE 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
Issue Mapping



Profile of respondents

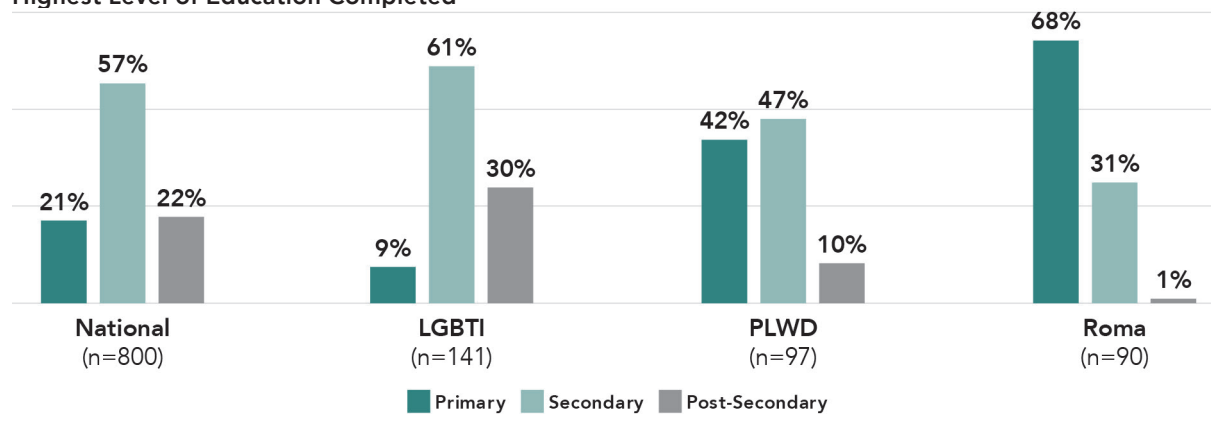
Random sampling within the national sample and Roma subsample allowed purposive selection to ensure age and gender distribution. The national sample includes 51% female and 49% male respondents, and distribution by age is 15-18 (31%); 20-24 (32%) and 25-19 (37%). Because of the way the LGBTI and PLWD samples were collected, both groups ended up being slightly older with 44% of LGBTI in the 20-24 age group and 45% of the PLWD in the 25-29 age group.

Young LGBTI respondents in the survey look more akin to, if not slightly better educated than the national sample, whereas young PLWD and particularly the Roma are more poorly educated, differences that were statistically significant.¹

FIGURE 2: EDUCATION

All samples

Highest Level of Education Completed



¹ The PLWD and LGBTI respondents were not sampled at random which almost definitely skewed the profile of these respondent groups. Both were affiliated with or known to civil society organizations who connected them to the survey, and the majority were Skopje-based. Observers note that LGBTI youth outside of Skopje may not be as well educated.

IV What is known about youth migration out of North Macedonia?

The territory that comprises today's North Macedonia has been an area of traditional migration for more than a century.² Most migration between 1945 and 1960 was internal, from villages to urban centers, owing mainly to increased urbanization and collectivization. The period between 1960 and 1990 was characterized by low skilled labor migration, primarily to Western Europe.³ Since Macedonian independence in 1991, highly skilled, well-educated professionals are also migrating, which has contributed to a brain drain.⁴

National statistics on migration are partial at best.⁵ In a report on migration, the European statistics agency, EUROSTAT, noted that between 1998 and 2011, some 230,000 people, or around 10% of the country's total population, left North Macedonia to live abroad legally. However, a number of other reports suggest that the number could be closer to 447,000, or 22% of the population (World Bank, 2011; MOES, 2013).

Current migration out of North Macedonia is analogous to other countries in the region, but comparatively much higher than other countries in the EU. **The World Economic Forum (2017) Global Competitiveness List ranks Macedonia 129th in terms of its capacity to retain youth talent.**

Internal migration. About 10% of respondents in the CSYA national survey had moved in the last five years, reflecting the longstanding rural-urban shift in the country. Internal migrants were most commonly young families (27% included the respondent and a spouse/children); the respondent and his or her family of origin (21%); or students (11%). A third moved from a rural to an urban area and another half from one urban area to another. While economics and education are important reasons for internal migration, the draw of stimulation in the city life appears to be just as important.

Young people in the CSYA complain that there are no places to gather, no cultural life, few recreational options, poor infrastructure and fewer employment options in the cities and rural areas outside of Skopje.

2 Suzana Bornarova, Verica Janeska, "Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe," April 2012, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8845&langId=en>

3 Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, "From pechalbari to iselenici: Migration history of Macedonians, University of Warsaw, <http://aemi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/macedonian-history-of-migration-1.pdf>

4 Ibid.

5 An EU country report on social impact of emigration and rural-urban migration notes that "in these circumstances, the scope of emigration could be approximated only through the foreign data sources from international institutions and receiving countries."

Who wants to emigrate? Half of the young people in the CSYA national survey express an intention to leave the country in the next 1-2 years. These findings resonate with other studies which put the aspiration to leave the country even higher (InfoCenter, 2016; FES, 2018).

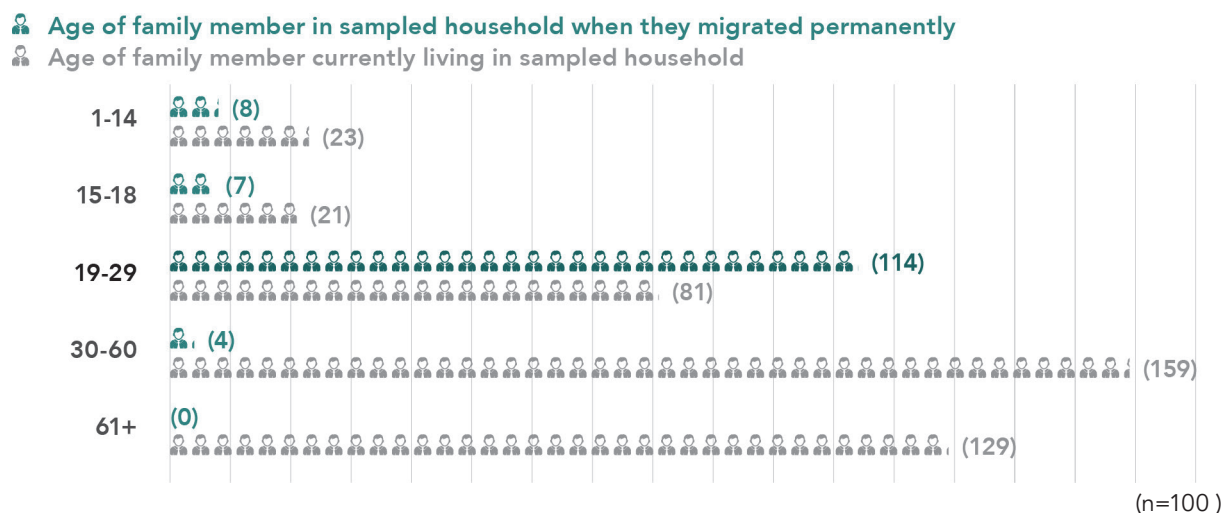
Results from the CSYA study suggest that desire to migrate is statistically stronger among young people who are unemployed; amongst those who identify as Albanian and other ethnic minorities; amongst those who identify as LGBTI; and amongst youth who express strong feelings of social exclusion—all findings that are statistically significant. Age and gender do not appear to make a difference in terms of plans to emigrate.

Only 20 of the 800 youth in the CSYA survey had migrated out and returned to North Macedonia, though an unknown number had traveled overseas before. The FES (2018) study found that while youth want to move overseas, the majority have not lived, traveled or studied abroad for more than six months, and amongst those who express a desire to emigrate, 44% had taken no concrete steps to move.

The CSYA included interviews with 100 families in which a young person had already migrated out of the country, most in the last three years. The sample is demographically reflective of the population of North Macedonia in terms of ethnicity and where the families live. As shown in Figure 2, **these households mirror a national demographic, which is increasingly hollowed out by the growing absence of youth in their productive years.**⁶

FIGURE 3: HOLLOWING OUT OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Profile of households where a youth has migrated in the last five years



In most of the families in this sample of households, one child had migrated. Nonetheless, in just over a quarter of the families two or more children had emigrated. In 37% of households, parents expected another child to migrate in the coming years. Some 58% of the youth were reportedly 24 years or younger when they left the country; 19% were 19 years or younger. Only 21% of parents expected to migrate themselves.

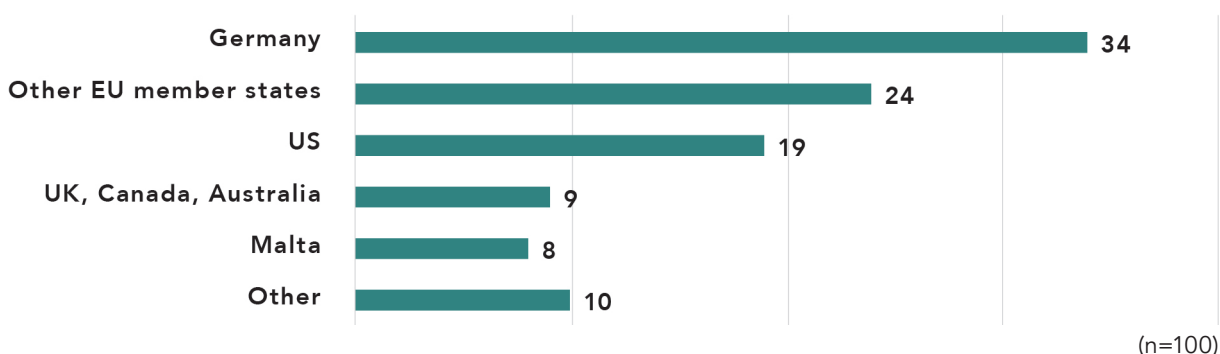
High school teachers in Skopje say that parents encourage their children to leave the country. Said one: *They say 'Get out of here...save yourself'.*

⁶ This finding is largely anecdotal since a census has not been carried out in North Macedonia since 2002.

Where do they want to go? No national data on the numbers of people leaving the country or their destinations was found. Anecdotal information from the CSYA suggests that the EU received the majority of young migrants from North Macedonia, with Germany a major destination and other Anglophone countries also an important (FES, 2018; InfoCenter, 2016).

FIGURE 4: MIGRATION DESTINATIONS

Households with youth 15-29 who have migrated out of North Macedonia in the last five years

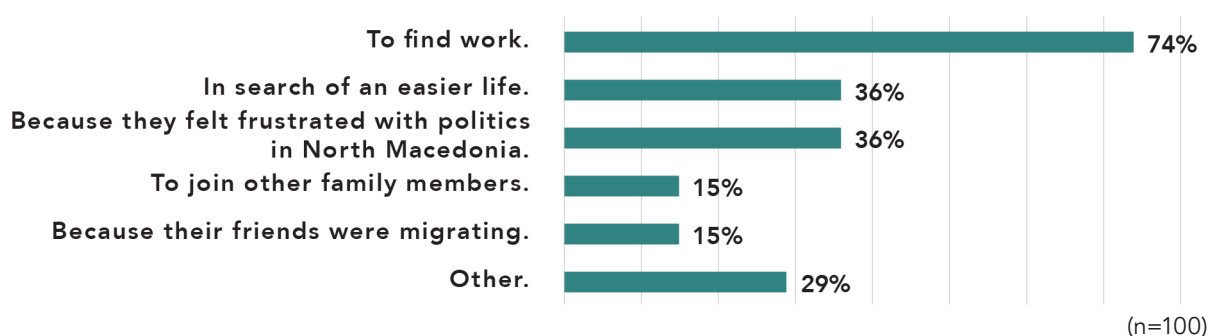


- Other EU member states (non-Germany, Malta, or UK) include Sweden (5), Austria (4), Croatia (4), France (2), Slovenia (2), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, and unspecified.
 - Other includes Switzerland (5), Montenegro, Norway, Qatar, Russia, Turkey.

Why youth emigrate? The reasons offered by families for why young people in their family had left the country were heard repeatedly in this study. They represent a complex combination of the push and pull factors explored in this report.

FIGURE 5: REASONS FOR MIGRATION ACCORDING TO FAMILY MEMBERS

Households with youth 15-29 who have migrated out of North Macedonia in the last five years



Youth migration is to some extent related to demands of the household economy. Amongst the 44% of families who received money from children working overseas, about a third rely on that income for half or more of the family livelihood; for another third it represents 10% or less. At the same time, families also affirm that widely held frustrations with prevailing political and lifestyle challenges contributed to decisions for their children to leave the country. The unpublished *National Strategy on Outmigration of Professionals* (2013-2020) (MoES, 2013) outlines a number of push factors including the overall socioeconomic situation in the country, levels of unemployment, poor working conditions including unfair treatment of employees (disrespect), limited opportunities for career advancement. These factors were expressed repeatedly by young people and others in the course of the CSYA. Corruption and broader dysfunctions in the political situation are blamed for feelings of insecurity. The situation in North Macedonia is contrasted unfavorably with receiving

countries that are characterized by desirable levels of service predictability and quality, and political fairness and functioning institutions of government.

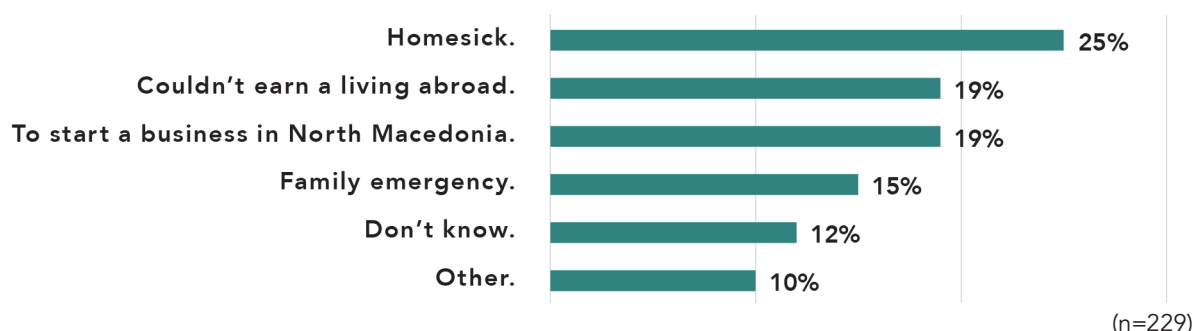
At the same time, youth leaders in a number of focus groups acknowledged that moving abroad is something of a trend amongst young people.

Those who have left share only positive things about their experience, that it's better for them abroad. It doesn't mean it's true.

The lack of response to the on-line survey for diaspora respondents may reflect a disinterest in dismembering the image from the reality, reflecting broader cultural norms related to risk avoidance and failure, discussed below. But this would need more investigation to validate.

FIGURE 6: WHY PEOPLE RETURNED TO NORTH MACEDONIA

National Sample (those reporting they knew someone who has returned)



The unpublished *National Strategy* (MoES, 2013) also acknowledges a worldwide phenomenon of “talent hunting” across most developed countries. Visas offered by programs to Germany and availability of Bulgarian passports have enabled both skilled and unskilled citizens of North Macedonia to emigrate. Established family or friend anchors in receiving countries enables migration and selection of destinations. The FES (2018) study suggests that 62% of youth expressing a desire to migrate had an invitation from someone living in the country of choice.

Return. In a hopeful sign, 26% of the young people in the national survey know someone who has returned after leaving North Macedonia—some of them with the intention to invest in the country. The CSYA reached out to a few such returnee entrepreneurs, as described in Chapter VI. Returnees are in the minority, however, and broader findings suggest the country will have to work hard to attract talent back.

V Education

Macedonia enjoys one of the highest student enrollment and completion rates in the Balkans and boasts some 19 universities with 58,083 students enrolled in 2016/17.⁷ But enrollment achievements are not matched by attainment outcomes. Amongst 15 year old students from 70 countries that participated in the Program for International Study Assessment (PISA) exam in 2015/16, Macedonian students scored third from last in math, science and reading (OECD, 2016). Anecdotally, rates of functional illiteracy including amongst university students are as high as 19%. Longitudinal findings from the FES study (2018) suggest that the time youth devote to studying dropped between 2013 and 2016.

Structural issues within the education sector contribute to the situation.

- The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is seen as under-capacitated, with frequent turnover due to political reasons.
- Schools and universities are under resourced with aging infrastructure and outdated materials and equipment. Older youth attending the biggest high school in Gostivar, for instance, say that students bring buckets to school because the roof is damaged.⁸ University students and graduates complain bitterly about the crumbling student dormitories that have come to represent broader neglect and broken promises for improvements in the country's education system.
- Teachers⁹ and professors are underpaid¹⁰, poorly supervised and often appointed and promoted based on political or family connections. Many complain of too much administrative work which cuts into their teaching time. Party oversight make teachers feel vulnerable, and introduces incentives for teacher performance that have nothing to do with student attainment outcomes.¹¹ At the same time, many young people want teachers to be more carefully vetted and monitored and, some suggest those whose expertise is outdated should be forced to retire.
- High school heads are nominated by municipalities, often on the basis of political affiliation, which also contributes to rapid turnover.

⁷ FES, 2018

⁸ The mayor reportedly promised to repair it, but then politics changed and the new mayor has installed a roof in the sports hall instead.

⁹ High school teachers are commonly referred to as "professors" in N. Macedonia. This terminology has been retained in quotes only in order to distinguish between primary and high school educators (teachers) and university "professors".

¹⁰ This view, put forward by a cross section of teachers, students and other observers is not corroborated in a recent report by the OCED (2018) that suggests that teacher salaries in North Macedonia is higher than other Western Balkan countries, comparing favorably with other European countries.

¹¹ Amongst many examples, One female student shared that her high school teacher who was teaching Biology was the best one, and she also received some state award for the best teacher. But lately she opened NGO and started to work there because, as she said, political party VMRO asked her to take party membership card but when she refused they fired her.

- There is a widely held perception that grades and entrance to university can be bought.¹²

Youth seem clear about the heavy hand of political parties in their education; 75% of CSYA respondents say political leaders are indifferent to quality education. These factors also contribute to a view of education as only partially relevant to employment. Comments from two young people:

I didn't care whether I learned anything or not, as I think that education is not crucial for finding a good job.

Students have good grades because of corruption. Influential people in the city are asking the professors to give good grades even if the students don't deserve the grades.

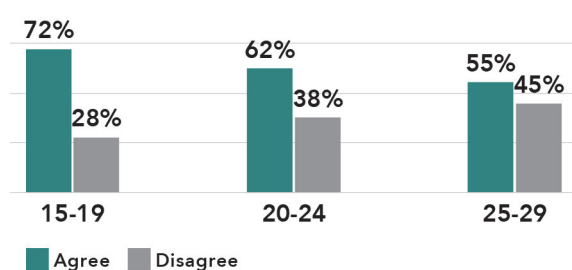
Even some high school teachers who took the initiative to talk to their students about job hunting skills say students don't see such skills as relevant, because students see people getting jobs through connections.

Findings from the national survey suggest that younger respondents and those holding more secure public sector jobs are more optimistic about education-to-work, as shown in Figure 7. Young people who are no longer in school and still looking for a job appear less convinced that their education prepared them for the job market.

FIGURE 7: MY EDUCATION PREPARED ME FOR EMPLOYMENT

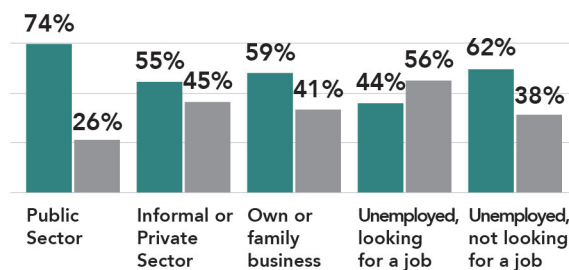
National Sample

BY AGE GROUP



(n=800)

BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS



(n=565)

excludes current school and university students

Pedagogy. Youth and educators are nearly unanimous that education in North Macedonia does a poor job of preparing youth for in demand jobs (Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016). The pedagogy is overly theoretical, based on rote learning, and many of the students in the CSYA note that some of the subjects they are required to study are irrelevant to their interests and their lives. The curriculum has changed several times over the last decade. Students old enough to have lived through these changes and even some high school teachers seem skeptical about whether they have contributed to improvements. Some suggest changes have been bitsy; too much is imported from other countries; promotes mediocracy. One member of a political youth wing notes:

¹² The percentage of youth respondents in the FES survey who expressed the view that grades and exams could be bought doubled between 2013 to 55% in 2018.

When I was a student at university, I noticed that those who were standing out as the best students were actually average, and those who were average were actually the best. Knowledge is not being rewarded, discipline is. Theory is being learned by heart. There are talented people who don't look at the world the same as the rest. The education system should notice these people. The benefit will be much bigger if the education system helps them develop.

Along the same lines, one university professor reflects:

The key goal of education today is the development of critical thinking. But I'm breaking a sweat until I manage to get a few words out of the students. No one has told them that they need to think about what they're studying. We need to find the golden middle between the East where no one allows the students to think and the West where it's all about their own opinions.

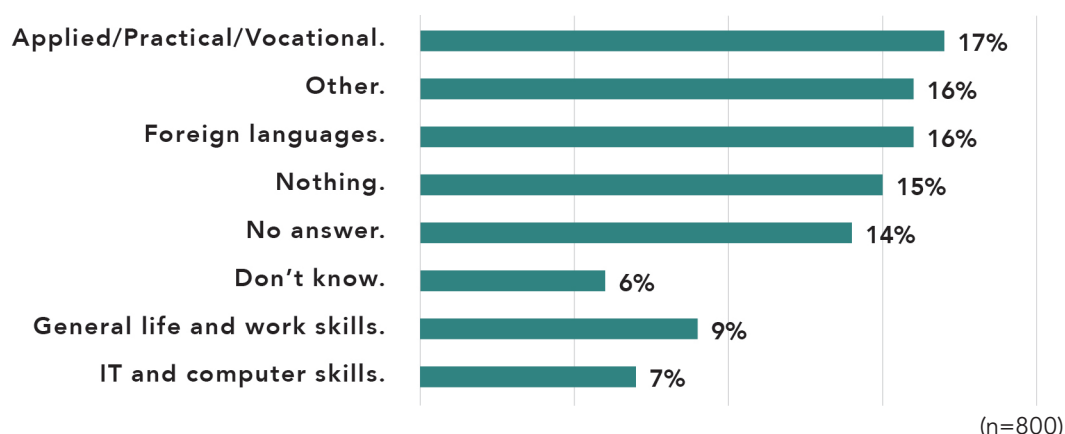
Non formal education (NFE) was mentioned repeatedly as a pedagogy (promotes critical thinking) and a type of intervention (promotes opportunities for applied learning). Echoing other, one FGD participant notes:

There are a lot of private trainings for basic skills that should have been learnt in school.

A range of civil society organizations and even businesses offer targeted technical training, for instance in programming and other IT-related skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training. Many of these NFE programs use the practical, problem solving approach that students like.

What youth missed. As part of the survey, young people were asked to write down one thing they would have liked to have learned in school that they didn't learn. As shown in Figure 8, many wished for more practical skills and guided practice.

FIGURE 8: THE ONE THING I WISH I COULD HAVE LEARNED IN SCHOOL THAT I DID NOT WAS:



* Other includes (in order of occurrence): vocational and skilled trade; sports; sciences; to continue my studies; and arts.

Many wanted to learn languages, and IT skills featured prominently as well.¹³ Forty-four percent (44%) would like to study art or music. A few also talked about broader life skills,

¹³ In a specific question in the national survey about IT, 66% of respondents said they would like to learn IT-related skill.

including resilience *How to become better at dealing with life; To be persistent*, and several focused on the pedagogy *To know how to study*. Notably, 35% struggled to suggest anything, which may suggest these respondents are too close to the situation to reflect on the “what else”, or as one despondent respondent notes: *Nothing special*.

Nonetheless, when young people sat together in focus groups, they had many ideas for what they wanted to learn in school, aside from academic topics.

- Sex education and mental health topics and services were mentioned repeatedly by young people and educators.
- Some pointed to the need to build skills and strategies to address bullying in school.
- Many also cited the need for computer and media literacy. One mentioned financial literacy.
- Political party youth leaders suggested the education system would benefit from subjects related to ethics, democracy, civic education and psychology. Along these lines, one Albanian activist reflected:

When we speak about the education system, we say that it is both for character and education —edukativo-arsimor—but in the last ten years this aspect of education has been lost.

Many older students, particularly those in university or recent graduates pointed to outdated curriculum and materials. Notes one CSYA respondent:

We need to learn more about the human body in the study of medicine, not other useless things. And teachers need to be younger....not those who don't even know how to open a computer.

One student in electrical engineering is using books from the 1990s. At the same time, students in computer science say they are being taught with material and using approaches that are 10 years out of date--learning programming rather than how to think as a programmer. University students are unanimously unhappy that text books in higher education are outdated and often available only in other languages (particularly Serbian). Students are aware that conditions are better in nearby countries and unfavorable comparisons with education systems in Germany, Scandinavia and even Bulgaria were shared.

Career readiness. Students receive little information about their career options, and schools do not offer many of the soft or technical skills for 21st Century jobs. Employers in North Macedonia struggle to fill positions needing computer and vocational skills and complain that young people don't have basic job skills. One youth admits:

There are students finishing economic studies who don't know what an invoice is.

Young people and teachers recognize that vocational training is seen as undesirable given prevailing attitudes about blue collar work. The education system does little to encourage students to specialize in vocational areas despite the high demand for construction, plumbers, electricians, metal workers, farmers etc. At the same time, a disproportionate number of students study law without relevant available jobs after graduation. Youth leaders in a political party sum it up this way:

Among us there is one unwritten rule that everyone who finishes high school should enroll in university. Personally, I don't agree with this. Abroad there are vocational schools which are preparing students for jobs. A degree from university here doesn't mean that the student is prepared for employment.

Current government regulations prevent youth on government scholarships from working, even during summer holidays, reportedly to protect jobs held by older people. Prolonged education appears to be a way for society to avoid having to grapple with youth unemployment, and for youth to have to grapple with decision making and fiscal independence.

Internships are required at most high schools and all universities in North Macedonia. This emphasis on applied learning is widely regarded as a positive element of the curriculum and one that in principle could provide students workplace experience in their field and even a stepping stone to future employment. Youth, educators, as well as business and public sector observers are quite cynical about the way internships are managed, however. The matching process is often inadequate, and receiving agencies are typically not well prepared to train interns and see interns as a burden. Information about internship opportunities are not readily available or accessible to youth. Reflecting on their internship experiences, university students in Shtip remember an often-repeated story from the CSYA:

We didn't learn anything. We were just making coffee and buying food for the employees. Even some bosses asked us "what are you doing here?" It was the same in high school.

Youth report that students are often asked if they want a signature to verify that they showed up at the internship. Some also complained that internships were not paid.

When we realized we wouldn't learn anything, but just sit for eight hours, of course we started to ask for the signature on the first day.

Equity. Students with Macedonian and Albanian heritage do not attend class together in public elementary and high schools in North Macedonia. Parallel delivery of education to support ethnic/linguistic and cultural identity has historical and political origins. The bifurcated system is also credited with reinforcing ethnic divisions in the country. At the same time, Albanian students in the CSYA who attend mixed classes expressed feelings of discrimination in school¹⁴. Other youth note that economic status and family connections also inform how teachers treat their students. Roma youth and PLWD advocates also complain about discrimination in the classroom and the system.

Education and migration. Quality of education is a direct and indirect factor pushing youth to migrate out of Macedonia. Two thirds of respondents in the national survey expressed the desire to study abroad (compared to just over a third who wanted to shift to a different school in Macedonia). Overseas education is also a stated goal of the Government of North Macedonia, which has set a goal of 20% of graduates of higher education studying abroad (Bozhinovska et al, 2015 cited in FES, 2018). The Bologna process and other programs of the EU such as Erasmus, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus and Marie Curie (FES, 2018) offer opportunities for youth to study or gain exposure abroad. The benefits of these programs for the country are not completely clear. While ideally these investments in youth will cycle back into the country's labor force, anecdotally, securing an opportunity to study abroad is seen by many as an opportunity to secure a future in another country. On the other hand, a recent tracer study carried out under the auspices of the National Agency for European Education and Mobility found that training abroad often resulted in return, particularly amongst those with vocational skills. These returnees had gained contacts and language skills that benefited them and the country.¹⁵

¹⁴ While public schools completely separate Macedonian and Albanian students, in some places Albanians can participate in Macedonian classrooms. Some private schools offer mixed classes, but the language of instruction is often English.

¹⁵ Conversation with Lidija Dimovska, Director, National Agency for European Education and Mobility, North Macedonia

Opportunities

The CSYA confirms broad agreement about the nature, depth and urgency of the need for education reform in North Macedonia. Students and former students have a range of firmly held concerns. Educators recognize their students are being short changed and can name the multiple reasons, as well as their own frustrations with their jobs. The CSYA also surfaced a number of hopeful signs:

- A recent UNICEF (2019) report on education reform in North Macedonia and commitments made by the Prime Minister to addressing education issues.
- Wide appreciation for the value of internship, mentoring and apprenticeships in preparing students for the workforce. Universities have agreements and MoUs in place with multiple agencies for potential internships.
- The EU is financing three centers of excellence which will provide vocational training to students across North Macedonia. These are poised to open in 2020.
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) is working with a range of development partners (including USAID) to provide in-school career advice at the end of elementary school.
- There is a new Law on Internships in place¹⁶ which may offer a framework for redressing current challenges in making practicum meaningful for youth.
- USAID's MCEC Project (Youth Ethnic Integration) has developed an interactive curriculum and materials on civic education, which the MoES is looking to in terms of its pedagogical potential in general.
- A number of civil society organizations and donor agencies have school-based programs that address some of the pedagogical challenges raised by youth and educators in this section. These NFE initiatives may offer models of what works.
- The Government of North Macedonia's One Society initiative includes steps to address stereotypes and cultural bias in the curriculum, and more blended classrooms for Macedonian and Albanian students, as well as PLWD.

Recommendations

1. **Comprehensive education reform** is the #1 priority for addressing young people's concerns, though it is unlikely to benefit current students. As above, reform should embrace a learner-centered pedagogy and include experiential learning opportunities; teacher training and retraining; more robust merit-based selection and supervision of teachers; well-structured internships; relevant, current learning materials; infrastructure upgrades. Appointment, promotion and supervision of teachers and school heads should be delinked from local government and carried out based on performance-based criteria. The language requirements for students from different ethnic backgrounds could be accommodated without isolating groups from each other and curriculum and teacher training include a focus on values, inclusion, problem solving skills. More transparent entrance exams for university would be welcomed. Recognizing that this may represent a significant undertaking in a less than optimal environment¹⁷, USAID may wish to consider projects that could address some of the issues, while at the same time laying building blocks for broader reform efforts.

¹⁶ This was noted by USAID during the review of this report, and had not been raised before. It will be important to consider the dimensions of such a law in the design of any program to improve internships.

¹⁷ Funding for education remains a low priority for the government, and leadership in the education space changes frequently and most often based on reshuffling of political coalition membership. To avoid fluctuations of the past, genuine reform will require a steady long term commitment to a strategy.

Some of these elements could be introduced immediately, including:

- Introducing effective non formal education strategies in classrooms via in service teacher training; partnering with civil society organizations; facilitated re-invigoration of student government
 - Infrastructure improvements, including computer and lab equipment installation
 - Preparing merit/performance-based criteria and systems for entrance, progression and access for students and educators, including deterrence measures for misuse of the system.
 - Scaling of strategies designed to promote ethnic integration and tolerance in school, based on additional evidence of what works (see Chapter IX.)
2. **Support career counseling** beginning at the end of primary school that offers students information about options and requirements. In the short run, this might be most effective through public-private partnerships that involve MoL, Chambers of Commerce and relevant civil society organizations to bring up to date information into schools. Schools should also promote information about existing sources of career information including on websites that students frequent. School psychologists could anchor and facilitate career counseling but they would need training and school heads would need to relieve them of other work.
 3. **Reinvigorate internship programs** with stronger performance-based incentives and oversight; curriculum-based guidance for host agencies; and accountability to students. Staff this initiative in each school and identify point persons at host agencies. (Anticipated Department of Youth and Sport point persons inside of government offices could anchor public sector internships). Partner with Chambers of Commerce to optimize business-based internship programs. Advertise opportunities through multimedia channels and at schools. Generate and celebrate evidence of what works based on close monitoring.
 4. **Pilot experiential life skills program** in end of primary and secondary classrooms¹⁸. Program would be delivered by volunteer secondary school graduates who receive an honorarium. The curriculum would focus on interactive exploration of issues young people care about (values, future planning, relationships, health etc.), with opportunities for guest speakers and open space creativity. Builds soft skills amongst participants and agency and leadership skills amongst youth volunteers.
 5. **Mainstream mentoring programs** in schools for struggling students based on evidence (evaluation?) from existing programs (e.g. STELLA for girls; Roma Versitas for Roma).
 6. **Mainstream classroom-based sex education in schools**. In the short run this could be delivered by civil society organizations or peer volunteers using the HERA or other validated curriculum. As with career counseling, the school psychologist should be the entry point and should receive training to follow up with advice and referral to services.
 7. **Improve school-based mental health services** (see Section VIII for more)
 8. **Renovate dormitories** at the three main public university campuses. Since this is a government responsibility, USAID could offer **technical design assistance** to help kickstart the project.
 9. Update **university materials**, including introduction and translation of relevant basic texts and translation into Macedonian language.

¹⁸ USAID notes that there may be a Life Skills curriculum developed by the Bureau for Development of Education which could be used.

VI Employment and entrepreneurship

In 2017, 65% of working age people in North Macedonia aged 15-64 were engaged in the labor force. But only 33% of youth, and only 23% of young women, had gainful work (World Bank, 2018). Table 2 presents the employment status of CSYA respondents who were not in school in at the time of the study.

TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT STATUS
(All Samples)*

Sample	Public	Private informal own/family business	Unemployd looking for a job	Unemployd not looking for a job
National	9%	47%	23%	21%
LGBTI	4%	46%	22%	28%
PLWD	3%	14%	28%	55%
Roma	3%	27%	48%	22%

*excludes those currently in school or university

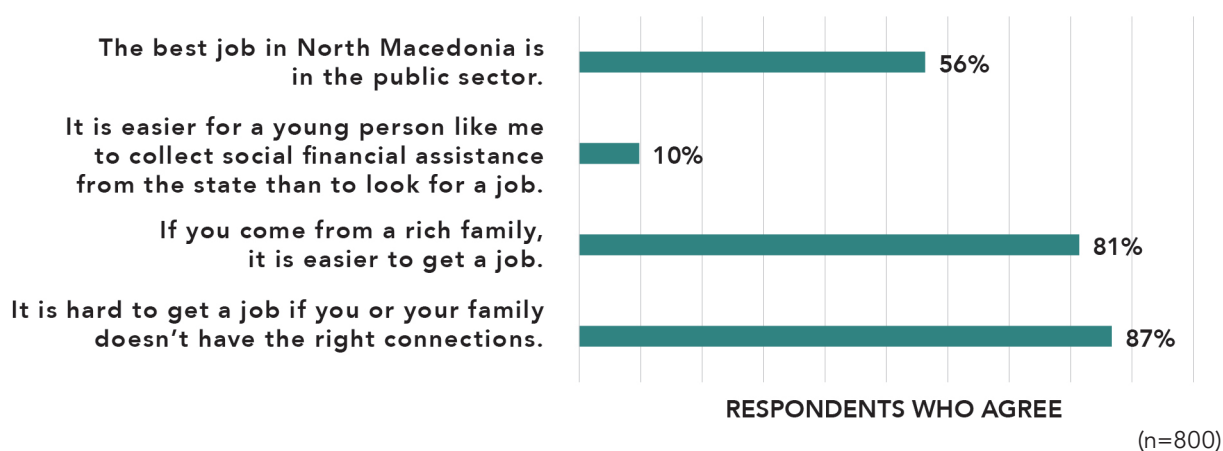
The proportion of youth who are unemployed, including those who say they have stopped looking for work, is striking. Unemployment jumps dramatically for marginalized groups, who are also underrepresented in both government and private or informal sector labor markets.

“Human capital inadequacies also hinder productivity: the average worker in manufacturing and services in Europe and Central Asia is four times more productive than a Macedonian worker. Low skills are at the core of the issue: about 70 percent of Macedonian 15-year-olds fall short of basic reading and numeracy proficiency, and employers cite lack of skills as a main obstacle for doing business.” World Bank (2018)

Lack of well-paying jobs was the most often cited reason for youth out-migration. Stakeholders across the board believe that the same job can pay double or more in Germany or Malta and bring with it more respect and security than in North Macedonia. Only some of these observers also noted the differential cost of living, however. Nonetheless, the fact that so many young people have secured employment elsewhere has helped inform the narrative for those planning to leave. Figure 9 presents a snapshot of youth attitudes towards employment in North Macedonia.

FIGURE 9: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: GETTING A JOB

National Sample



Youth in the CSYA appear to regard their employment prospects somewhat skeptically. Although they complain about the low wages, many young people aspire to the security associated with a government job. They also recognize that access is not always based on qualifications. The public service is seen by many as bloated, with staff whose qualifications are mismatched with their jobs. A number of young observers resented the fact that the public service employs people who collect a salary but don't come to work. Capturing an often-heard sentiment in the CSYA, a high school youth from Skopje notes:

It's a toxic environment where no one questions anything...you can't do anything if you want a job and you know no one. People who are smart and study hard don't get a job because there is no equal treatment.... being corrupted is the only way to be successful in Macedonia.

An overwhelming sentiment amongst youth in the CSYA was that they want work that recognizes and remunerates them for their efforts and skills. They see many structural and social obstacles to such employment in their own country and have another more attractive point of reference from nearby countries.

Youth leaders from one of the coalition parties in power characterize these attitudes as “post-VMRO syndrome”—referring to the party in power from 2006-2016, and suggesting the current government may be more cognizant of a trend they are committed to change. Some observers also think young people have unrealistic expectations of what salaries they should get and prefer to live at home rather than take a low paying job. Others justify this mindset, saying young people know they will not be able to advance based on hard work alone.

Finding a job. A 2016 study¹⁹ on North Macedonia's youth attitudes, beliefs and values published by the Institute for Sociological and Political Research of the Kiril i Metodij University, showed that a majority of youth respondents aged 15-29 (77%) believe that they are losing the best years of their lives waiting for employment. According to the ILO, the school to work transition takes an average of 31 months from graduation to first job and is much higher for youth with a secondary than a tertiary degree. Young people with only

19 St. Kiril and Metodij University, “Study on the Youth in Macedonia 2016,” <http://isppi.ukim.edu.mk/images/980428Kvalitativna%20studija%20za%20mladi%20-%20verzija%20za%20pecatenje.pdf>

a primary education can be as high as 62 months transition²⁰ (ILO, 2016). As shown in the CSYA, some just give up looking.

The ILO estimates that a third of young workers are mismatched with their employment, and despite rising educational outcomes, young people are concentrated in medium and low skilled employment.

Focus groups with young people suggest that youth are acutely aware of the distortions in the labor market due to corruption in education and hiring systems, purchased grades and degrees, and jobs that rely on family connections and party affiliation. From a FGD with Roma youth, one participant notes:

It's as if the business sector doesn't exist here. They're not doing anything for the youth... they give false reports on paper that they had a tough selection process and yet they employ their relatives and friends.

This sentiment was particularly acute amongst young people of all ages outside of Skopje. University students in Gostivar talked about how hard it is to get a start in a career without a level playing field for first time applicants.

Labor rights. Many young people see the job market as exploitative, with employers taking advantage of high unemployment; the exertion that political influence can have on acquiring and keeping a job; and less than effective workers' unions and legal recourse. Youth cite painful examples from their own families of employers who pay minimum wage, but then expect a kickback; or who demand overtime but do not compensate their workers. Some university students blame the attitudes on the workers who, afraid of raising their voice, tell themselves "it could be worse" and stay in the job. Youth also know that they and most citizens are not fully aware of their rights.

Gender. Studies suggest that young women, overall more highly educated than young men, also experience shorter school-to-work transition periods, lower unemployment and greater opportunities for contracted employment. Women with tertiary education enjoy higher pay than their male counterparts, but this is not the case for women with less education (ILO, 2016). In the CSYA, amongst the 228 respondents who said they were unemployed and no longer looking for work, there were significantly more women in the 24-29 age bracket, a fact that other studies attribute to family care responsibilities, and the absence of affordable alternatives. (ILO, n.d.)

PLWD. North Macedonia has progressive laws for employment of PLWD, including financial support for equipment. But key informants suggest PLWD are not properly screened for work they may be qualified for (including by the government Employment Service Agency), and generally underpaid when they can get employment. There appear to be some moves to redress this situation, including efforts on the part of the MLSP and UNDP to establish vocational rehabilitation centers.

Government programs. As the gravitational pull towards EU accession increases, the country has adopted some aggressive policy and programmatic initiatives to try to create jobs and encourage entrepreneurship. The Action Plan for Youth Employment 2016-2020 calls for the introduction of policies aimed at improving diversification of exports, facilitating investment in new technologies, and prioritizing economic sectors with high potential for

²⁰ A study conducted by private youth employment/engagement agency Kuzoun, found an average nine year hiatus between graduation and employment, although subjects graduated in 2004.

employment of young people. The Government of North Macedonia has also put in place attractive incentives for business start ups, though the level of awareness and uptake is unknown. There are also multiple development projects encouraging entrepreneurship, including at least one sponsored by a multinational business in the country (Heineken/Coca Cola).

The **Youth Guarantee Scheme** (YGS), adapted from the EU and piloted through the MLSP over the last two years, seeks to redress high youth unemployment through a variety of incentives to unemployed youth and employers. Early results of the pilot suggest the program has responded to a significant latent demand for both skilled and unskilled workers²¹ with results exceeding targets. Policy changes designed to move the unemployed off of social security and into the job market were also instituted. A package of incentives for startup businesses garnered more interest than resources available (10 out of 30 new business applicants were supported in the first year). The government Employment Service Agency—around which much of the YGS pivots—is widely regarded by youth and other observers as inefficient and offering largely low paying jobs. The ESA also appears to have difficulties of its own including what is noted in a report as “the limited capacity of enterprises to clearly articulate their vocational and non-vocational skills needs and the tendency to rely on higher educational attainment, irrespective of the tasks of the occupation”.

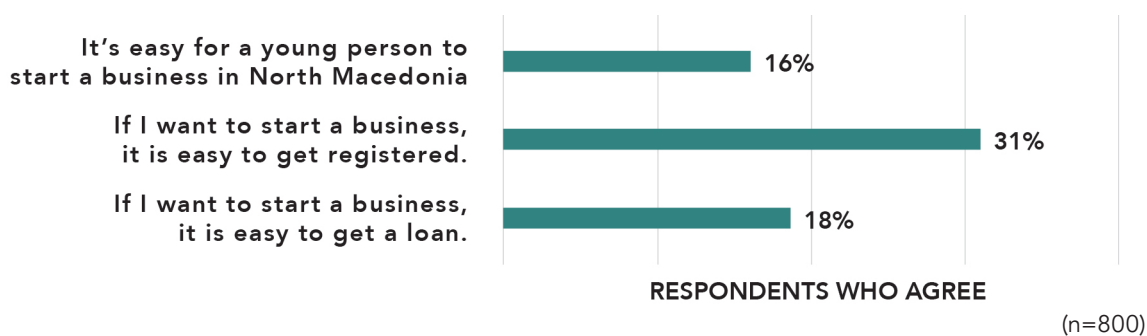
Entrepreneurship. Although a substantial number of youth in the CSYA said they work in family or other businesses these jobs are more often than not in informal, non-contractual labor because they cannot find a job (ILO, 2016). Youth appear to view entrepreneurship with some trepidation, as shown in Figure 10.

Some informants from the CSYA attribute fears around entrepreneurship to historical attitudes from the state-dominated economy of the Former Yugoslavia, as well as an outdated educational system which doesn’t reward innovation, and punishes risk taking. Says one observer:

Parents are saying to their children ‘finish university and get a normal job...if you risk a new business idea and it fails you will be ashamed, people will laugh at you and you will lose a lot of energy and money’.

FIGURE 10: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: STARTING A BUSINESS

National Sample



Chambers of Commerce, businesses, donors and civil society organizations offer a range of

²¹ ILO (2015) The report of the pilot was not available; these results were shared anecdotally by a representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP).

on-the-job and entrepreneurship training. The ICT space is particularly active in this regard. Little comprehensive data is available about these opportunities and in general youth lack information about their options.

The FGD with LBGTI youth stands out because of participant enthusiasm for entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, even these participants still appear to hold some trepidation about support from the system, corruption and their own skills to engage in business.

In order to learn about the experience of youth doing business in North Macedonia, four young entrepreneurs were interviewed for the CSYA—two in the IT space, one in the hospitality business, one in the beverage industry; two in established businesses; two in startup mode. All of these young men²² had lived and worked abroad where they garnered skills and in two cases networks that are helping them in their businesses. All said they returned because of a commitment to family, friends and the country and a vision for their business as an anchor for further growth in their respective sectors. All are employing others and the two IT firms are also networked and offering training in the region.

Conversations with these entrepreneurs confirm some of the preconceptions (and fears) expressed by other youth, as noted above. None were benefitting from government programs, and all appear to hold a perspective that such programs are not fairly implemented or designed to support start up's like theirs'. Only one of the entrepreneurs had direct experience, however. Reflecting on doing business in North Macedonia, the oldest and most established of the four entrepreneurs notes optimistically: *There are no obstacles for a young person to start a business here. All they need is a good idea and, most importantly, courage.*

²² These individuals were identified in the course of the qualitative research and, with more time female entrepreneurs could have been found.

Opportunities

- There are multiple sources of information about job availability.
- The State Statistical Office publishes a study every year of in-demand jobs based on interviews with businesses across the country.
- The ESA publishes an annual employers' skill needs survey and posts jobs on its website.
- The ILO and MLSP have an interactive website that features in-demand jobs, including salary scales, required qualifications and interviews with people in those jobs (www.zanimanja.mk)
- Some companies (e.g. construction; metal working; IT) offer good salaries because they are having a hard time retaining staff.
- The EU plans to put 15m Euros into the Youth Guarantee Scheme and regional vocational training centers starting next year.
- The IPA Action Programme 2017 EU support to Education, Employment and Social Policy includes training courses on workers' rights and a component for inclusion in the school curriculum.
- Agriculture offers untapped potential for youth given the country's unused arable land, water, climate and infrastructure. The government has a little-known program called "Young Farmers".

Recommendations

Some of the broader structural challenges that contribute to high youth unemployment--including issues raised by youth and youth workers--are only addressed indirectly in the recommendations for the CSYA, including those related to current business sector programming (see recommendations in Chapter IX). On-going government, Chambers, EU and other donor efforts to strengthen employment services as well as vocational training and job placement services are consistent, in principle, with what youth say they want. More efforts could be made to inform young people about these programs and services, for instance through career counseling (see recommendation 2.).

The following recommendations are in addition to on-going efforts and to the school-based programs for career counseling and improving opportunities for practical, on the job skills training presented in the previous section.

10. **Launch a multi-media campaign on workers' rights** aimed at providing current and future workers an understanding of the law and legal support options. Provide capacity building for the youth section of the Association of Unions. Cultivate champions inside the political parties (in youth wings and generally).
11. Improvement of **agriculture entrepreneurship** programs for youth. This sector is singled out because, like the IT sector, it seems to offer a number of unexplored opportunities for business and local and regional markets. USAID could cooperate with the Young Farmer program to bolster the profile, services and incentives for young people to engage in agriculture and ag processing enterprises through training, extension services, and financing options.

VII Civic and political engagement

Politics and the role of the political party stand out as the cross-cutting issue in this CSYA in North Macedonia. Politics touches—many young people would say interferes in—every part of a young person's life in North Macedonia. Informants across the age spectrum blame corruption, nepotism, and political influence for much of what they see as governance and structural dysfunctions, and, as noted above, factors which are widely acknowledged as key push factor for out-migration.

Young people are incentivized to affiliate with a political party from a young age in order to gain access to educational and then employment opportunities. Becoming a member of a youth wing of a political party appears to offer more of an occasion to be socialized into party norms than an opportunity for voice or collective action.²³

The so-called Colorful Revolution (2015/2016) which brought down the decade long government under the coalition government of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, also energized youth who participated in street demonstrations. Some of the youth leaders have since joined the government, headed by a coalition led by the then opposition party, SDSM. The Colorful Revolution appears to have contributed to an awakened appreciation amongst national leaders for the need to initiate inclusive processes, policies, and programs. The Law on Youth and the One Society Initiative (discussed in the following section) are both steps in this direction.

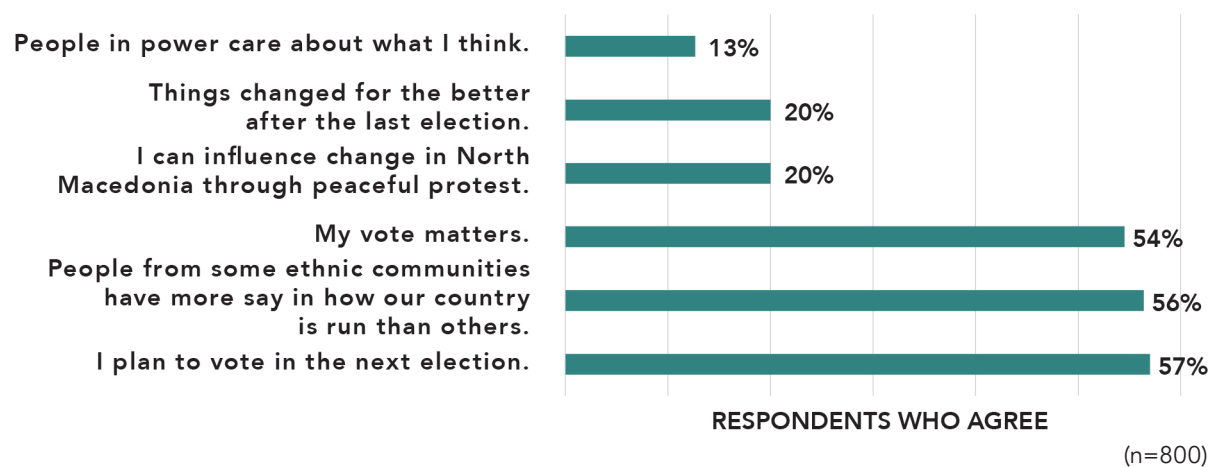
Despite early disappointments about the unwillingness of the new government to elevate youth to a ministerial level, the Agency of Youth and Sport reports directly to the Prime Minister. Although until very recently, it has had only a token budget, the Agency now has a higher profile as it spearheads a consultative process to prepare a law on youth for the country and rolls out new initiative such as an EU-wide youth discount card, released during the fieldwork for the CSYA. This consultation around the Law on Youth has sparked dialogue about what youth need and what youth want. It has also spotlighted the considerable disengagement amongst the majority of youth in the country, particularly those outside of Skopje.

Confidence in democracy. CSYA survey results point to a feeling of exclusion from the decisions about the country's future, and distrust in the institutions of government—themes repeated in focus groups and interviews. Roma youth are particularly disheartened about their ability to participate in the conversation—only one of the 100 Roma respondents agreed with the statement *People in power care what I think*.

²³ The CSYA was able to hold a focus group with two of the three main political youth wings because of resistance. Individual interviews with a political youth leader was declined in one case because the leader in question indicated they had not been given sufficient guidance by party elders.

FIGURE 11: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: POLITICAL AGENCY

National Sample



University students in a focus group say: *We are a democratic and capitalistic country only technically. Inside we all know that we are not democratic.*

CSYA respondents often compared North Macedonia unfavorably with democracies in the EU and elsewhere.

Results from the FES 2018 study suggest that satisfaction with the state of democracy in North Macedonia declined slightly between 2013 and 2016, with only 20% of youth saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with the state of democracy in the country. The report notes: *Findings since the late 1990s indicate a significant prevalence of authoritarian values but also a general acceptance of democracy. The study also finds worryingly high scores measuring fascism and nationalism, (though this is based on a limited number of questions). Sixty percent (60%) of respondents said they were proud to be Macedonian, but at the same time all values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights were rated higher in the EU than in North Macedonia. Respondents are far more optimistic about their future than they are about the future of Macedonian society.* (FES, 2018)

Voting and representation. Seventy eight percent (78%) of eligible voters in the CSYA said they voted in the 2017 election and 74% expressed an intention to vote in the next election.²⁴ Yet only 40% of youth in the national survey believe their vote matters. There are few reliable statistics about youth voting, so it is hard to know whether these findings are consistent with national trends. In general, youth seem quite cynical about the political process. Three quarters disagreed with the statement *Things changed for the better after the last election*. One participant in the focus group with Roma youth despaired

We either vote just to get it over with, or because we're manipulated, or we're just tired of this and we don't vote. The state can collapse - we don't care.

The frustrations in this quote may seem extreme, but they were echoed in different ways even by youth with more privilege. (They also suggest that voter turnout may not be the optimal indicator of civic engagement).

²⁴ Actual voting figures are difficult to confirm. Media reports vary wildly. Cf Why barely 20% of young people aged 18 to 29 years old vote in elections? October 12, 2017 <http://samoprasaj.mk/videos/686-20-18-29>

Further, while many are unconvinced about quotas established for youth representation in the parliament—saying they are assigned low priority in party processes—there appears to be some nascent traction inside the parliament to elevate youth voices. At the moment there are two MPs under 29 years old, and a youth committee comprised of 10 MPs. There is also a youth advisor to the PM.²⁵

Accountability. It was easy for FGD participants to list issues challenging good governance in the country, and themes related to corruption, nepotism, unrealized promises, and lack of respect for the rule of law were repeated again and again. Making recommendations about how to address the many systemic issues was more difficult. General recommendations for greater transparency, more representation and voice, and strict consequences for corruption were put forward. Some young people look to outside arbiters to help, welcoming reports from the EU that resonate with their lived concerns. Says one:

Our people are sheep; we need someone from outside to whip.

A few youth commented directly on EU ascension with optimism that this would positively affect the governance situation in the country.

Access to information/media. Young people in the CSYA national survey get most of their information through social media and television. Family and friends are also resources. Far fewer youth listen to the radio or read print media. According to the FES (2018) study, Macedonian youth spend an average of 6 hours a day on the internet—up from 3 hours in 2013. Some say the media is too regulated by political parties, and there are a few youth outlets. Journalism is not a highly regarded profession.

Social spaces. Two thirds of the national sample respondents said there were places they could go to socialize with peers. Nonetheless, the absence of social spaces where youth can gather was also an often-cited reason given for youth migration out of rural areas. The CSYA results suggest that youth who identify as Macedonian, and youth who live in areas where there is less ethnic diversity are more likely to say they have places to gather, compared to youth who identify as Albanian or live in areas of greater ethnic diversity. Age and gender don't make a difference in this regard. Youth space is particularly important because such a large number of young people live at home, even into their 20's.

Some young people complained that **sports** were not included in school curricula, and, particularly outside of Skopje, that places to play sports were not available. Both of the mayors interviewed outside of Skopje mentioned sports facilities as initiatives they could take and were taking for youth. A few youth said politics interfered with sports and one said sports betting places should be closed.

Limited places and opportunities to gather and connect with peers help explain the growing reliance on the internet as a channel for social interaction (which of course is not unique to Macedonian youth). (FES, 2018). It raises concerns about social isolation and vulnerability to manipulation.

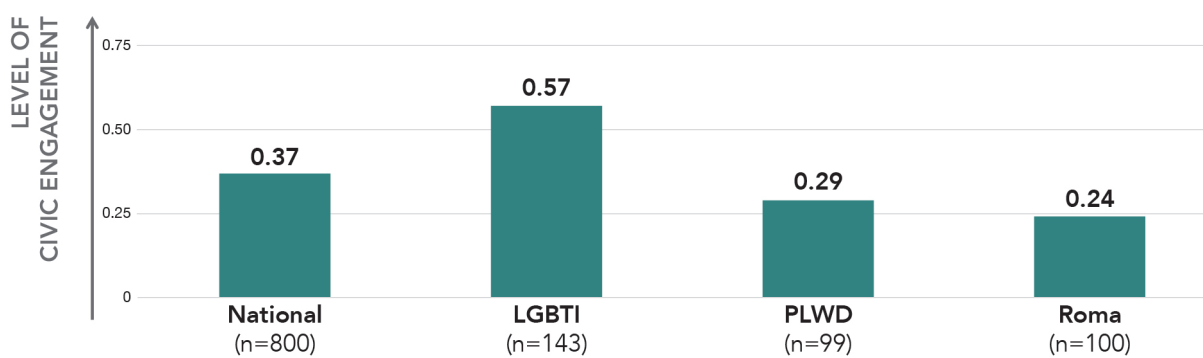
Civic engagement was explored through a number of questions related to young people's perspectives about and participation in the life of their communities and the society. A subset of statements in the survey were converted into an index of civic engagement, in order to be able to explore links with demographic factors, feelings of social exclusion and aspirations to migrate.

²⁵ He is a member of the Steering Committee for this CSYA and participated in a Key Informant Interview.

FIGURE 12: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INDEX

1. I voted in the last election
2. My vote matters
3. I am a member of an NGO/civil society organization
4. In the last 12 months, I participated with others in an activity or event for social change.
5. I can influence change in North Macedonia through peaceful protest
6. I plan to vote in the next election
7. In the last year, have volunteered with a community organization, civil society organization, or local government to make my community a better place
8. In the last six months I have attended a cultural event or visited a historical/cultural site in North Macedonia

As shown in Figure 13, youth in the national sample are characterized by low levels of civic engagement and more marginalized youth are less engaged than the national average. Youth who identify as Macedonian, youth who are better educated, employed, and in the 25-29 age group all appear to be *more* engaged in their communities and more empowered citizens in the democratic process than youth who identify as Albanian or other ethnic groups, youth who are less educated, youth who are unemployed, and youth who are younger. The latter represent a sizable majority of the population, however. Whether this situation is a result of cultural and social norms, an education or job market that fails to reward initiative, or simply the lack of opportunities for satisfying civic engagement is an open question.

**FIGURE 13: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
MEAN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (0-1)**

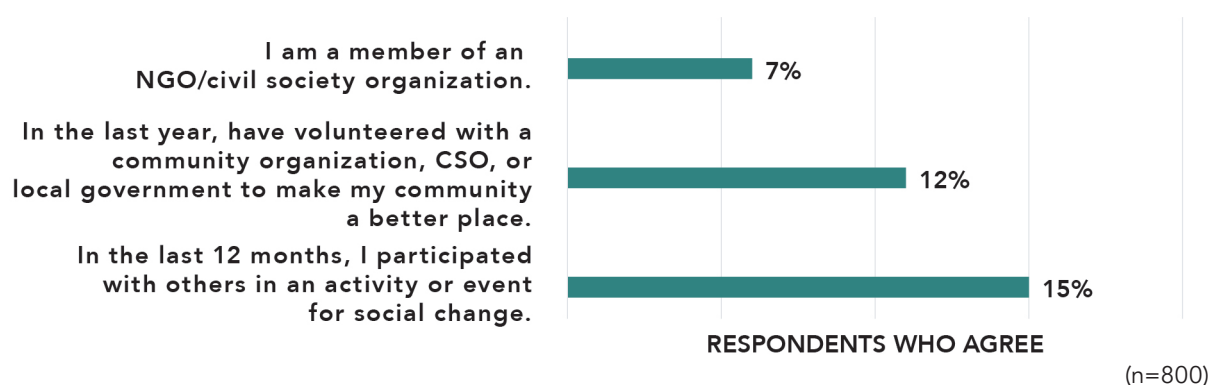
Focus group participants attribute a history of being excluded from conversations and decision making in the public sphere to low levels of civic engagement. Government, including local government, does not work in a transparent or consultative way. Choice of programs for youth are based on “guessing” according to one mayor. In one focus group with high school students, when facilitators invited participants to talk about their concerns, the students asked *are you really going to listen to what we say?* Older youth reflected: *We only know how to hate stuff, we don’t take any action.*

The CSYA data also suggests that a minority of young people participate in **volunteer** or civic activities that contribute to society. A government strategy on volunteerism is on the books, but according to one youth expert seems to equate volunteerism with internships. This strategy expired in 2014 and it is unclear whether a new one is being drafted. In a hopeful sign, the FES study found that the rate of volunteering reported by youth increased from 13% in to 20% between 2013-2016.

There is also a sense in which youth don't have trusted or known entry points and may lack a reliable frame of reference for how to engage. Student governments (where youth can learn about productive participation in democratic processes) exist on paper only in most schools and universities. Youth Councils are largely dormant. Activism and even volunteerism are not socially encouraged. Civil society organizations say they were marginalized under the previous government so are working to regain capacity and trust. Youth leaders who participated in the Colorful Revolution seem discouraged.

FIGURE 14: CIVIC PARTICIPATION

National Sample



Neither is the concept of an advocacy campaign or peaceful protest well established. Despite widespread complaints about air pollution, for instance, focus group participants report that

When there were some demonstrations because of the air pollution, only 20 people gathered.

Nonetheless, a former youth activist who is now a mayor, suggested the effective “on bike” campaign which is pushing for more bike-friendly transit options in Skopje²⁶ could be an example of how youth could advocate on targeted issues that matter to them.

Programmatic and institutional mechanisms for youth engagement. A number of government and NGO initiatives are trying to redress these trends. A short list of training and models that promote youth civic engagement encountered during the CSYA include:

- American Corners managed by the Youth Education Foundation (YEF) across the country, that offer cultural information about the US and trainings and fora for youth to connect;
- Friedrich Erbert Foundation’s mock municipal council events for youth;
- EU-supported street law initiative;
- Debate programs supported by the Community Development Foundation;
- The EU-supported Erasmus program that connects youth across countries on issues of interest to them.

A staff from the American Corner in Shtip notes that youth are most interested in workshops related to graphic design, film for social change, and how to find a job on line. She noted less interest when NGOs or the municipality ask for participation, however.

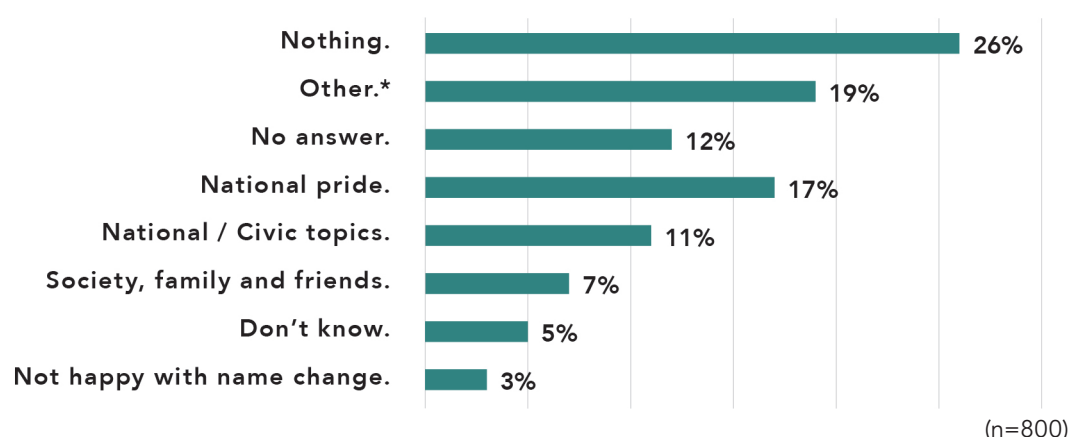
²⁶ This group garners sometimes 1000’s of people who like biking to rally for bike tracks in the city. They use media to highlight the environmental, economic, and health benefits of biking. “It’s better than a seminar”.

Historically, **Youth Councils** were seen as a mechanism for youth to engage with municipal governments. However, municipalities were often responsible for selecting representatives to the Youth Council. As a result, Youth Councils were largely coopted by political parties and are currently functioning in only a few places. The CSYA sought these places out, in order to explore their potential as constructive fora for youth voice in local decision making. In Shtip, a nascent Youth Council is in place, with a handful of active members who report growing networks with youth in nearby municipalities. The Youth Council in Shtip remains tied to party politics and struggles to engage with a broad cross section of youth in the municipality. The Law on Youth gives the Youth Council more autonomy and make it possible for representation to be less politically based.

The National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) was established in 2013 with 55 member organizations representing a broad cross section of youth in the country including unions, youth organizations, organizations for youth, political youth wings. The NYCM represents an estimated 70,000 young people in the country. NYCM has regional offices in seven sites. NYCM's governance structure is designed to promote equity, on-going engagement amongst the membership, and minimize potential political interference. The NYCM has carried out research, advocacy and consultation processes, including for key youth-related initiatives, most recently the Youth Guarantee Scheme and the Law on Youth. Although the NYCM posts jobs, events, travel and other opportunities of interest to youth on their website, awareness of the body is low, given their status as a peak organization. Youth may know members better. The NYCM gives an annual award for civic engagement which may help to identify positive home-grown role models—something that is sorely lacking in North Macedonia. Last year the prize went to a female Roma activist.

National pride. At the end of the national survey, respondents were asked to finish the sentence *The thing that makes me most proud to be a citizen of North Macedonia is....* The responses across all 1044 respondents in the CSYA represent a range of views.

FIGURE 15: THE THING THAT MAKES ME MOST PROUD TO BE A CITIZEN OF NORTH MACEDONIA IS:



* Other includes (in order of occurrence:): personal values and achievements; bilingualism; nature and environment; and unclear.

Youth expressed pride in the country's natural environment, language, security, family and some mentioned their birthright: This is the place where I was born. Some valued cultural norms, including mentions of interethnic relations: Communication between people, and friendship with my peers, which is not on that level in other countries. A few highlighted

their individual rights and freedoms as Muslims, Christians and women, as well as more general rights to vote. Some were proud of the future of the country in the EU.

At the same time, 3% expressed concerns about the recent name change to North Macedonia—a topic that came up throughout the CSYA. The proportion of respondents who said they have nothing to be proud of (26%) is quite striking. Lamented one: *Nothing makes me proud, as I am unemployed.*

A feeling of exclusion and limited opportunities for voice in shaping the future of their country characterize young people in North Macedonia. This is an immediate challenge that will take creative cooperation amongst government, civil society and other development partners to stem the tide of youth leaving for places they perceive as free (or freer) of these constraints.

Opportunities

- The Law on Youth offers a framework for increasing youth voice and engagement. Importantly, it anticipates a Youth Assembly with representation from a range of youth organizations which will elect Youth Councils in municipalities and includes municipality funding for youth activities. A representative umbrella body is also anticipated at the national level. The law will go before parliament in September.
- Guidelines on how to run a Youth Council and other mechanisms specified under the Law on Youth are being prepared by OSCE.
- The Law on Youth requires that every municipality has to build a youth center in the next five years.²⁷
- Consultations in the drafting of the Law on Youth offered a model for multi-stakeholder coalition building (importantly, bringing youth together across party lines).
- Conditions associated with EU ascension gives added pressure and encouragement to address governance issues of concern to youth.
- There are models that promote civic awareness and engagement for youth.

Recommendations

12. **Reinvigorate student government** in schools and universities in order to offer students hands on experiential learning opportunities in representative decisionmaking, leadership, negotiation, accountability etc. Use lessons learned and curriculum from on-going youth civic engagement initiatives.
13. **Support to Youth Councils.** Partner with municipalities to test a variety of approaches to reinvigorating Youth Councils. Robust M&E will be key to enable better understanding what kind of support are most beneficial to the establishment, inclusivity and sustainability of Youth Councils, consistent with the new Law on Youth. Include training for municipal government officials and Youth Council members.
14. **Support local youth centers** across the country with courses, activities, art etc. Drawing lessons from successful American Corners, enable youth (and Youth Councils) to lead in shaping locally-relevant activities and spaces that are of interest to them. Look to rehabilitating unused buildings. Ensure appropriate links to local CSOs and municipal government for sustainability.
15. **Provide support to the NYCM** to engage with its membership to undertake advocacy or informational campaigns on specific issues of concern to youth (for instance related to education reform, employment, environment, mental health, representation in parliament). This will build the confidence and profile of youth voice—means as important as outcomes. Support could include capacity building in advocacy.
16. **Provide capacity building to youth wings of political parties** to strengthen skills and understanding of strategy, bargaining, etc. Joint trainings and role plays will advance understanding, build bridges, and ideally establish new, shared norms around leadership and good governance. Program should emphasize strategies for advancing accountability to citizens and voters.
17. **Trial a volunteer initiative** for youth that is values focused and builds leadership and civic engagement skills, and sense of social inclusion. Remuneration essential. Engage with youth CSOs to lead on issues and placement. Ensure diversity amongst volunteers and recipients. Include robust M&E to ensure sensitivity to socio cultural issues.
18. **Introduce media literacy in high school curriculum.** In the short run this could be carried out by an NGO in order to refine an appropriate curriculum (particularly given the absence of computers in many schools), with an eye to mainstreaming over time.
19. **Support youth journalist training** including mentorships in order to promote youth perspective in the mainstream media.

²⁷ Conversation, Director of the Agency for Youth and Sport

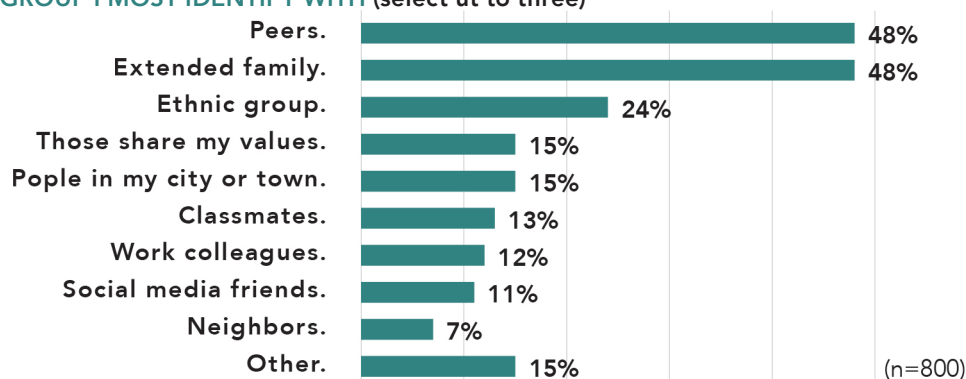
VIII Social issues and exclusion

Sense of belonging is important developmentally and shapes a young person's values and life decisions as they take steps towards social and financial independence. Sense of belonging also turned out to be an important consideration for youth in thinking about leaving the country. In order to understand how young people in North Macedonia think about their "community", respondents in the national study were given a list of 14 groups they might identify with most, and least.

FIGURE 16: SENSE OF BELONGING

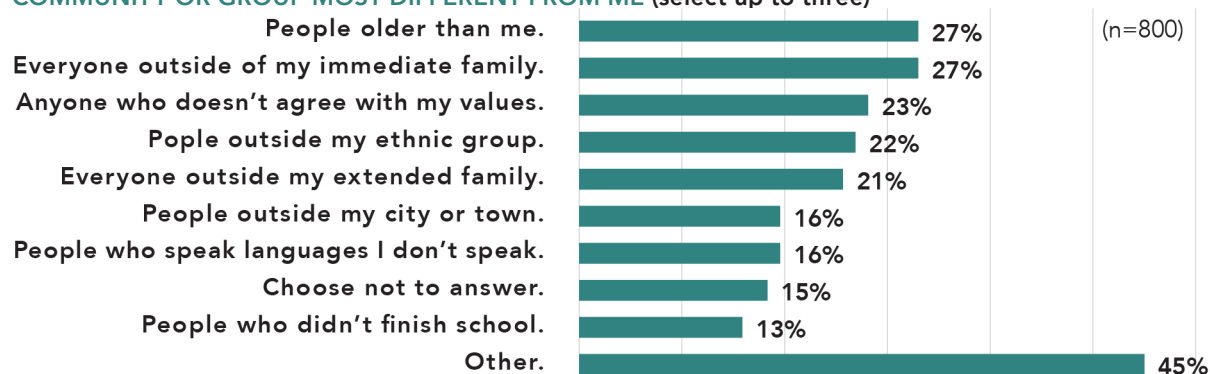
National Sample

COMMUNITY OR GROUP I MOST IDENTIFY WITH (select up to three)



Other includes (in order of occurrence): those who speak my language; family and friends in the diaspora; members of my political party; chose not to answer; other; parents, brothers, and sisters.

COMMUNITY OR GROUP MOST DIFFERENT FROM ME (select up to three)



Other includes (in order of occurrence): family and friends not living in North Macedonia; people who live outside my neighbourhood; people in other offices or jobs; anyone who is not on social media with me; members of the other political parties; and other.

As shown in Figure 16, extended family help define youth, who also identify strongly with people of their own age. Of note in these results is the emphasis on ethnic identity, shared values and language in how youth in Macedonia regard their 'in group' community. More than 85% of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanian youth say that most of their friends are from their own ethnic group. Although youth recognize the importance of political parties in controlling education and employment options, they do not regard the parties (or the politics) as relevant to their values or feelings of social inclusion.²⁸

These findings are consistent with findings from the 2013 and 2018 FES studies. Youth in this study said they trust immediate family and friends most and political leaders least (although the Army appears to be highly trusted by youth (FES, 2018).

Parents everywhere inform children's values and shape their view of social norms. In Macedonia they provide a prolonged safety net, with 72% of youth the CSYA still living at home.

While it seems that generally their family is very important for young people in Macedonia, some youth in the CSYA also complained that their parents were too traditional and held them back. Say youth in Shtip:

We are being criticized by our parents for being too ambitious, which they see as being greedy. They tell us we should settle for a minimum wage job: what more could you need?

Marginality. Sense of belonging was also considered with the use of a marginality index. Respondents in the national survey were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Although there are no international or longitudinal benchmarks to compare these outcomes with, sense of exclusion appears to be moderately high amongst youth in Northern Macedonia, with each of the other populations in the study reflecting sentiments of marginality that were statistically stronger than the national average. Gender was less important than employment status as a driver of sense of social exclusion. Roma respondents who say they are unemployed and not looking for work have the highest sense of social exclusion amongst all strata.

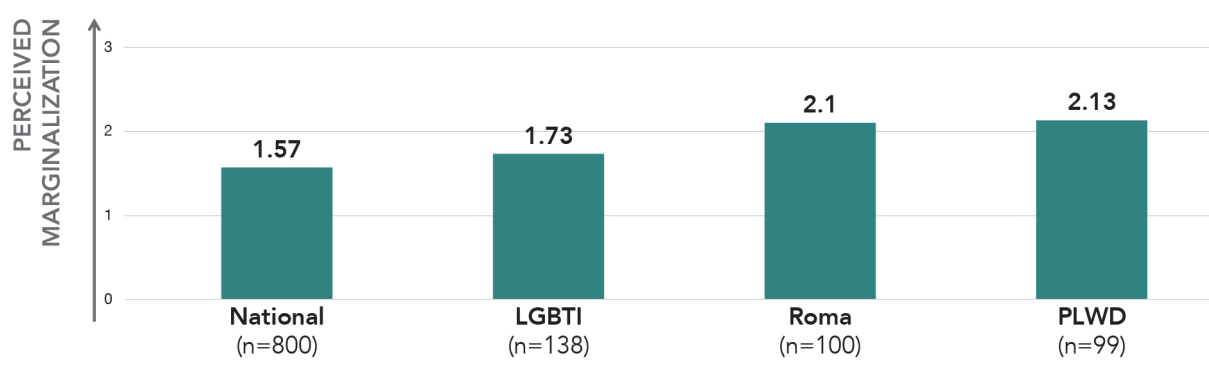
FIGURE 17: SELF PERCEIVED MARGINALIZATION INDEX

1. In my day to day life others treat me as a person of significance
2. The world in which I live treats people like me with respect
3. People like me are often given positions of high status in society
4. I have access to opportunities for occupational development
5. There are many barriers for me to achieving success
6. People like me are often victimized
7. People like me tend to have no power to change things that they do not like
8. I think that I am someone who exists on the margins of society
9. I think that I am someone who is part of mainstream society
10. People like me are not often given fair access to suitable employment
11. People like me are not often included in decisions about how society runs things
12. I often feel that I am excluded from making decisions about things that affect me

Source: Stone, A., McDermott, M. R., Abdi, A., Cornwell, B., Matyas, Z., Reed, R., & Watt, R. (2018). Self-Perceived Marginalization Questionnaire

28 Only 1% included members of my political party in their "in group", and only 5% put them in the "outside" category.

FIGURE 18: SELF PERCEIVED MARGINALIZATION SCORE
(MEAN MARGINALIZATION SCORE (0-3))



LGBTI youth in the CSYA tend to be better educated and demonstrate greater agency, including different expectations for their role in society (though as noted this is likely in part a result of sampling). LGBTI respondents dissent from the mainstream view in that they tend not to prize public sector jobs, report more of an ethnic diversity amongst their friends, and identify less as religious—all findings that are statistically significant. In the focus groups, LGBTI youth say they feel unsafe in North Macedonia. All had been physically attacked and until a month before this research they had no grounds for legal recourse. Eighty percent (80%) of LGBTI respondents expressed an intention to leave the country in the next 1-2 years—significantly more than young people in the national sample and other marginalized groups.

Young people living with a disability, like counterparts around the world, struggle more than able bodied young people to find employment and have the lowest employment rates amongst the groups under study. Not surprisingly, a large minority of PLWD respondents say it's easier to live on government benefits than to find a job--distinguishing them from all other respondents in the survey.

Religion. North Macedonia is characterized by religious plurality. While the majority (65%) identify as Orthodox Christian, there is also a sizable Albanian Muslim population (33%), making it the country with the highest proportion of Muslims in Europe. Other, smaller communities with ties to nearby countries, including Roma, Turks, and Bosnians practice different forms of religion. This plurality is also reflected in distinctions related to linguistic, educational, political identity.

Eighty five percent (85%) of young people in the national survey say religion is an important part of who they are. The sentiment is significantly stronger for young people who identify as Albanian than those who identify as Macedonian or other ethnic groups. However, religion did not come up in the focus groups with youth as a consequential issue related to their priorities, concerns about their lives, or of significance in decisions to migrate.

Ethnicity did not emerge as a major issue in the conversations with youth either, although it does seem to be a factor in feelings of social exclusion, as noted above. Importantly, young people in areas that are ethnically homogenous expressed more limited feelings of social exclusion than those in more diverse locality—a finding that was statistically significant.

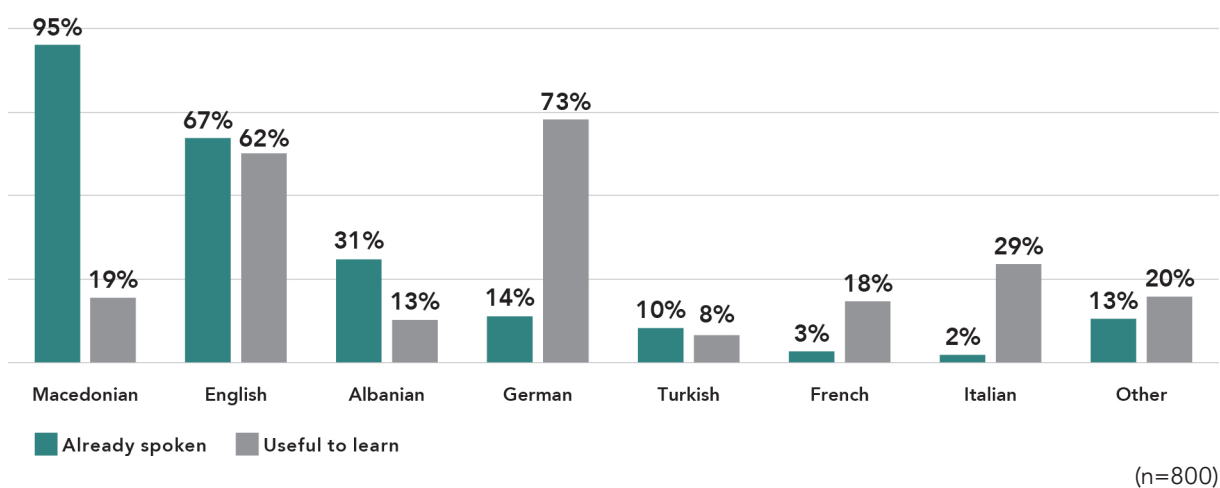
The **One Society Initiative** launched by the government in late 2018 is based on a perceived fragmentation along ethnic, linguistic, religious and sexual identity lines in

society. Importantly for the CSYA, the One Society initiative highlights the need to redress ethnic stereotypes in textbooks, teacher training, separate classrooms and in the media. Although as yet still on paper, the initiative is being promoted at high levels in government and bears watching.

Language. As in many multi ethnic countries, language in Macedonia is an important and sometimes charged issue. Albanian youth in the CSYA overwhelmingly hold the view that speaking both Macedonian and Albanian languages are important for all citizens, while ethnic Macedonians and all other groups do not. The parallel education system shapes these views and what they represent in terms of social inclusion.

Language is also a consideration for migration. Figure 19 presents the languages that youth in the sample say they speak, and the languages they say would like to study.

FIGURE 19: LANGUAGES YOUTH SPEAK AND WANT TO LEARN
National Sample



The emphasis on European languages is notable in the latter category, mirroring languages spoken in the current migration destinations of choice—Germany, USA, Australia and Canada,²⁹ with far fewer young people interested in learning languages spoken by communities in their country, and countries that border North Macedonia.

Marginality and civic engagement. Youth in the CSYA who demonstrated strong feelings of marginalization also demonstrated lower levels of civic engagement—a finding that was statistically validated, including amongst Roma and PLWD populations. Youth, even those who identify with the majority, may feel excluded for any number of reasons, as discussed throughout this report. These feelings appear to contribute to lower levels of participation in community and society. The LBGTI population is an exception. These respondents were found to demonstrate high levels civic engagement and strong feelings of social exclusion (scores are all statistically significant). The highly organized characteristic of the LBGTI population and international support to advocacy initiatives may contribute to this finding.

Mental health. The education, employment and social situation which shape feelings of limited agency and exclusion amongst many young people growing up in North Macedonia have likely contributed to what some consider a mental health crisis in the country. This

²⁹ In the FES (2018) study, a third of young people had knowledge of the language of the country they want to move to.

issue was raised by young people as well as youth experts across the CSYA. University professors described the situation as “collective depression” and blame it on unfairness in the society. Youth in the CSYA frame the issue in terms of their own anxieties about the future: What’s going to happen to me tomorrow? I have no money, no job (or even if I have a job I may lose it when another party comes into power), my friends have left the country, I can’t afford to start a family, the health system doesn’t work if I get sick, and police are untrustworthy if I need help. Feelings of insecurity amongst youth were also raised in the FES (2018) study.

High school teachers comment on depression as an issue amongst their students but also recognize they have neither the skills nor referral options to deal with it. The stigma around mental health and the dearth of data³⁰ and services perpetuate the silence around what appears to be a growing issue. Rates of suicide nationally rose between 2000 and 2015, from 7.2 to 7.9/100,000,³¹ though this is not desegregated by age. Psychologists exist in the schools, but their skills are typically dated, and they are used as substitute teachers and looked to enforce discipline—which compromises their mental health role.

Other issues. Two additional quality of life issues were heard repeatedly when young people talk about why they want to leave the country: the health care system and pollution. Both appear emblematic of corruption and lack of responsive government. Many told personal stories about family or friends who had paid into the health insurance system only to have to revert to private providers to receive care.

Air quality, particularly in the winter months, was given as a reason to leave the country, and young people feel frustrated that government is not addressing it. These issues are included here for completeness. As they require significant systemic change affecting the entire population, specific recommendations are not included.

30 A report of the Republic Institute for Health Protection entitled Global research on adolescent health in the Republic of Macedonia 2007/2008, 2008 was received late in the research in Macedonian and may be a relevant resource.

31 <https://tradingeconomics.com/macedonia/suicide-mortality-rate-per-100000-population-wb-data.html>

Opportunities

- The Minister of Health regularly raises the issue of mental health in public fora.
- Some positive examples of mainstream television promoting interethnic tolerance are popular (Nashe Maalo—Our Neighborhood, which older youth say shaped their attitudes about other groups; there is a sitcom on state TV featuring a sympathetic Albanian character—the actor recently won a European award; theatre performances in both Macedonian and Albanian have been successful; radio MOF for youth is well known). The USAID-supported media productions by Search for Common Ground have gained widespread appreciation (see Chapter IX).

Recommendations

20. **Support research and public awareness on mental health amongst youth** in the country in order to provide an evidence base and encourage appropriate government action. Follow research with public awareness and consider rapid action research on appropriate ways to deliver mental health services in schools.
21. **Support a suicide hot line.** (There was a hotline for children in crisis situations, but it didn't work well—it will be important to understand why before a new hotline is put in place). Include multi-media promotion to raise awareness and encourage use. This is an inexpensive approach which could be expanded to include broader mental health issues if successful.
22. **Support edu entertainment on social issues.** Build informed conversations and constructive engagement around issues of concern to youth. Include youth in production. USAID is already doing important work in this space (See following chapter).

IX A youth lens on USAID's current portfolio

USAID North Macedonia currently supports a number of youth-specific programs and programs that impact—directly or indirectly--on youth as citizens and current or future leaders, workers or entrepreneurs in the country. Projects were not assessed specifically in the CSYA, though representatives of five of the projects that have most direct bearing on youth issues were interviewed as part of the research (projects noted with a * and listed first in the following Table). Some USAID projects were mentioned by youth informants in the course of focus groups and interviews. **Many of USAID's current projects are already advancing innovative strategies that respond to issues that are important for youth.** These should be continued, scaled, and, as noted below, rigorously assessed in order to offer evidence of what works, why and how.

Enhanced programmatic linkages amongst these projects and with other initiatives led by government, civil society and business that address youth concerns will boost synergies and contribute to impact. For instance, within the USAID portfolio such synergies could be achieved in a number of ways:

- Media programming has the potential for providing information that youth want, and advancing conversations about critical issues related to civic engagement, values, social cohesion, government accountabilities, entrepreneurship etc. Projects addressing these issues can help to inform media content.
- Civic engagement outreach will be more powerful if it includes information about laws, recourse options, volunteer options and internships that are being addressed under various projects.
- Youth entrepreneurship can be promoted through coordination amongst the various business-focused projects (many of which share the same partners) with a particular eye on how interventions may be affecting and involving youth (see below).

TABLE 4: STRENGTHENING YOUTH RESPONSIVENESS IN USAID PROJECTS

Project profile	Relevant findings from the CSYA	Project-specific recommendations	Links with CSYA Rec's.
Youth Ethnic Integration Project* \$5.8m (ends 2022) MCEC-MoES partnership to promote inclusion, civic education in schools, and volunteerism amongst youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement, volunteerism amongst youth moderate to low; significantly lower amongst traditionally marginalized groups (PLWD, Roma). • Ethnicity ranks third in terms of "in" group for youth • 85% of youth say most of their friends are from their own ethnic group. • Dual stream schools contribute to sense of "other". • Transformative anecdotes about interethnic activity-based engagement. • Interethnic issues not pre-eminent in FGDs aside from the school setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include assessment of civic engagement curricula to gauge early outcomes, provide feedback for refinement, profile with evidence for mainstreaming. • Pilot secondary youth volunteer program to deliver civic engagement curriculum. • Under the civic engagement umbrella, include internship opportunities and Youth Council/Youth Assembly events. • Promote high profile individuals as ambassadors of tolerance and understanding. 	4., 5., 12., 13., 17., 22.
Advancing Social Cohesion Project* \$1.3m (ends 2021) Strengthens interethnic interaction among children, advance intercultural education in kindergartens and primary schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • Minority students in mixed classes note discrimination. • Other students and observers say values are no longer taught in the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add an action-research component. Gather longitudinal data from i) teachers and students; ii) community activity participants; iii) television audiences (disaggregated by age and ethnicity) to generate evidence of attitudinal change. • Package and disseminate evidence for MoES and media outlets to promote mainstreaming across school curricula/teacher training, building on GoNMK One Society mandate. • Train peer volunteers to anchor after-school discussion groups about inclusion, values, other issues of interest to youth raised in television series. 	4., 17., 22.
Civic Engagement Project* \$9.4m (ends 2021) Builds capacity of CSOs and individuals to raise public awareness and engage government officials on issues of public concern.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals are current and highly relevant to youth. • Links with CSOs, civic engagement and volunteerism limited amongst youth. • CSO sector rebuilding trust, profile, outreach to youth. • NYCM offers broad representation, though many youth still disaffected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to initiatives (programs and campaigns) in addition to institutions. • Pilot youth volunteer schemes via public-private partnership. • Leverage internship opportunities to engage students in civic and governance initiatives. • Provide training and support to Youth Councils (pilot test). • Track participants over time to assess life choice outcomes. • Prioritize CSO's outside of Skopje for support, mentoring, networking. • Revisit English language requirement. 	12., 13., 15., 16., 17.

Project profile	Relevant findings from the CSYA	Project-specific recommendations	Links with CSYA Rec's.
Macedonia Media Program* \$2.7m (ended 09/2019) Supported production of three fact-based in-depth news reporting programs for TV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth get most of their information via social media and television. Television dramas with social themes resonate and inform, may also offer role models which are few. All three media programs in this project are highly relevant to youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience research to assess reach and impact of programming on specific demographics to inform future focus on youth. For future projects: introduce topics of priority to youth, e.g.: mental health; sex education and sexual identity; volunteering; debates amongst political youth leaders; profiles of life in the diaspora; profiles of young entrepreneurs; interviews with PLWD, Roma, LGBTI leaders. Support opportunities for young journalists, personalities, crew. Screen Family Markovski episodes to stimulate classroom-based discussions on societal issues. 	10., 15., 18., 19., 22.
Increased Political Competition & Accountability Project \$9.7m Eight-year initiative to promote political accountability. Includes CSO strengthening to monitor government; good governance practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth critical and cynical about governance and accountability overall—want change. Law on Youth and CSOs key to advancing youth engagement, but many youth are unaware and remain disengaged (esp. outside of Skopje) Youth CSOs feel marginalized in political discourse. There is an appetite within youth wings of political parties for cross party engagement on youth issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide capacity development to youth wings (collectively), consistent with current project activities. Support parliamentary youth committee with skills building, consultations with youth organizations. Pilot test approaches to re-energizing municipal Youth Councils consistent with Law on Youth. Support student governments. Support productive government internships. Promote public awareness targeted to youth in interactive format about results of this project. 	12., 13., 15., 15., 16.
Macedonia Electoral Support Project \$1.7m Three-year support to the State Election Commission in the lead up to the 2019 presidential elections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth say they vote and plan to vote, but the credibility of the voting system seems less important than lack of confidence in institutions of government more broadly. Youth may be voting without full understanding of party platforms Robust data on youth voting patterns is absent; media coverage varies widely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media and television awareness targeting youth about importance of election reform. Provide fora for parties to present and debate their platforms, particularly in media that youth consume. Include youth wings of political parties. Support evidence-based polling data about youth voting patterns. 	16.
Partnership on Microfinance \$1.4m Improve IT platforms and financial literacy to serve low income households.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth skeptical about entrepreneurship; young entrepreneurs skeptical about government programs. Youth uninformed about entrepreneurship training opportunities, financing, government policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide one stop, on-line site with easily accessible information about training, financing, policy for young entrepreneurs. Network with other entrepreneurship promotion projects for youth to maximize reach and synergies. Pilot financial literacy in schools. Prioritize outreach to marginalized youth—e.g. PLWD, Roma, rural. 	2., 10., 11.

Project profile	Relevant findings from the CSYA	Project-specific recommendations	Links with CSYA Rec's.
Business Ecosystem Project Provides training and advice to a range of actors to support more robust business environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above Education system and culture do not encourage risk taking, innovation, vocational careers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target information about BEP services to youth (see above); proactively reach out to young people including PLWD, Roma, rural. Earmark BEP support for young entrepreneurs. Offer linkages, cushions for innovation/risk, business incubators. Document and share stories (role models). Network with other donors, Chambers, government agencies active in this space to ensure synergies, prioritize youth focus. 	2., 10., 11.
Partnership on Better Business Regulation \$1.9m Work with four Chambers of Commerce to support SMEs in compliance and policy formulation. Includes drafting new Law on Internships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internships required and seen as a valuable way for youth to get hands on job experience. Currently matching, management of internships dysfunctional; employers lack incentives, motivation and guidance. Youth say workers are disrespected, cite painful experiences of exploitation of selves and parents. Youth lack information about worker rights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide standards of practice and guidelines to support Law on Internships. Include youth inputs, accountabilities via engagement with NYCM, YEF and other youth CSOs. Pilot test approaches to effective internships in a range of settings, then tweak guidelines, incentives, accountabilities. Promote better public awareness about workers' rights. Consider including the youth section of the Association of Unions in crafting outreach to youth. 	2., 3., 10., 11.
Partnership for Business Friendly Inspection System Improve effectiveness of inspection bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above. Youth feel performance, qualifications not as important as connections in access to jobs and promotions. Youth living with a disability particularly marginalized in job market, despite government incentives on paper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure guidelines, training and implementation include attention to compliance with government regulations for hiring and workplace support of PLWD. Consider a hotline for labor complaints. 	10.
Partnership on Factoring \$700,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See findings related to business, above, esp related to information, trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target youth with information about this financing option (as above). Include in financial literacy training. 	2., 11.
Partnership on Energy (ends 12/2020) Promotes national compliance with EU energy policies and regulations, improvement of energy to households and industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air pollution a stated driver of youth out-migration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote enterprise and innovation options for youth in renewables. Advance public awareness and pressure to comply through NYCM advocacy. 	24., 25.

This portfolio includes a number of projects related to jobs and government accountability that are of particular priority for youth. Together with on-going government, EU and ILO initiatives mentioned in this report, opportunities are there to create a more transparent and friendly employment and business environment.

Youth in North Macedonia are also concerned about education and health reform. Recommendations for long- and short-term programming have been put forward in the education sector. Because the health sector affects the general population, recommendations in this report have been limited to preventative measures related to mental health and sex education, which are of particular priority to youth. A program focused on health reform or specific health interventions would also benefit from a youth focus of course, and USAID brings particular expertise in this space.

Evidence and learning. A cross cutting recommendation is the need for more rigor in the monitoring and evaluation of projects designed to reach youth, in order to better understand what works and what strategies are reaching youth most effectively. Many of the current projects share similar outcome indicators related to awareness, attitude and behavior change. Impact evaluations or case study assessments would be valuable, and USAID could consider thematic rather than project-based assessments (e.g. to look across programs designed to promote for instance civic awareness and engagement; social cohesion; accountabilities; conduits for reaching disenfranchised youth). Building on the CSYA, a portfolio **Theory of Change** that ties design assumptions for each of the projects into a coherent whole would be a logical start.

X Conclusions

The CSYA surfaced a range of frustrations and anxieties that shape young people's perspectives on their country and their stated desire to migrate out. Many of these are historical and systemic and require long term change. Youth do not see themselves as part of the change, which exacerbates their inclination to leave. Out migration represents a threat to the economic viability of the country. There are signs that the Government of North Macedonia is taking steps to address some of the issues youth feel most strongly about, particularly in the area of employment. The Law on Youth and the consultative process surrounding it suggest an opening for youth voice.

US Government agencies and a number of international NGOs have invested in some innovative programs that address issues that youth care about, particularly related to non-formal education; social cohesion and access to information/media. More evaluation would contribute to surfacing what is working best and provide evidence for mainstreaming. Because North Macedonia is poised to join the EU, the EU and other EU member state agencies do not see their role in traditional development donor terms, the importance of USG and other efforts in this space is important. Strengthening of civil society partners and encouraging a robust CSO/GO dialogue will be important in this regard, as CSOs will be key in addressing many of the challenges raised in this report, particularly in the short run.

