

# **YOUTH AND COVID 19 IN NORTH MACEDONIA**

Needs, Challenges, Consequences



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	– disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
CSD	– Civil Society Organization
FB	– Facebook
FITR	– Fund for Innovation and Technological Development
IT	– Information Technology
LGBTQ+	– Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer +
LYC	– Local Youth Council
MES	– Ministry of Education and Science
MKD	– Macedonian denar (currency)
MLS	– Ministry for Labor and Social Policy
NEET	– Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	– Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	– Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	– Personal Computer
SSO	– State Statistical Office
UNICEF	– United Nations Children's Fund
UNSHM	– Union of High School Students of Republic of North Macedonia
WHO	– World Health Organization
YEF	– Youth Educational Forum

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# ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected, and it keeps influencing lives in many negative ways. Globally, as of 1 June 2021, there have been more than 170 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including more than 3.5 million deaths. In North Macedonia, from 3 January 2020 to 31 May 2021, there have been 155,272 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 5,413 deaths.

Although young people have not been the main risk group of contamination from the virus, since the beginning of the pandemic they have been in the frontline when it comes to taking severe attacks from social, educational, and financial nature, and with their physical and mental health clearly at highest stake.

Some first response analyses on COVID-19 in North Macedonia could be found, while no cross-section assessment on the effects of the pandemic on youth has been provided to date. This is where our study fits in. We offer a cross-section inquiry that aims to understand how youth in North Macedonia is coping with the pandemic. What are the resilience mechanisms for young people? What are the needs, the challenges, and the consequences of the youth facing the COVID-19 pandemic? Many aspects of young people's lives are to be analyzed: education, social and economic state, emotional health, youth participation, and inclusion of marginalized groups. Some sub-questions addressed in this study are youth's communication and socialization, empathy and solidarity with vulnerable groups, activism and volunteering practices, gender and family violence, and inclusion of young people living in rural areas. The institutional response to the pandemic is also analyzed.

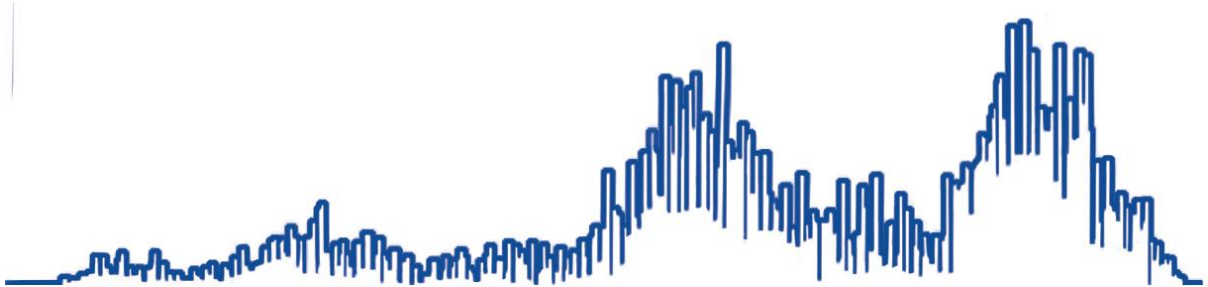
This analysis relies on four different methodological tools. A secondary data qualitative analysis via 'desk research', focus groups with 14 CSOs working with youth or specific groups of interest to our study, 8 interviews with representatives from relevant institutions, and empirical analysis of data coming from a nationwide survey with 1002 young people aged 15 to 29.

Among other, we argue that young people assess the government measures to be inefficient, online learning is a challenge for students as well as for the parents, the pandemic has a tremendously negative effect on young people's balance of work and home duties, especially for women, and their economic situation in general. Additionally, we show how young people usually spend their free time watching TV and surfing the Internet/socializing, rather than volunteering and participating in civil society activities. We emphasize the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health as well. The health crisis significantly changed the way of communication and coordination between CSOs and youth, while the legislation on youth is only at its beginnings, with institutions struggling to find a leading and coordinating institution in youth matters.

**Keywords:** youth, pandemic, COVID-19, North Macedonia, government economic measures, civil society organizations, civic participation, volunteering, vulnerable youth.



# INTRODUCTION



*"Let me give you some other words that matter much more, that are much more actionable. Prevention. Preparedness. Public health. Political leadership. And most of all, people. We are in this together, to do the right things with calm and protect the citizens of the world. It's doable."*

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
WHO Director-General's opening remarks  
at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020

On 11 March 2020, after the new coronavirus spread globally from Wuhan in China, The World Health Organization, declared a COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, as of 1 June 2021, there have been more than 170 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including more than 3.5 million deaths, reported to WHO. As of 1 June 2021, nearly 1.6 billion vaccine doses have been administered, and the world continues fighting the spread of the virus via safety measures, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and vaccination.

In North Macedonia, from 3 January 2020 to 31 May 2021, there have been 155,272 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (the first one registered on 26 February 2020), and 5,413 deaths. The country's two peaks in both infection and death numbers were in November 2020 and March 2021.

No aspect of life on Earth has been spared in the one year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The negative consequences of the pandemic, along with the emotional distress due to the loss of close people, are numerous. Young people seem to have faced all these negative effects at a higher degree. Private life (family and friends), education, work, communication, leisure, activism, health (mental and physical), political environment, are some of the aspects in which they were affected. No social strata have been immune to the lockdowns, physical and social distancing, financial shortcomings, and loss of people.

Due to this substantial turmoil, some immediate response studies emerged several months after the pandemic in North Macedonia. The "Rapid gender assessment: The impact of COVID-19 on women and men in North Macedonia" (Bashevska 2020) addressed the many negative implications of the pandemic for gender equality

due to the possibility for further deepening of the existing inequalities. Among other conclusions, the report accentuates the need for a more specific focus on women in government measures. Reactor's report on "Unpaid and paid work, gender-based discrimination and working rights in time of COVID-19" adds that the Government measures lacked gender-sensitive assessment, a point made once more in Reactor's December 2020 study (Ivanova, 2020). Petkovska (2020) offers a qualitative analysis of the impact the governmental measures had on workers' rights in general. A new survey on the "Impact of COVID-19 crisis on Roma and Other Women in The Republic of North Macedonia", was also released in April 2021. (Pavlovski, Antikj, Frishchikj 2021)

A nationwide survey "COVID-19 in Macedonia. One-year fear, expectations, and hopes for returning to normal" (Jakovlevska, Ivanovska, Velickovska), has been published in March 2021, to compare the change of attitudes towards the pandemic by the Macedonian public in the past year. The report of this nationwide survey tackles, among other, online education, mental health, family relationships, governmental measures, etc. The brief for public policies "Inequality in Time of Corona. Effects of the pandemic on the Macedonian economy" (Jovanovikj, Jovanovikj, Mitevski, Stojkovski 2020), the effects are also observed from the age perspective, including the strong negative effect the pandemic has had on young people's careers and economic wellbeing.

A group of CSOs, in April 2020, has released a report "Perspective: Young people in crises - Immediate recommendations for overcoming the negative effects of COVID-19 crisis on youth", because they deem that the

negative consequences of the pandemic for young people are to have a long-lasting effect. The report tackles unemployment and economic effects, education, psychosocial and health effects, and youth engagement and volunteering. "Youth in crisis report 2.0" has been issued one year after the emergence of the pandemic as well, with some new findings and recommendations. Gjorgjiev and Barlakovski (2020) write on the "Crisis attempts of Higher Education Institutions for Digitalization in the academic 2019/20",

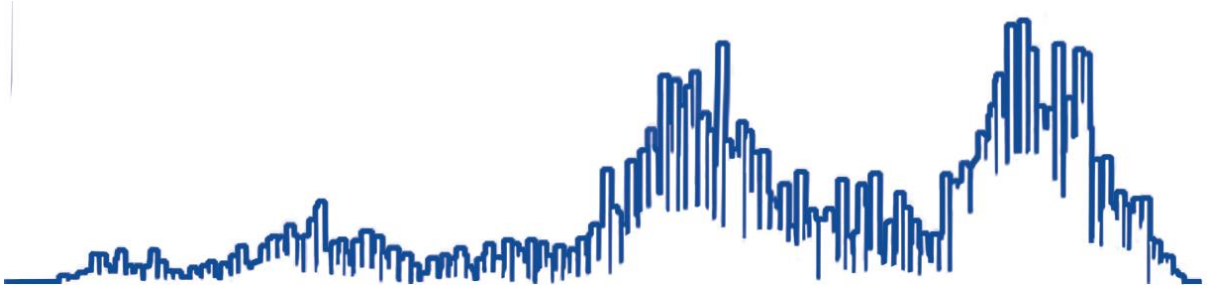
From the literature review, we can conclude that some first response analyses on COVID-19 in North Macedonia could be found, while no cross-section assessment on the effects of the pandemic on youth has been provided to date. This is where our study steps in. We offer a cross-sectional inquiry that aims to understand how youth in North Macedonia is coping with the pandemic. What are the resilience mechanisms for young people? What are the needs, the challenges, and the consequences of the youth facing the COVID-19 pandemic? Many aspects of young people's lives are to be analyzed: education, social and economic state, emotional health, youth participation, and inclusion of marginalized groups. Some sub-questions that should be addressed are their communication and socialization, empathy and solidarity with vulnerable groups, their activism and volunteering practices, gender and family violence, and inclusion of young people living in

rural areas. The institutional response to the pandemic is also put under scrutiny.

This cross-section analysis relies on four different methodological tools. A qualitative analysis via 'desk research', focus groups with CSOs working with youth or specific groups of interest to our study, interviews with representatives from relevant institutions, and empirical analysis of data coming from a nationwide survey with young people aged 15 to 29.

Among other, we argue that young people assess the government measures to be inefficient, online learning is a challenge for students as well as for the parents, the pandemic has a tremendously negative effect on young people's balance of work and home duties, especially for women, and their economic situation in general. Additionally, we will show how young people usually spend their free time watching TV and surfing the Internet/socializing, rather than volunteering and participating in civil society activities. We emphasize the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health as well. The health crisis significantly changed the way of communication and coordination between CSOs and youth, while the legislation on youth is only at its beginnings, with institutions struggling to find a leading and coordinating institution in youth matters.

# METHODOLOGY



In this study we have applied four different data collection methods: qualitative desk analysis, interviews with representatives of relevant state institutions, focus groups with CSOs and survey with young people.

The first method was a “desk analysis” regarding the relevant and recent youth sector documents (both produced by government, international and domestic non-government organizations). This is to assess the country's urgent need for regulating the state support for young people in North Macedonia in their post-COVID-19 period of adjustment on the labor market, education, and social inclusion. We are focusing on four types of data.

- The first method is secondary data gathering and analysis. Firstly, data on the legislative framework resulting from the pandemic, and the measures taken to combat the negative effects from the pandemic for youth (and citizens of North Macedonia in general) were gathered and analyzed. Secondly, the institutional setup in which these changes are taking place, along with the responsible institutions is provided. Thirdly, the latest studies on the effects of the pandemic on youth have been gathered, analyzed, and used as references in our study. Finally, the civil society sector's work regarding COVID-19 and youth has been analyzed and this baseline assessment has been used for the focus groups' questionnaire drafting and some information is also referenced in the study.

- The second methodological approach comprised conducting four “online focus groups”. We have conducted focus groups with a total of 14 representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).<sup>1</sup> Our main purpose for that is to help us understand the general set of needs and challenges youth faced and will face because of the pandemic from youth grass-root organizations. The representatives discussed open questions, with the possibility for certain questions to contain help-answers which were only a discussion opener, not a final answer option. The selection of the relevant CSOs was done during the desk research phase and was inclusive for not only youth CSOs, but as well CSOs working with people with disabilities, marginalized groups, and minorities (especially Roma).

- The third method used is interviews with representatives from relevant institutions, conducted to better understand how the existing measures were projected and realized, and how it is assessed by the authorities that these measures help young people get through the pandemic. What else could be done? Are there any measures planned for the following period? The interviews were conducted online in compliance with COVID-19 measures and restrictions. To what extent do these measures respond to the real needs and challenges of the youth? A couple of institutions have provided answers in a written form, while some have additionally provided us with data on relevant issues discussed during the interviews. The institutions involved in these semi-structured interviews are: the Youth and Youth Policies Adviser to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Agency for youth and sport, Ministry for Science and Education, National Agency for European Educational Programs, Ministry for Labor and Social Policy, Agency for Employment, while Bureau for Development of Education and Ministry of Health responded that they do not have competences for addressing youth issues.

- Finally, an online survey with 1,002 young people aged 15-29 from North Macedonia was conducted in April 2021, with the aim of gathering quantitative data from young people on their resilience, needs, and challenges facing the pandemic. This data allows us to look at different factor variables, such as gender, education, work status, special needs, living in rural areas, ethnic background, etc. Due to the pandemic and the length of the survey, the questionnaire was disseminated in both Macedonian and Albanian language, online. The initial tool for dissemination was by social media advertising and through the help of CSOs working with youth and marginalized groups.

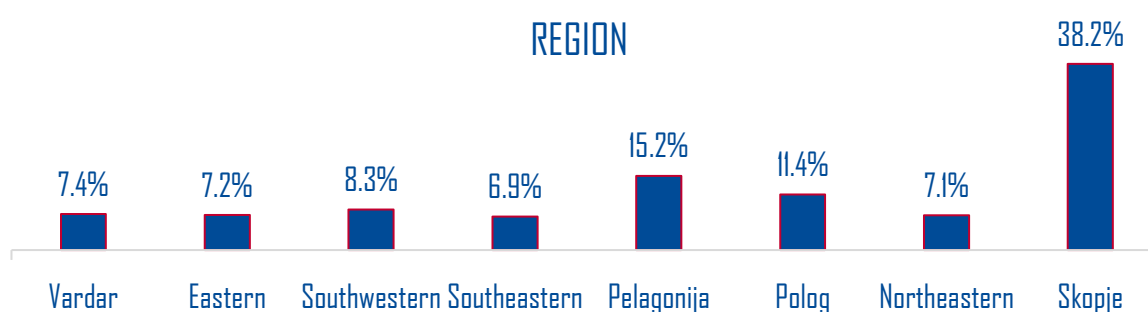
However, we consider that there is a limitation to the power of this survey to reflect fully the situation with all vulnerable/marginalized groups because there is a lack of official data on the share of these groups from the whole population (some of these limitations coming from the legislation, which does not require registration for many of these categories).

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in continuation.

To begin with, the sample closely reflects the population distribution across the eight Plan regions in North Macedonia (according to the State Statistical Office

estimations for the population) (Chart 1). The biggest share of respondents (38%) of the sample counts for the youth voices from the Skopje region, which is somewhat higher than the official statistics but probably reflects the real image, as there is a large proportion of unregistered people living in the Capital. The smallest proportion (6.9%) is from the Southeastern region.

Chart 1. Region of living



In addition, 15% of the sample represents young people living in rural areas (Chart 2).<sup>II</sup> The sample includes 64% women and 36% men (Chart 3).<sup>III</sup> In terms of age, the sample includes young people from 15 to 29 (Chart 4). Regarding ethnicity, 79% of the sample are ethnic

Macedonians, 15% ethnic Albanians, and 6% are Other (smaller ethnic communities (Chart 5). Macedonian is mother tongue to 82% of the respondents, whereas 15% are native in Albanian (Chart 6).

Chart 2. Place of living (Rural or Urban)

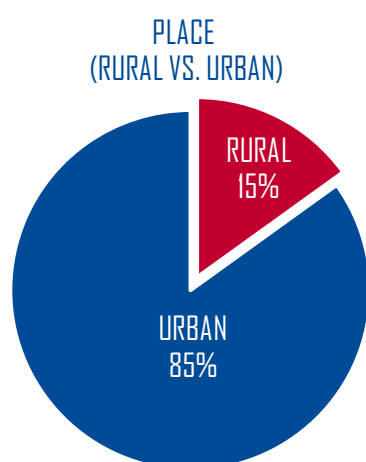


Chart 3. Sex

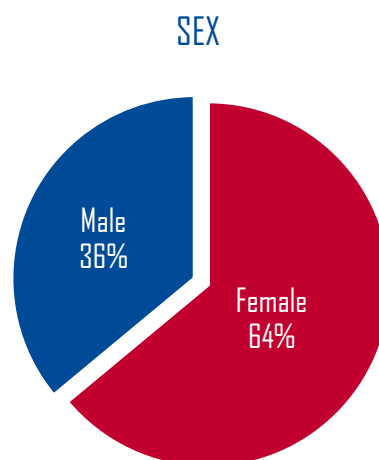
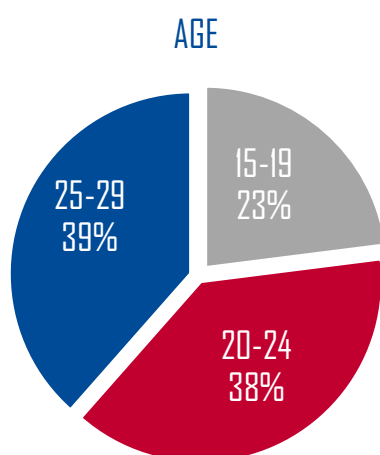
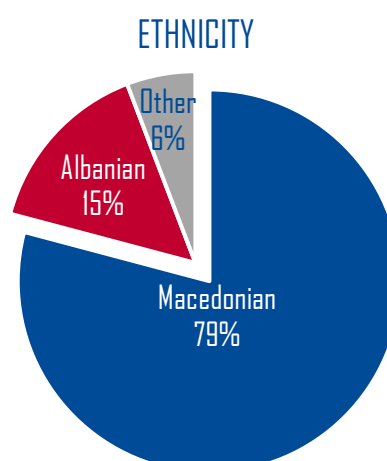


Chart 4. Age



Most of the respondents fluently speak or actively use one language in addition to their mother tongue (35%), and 33% speak two other languages (Chart 7).

Chart 5. Ethnicity



The language which is most widely spoken in addition to their native one is English (85%), followed by Serbian (41%), Croatian (18%) and German (15%), and Macedonian (14%) (Chart 8).

Chart 6. Mother language

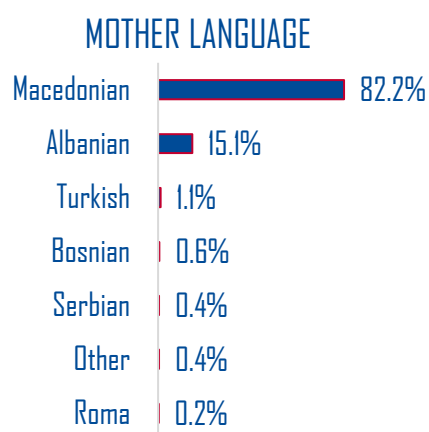
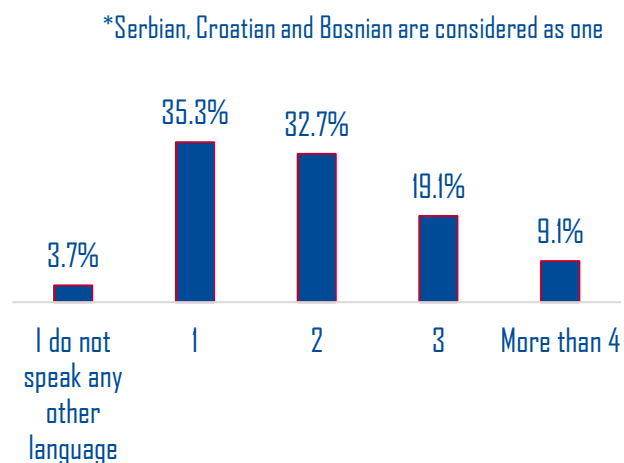


Chart 7. Number of languages young people speak fluently apart from their mother language



Almost 52% of the respondents have completed secondary education, while 27% university degree (Chart 9) Most of the respondents are in process of education or

some professional training (40%), 27% are full-time employees, and 11% are unemployed young people actively searching for a job (Chart 10).

Chart 8. The list of languages youth uses apart from their mother tongue

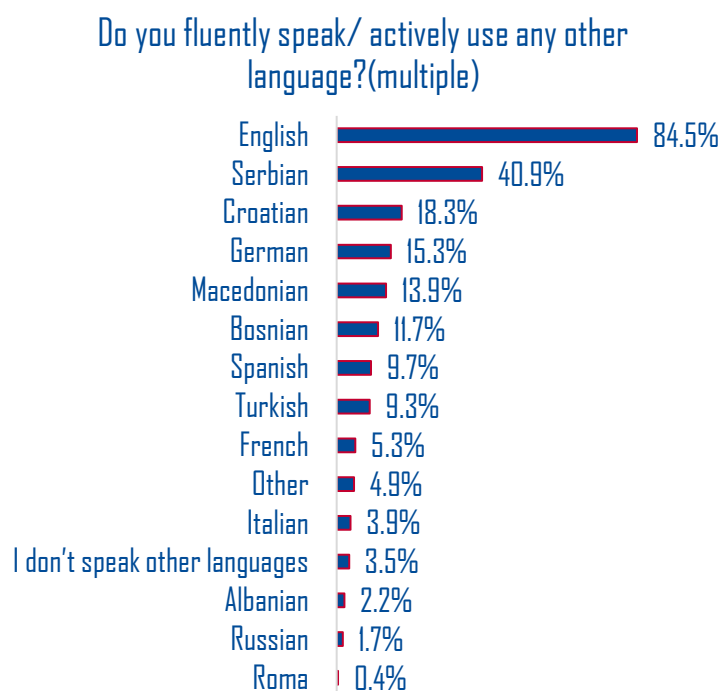


Chart 9. Education

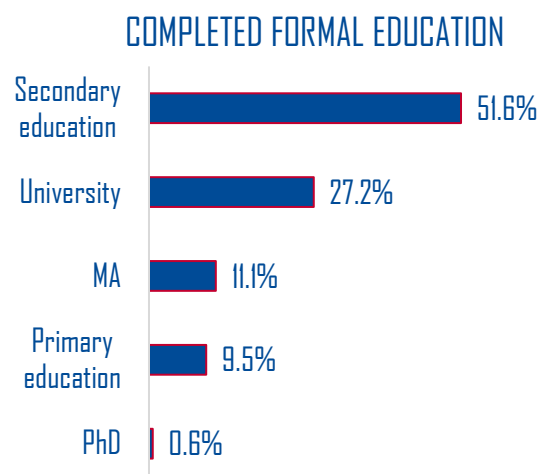
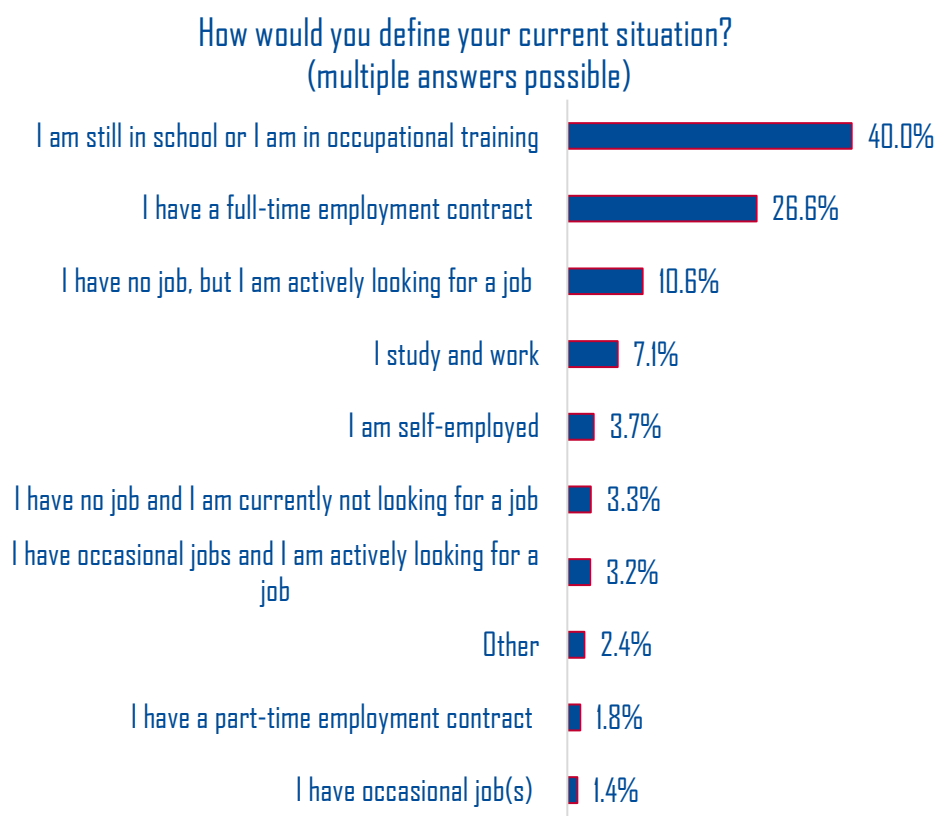


Chart 10. Professional status





The highest percentage of the respondents identify themselves as "Single" (43%) and "Other" (21%), while 13% are married (Chart 11). Most of our respondents live

in a family of four members (33%), 20% in a family of three, and only 2.5% in a single-member family (Chart 12).

Chart 11. Marital status

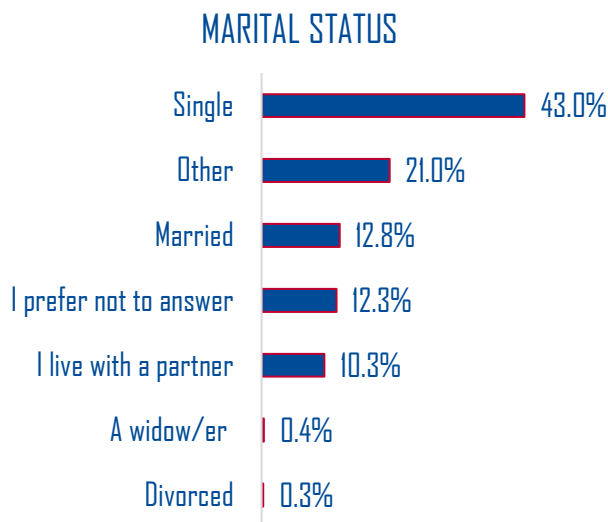
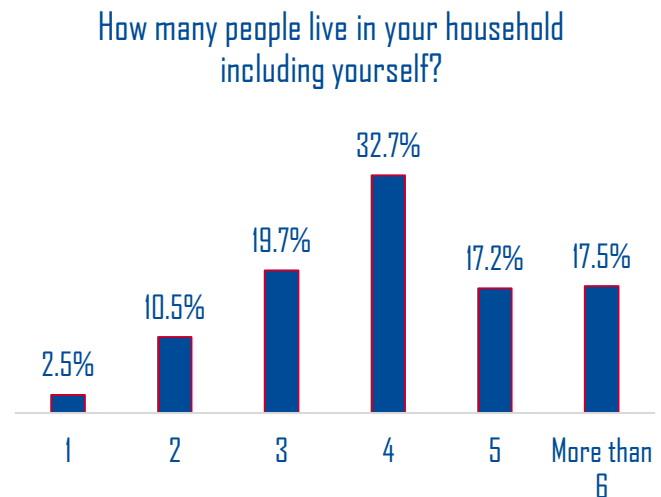


Chart 12. Number of people living in the family

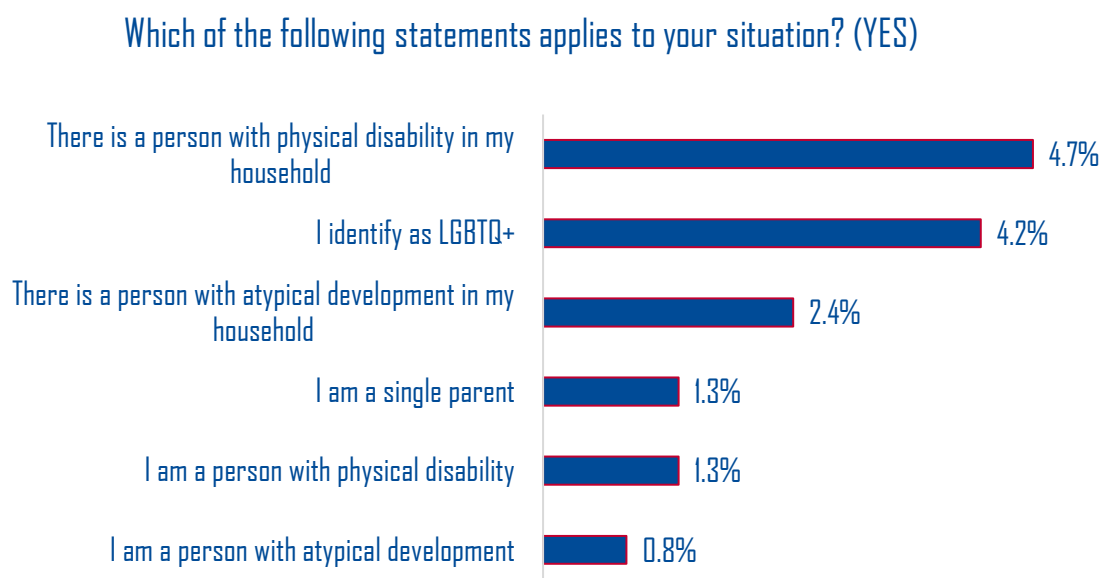


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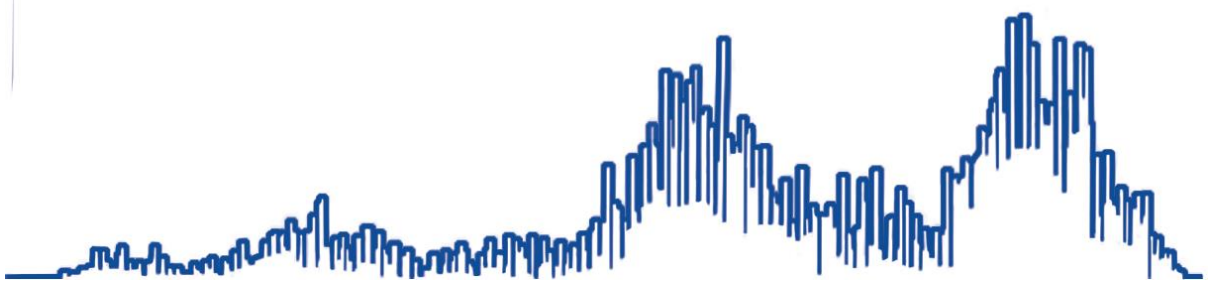
7% of the respondents live in families where there is a person with a physical disability, while 1.3% of them are a person with a disability; 4.2% of the respondents identify

themselves as LGBTQ+; 2.4% live in families where there is a person with atypical development and 0.8% are that person, and lastly, 1.3% are single parents (Chart 13).

Chart 13. People with disabilities, atypical development, single parents, and LGBTQ+



# **INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL SETUP. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF YOUTH IN PANDEMIC**



The institutional framework that regulates different aspects of youth needs in North Macedonia consists of several vital institutions: the Government/ Special adviser for youth and sport; the Agency for Youth and Sport, The Ministry of Education and Science, The Bureau

for Development of Education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Employment Service Agency, etc. Below (Table I) we offer an overview of the competencies and duties of the responsible institutions:

Table I. Institutional and political setup

<b>Institutional and political setup</b>	
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Short Description</b>
<b>Government/ Special adviser for youth and sport</b>	The Government of North Macedonia is the main policymaker responsible for the development of politics, reforms, and measures related to youth. Its commitments are supported by introducing the government special adviser for youth and sport in 2018 that coordinates and participates in the implementation of activities focused on youth on behalf of the Government: events, coordinating and participating in meetings with youth, civil society organizations, and other institutions. The adviser also participate in working groups, give opinions and prepare materials related to youth issues and initiatives.
<b>The Agency for Youth and Sports</b>	Among the government, the agency is the main body responsible for the development and implementation of the youth policies. The agency adopted the overall national strategy for youth <sup>IV</sup> and it is responsible for its monitoring and implementation. Additionally, the agency is responsible for conducting analysis of the youth sector and providing information related to youth. However, the Agency focuses mainly on sport and the improvement of sports infrastructure while the youth sector is left aside.
<b>The Club for Youth Affairs and Policies<sup>V</sup></b>	The Club for Youth Affairs and Policies is an informal body in the Parliament, composed of members of all parliamentary parties that aim to achieve the interests of young people in the country, in cooperation with youth organizations, informal youth groups, and young political parties' members.
<b>Education</b>	
<b>The Ministry for Education and Science</b>	The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for activities related to education and teaching of all types and at all levels, organization, financing, development, and improvement of teaching, education, and science, etc. The Ministry employs several projects for the preparation of youth for employment, prevention of dropouts, programs for adult education, and inclusion of vulnerable groups in education. Moreover, it also implements programs on mentoring Roma youth and the inclusion of youth with disabilities in regular education.
<b>The Bureau for development of education</b>	The Bureau is a governing body within the Ministry of Education and Science that performs professional activities of importance for the development and promotion of upbringing and education. The activity of the Bureau includes components that determine the purpose and content of educational work in the field of preschool, primary, high school, secondary vocational and post-secondary education, education of children with special educational needs, adult education, dormitories, as well as for the education of the children and the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia abroad for learning the mother language and culture. In the time of health crisis related to COVID-19, the Bureau prepared several documents/ guidelines for the realization of the educational process online. <sup>VI</sup>
<b>The National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility</b>	The National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility is a Public Institution that works on the promotion and implementation of European programs in the field of education, training, youth, and sports. By implementing these programs, the Agency contributes to the development of the community as a society based on

	advanced knowledge, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion, while providing environmental protection for future generations and especially exchange, cooperation, and mobility in the field of education and training.
<b>Socio-economic</b>	
<b>The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy</b>	The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is the central institution responsible for unemployed persons. Within the Ministry, the labor and employment sectors are responsible for planning and implementation of employment policies, labor law, and labor relations. Within this sector, there is a particular unit for the labor market that is responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluation of employment policy and the national action plan, analysis of labor market trends, especially concerning groups at risk of exclusion from the labor market, as well as monitoring and evaluation of active labor market policies.
<b>The Employment Service Agency</b>	The Employment Service Agency is responsible for collecting and disseminating information on the labor market, employment counseling, and career guidance, setting up a job for active job seekers, and administering passive and active programs on the labor market. As such the Agency is included in the creation of strategies, action, and operational plans, with it being the leading institution in implementing the Operational Plan.
<b>The Fund for Innovation and Technological Development</b>	The Fund for Innovation and Technological development supports (co-financing and financing) innovative micro, small and medium enterprises. It targets youth talents, provides mentorship for entrepreneurship, and gives grants for innovations and businesses. In September 2018, FITR signed agreements on financial support for the opening of three business accelerators for startup companies founded by young entrepreneurs and innovators.
<b>Ministry of Health</b>	The Ministry of Health is a central institution responsible for the health protection of the population, organization and development of health services, and monitoring of the health condition. Among the other strategic documents, the Ministry adopts the National strategy for the promotion of mental health (2018-2025).
<b>Youth participation</b>	
<b>Youth local councils/ Officers for youth in each municipality</b>	The Law on Youth Participation foresaw the establishment of youth councils within a year and officers for youth in each municipality in the country. However, till the end of 2020, only 12 municipalities have had active youth councils and only 17 have appointed officers for youth.
<b>Youth advisory body</b>	The Law on Youth Participation also foreseen the establishment of a national youth advisory body that consisted of institutions and youth. Furthermore, a national assembly of youth that is supposed to appoint and choose representatives that will participate in that advisory body is not formed.

### Key findings on the challenges the institutions face in tackling youth issues: a qualitative analysis of interviews with stakeholders

For the research, eight government institutions were interviewed in April and May 2021.<sup>vii</sup> We used a semi-structured questionnaire, to get more insight into the work and practices of institutions and how they address youth issues. Following legislation and interviews, the

Agency for Youth and Sport as well as the government Special adviser for youth and sport are/should be main points for addressing youth issues in general, while the other institutions such as the Ministry for Education, Ministry for Labor and Social Policies and Agency for employment have specialized approaches/ targeting different youth issues.

### *The legal and policy framework addressing youth positions and issues*

When analyzing the legislation on youth, we focused on identifying the most crucial legislation in the field as well as the latest and most relevant: youth legislation, strategies, and action plans. On the question "Do you think that the existing legal framework sufficiently protects and guarantees the rights of young people and is consistently implemented" the representatives were reluctant to offer a definite answer, as they considered that the legislation in support of youth employment is relatively new and in progress. Though, they acknowledged the importance of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, Youth Guarantee, and the Law on Student Standard. Asked 'How does your institution create policies' institution representatives shared that the new changes in the legislation and policies are based on studies, research, and open dialogue with all stakeholders. In terms of data collection, the institutions' representatives mainly get data from the SSD, the employment service agency, international reports, CSOs studies, and with few internal data collection processes. Below we offer a short description of the current framework as well as statistical data.

**Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies** is a new law on youth adopted in the beginning of 2020 and the first such law since 1991. The Law is presently a fundamental and unique law focused on youth issues, and mainly regulates youth organization and participation in decision making. On the question 'Do you think that the Law sufficiently protects and guarantees the rights of young people and is consistently implemented' the interviewed representatives stated that are satisfied with the adoption of this law, but they faced issues with some aspects of implementation due to political instability and global pandemic. In that manner, many provisions remain unimplemented and perhaps unreal for implementation in the following period and some of them are in the initial stages. According to the interviewed representatives, it can be expected appointment of officers for youth to be done till June by all institutions and very soon to be formed by the local youth councils. We cannot expect the allocation of budget funds at least 0.3% of the total state budget and 0.1% from local municipalities' budgets for youth issues. Moreover, this law envisages the creation of a research center within the Agency of Youth and Sport.

This center has not been established, and from the interview, we are aware that the procedures have stalled, mainly due to general elections and the Covid-19 situation. While this research center has not been established, the legal base exists and is a significant step forward in understanding youth trends in the future, as for its success in addressing the issue of lack of data on youth, which we are yet to see in the following years.

**Law on internship** was adopted in May 2019 and according to this law, an intern shall be a person up to 34 years old arranged/ hired for a period up to 6 months. The conditions for doing an internship are defined with a contract and among the other staff, the employer should appoint a mentor for the intern, define the reimbursement, and issue a confirmation for the internship done. Till 31.03.2021, 41 employers reported 58 interns to the Employment Service Agency. Moreover, within the Agency's program Internship, 859 of 945 interns that applied are up to 29 years and within the program training for known employers- 23 of 48 unemployed who applied are up to 29 years.

**Law on volunteering** was adopted in 2007 and there is no limitation regarding who can be a volunteer and volunteer work organizers. The conditions are defined by the law and contract. Three representatives of the interviewed institutions shared that their institution involved interns/ volunteers in their work, but not regularly. The pandemic brought several changes in doing the internship especially in the flow of their responsibilities and difficulties in coordination and close learning in the workplace having in mind that there were periods when the administration worked from home. Additionally, was mentioned that with the program Dual vocational education and training many high school students were involved in companies' work and managed to develop high-quality, practical skills that are demanded on the labor market. <sup>VIII</sup>

In September 2020, the Assembly approved the amendments to the **Laws on Primary and Secondary Education**, which ensure the smooth organization of teaching in the country and in times of emergency, such as the case of the Covid-19 pandemic. The legal changes, for the first time in the country, provide exceptions to the regular educational process in several cases: in conditions when there is a crisis, an epidemic, i.e. a

pandemic, fires, floods, or other major natural disasters. The legal amendments make exceptions regarding the beginning and end of the school year during extraordinary circumstances so that the school year can start and end at a time different from the time when the school year usually begins, which will be decided by the Government. In extraordinary conditions, with these legal changes, the teaching in the primary and secondary school will be able to be organized with the physical presence of the students, or at a distance by using means of electronic communication. According to the amendments to the laws, the organization of classes with physical presence of students will be possible only if the criteria and conditions are met under the protocols and the plan for teaching for primary and secondary schools, adopted by the Government. The amendments to the two laws envisage the class to last less than 40 minutes, for greater protection of students who will attend classes with physical presence. The legal changes also provide the possibility of reducing the teaching days in the school year from 180 to at least 100.

**Law on youth allowance** is a new measure introduced in 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 effects on youth employment. Moreover, it was introduced to stimulate enrolment in secondary vocational schools and encourage employment after graduation; the need arose to legally regulate a measure to provide a supplement to young people up to 23 years of age who will be employed or are employed mainly in manufacturing areas. In March 2021, 3519 young people's right to youth allowance in the amount of 3000 MKD, and more than 11 million MKD were paid to them.<sup>X</sup>

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

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

**National Youth Strategy (2016 - 2025)** offers the primary guidelines in the field of youth policies. The strategy was created following international standards and guidelines and encompassed 9 areas relevant to youth (youth participation, youth information, local youth work, education, employment, and pre-employment support, culture, sports, health, and quality of life) and is a solid basis for the Government and other institutions in terms of guidelines and desirable outcomes. However, the Strategy lacks in implementation and functionality; the same has not been implemented since 2016. Although it formally addresses most of the issues young people face, it has not been revised substantially since it was created. Namely, the Action Plan corresponding to the National Strategy on Youth has been adopted only once in a period of two years and having in mind that there is no responsible institution in creating a monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy and budget for it, implementation is left to the CSOs and their capacities. While the creation of the Strategy was crucial, the same needs to be revised thoroughly in times of stability, especially having in mind the fast-changing nature of youth trends. However, there is still no institutional will for adopting action plans or revising the existing strategy.<sup>X</sup>

The **Comprehensive Education Strategy for 2018-25** and associated Actions set out key actions to be undertaken in the coming years to improve teaching and learning. Priorities include developing student-centered instruction, measuring learning in terms of outcomes (rather than focusing solely on knowledge acquisition), and the introduction of a national assessment. The government also aims to reform curricula to make learning more relevant to the labor market (MoES, 2018) However, the strategic documents do not set out any specific goals for the sector. There is a notable absence of targets to raise learning outcomes, despite the country's low performance in international student assessments. The strategy also lacks an implementation plan or a defined process to monitor progress.

**The Concept for development of a distance education system in primary and secondary schools<sup>XI</sup>** was adopted on July 21, 2020, by the Ministry of Education and Science. This document provides guidance in the establishment of a distance learning system in primary and secondary schools in the country, in terms of

educational policies, organization, and implementation of distance learning and is the basis for establishing a national platform for distance learning and its application at the national level. The concept contains guidelines in the three key areas in which the system will be developed: educational policies, technical support/educational technology, and pedagogy.

**The Strategy for the Roma people (2014-2020)** envisages concrete measures to improve employment among Roma through guidelines for the employment of Roma in specific sectors: employment, education, household, health, and culture.

**Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020** offers a more concrete plan on youth employment based on the goals of the National Youth Strategy. The ultimate goal of the Action Plan is to promote more and better jobs for young people. The specific objectives of the Action Plan mainly focus on the areas that are key to promoting youth employment: Improve the matching of the supply of skills with the requirements of the labor market; Promotion of job creation led by the private sector; Facilitating the transition of young people to the world of work. One of the main targets of the Action Plan is to increase the number of youth that work jobs matching their qualifications. In fact, the Plan states that by 2020 at least 85% of the youth will work in places matching their qualifications as opposed to 64,8% in 2014. The plans also focus on having less than 10% of the children leaving education and at least 5% of those with primary education to start following courses in skill development. These are only a few of the targets envisaged in the Action Plan, which also focuses on the employment of youth, stating that they expect that at least 20% of those employed through government schemes will be young people until 29 years of age. According to the statistics provided by the Employment Agency, from 145.327 unemployed persons, 22,5 % (32.755) are up to 29 years, of which 230 are people with disabilities. Moreover, of registered 58.334 passive unemployed persons, 16,4% (9.561) are up to 29 years. In the first quarter of 2021, with the Youth guarantee are involved 5.886 unemployed young persons (2936 women) and from them, 1149 found a job.

## ***Government economic measures for overcoming the negative effects of the pandemic***

### **Context and Research questions**

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, until May 31, 2021, on its website announced 106 measures to deal with the negative consequences of the pandemic,<sup>XII</sup> and in addition, offers information on the status of their realization.<sup>XIII</sup> In the report of the Helsinki Committee, Petkovska (2020) concludes that none of the adopted packages of economic measures reflected the needs of the workers, nor did they enable protection of the workers' rights from abuse during their implementation. Instead of using the state financial support to deal with the crisis caused by COVID-19 and save workers' jobs, employers have illegally profited at their employees' expense. From the applications to the Helsinki Committee from March to June 2020, we know of 912 workers whose salary was reduced or not paid at all during this period. In addition, 1,022 workers faced violations of government measures to give workers leave when needed. In this way, the measures have contributed to deepening inequalities between workers and employers. Although some of the demands of civil society organizations and trade unions were considered, Petkovska (2020) argues that overall, workers were not involved in decision-making processes and measures to deal with the crisis. The citizens, on the other hand, in April 2021, evaluated the government economic measures with 2.3 (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the best), (Jakovlevska, Ivanovska, Velichkovska 2021), which is 0.4 less than the average grade that the measures received in June 2020 (rated at 2.7) "Youth in Crisis 2" concludes that the Government's approach at the beginning of the crisis was in the direction of "umbrella policies" where all sectors, jobs, and additional measures were placed under the umbrella of flat measures, which put the specific conditions in which young workers operate, as well as the long-term unemployed youth, in the background.

Therefore, we shall look at young people's information, use, and satisfaction from these measures. Moreover, we shall look at gender, age, and place of living to better understand the trends among different strata within the target group- youth.

## Findings

On the question 'How has your institution responded to the challenges of the pandemic regarding the youth?' the interviewed representatives mainly mentioned the adoption of the 6 economic packages and they pointed on the vouchers for education in the IT sector in amounts of MKD 30000 (MKD 47.524.080), vouchers (MKD 3000 to 6000) for covering part of the university participation (around MKD 5.8 million spent so far), as well as financial support for covering minimal monthly salary as most used measures by youth. Even most of these packages are general and are not devised solely for young people but encompass the whole population, in each package, there is an economic measure targeting youth. On the other side, the representative from the Ministry of education and science mentioned that besides the economic difficulties, students are facing great difficulties in the teaching and education process and they try to minimize the side effects by ensuring the involvement of students in online education i.e. they have prepared number of protocols<sup>XIV</sup> for online teaching and practical teaching with physical presence in vocational high schools as well as donation of the computers/ tablets by the private companies, individuals, humanitarian organizations as well as local municipalities for students in order to be able to follow the teaching. Moreover, they do not have amendments to the contracts of the students who have a scholarship for studying abroad, and in line with it, the representative from the National Agency for European Educational Program and Mobility mention that due to the pandemic they have extended the period of implementation of the awarded project and for the first time allowed activities to be done online without physical presence.

On the question 'Does your institution develop/has your institution adopted special programs for young people from vulnerable groups' the representatives were able to identify only the Strategy for Roma People, One society program, and Law on Employment of Disabled Persons. However, they brought to our attention the support scholarships for marginalized youth, such as Roma people, and the programs on adulthood education, which are offered through the Adult Education Centre, both intended to include excluded youth in the education process.

On the question 'Do you think that budget allocations are sufficient for quality measures and policies for young people (including pandemic management policies)', the representatives agreed that the funds are increased and enough in the given circumstances. However, municipalities should allocate 0.1% of their funds for youth issues, which is already a small percentage that is not even met. On a national level, the amount is over 50 million euros, which is more than the 0.3% minimum. It should be noted that they include funds for youth CSOs, infrastructure, sports, policies, etc., and not specifically just for youth. At the same time, the Agency of Youth and Sports allocated only 320 thousand euros for youth which is the lowest amount in the last five years.

In terms of cooperation, most of the institution representatives stated that the cooperation between institutions is better and more consistent, still, there is always space for improvement. When it comes to cooperation with CSOs they also express satisfaction and mentioned different kinds of cooperation: regular meetings, attending/ organizing joint conferences, debates, and exchanging data and experience. For example, the representative from MLSP mentioned the involvement of youth organization in the implementation of Youth guarantee, while the Special adviser for youth and sport mentioned that the CSOs, chambers, and other on-governmental actors are involved in the policymaking process and lastly in the process of preparation of the economic packages.

### *The response of young people to the government measures/findings from the focus groups and the survey*

The general attitude of the CSOs involved in the focus groups, regarding how the institutions built the economic measures to deal with the pandemic and their effectiveness is, foremost, that young people as a group are not identified, neither before the crisis, during the crisis, nor after the crisis. Three of the organizations participating in the focus groups were consulted and/or involved in the process of preparing the economic measures for youth.<sup>XV</sup> The others stated that they were generally familiar with the measures as CSOs, but that they were not consulted by the Government.



The general opinion is that the measures did not cover all young people and not in the same way, that they were not promoted enough, and that they were decided on overnight. In addition, CSOs believe that the measures did not target well enough those young people who really needed help and that no significant measures were taken to offer a way out of the pandemic in the long run, because these were one-time financial support aids that many young people did not get to use. A small number believe that the measures were great on paper but were not implemented properly and that some may have been appropriate, but there was still a lack of support for young people.

Youth Educational Forum (YEF) and the University Students Assembly at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University often reacted to the fact that many of the young people for whom the measures are intended, especially those in secondary and higher education, did not reach them as such; encountered some technical obstacles, or had no information. After their reactions, the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science responded and the measure was released again, educational vouchers for young people were provided and most of the young people were exempt from tuition.

Several CSOs point out that economic measures did not cover all young people – they either covered young people in higher education (tuition relief) or young people in high school to be able to provide them some financial relief. Two organizations emphasize that the measure providing vouchers for additional training in the IT sector, covered only 50% of the amount required by IT schools, which is not helping young unemployed persons who cannot afford that training even at half price. "What really needed to be done in secondary education was to offer young people vouchers to buy Internet or an electronic device to attend classes, and we have not seen such a measure," said one CSO representative. "I think that regarding support for individuals, the institutions have completely failed", said another CSO representative.

Although they generally noticed activity in the institutions, CSOs could not single out which institution was the one that best dealt with the pandemic. They state that all institutions could make more efforts regarding this, especially the higher education institutions, as well as the Ministry of Health. One CSO representative believes that

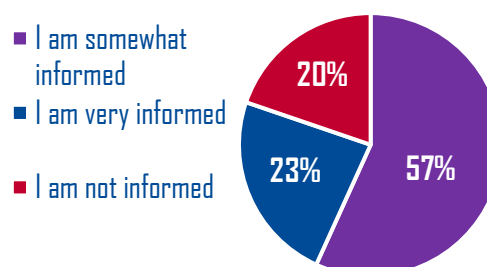
the Innovation Fund supports many young people at the national level, as well as "the municipality of Prilep, which allocates some funds for organizations, provides masks and protective equipment for citizens".

"Regarding the process of decentralization that has been around for a long time and directing central government competencies at the local level related to social protection, in the absence of that, government engagements may have been louder or more active throughout this past year", said one representative. "I'm not talking about budgets or program activities, I mean the COVID-19 period, where all that was lacking" is another opinion from civil society activists.

The data gathered from the survey with youth shows that young people are familiar with the government's measures i.e., 23% consider themselves as very well informed, 57% as somewhat well informed, and only 20% believe they are not informed at all regarding those measures. (Chart 14).

Chart 14. Degree of awareness of the Government packages with economic measures for dealing with the pandemic.

*How would you assess your level of information on the Government measures?*



On the other hand, the responses of the youth show that the most used measure (by 30% of the respondents) is the measure "Domestic payment card of MKD 3,000", which covered all employed citizens with a net salary of less than MKD 15,000 who have no other income; second most used measure is the measure "Voucher of MKD 6,000 for domestic tourism", used by 12.7 %; third most used measure is the "Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for young people aged 16 to 29 who were not

covered by previous measures" (from the fourth package) by 10.1% of all respondents. (Table 2)

Table 2. Which of the following measures have you benefited from? (Multiple answers are possible)

Which of the following measures have you benefited from?	%
None of these measures	47.9%
The domestic payment card of MKD 3000 (this measure covered all employees with a net salary of less than 15,000 who don't have other income.)	30.1%
Voucher of MKD 6,000 for domestic tourism	12.7%
Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for young people aged 16 to 29 who were not covered by previous measures	10.1%
Financial support up to MKD 6,000 for young people for co-financing for training or for participation in a university or accommodation in dormitories	4.2%
The minimum wage for the months of April and May, as well as contributions through the Ministry of Culture for independent artists	4.1%
Monthly salary (cash benefit) for citizens who lost their jobs due to the crisis, in the amount of 50% of the average salary of the employee	3.4%
Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for unemployed passive job seekers	3.4%
Compensation of MKD 7,000 per household for persons without employment or persons who were part of the informal economy	2.4%
Voucher of MKD 30,000 for co-financing training, training for skills, and knowledge of information technology to enable faster employment.	1.5%
Cash compensation for citizens who lost their jobs from March 11 to April 30.	1.4%
Financial support for Roma entrepreneurs by creating a "Matching Fund for Entrepreneurship for Roma".	1.3%
Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for single parents	0.6%
Minimum gross salary in the amount of MKD 21,776 for the months of October, November, and December 2020 for the registered tourist guides	0.3%
Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for independent artists, filmmakers, cultural workers, and entertainers	0.1%

Although respondents feel they are well informed about the Government economic measures, almost 48% of the respondents did not use any of the Government measures, of which the male respondents in a larger number (52%) as opposed to 45% of the female respondent that did not use any measure. (Chart 15). Regarding the number of measures used by young people per person, 37% used only one, 1% used two, and 5% benefited from three or more measures. (Chart 15) Additionally, from Chart 16 we can see that the measures were least used among the oldest respondents (group 25-29 years of age), then among the youngest (15-19 years of age). Thus, as many as 58% of young people aged 25 to 29 have not used any measures of government economic packages to deal with the pandemic.

Half of the respondents rate these measures as ineffective, 36% as somewhat effective, and 3% as effective. (Chart 17). Of those who consider certain measures to have applied to them, but didn't manage to benefit from them, 20% filed a complaint. (Chart 18).

Chart 15. The number of Government measures a single respondent benefited from (By Sex).

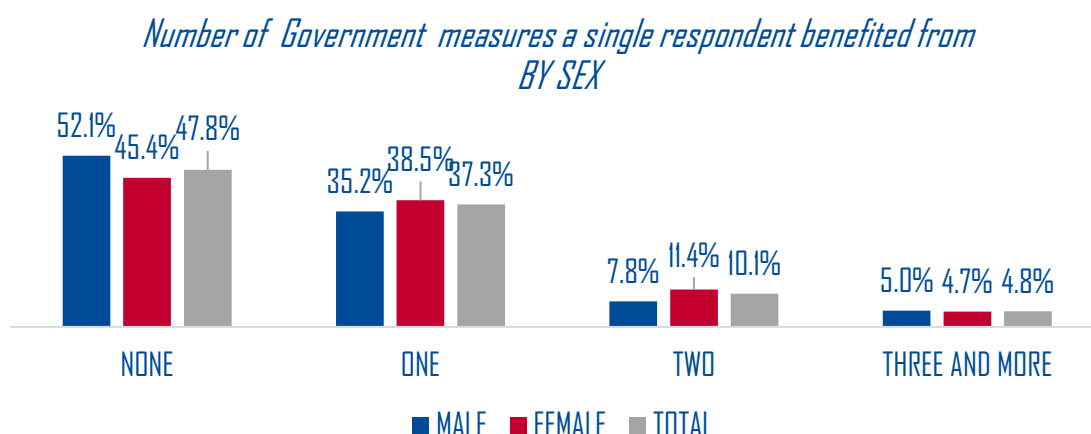


Chart 16. Percentage of respondents that have benefited from no single Government measure (By Age).

*Percentage of respondents that have benefited from no single  
Government measure  
BY AGE*

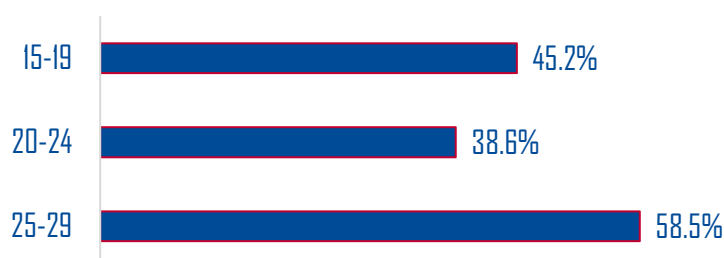


Chart 17. How would you assess the efficiency of the Government's packages of economic measures for dealing with the consequences of COVID-19?

*Government's packages of economic  
measures are:*

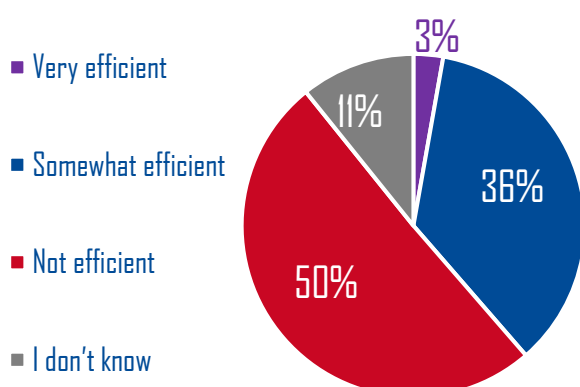
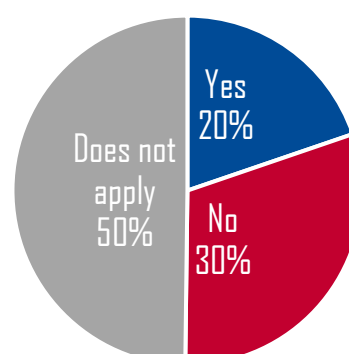
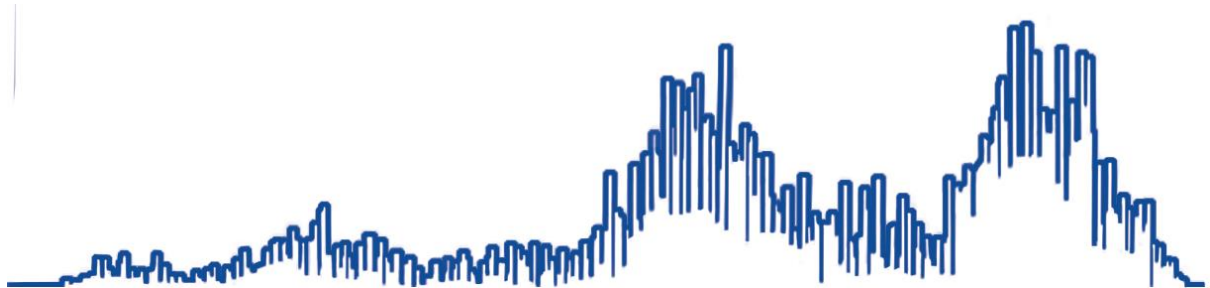


Chart 18. Have you filed a complaint regarding not getting financial aid from the Government from the measures you consider apply to you?

*Complaint regarding not getting financial aid  
from the measures you consider apply to you*



# EDUCATION: CONDITIONS AND POSSIBILITIES, MOTIVATION, QUALITY



When the pandemic was declared, education has arisen as one of the immediate and biggest challenges for the world to deal with. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting almost all students in the country. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted the population. It affected not only the pupils and students, but families, institutions, and the whole society. Physical distance from the classroom (in North Macedonia beginning on 10 March 2020) required new technologies and equipment, parental supervision, and learning new teaching methods for the teachers. Students lost motivation; parents (especially mothers) were faced with an increased workload as they stayed at home to homeschool; families were faced with the danger of losing jobs because of the need to take care of their children; families faced challenges to provide the necessary equipment for online schooling.

At the beginning of the pandemic, most of the people agreed that learning needs to take place online, i.e. 65% of the population did not agree that the schools should reopen (Mihajlovska, Ivanovska, Krzalovski, 2020). This position was more pronounced among respondents from the urban area. In the summer of 2020, more than half of the teachers considered that the number of pupils/students having some difficulties with the curriculum has increased, and 77% of the teachers reported difficulties to stay in contact with its alumni, in some period of the learning-from-home period. (Reactor-research in action, 2020) This same report contains conclusions that most of the teachers needed further training for using the new educational technology. High school students had difficulties with motivation and taking school seriously, and many had help from other students and parents, which made grading somewhat unfair. Making an attendance list was also challenging to be made properly, as students were only present via their electronic devices, but not actually following the class. Finally, most of the primary school teachers preferred classroom learning in the year 2020-2021, while most of the high school teachers chose a combined (online-classroom) approach. The Government chose to continue with online learning for all but the pupils from first to third-grade primary school. One year later, the educational year 2020/21 was assessed with a grade of 2.3 (from 1 to 5, where 5 is the best), and people

demonstrated much higher dissatisfaction with how the Government have led the process. (Jakovlevska, Ivanovska, Velickovska, 2021)

The Union of High School Students of Macedonia (UNSHM)<sup>XVI</sup> has protested the state exam in 2021, due to, as they argued, poor quality of the school year and additional stress to high school students in times of a pandemic. Therefore, among several changes, the state exam was moved one week later than usual, the number of subjects was decreased, from three external and one internal exam to two external and two internal exams. Additionally, the study program was modified and shortened to reflect the online curriculum.<sup>XVII</sup> As for the university transfer of classes to online, some challenges were assessed, but the general conclusion is that higher education institutions are significantly adapting to the new technologies, which is a step forwards in digitalization. (Gjorgjiev and Barlakovski, 2020). Finally, when asked if during the time of pandemic people have gained new skills or learned a new language which previously, they have not had the time to do so, 74% of the respondents of the national survey in May 2020 said "no". (Mihajlovska, Ivanovska, Krzalovski 2020)

The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities, and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning. On the other hand, this crisis has stimulated innovation within the education sector. We have seen innovative approaches in support of education and training continuity: from radio and television to take-home packages.<sup>XVIII</sup> Distance learning solutions were developed thanks to quick responses by governments and partners all over the world supporting education continuity.

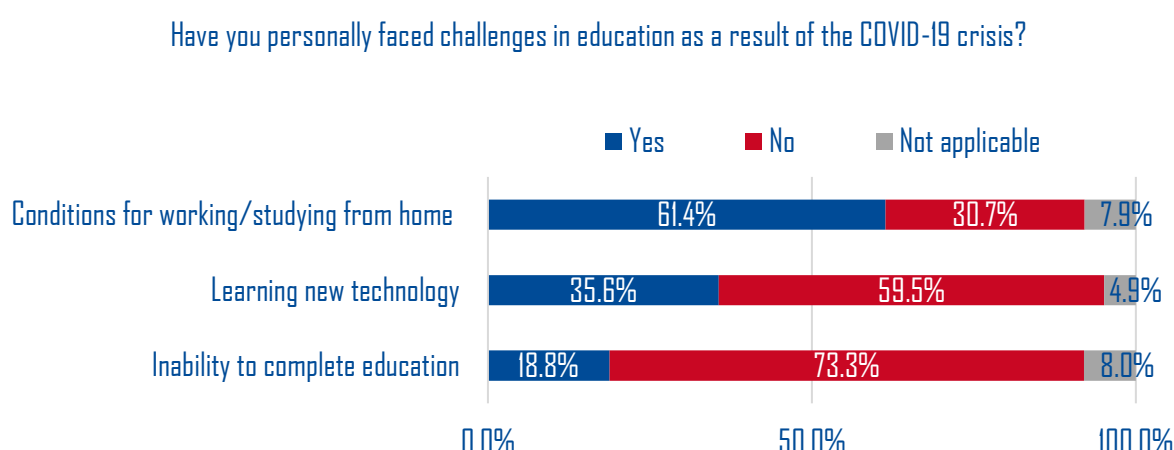
Due to the above cited data, we shall look at the (negative) effects of the pandemic for young people in education. Has the pandemic influenced the motivation, the quality of education, access, and further opportunities for young people's extracurricular activities? We want to know which aspects of online learning have been the most challenging part for young people and their families to cope with, and how much have young people make good use of the online learning possibilities during the

pandemic. The question of balance between working/studying from home and home obligations is also a research question that shall be analyzed (with stress on gender).

The biggest challenge young people face in terms of education comes from the condition for learning and working from home (for 61%), while learning new technologies is also an important challenger for 36% of them. (Chart 19).

## Findings

Chart 19. Educational challenges due to the pandemic



While 18% faced the threat of not being able to finish their education (Chart 19), our survey finds that 11% of the respondents have stopped their education due to the pandemic, (Chart 20). Additionally, for 40% of the respondents who are in school, the pandemic had a negative impact on the continuity of following the classes and being active. (Chart 21)

Be that as it may, the respondents report a higher negative effect on their motivation for studying (65%), and on their extracurricular activities (61%). Quality of the educational process (60%), the fairness of grading (60%) and the ability to learn (59%) have all negatively impacted most of the respondents in education. (Chart 21)

Chart 20. Continuation of education in pandemic

*Have you continued with your education during the pandemic?*

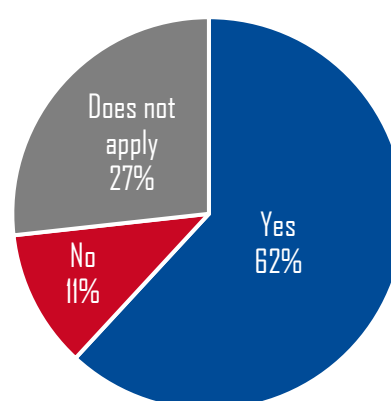
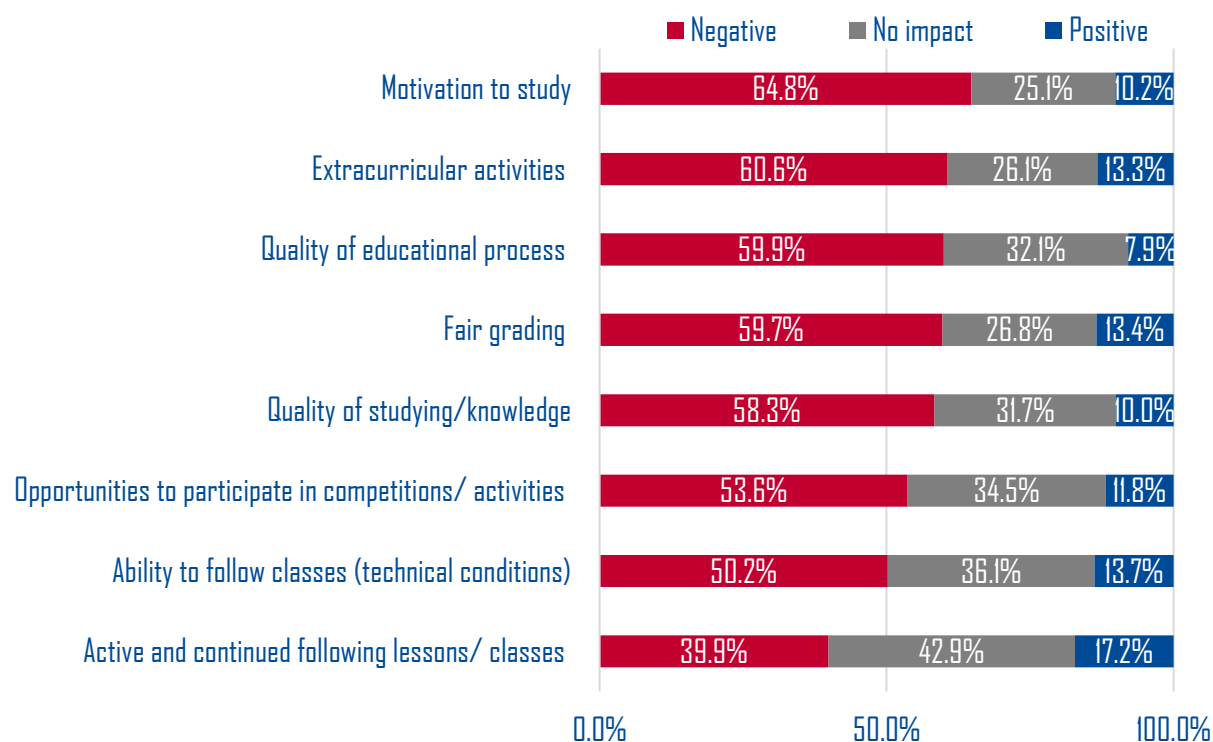


Chart 21. The impact of the pandemic on the education

*Has the pandemic had an impact on your education in terms of:*



Thus, to the question “What challenges have you met in the educational process during the online learning?”, most of them pointed to lack of motivation (74%), internet connection (54%), and a bad curriculum/program (50%). Despite the lower percentages (compared to the rest of the answers, we cannot underestimate the fact that 21% of the youth do not have help from a grown-up, 17% do not have the needed

learning equipment, and almost 14% cannot afford regular internet connection (Chart 22).

In terms of gaining new skills, learning something new thanks to the online seminars, training, and courses available during the pandemic 35% responded with “somewhat yes”, 13% with “yes”, while 24% did not use those online activities because of lack of information and lack of interest (16%) (Chart 23).

Chart 22. Challenges for (online) education due to the pandemic

*What challenges have you met during the online leducation in the past year*

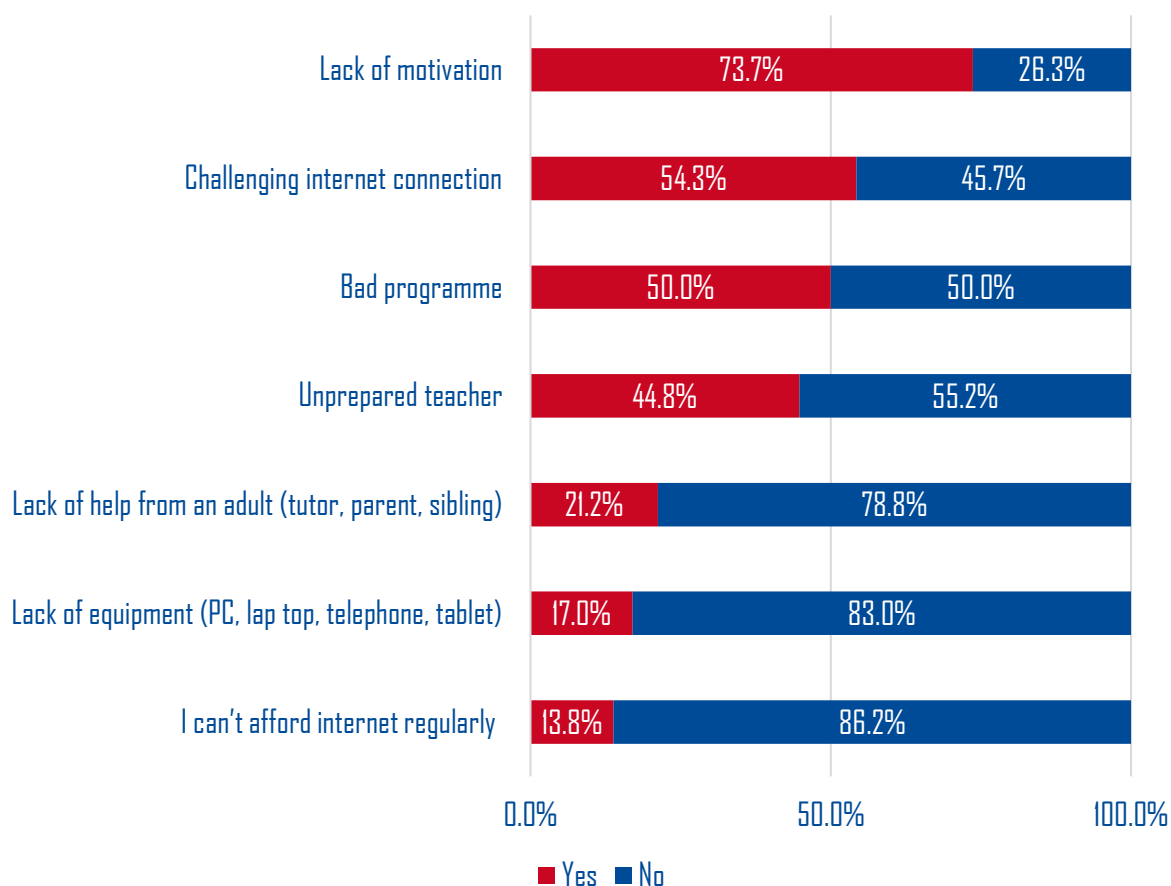
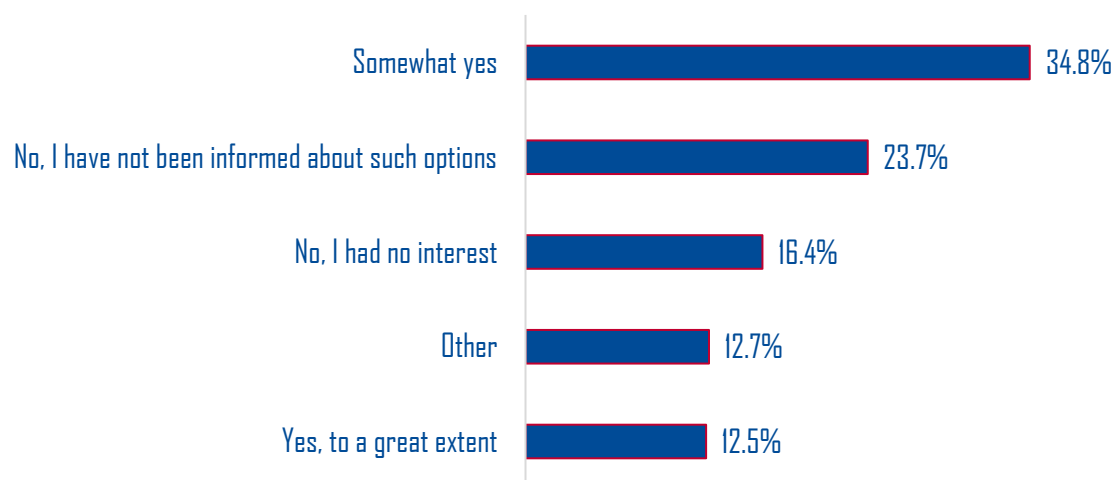


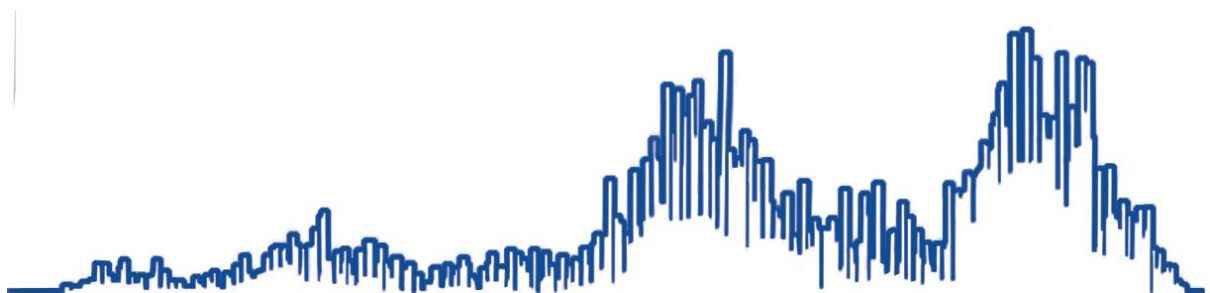
Chart 23. Online seminars, training and courses, and skills

*Have you gained new skills, learned something new thanks to the online seminars, training, and courses available during the pandemic?*





# **SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION: WORK, FAMILY, HOME DUTIES**



## Context and Research questions

Experts point out that the short-term effect of the pandemic on income in North Macedonia is aimed at increasing inequality between weaker and stronger social groups (Jovanovikj, Jovanovikj, Mitevski, Stojkovski 2020). The most affected by the crisis were people with incomes around the minimum wage. The incomes of women and youth were reduced by a significantly higher amount compared to the rest, and the richer regions were less affected, as were the less labor-intensive industries.

In "Youth in Crisis 2", civil society organizations argue this negative effect of the crisis, especially on young people. Namely, in the period from February to July 2020, the changes in the number of payments were not significant from month to month, but the average income of young people was constantly declining with a higher rate of decline in average monthly net income. The consequences for employees under the age of 29 were higher than the negative effects on all employed individuals in the country. This was due to changes in employment contracts, not job losses (part-time or temporary work contracts). Additionally, the research argues that the number of young people earning below the minimum wage increased from 27,149 in February 2020 to 31,755 in June 2020, which was a significant rate for such a short period of time. The difference in income reductions, according to "Youth in Crisis 2", is much higher among young women compared to other women in the country (the rate of decline in income among young women is higher by almost 5% points in each income group, except the lowest, in comparison with other women).

Online schooling further complicates the balance of work and housework for parents. The Reactor report (2020b) identified the problem of parents/guardians not having sufficient time to devote to studying with their children due to work responsibilities. This is the most common challenge for them (61%), while 41% of parents had difficulty with lessons in some subjects so they were unable to help their children.

"Abusers always work from home" is the slogan used worldwide to point to the increase of family violence (domestic violence, child abuse, and pet abuse). "Social distancing" is recommended, and "stay home" is the

ultimate safety advice from the Governments and experts. Victims find themselves trapped in the home with a violent perpetrator during a time of severely limited contact with the outside world. Many countries are already indicating a dramatic increase in reported cases of domestic violence. (Campbell, 2020) In North Macedonia, the pandemic did not affect reporting of domestic violence cases; one-third of women who needed protection during the pandemic had also suffered domestic violence before the pandemic outbreak. (Pavlovski, Antikj, Frishchikj, 2021) The real figures could still go much higher. According to this report, the pandemic did not affect the work engagement of women who suffered domestic violence, but it had a significant impact in terms of the lower incomes earned in their households. Victims of domestic violence did not benefit from other types of state support, but the payment cards for the purchase of domestic products as a state relief measure aimed to address the consequences of the pandemic. (Ibidem)

Pavlovski, Antikj, and Frishchikj (2021) argue that five months into the pandemic, a decrease in the number of women employed at state-owned joint-stock companies, those working in hospitality and textile sectors, and among self-employed women. The number of women who needed state support increased by 100% compared to the pre-pandemic period. From the total of 1,025 surveyed women, 72 households did not have the means to buy sufficient food, of which 41 experienced hunger only as a result of the pandemic.

We aim to discover to what degree the pandemic caused interruptions in young people's careers, family income, the ability to afford living expenses, and keeping the balance between work and home obligations. Additionally, we are interested in the time spent taking care of other members of the family, which indirectly is associated with unpaid work, the degree of help young people had in the care for others, and what is the gender role in this regard. Finally, we press attention to the necessity of young people to change their place of living due to the crisis, as well as the impact the pandemic has had on their intentions to emigrate from the country.

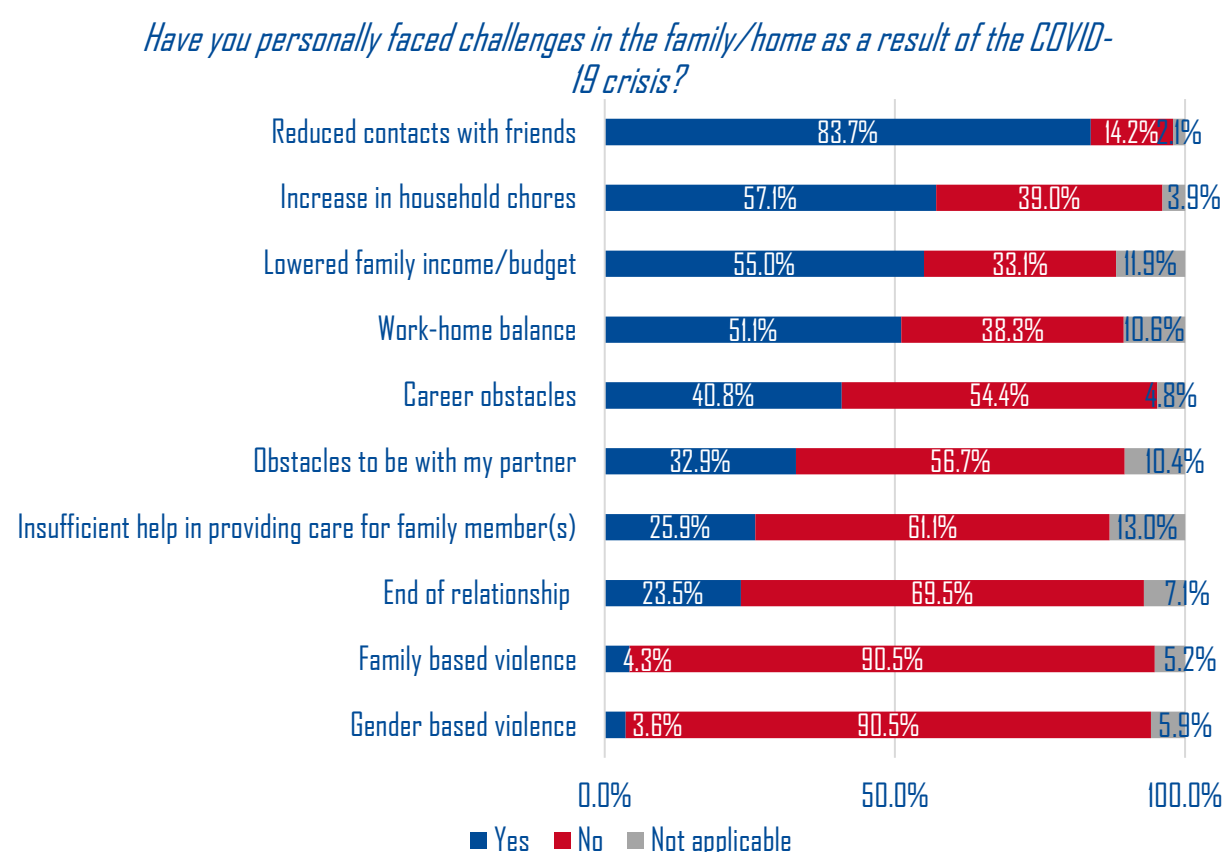
## Findings

As many as 84% of young people had less contact with friends, which was one of the main recommendations

worldwide. More than half (57%) of the respondents faced the challenge of increasing domestic responsibilities, while more than half of the respondents (55%) faced reduced family income/budget, while 51% had a problem with maintaining a balance between domestic and work obligations. As many as 40% of young people had career setbacks, 33% of young people had obstacles to being with their partners, 24% faced termination of an

emotional/romantic relationship as a result of a pandemic. 26% of the respondents had insufficient assistance in providing care for family members, 4.3% faced domestic violence and 3.6% faced gender-based violence. (Chart 24)

Chart 24. Challenges in the family and home because of COVID-19.



From Chart 25 we can see that the percentage of those who personally faced the challenge of maintaining a balance between work and home responsibilities as a result of the pandemic crisis is higher among women than among men (53% women and 47% men said that they faced this challenge). The difference between male and female respondents in terms of the challenge of not having enough help in providing care for a family member because of the pandemic is almost 8% higher than that of

women. (Chart 26) Regarding the time spent providing care for other family members (siblings, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, sick people) as many as 44% said they spend more time, 33% the same, and 9% less. (Chart 27) Female respondents said they spent more time providing care for other family members during the pandemic by almost 6% (46% of women and 40% of men). (Chart 27)

Chart 25. The balance between work and home responsibilities, and gender

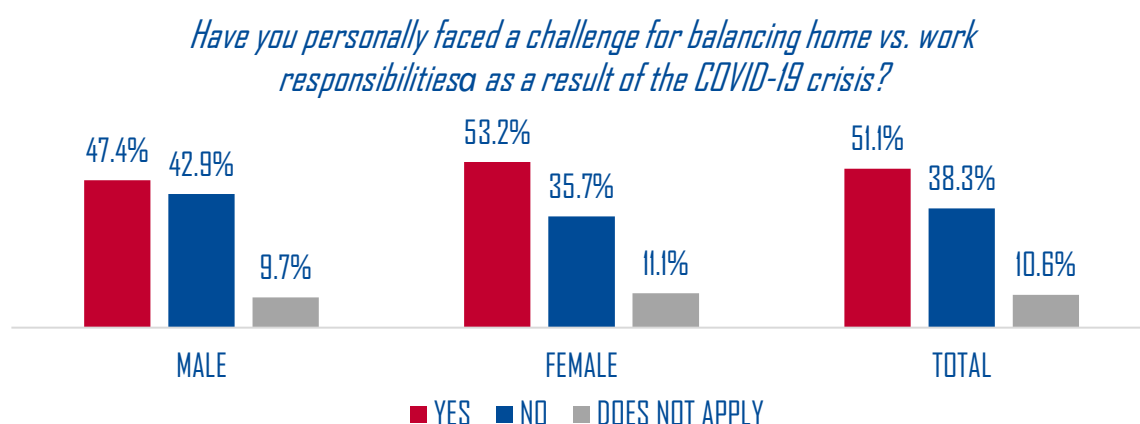


Chart 26. Insufficient assistance in providing care for a family member, and gender

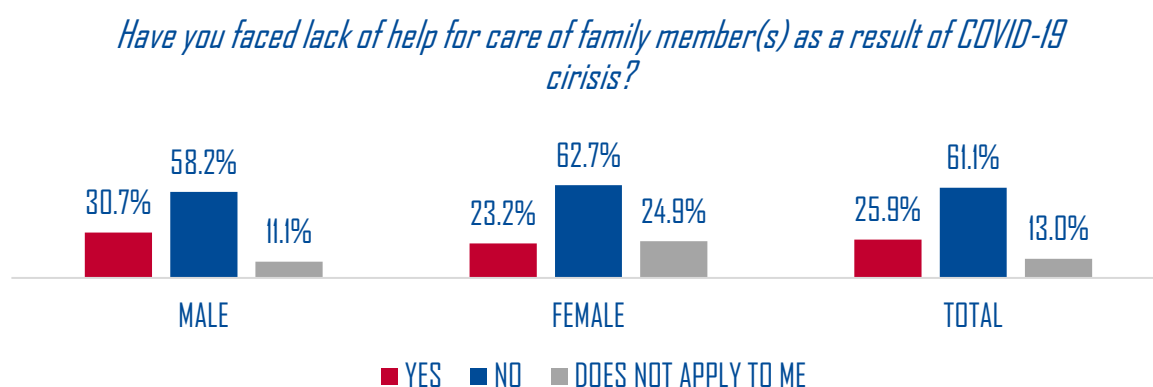
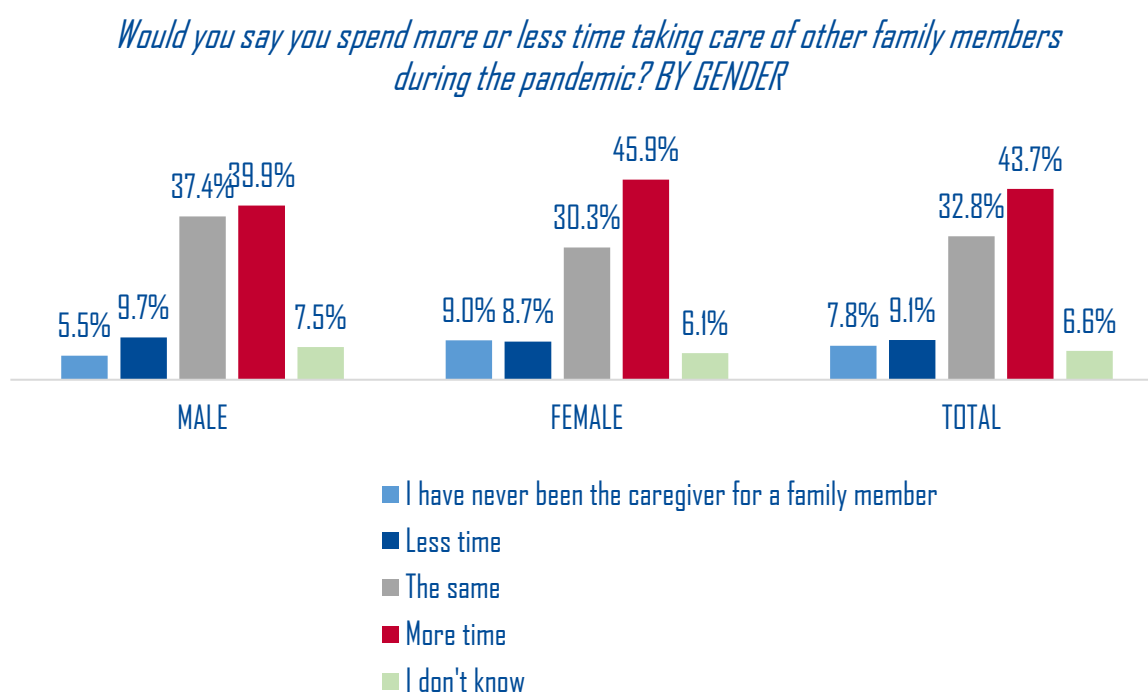


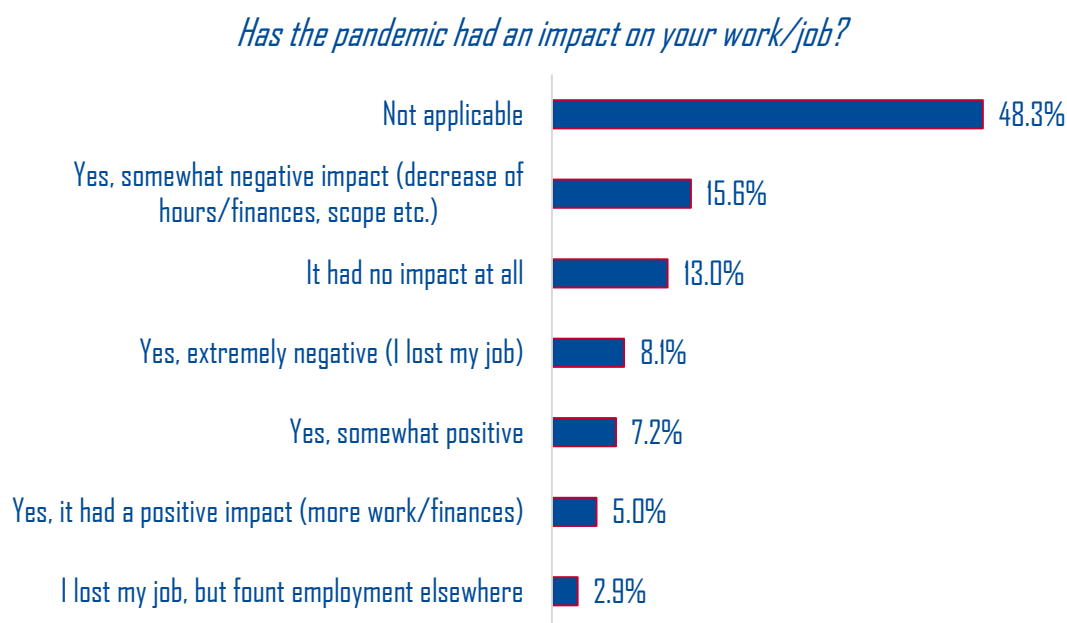
Chart 27. Would you say you spend more or less time taking care of other family members (siblings, kids, elderly people, people with disabilities, people with illness) during the pandemic? By gender



Considerable 80% of the respondents believe they have opportunities for professional development, and 43% of the respondents do not see many obstacles to achieving success. For 16% of the respondents, the pandemic had a somewhat negative impact on work (reduced number of

working hours, finances, volume, etc.) and for 8% it had an extremely negative impact (job loss). On the other hand, for 13%, the pandemic had "somewhat" or "considerable positive" impact. (Chart 28)

Chart 28. Impact of the pandemic on the workplace of young people



Of those who lost their jobs, 60% said that the impact of losing their job on the family budget was very big, and 6% that it was very small. (Chart 29) For 48% of respondents

finding a job during a pandemic is harder than before, and 43% do not know because it does not apply to them. (Chart 30)

Chart 29. Impact of job loss due to pandemic on the family budget

*On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "to a great extent", how much negative impact has your job loss had on the family/household budget?*

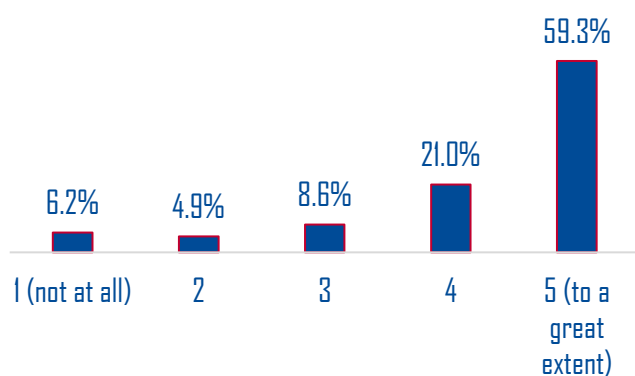
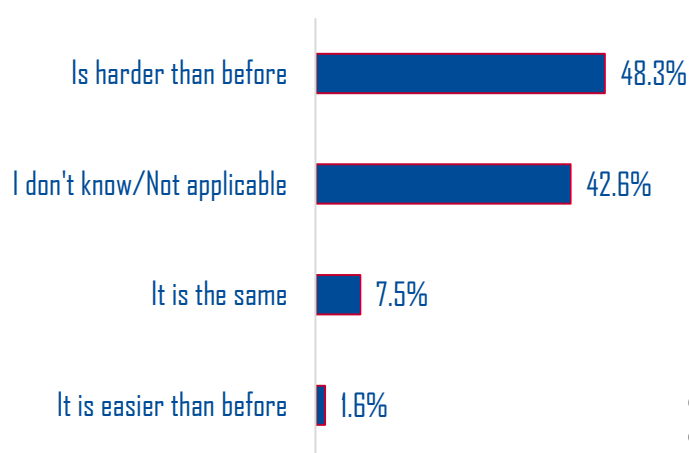


Chart 30. Finding a job/new job during a pandemic.

*Finding a job/ new job during the pandemic*



Most of the respondents (38%) faced difficulties in paying for utilities, 35% in paying a loan, 35% in paying unexpected bank charges, interest rates, etc., and 34% in providing funding for a vacation of at least seven days. In addition, 29% did not have money for clothes, 28% did not have the means to provide food and 22% could not

provide money for transportation and, finally, 11% had no way how to pay rent. (Chart 31). As many as 83% did not change their place of residence during the pandemic, but 4% returned to their family/parents due to lack of finances, 2.6% moved out of their home due to lack of space, and 2% returned from abroad. (Chart 32).

Chart 31. Difficulties in paying bills and current family expenses.

*Has your household faced some of the following difficulties during the pandemic? YES*

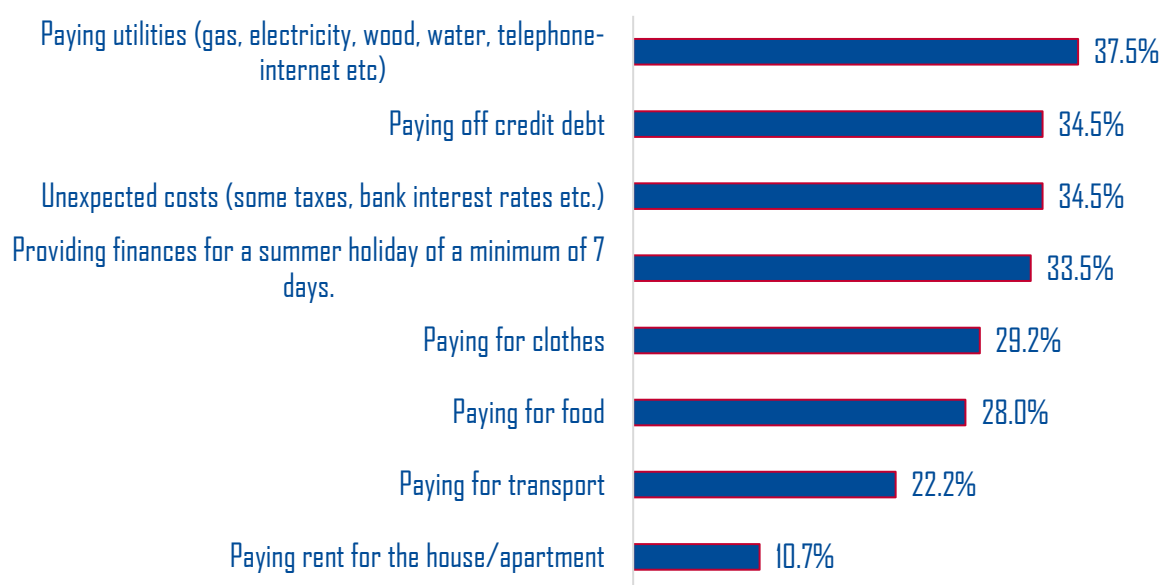
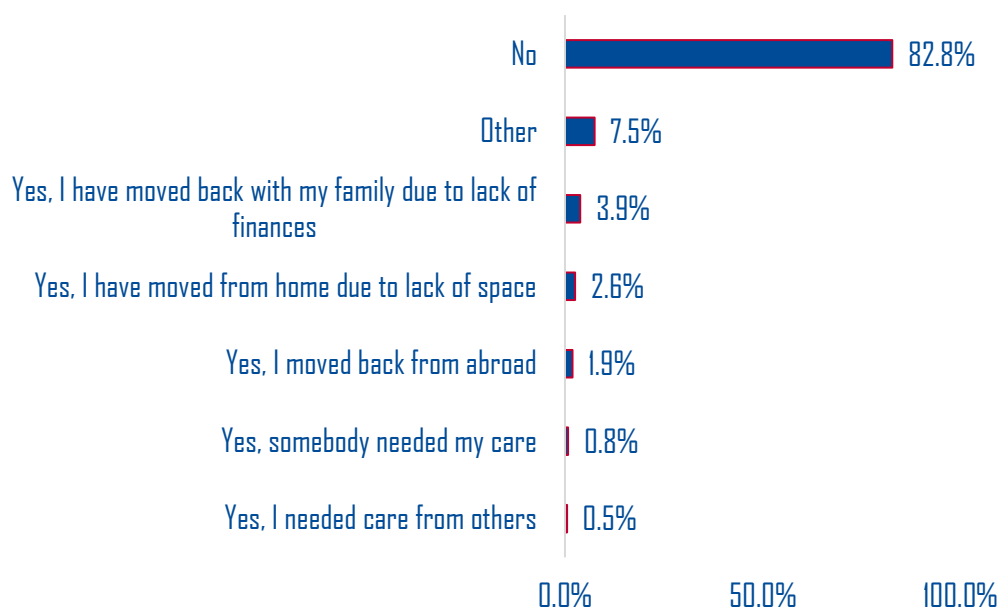
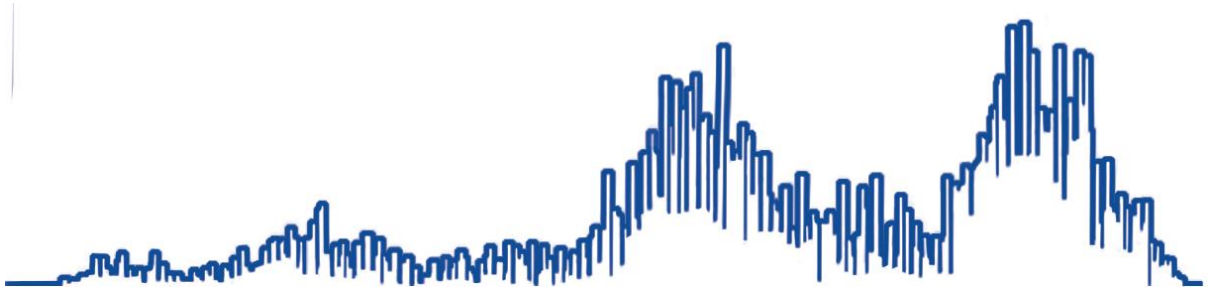


Chart 32. Change of residence due to the pandemic.

*Have you changed your home during the pandemic?*



# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING: COMMUNICATION, SOCIALIZATION AND LEISURE, EMPATHY AND SOLIDARITY, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



## Context and Research questions

When we speak about emotional well-being, we are referring to “a state of well-being whereby individuals recognize their abilities, are able to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities”.

The secret parties taking place in several nightclubs nationwide have demonstrated just one aspect of the mechanisms young people used to cope with the new reality in awaiting the “new normal”. Even though North Macedonia has never had such strict lockdown and quarantine practices as those in Spain, the United Kingdom, or Italy, the public have criticized some measures such as curfews, the closure of restaurants and bars, and especially religious gatherings’ limitations. Be that as it may, 62% of the Macedonians believe that their mental health has not changed compared to the last year. (Jakovlevska, Ivanovska, Velickovska, 2021)

However, the belief that mental health has worsened in comparison to the last year increases with the age of the respondents, i.e. 21% of young people (aged 18 to 29) believe so, while 34% for 65 over. Those involved in domestic work and agriculture feel their mental health has worsened more than the other professions. The feelings of loneliness, sadness, anxiety, and fear have increased as well in the period between May 2020 and March 2021 (especially among women). The findings from the OECD survey (in line with other studies in The United Kingdom and The United States of America) also confirm significant psychological impacts of social distancing and quarantine measures on young people causing stress, anxiety, and loneliness. These studies show that young adults (aged 18 to 29) experience a higher level of distress compared to other age groups since the onset of the pandemic. (OECD 2020)

Youth have suddenly lost many of the activities that provide structure, meaning, and a daily rhythm (school, extracurricular activities, social interactions, and physical activity), which could lead to depressive symptoms and may further entrench social withdrawal. The concerns regarding contagion may also exacerbate specific types of anxiety, including specific phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and generalized anxiety related to unpredictable and frightening situations. (Courtney et. al. 2020)

Parental unemployment, financial insecurity, low levels of social support from family and friends, and a lack of leisure time have all been associated with an increased risk for “parental burnout”, a condition defined as “a prolonged response to chronic and overwhelming parental stress” (Mikolajczak et al. 2019) During the COVID-19 pandemic risk factors related to parental burnout have increased, and so has their promptness to escape and suicidal ideation, greater levels of conflict with their partners, higher levels of partner estrangement ideation, and child abuse and neglect. (Griffith, 2020)

There is a significant distrust in the vaccination process in the country. Mainly because of the Government's belated response for the vaccine supply, skepticism over the short time for patenting and manufacturing of the vaccines, possible (unknown) side effects, etc. The nationwide survey of March 2021 (Jakovlevska, Ivanovska, Velickovska, 2021) finds that half of the respondents believe in the new vaccines, and the other half no. Thus, 56% would get vaccinated. There is a small percentage (4%) that believes that the risk of COVID-19 is exaggerated. As of 31 May 2021, 433,787 people have registered for vaccination. Finally, 11% of the population of North Macedonia has received the first dose of the vaccine, while 3.5% is fully vaccinated, as of 31 May 2021 (with a total of 290,829 vaccine doses been administered).

We shall ask young people to tell us about their communication tools with their peers, the resilience techniques (leisure and free time habits), their level of stress, anxiety, solidarity and empathy with vulnerable groups, support (private or professional), mental and physical health state, and their expectations for the final solution of the crisis.

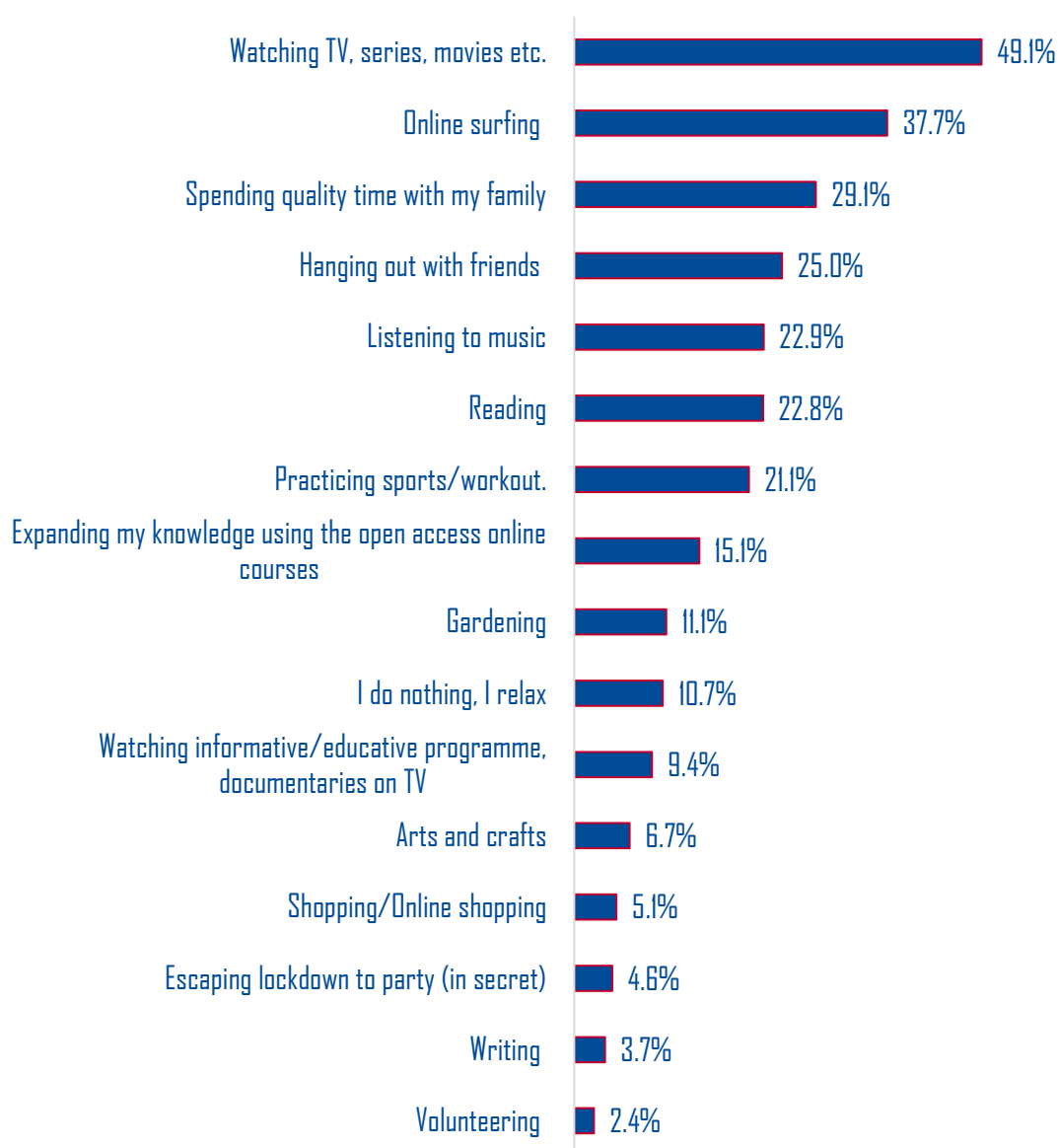
## Findings

Almost 50% of young people spend their time during the pandemic mostly in front of the TV, watching movies, series, etc. 38% of the respondents mostly surfed the Internet, and 29% spent quality time with their family. Although 7% of respondents said they violated quarantine to go to secret parties, this is the third choice at the bottom of the list, along with writing (by 3.7%) and volunteering by only 2.4%. (Chart 33).



Chart 33. Leisure time during the pandemic

*How did you spend most of your leisure time during the pandemic?  
(up to 3 answers)*

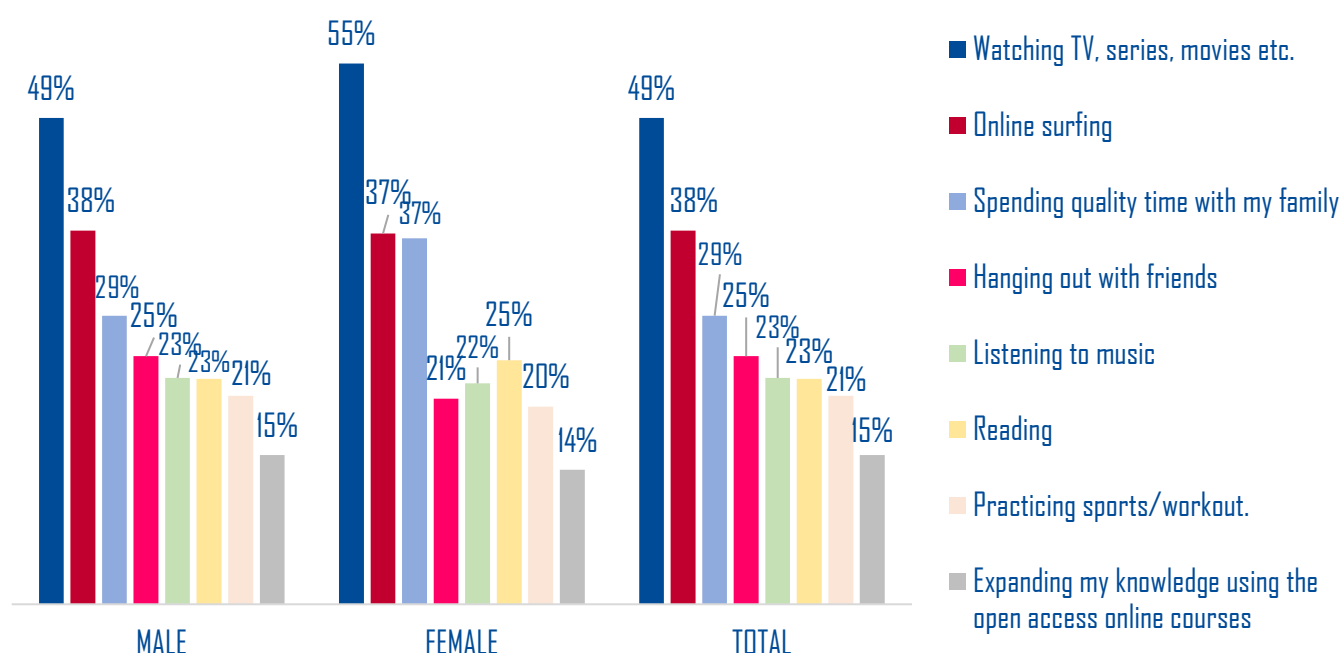


Of the eight most common types of entertainment for both female and male respondents, girls and women were more likely to watch television, movies, and series

(55% vs. 49% of boys/men), spend quality time with family (37% vs. 29% of boys/men) and read (25 % vs. 23% in boys/men). (Chart 34)

Chart 34. Leisure time by sex

*How did you spend most of your leisure time during the pandemic?  
8 MOST COMMON ANSWERS BY SEX*



The three most common places for young people to gather during the pandemic are in a park (48%), at home with friends (42%), and in a cafe (34%). (Chart 35) The most common activity of young people on the Internet is connecting on social media (38% very often and 34%

sometimes), then conferences and lectures (28% very often and 38% sometimes). Respondents least used the Internet for workshops/webinars (49% have never used it) and volunteering (74% have never used it). (Chart 36)

Chart 35. Where do you and your friends usually gather?

*Where do you and your friends/peers usually gather? (Up to 2 answers)*

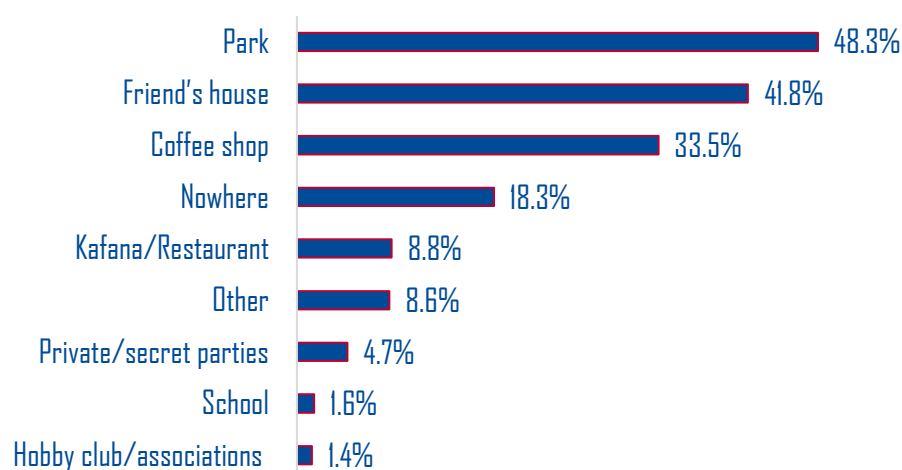
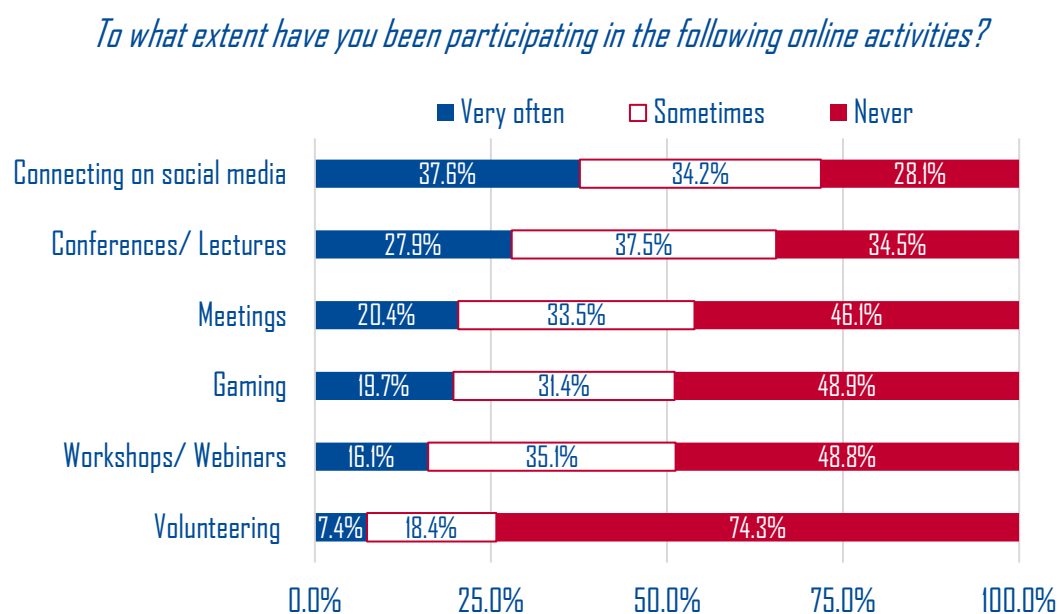
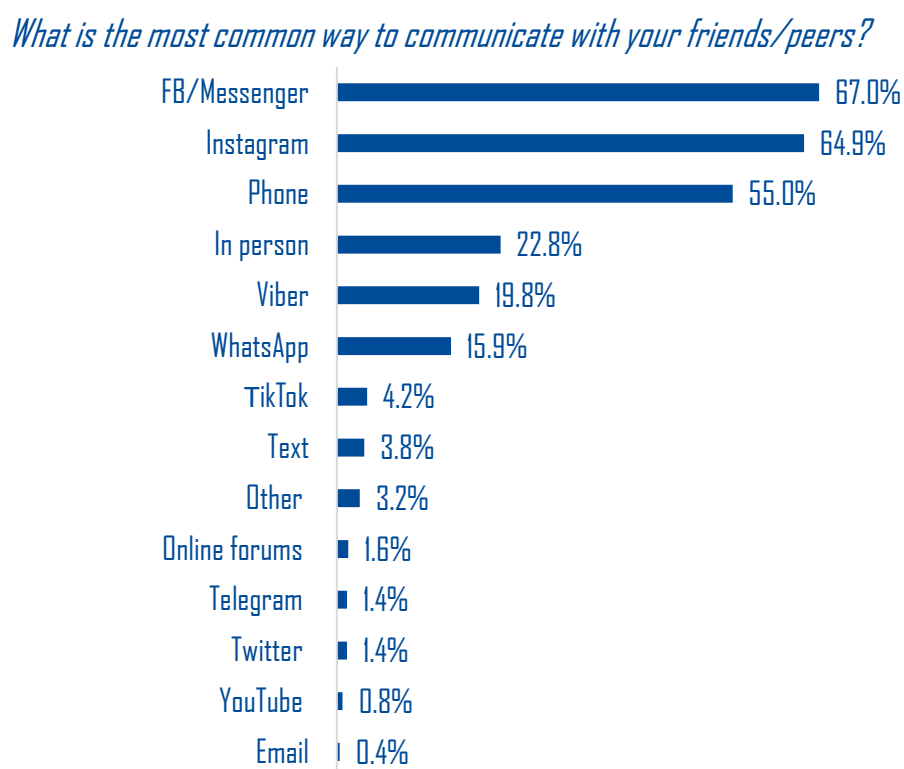


Chart 36. Participation in online activities



The three most common tools/ways of communication between young people are Facebook-Messenger (67%), Instagram (65%), and telephone (55%). (Chart 37)

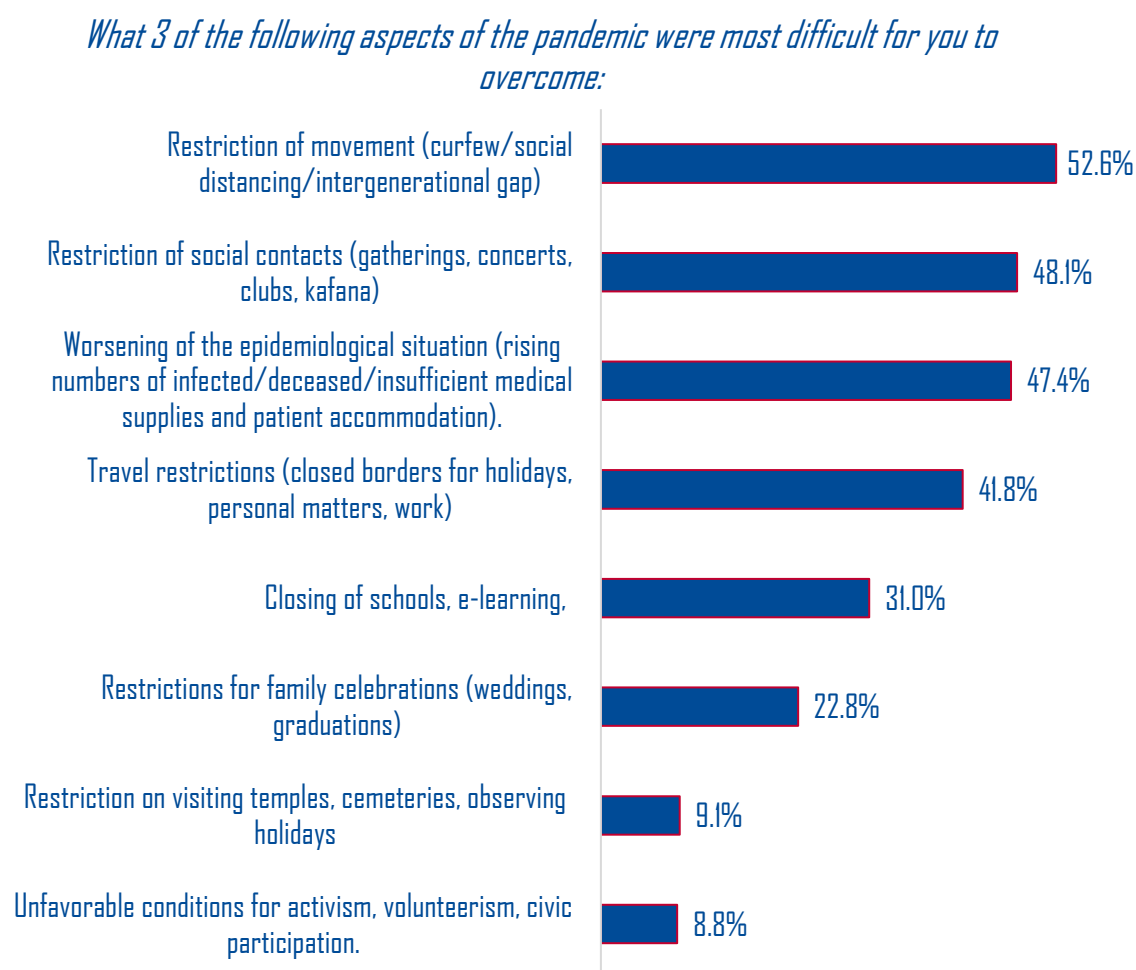
Chart 37. Most common communication tools for youth



Restriction of movement (curfew/physical distance and the creating of a generational gap) is one of the most difficult aspects of the pandemic to overcome for 53% of young people. Limiting social contacts through gatherings, concerts, clubs, and pubs is the second most difficult aspect to overcome, for 48% of young respondents, and the deterioration of the

epidemiological situation by 47%, and travel restrictions for 42% of young people. Restricting visits to temples, cemeteries, and celebrating religious holidays is among the three most difficult aspects for only 9%, and unfavorable conditions for activism, volunteering, and civic participation for only 8.8% of respondents. (Chart 38)

Chart 38. Most difficult aspects of life during the pandemic



Physical distance is a stronger weight factor for male respondents than for female, although it is a major challenge for both. (Chart 39)

As many as 73% of the respondents had travel restrictions disrupting their desire to explore and travel for leisure, 58% their intention to visit relatives and friends abroad, and 40% their intention to work

abroad, 35% their intention to reunite with the family, by 25% the intention to emigrate abroad and finally by 24% to study abroad. (Chart 40) The negative effect of the pandemic on the lives of young people in northern Macedonia can be read in the answer to the question about the motives of young people to emigrate from the country - as many as 73% said they would emigrate as a consequence of the pandemic. (Chart 41)

Chart 39. Most difficult challenges by sex

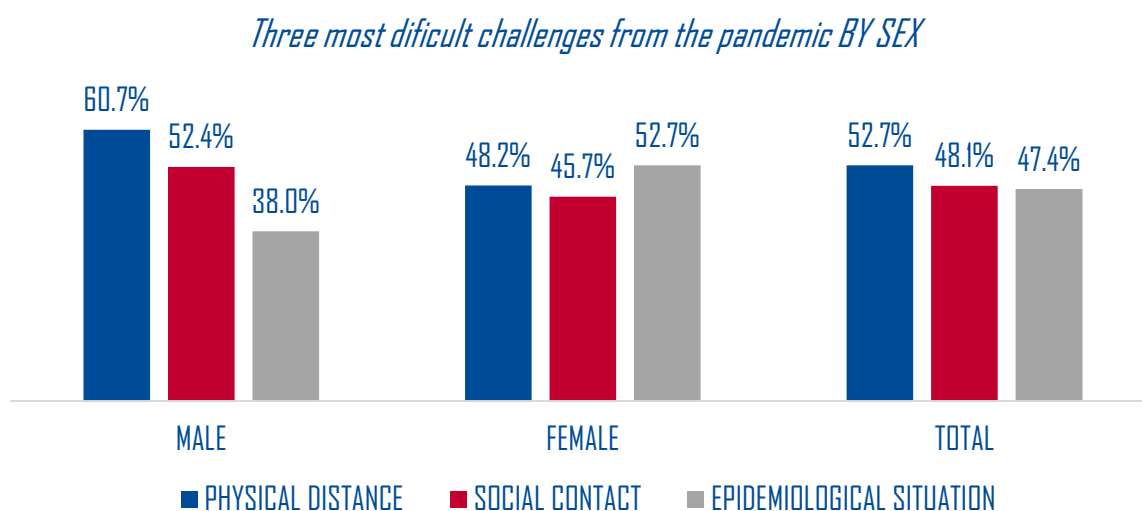


Chart 40. Influence of travel restrictions on life

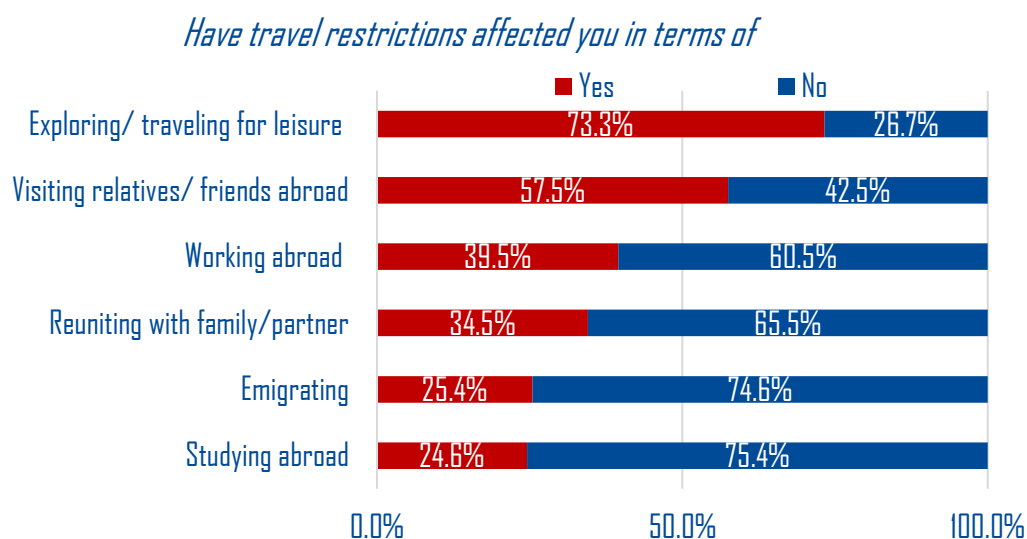
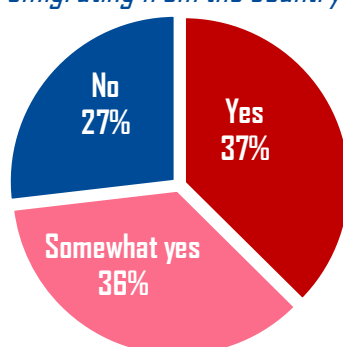


Chart 41. Pandemic as a motive for emigrating from the country.

*Has the pandemic motivated you to think about emigrating from the country?*



As many as 65% of respondents had increased levels of anxiety/panic during the pandemic (Chart 42), and 48% had increased levels of stress due to the campaign for responsibility and solidarity of young people with the elderly and vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Covid-19. (Chart 43) Among female respondents, there is a significantly higher degree of increased anxiety (for 71%

of female respondents) compared to 55% of male respondents. (Chart 42) And the level of stress, although with a smaller difference, is higher in girls and women (51%) than in boys and men (43%). (Chart 43) When it comes to the level of anxiety during the pandemic, no significant differences are found in the responses among different age and ethnic categories.

Chart 42. Anxiety during the pandemic by sex

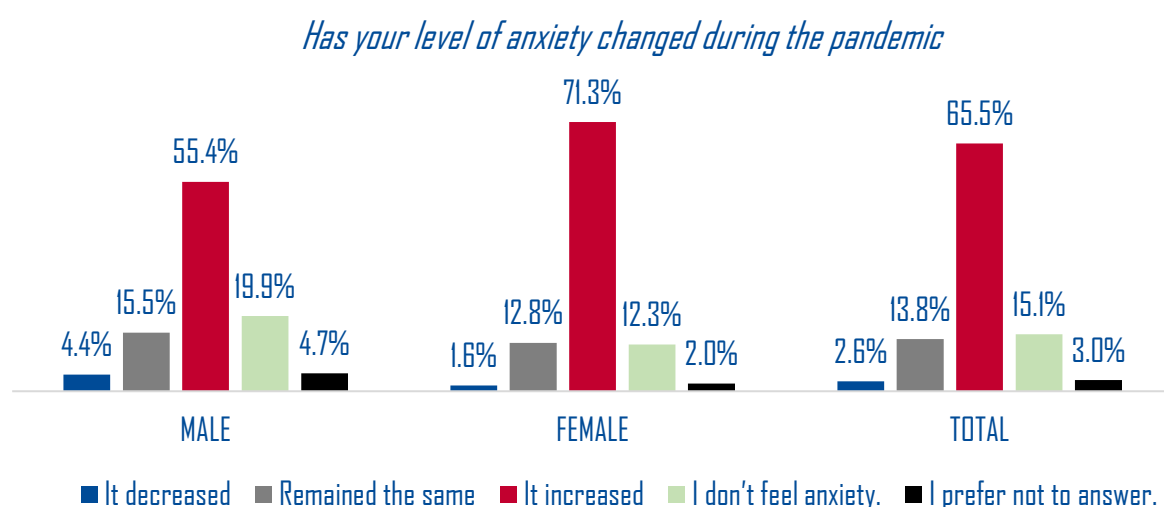
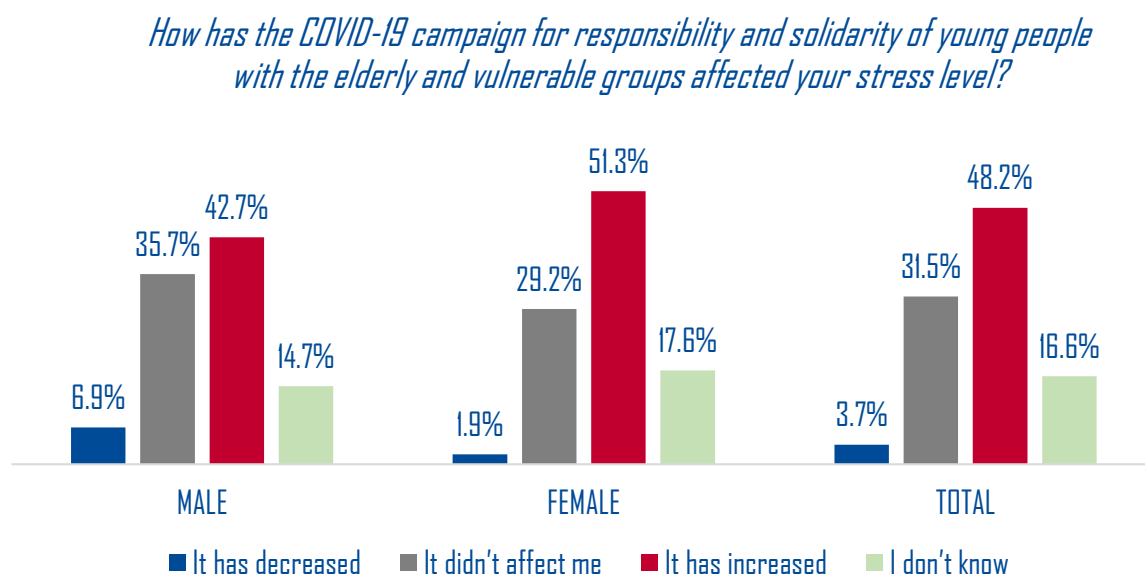


Chart 43. Stress level during the pandemic by sex



For most young people the feeling of empathy and solidarity with other people remained at the same level (39%) or increased (38%). (Chart 44) In male respondents in the largest percentage (40%) the feeling of empathy and solidarity with other people remained at the same level, and in 41% of female respondents, it increased.

CSD officials also talk about the current prevalence of another pandemic "with some psychotropic substances" and assume that the use of narcotics, alcohol, and drugs is on the rise. Chart 45 (a-f) shows the level of using drugs, psychotropic substances, alcohol, gambling, level of aggression, and illegal activities in the respondents. To a large extent,

respondents said that they had never used such means or had never used violence and that drinking alcohol and taking drugs were the most common practices among the options offered. (Chart 45)

Compared to the period before the pandemic, of those who didn't say that they had never experienced/practiced any of the above activities, 37% of the respondents answered that they were more violent, 33% took more drugs and the same percentage (33%) have undertaken/experienced or witnessed illegal activities. 34% of those respondents that did not choose the option "never", claim they used less substances than before the pandemic, 38% of them gambled less and 48% of them drunk less alcohol.

Chart 44. Empathy and solidarity with others during the pandemic by sex

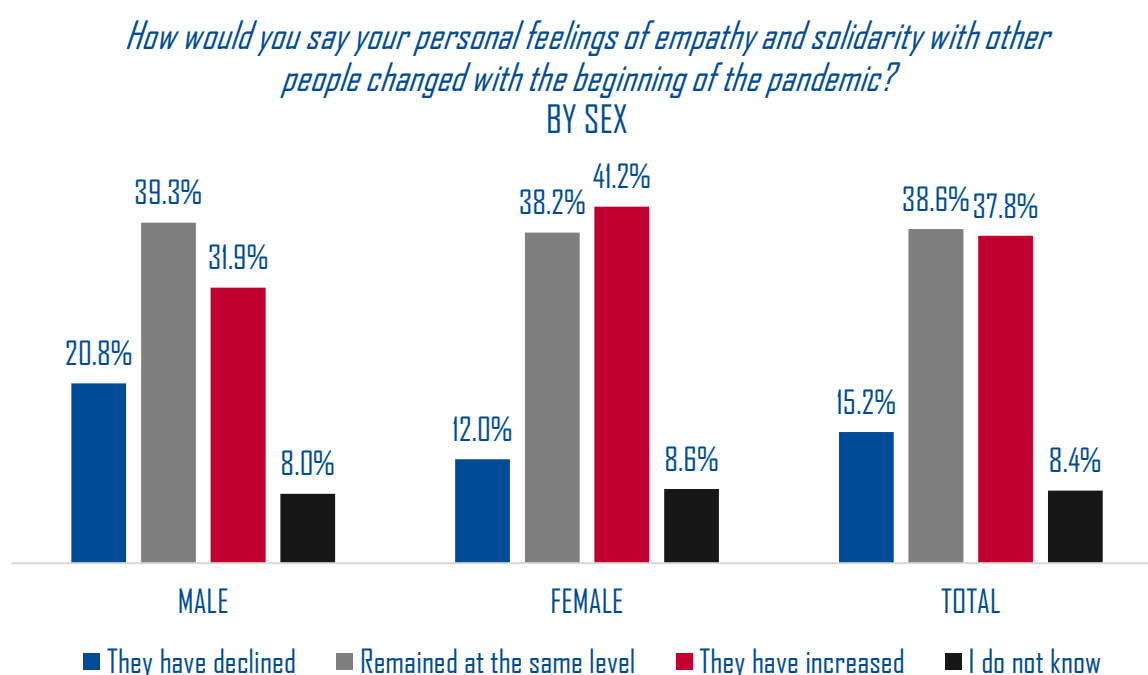
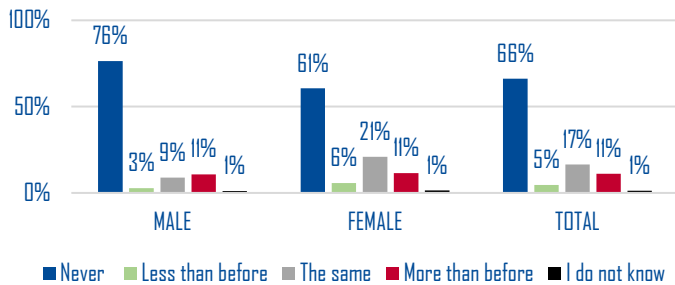
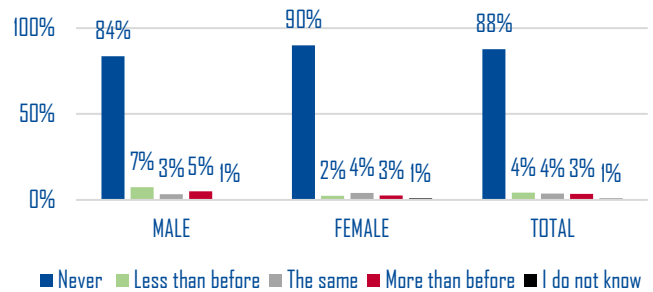


Chart 45. Use of a) medicine, b) substances, c) alcohol, and practice of d) gambling, e) illegal activities and f) violence.

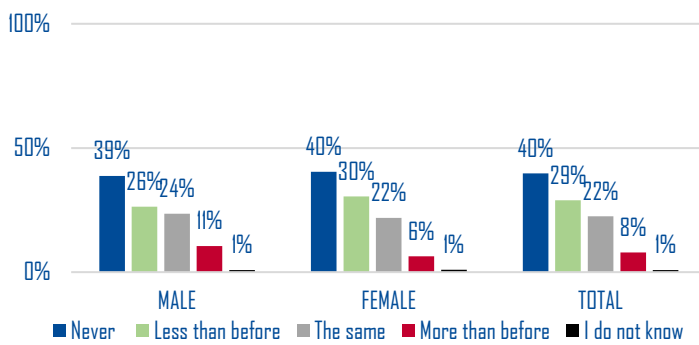
*Used medicine (Ibuprofen, Ketonal, antidepressant)?*  
**BY SEX**



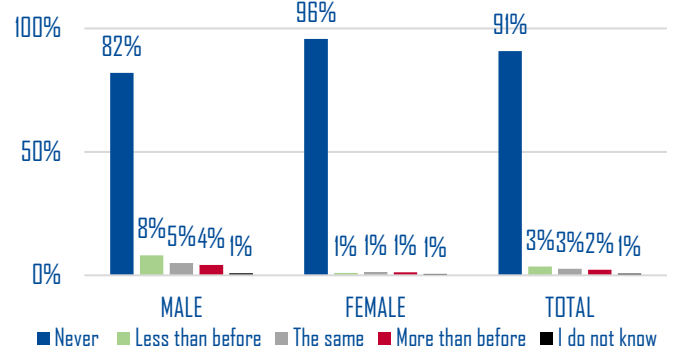
*Used substances (marijuana, opiates, ecstasy, cocaine)?*  
**BY SEX**



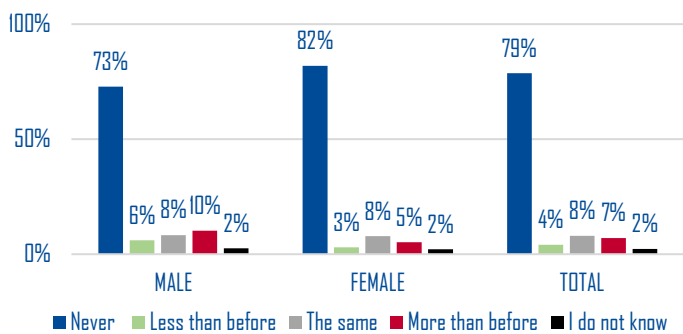
*Consumed Alcohol?*  
**BY SEX**



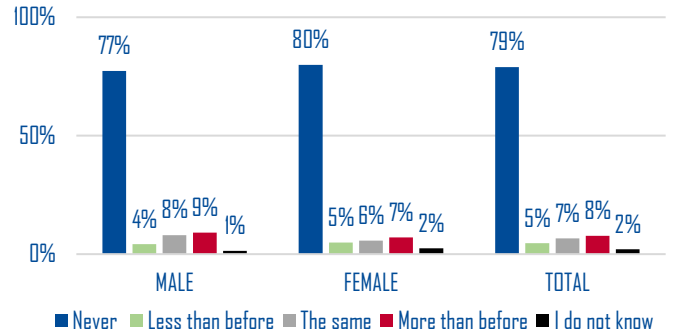
*Gambled?*  
**BY SEX**



*Experienced illegal activities?*  
**BY SEX**



*Been violent (verbally and physically)?*  
**BY SEX**



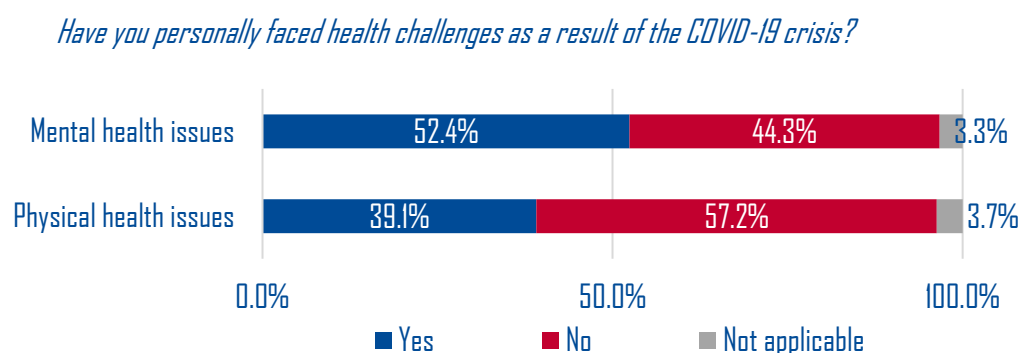


What we conclude is that young people reported taking more drugs, engaging in or witnessing some illegal activities, and using psychotropic substances less than what was expected. Yet, it is highly likely that online surveys might not be the place young people are willing to disclose such intimate matters. What they were open to

report, nevertheless, is the challenge to overcome mental health problems.

Half of the young people surveyed (52%) experienced mental health problems, and 39% problems with physical health, because of the COVID-19 crisis (Chart 46).

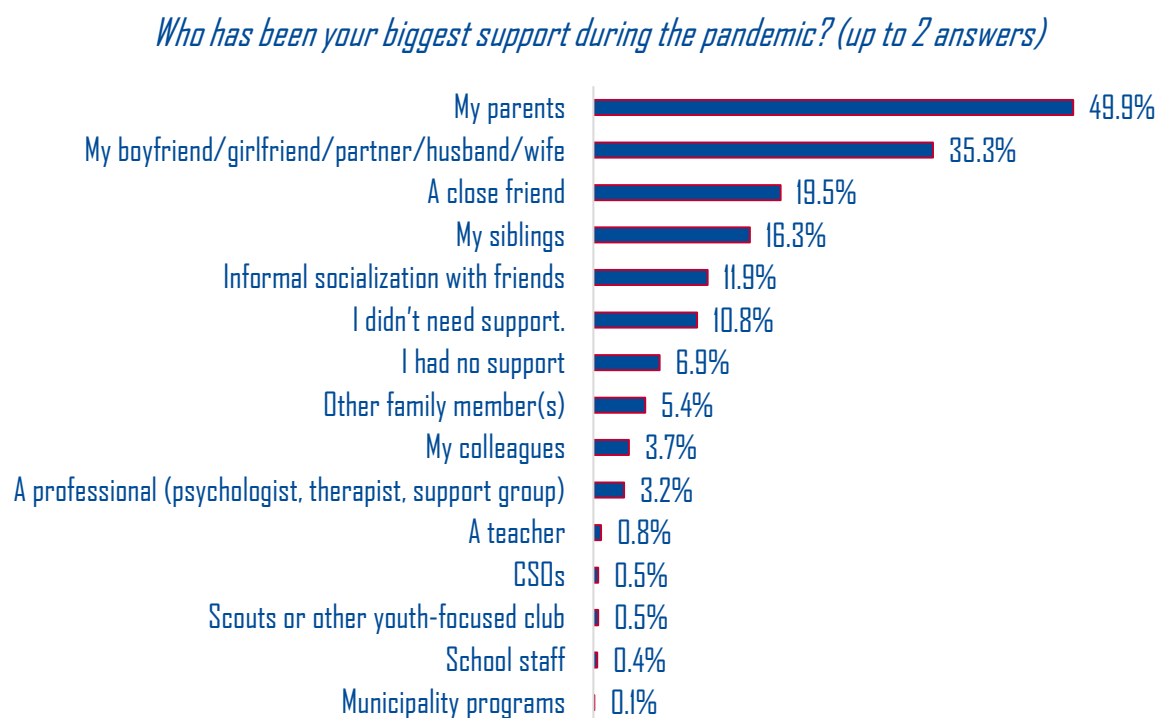
Chart 46. Health challenges and COVID-19



For half of the young people in the survey, parents were their biggest support during the pandemic, while for 35% it was an intimate partner, and for 20% a close friend.

Young people relied least on assistance from civil society organizations, school services, and municipal programs. (Chart 47)

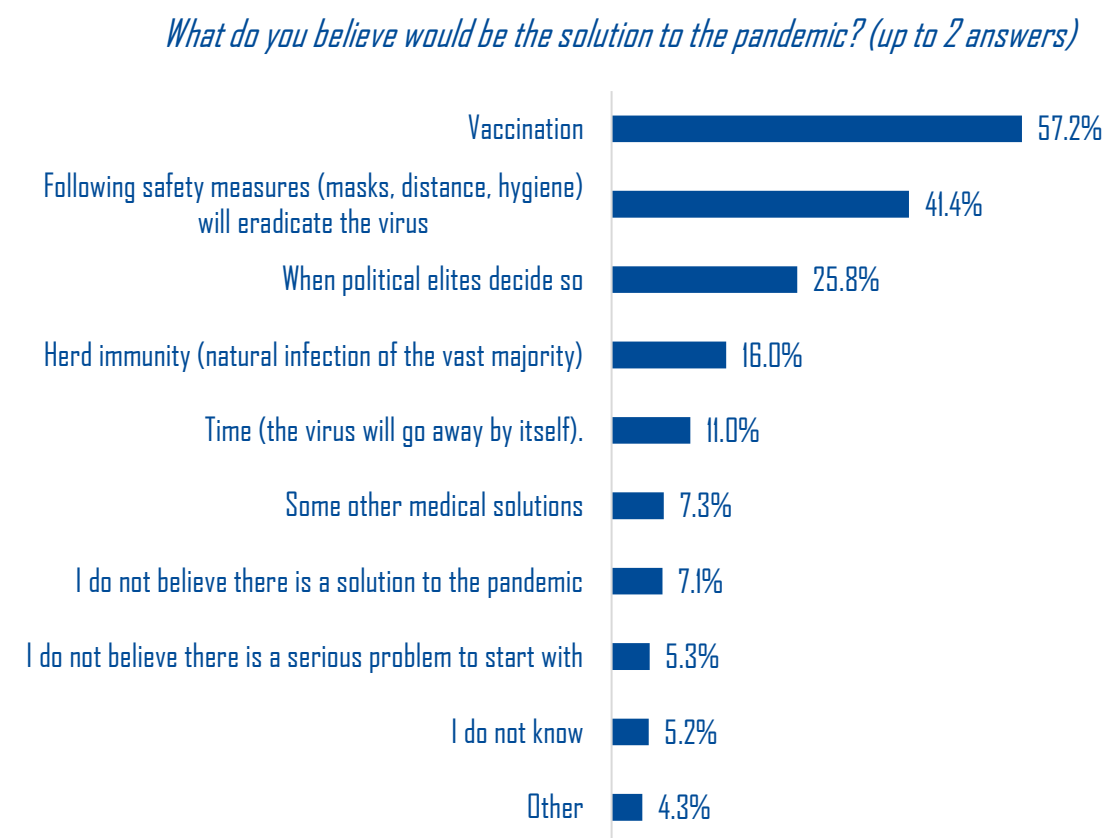
Chart 47. Support during pandemic



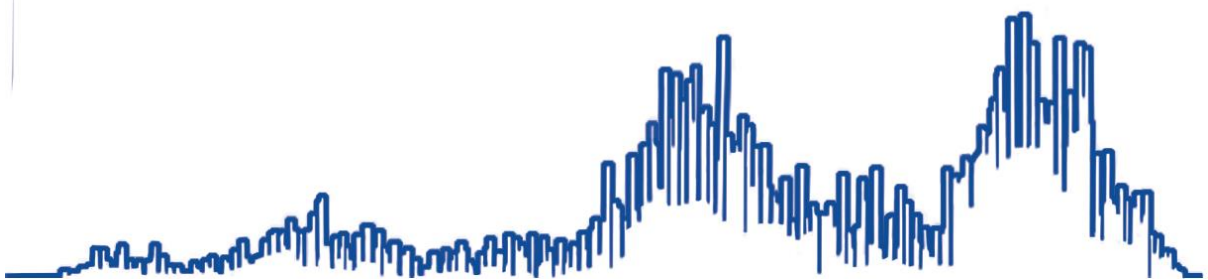
For 57% of respondents, one of the two best solutions to the pandemic is vaccination, and for 41% it is compliance with safety measures. Not to be overlooked is the fact that 28% of young people think that the pandemic will end

when the political elites decide, 7% think that there is no solution to the pandemic and 5.3% think that there is no serious problem to begin with. (Chart 48)

Chart 48. Solution for the pandemic



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: VOLUNTEERING, CIVIL SOCIETY



## Context and Research questions

### *A. Youth engagement in times of pandemic*

Civic engagement as a concept is a crucial component for a healthy democratic society. Engaged citizenship, i.e., citizens who are actively involved in improving their communities and their country are a huge benefit to the civil society and the main indicator of healthy communities, a democratic state, and satisfied citizens (Ehrlich 2000). The most frequently used terms are: civic participation, civic engagement, civic activism, civic involvement, active citizenship, and civic engagement (Lenzi et.al.). Volunteering, on the other hand, is defined as an integral part of civic engagement and thus further highlights the societal benefits of civic engagement.

Volunteering is a key part of civic engagement, oftentimes even used synonymously to civic engagement. It is closely related to civic initiatives because they are a sort of volunteering themselves. Volunteering is most frequently used to deal with certain problems within the community (identically to initiatives); however, volunteering has a broader scope. Volunteering also covers actions for practical help to groups or fellow citizens, as well as organizing events within the community. In that way, the volunteers directly participate in the life of the community - the reason why volunteering is synonymous with civic engagement.

Physical distancing got in the way of youth activism and volunteering at the outbreak of the pandemic, but at the time when the focus groups were conducted, CSOs have already overcome this obstacle. Nevertheless, this was probably one of those times when volunteering saves lives, so young people could be seeing delivering humanitarian aid and helping vulnerable groups along with volunteering in medical centers. UNICEF in North Macedonia, for instance, initiated the "Volunteering in time of COVID-19" program.<sup>[XIX](#)</sup> while the Red Cross volunteers remained active during the whole period. This increase in solidarity in the form of volunteering, especially among young people is seen in many countries. In the United Kingdom, for instance, 750,000 people signed up to the National Healthcare Service volunteer scheme, and another estimated 250,000 joined local volunteer centers (Butler, 2020).

### *B. CSOs' response to youth needs in times of pandemic*

The CSO KRIK has issued a short report (April 2020) on the challenges and needs of the civil society sector in times of COVID-19. Among the most significant challenges to the CSOs, there are: canceled or delayed projects, lack of finances, and incapability to finish the ongoing financial and administrative tasks. In terms of education and awareness-raising on the public health in the pandemic, most of the CSOs launched informative campaigns, online educative content, new technological tools, and volunteering and help for elderly people. The CSOs need financial state support, online tools, and adaptation of their work and information for institutions and donors.

The unilateral decision of the Government to initially cut and then return the funds intended for civil society organizations (according to the budget for 2020) and to allocate them only for financial support for measures to deal with the COVID-19 crisis is assessed quite negatively in the report of Savevska and Ivanovska (2020). This affected the transparency and accountability of the whole procedure and the building of a long-term partnership between the Government and the civil society sector and its involvement in the decision-making processes as an essential element of that relationship. The biggest criticism is placed on the short deadline for applications, the difference in points given between the evaluators, and the transparency of the evaluation process. (Ibid)

Among other conclusions, the latest study on governance practices for transparency and accountability of CSOs (Ivanovska Hadzievska 2020) notes that the main indicators for measuring efficiency and effectiveness by CSOs are annual financial resources, end-user satisfaction, and public visibility of CSOs. A very small percentage of CSOs use the recruitment of new members annually as an indicator of efficiency and effectiveness, which is considered problematic in terms of sustainability and representativeness of CSOs with membership. 11% of CSOs do not prepare a financial report, while 17% do not prepare a narrative report, and almost one-third of the organizations that prepare such reports do not share them with the general public (although both are a legal obligation). All these factors undermine the trust and

interest of young people for membership or volunteering in civil society organizations.

Consequently, we ask Young people about their involvement in such organizations and activities before and after the pandemic, and we want to see if there is change due to the new reality. We also ask CSOs to depict their challenges and needs in time of pandemic; how has the communication with their communities' changes, and how would they define the level of cooperation between them and state institutions.

## Findings

### A. Youth engagement in times of pandemic

The survey with 1002 respondents-young people from North Macedonia offers us a general picture of the level of civic activism, volunteering, and participation of youth. The percentage of citizens who were members of some organization, group, or club did not significantly change in the years before and during the pandemic and it can be said that on average less than 1/4 of the citizens had been active.

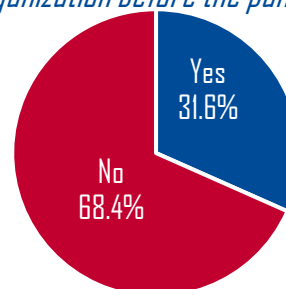
According to the data gathered from the survey, one-third (32%) of the youth were active/ members of some organization (Chart 49).

The respondents were also asked about the type of organization they have been/are active in, which was a

multiple-choice question. That means that the respondents could choose one or various types of organizations.

Chart 49. Engagement of youth in organizations before COVID-19.

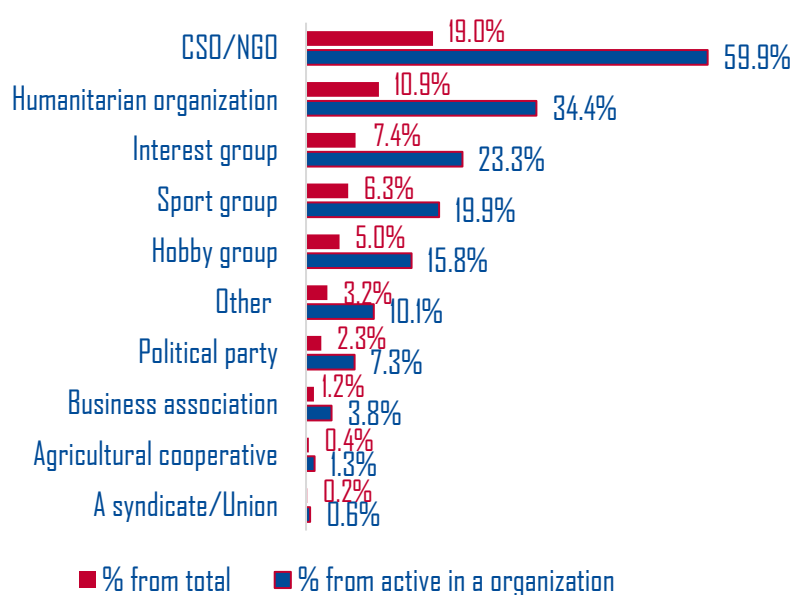
*Have you been active in some organization before the pandemic?*



The three kinds of organizations youth have been part of mostly are CSOs/NGOs (19% of all respondents), humanitarian organizations (11%), and Interest groups (7.4%). When the data was calculated only with those respondents that have previously answered that they have been active members of some organization the percentages are the following: 60% of the active youth were part of a non-profit organization, 34% of a humanitarian organization, and 23% of an Interest group. (Chart 50)

Chart 50. Type of organization youth was engaged in before the pandemic

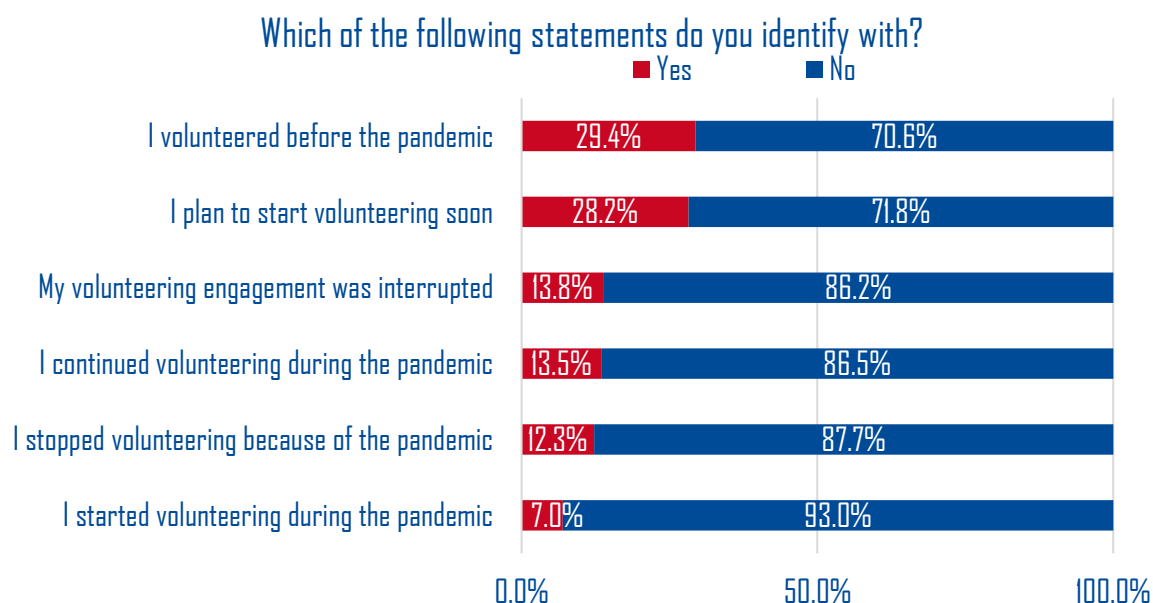
*What kind of organization have you been/are active in? (multiple choice)*



Before the pandemic, only 29% of respondents volunteered somewhere and 17% of respondents said they volunteered during the pandemic (started or continued to volunteer) with male respondents volunteering more than female respondents (See Chart 65a in COVID-19 and Vulnerable Youth section). From them, 13.5% of

respondents said they continued to volunteer, 7% said they started volunteering during the pandemic, and 28% said they planned to start volunteering. On the other hand, for 14% the volunteering was stopped, and 12% stopped volunteering during the pandemic. (Chart 51)

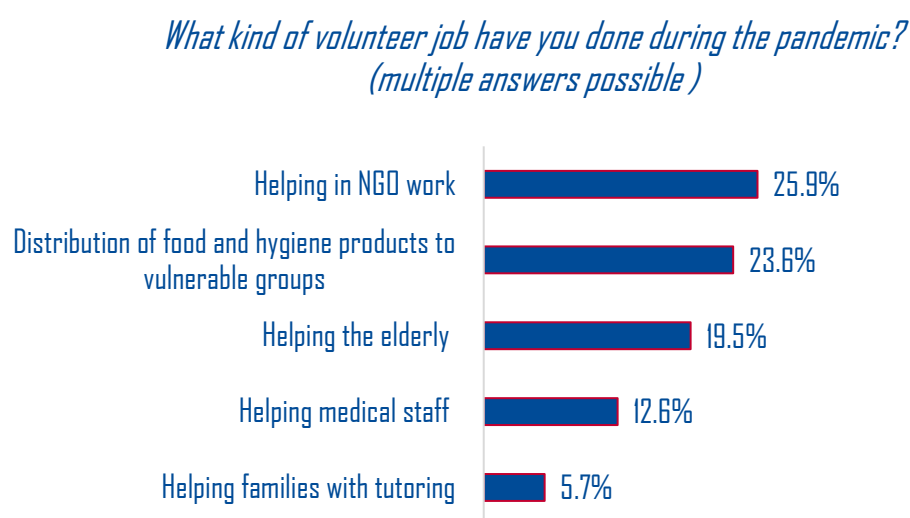
Chart 51. Youth and volunteering before and after the pandemic



Of those respondents who stated that they volunteered during the pandemic, most (26%) helped the work of CSOs, 24% in the distribution of food and hygiene

products to vulnerable groups, 20% helped the elderly, 13% in a medical institution, and 6% were tutors in families. (Chart 52).

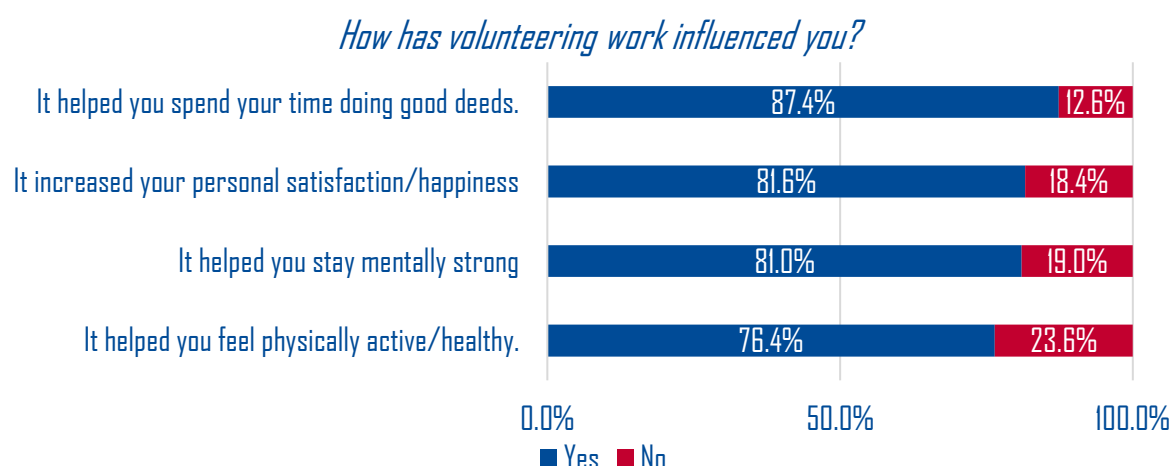
Charts 52. Types of volunteer jobs during the pandemic



In general, the volunteer activity was assessed by the respondents who volunteered as very positive in several aspects; helped them the most to spend their free time

doing good deeds (87%), increased their personal sense of satisfaction/happiness (82%), and helped 80% of the volunteers to stay mentally strong. (Chart 53)

Chart 53. The influence of volunteering on youth's life



To the general question for all respondents about what motivates them to volunteer, 43% answered that they never volunteered, while 38% did so because they wanted

to help other people/friends, 15% because they wanted to meet new people and gain skills, and for 11% volunteering helped them in their career development. (Chart 54)

Chart 54. Motivation for volunteering

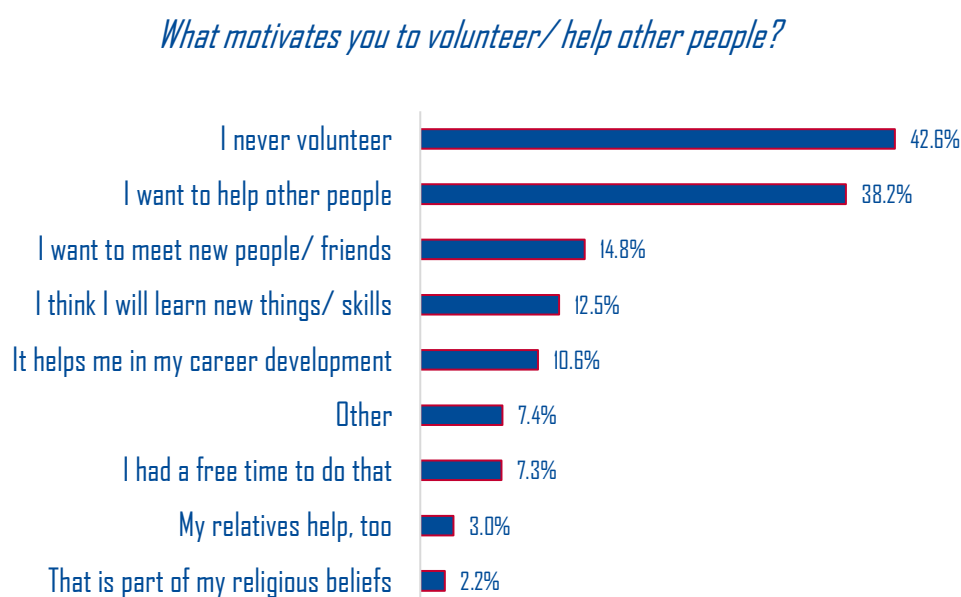
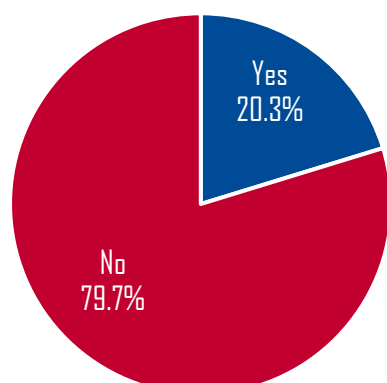


Chart 55. Activism in youth organizations

*Are you part of a youth organization?*



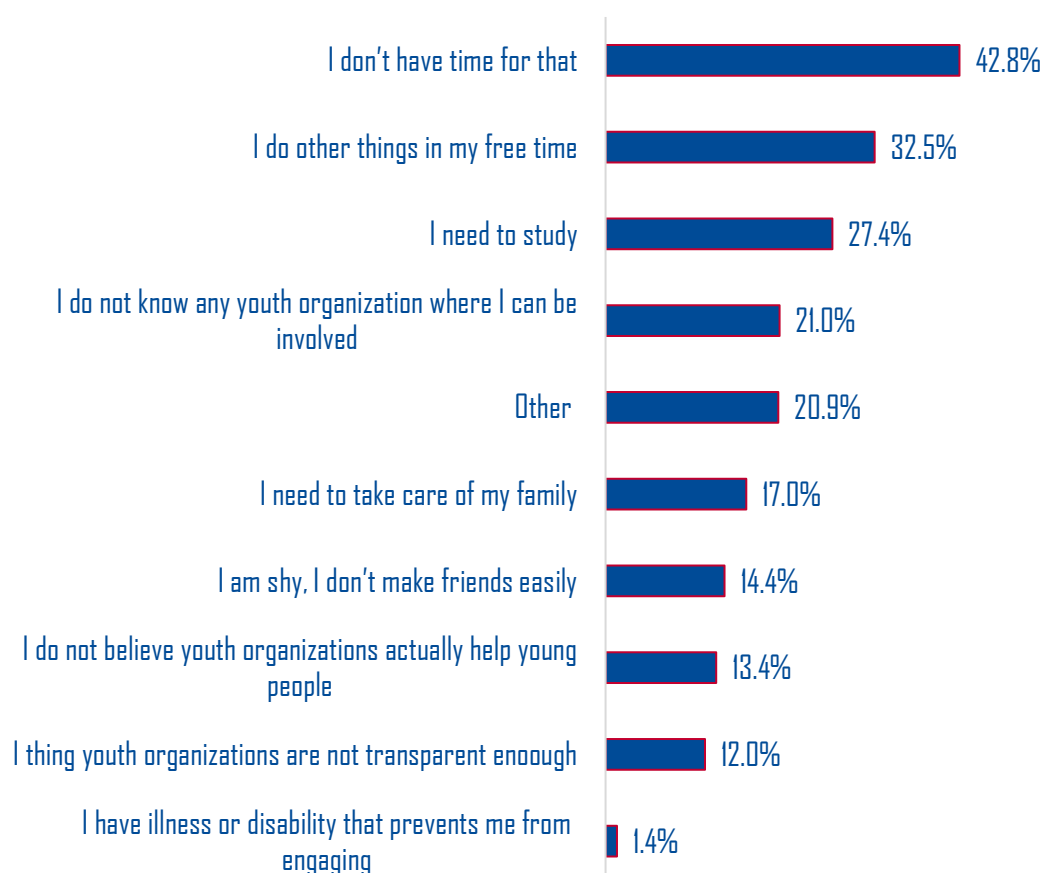
Only 20% of respondents said they were part of a youth organization. (Chart 55) with female respondents being more active than male (See Chart 64a in COVID-19 and

Vulnerable Youth section). The most common reason that young people single out for not being part of such an organization is lack of time (by 43%). Almost 33% do other things in their free time, and 27% don't volunteer due to schoolwork. Although at the end of the list of reasons for not joining youth organizations, for 13% of respondents the reason is that they do not believe that youth organizations, in reality, help young people, and for 12% the reason is that they thought that youth organizations were not enough transparent for their work. (Chart 56)

The results show that more than half of the respondents (55%) do not feel excluded from the decision-making processes for things that affect them, while 41% feel partially or completely excluded.

Chart 56. Reasons for no engagement in youth organizations

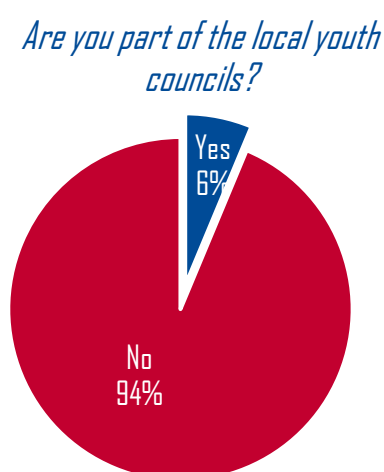
*Why aren't you a part of a youth organization? (up to three answers)*





The law on youth participation and policies envisages forming of local youth councils and direct participation of the youth. Still, the data shows minority participation and interest in engaging i.e., only 6% of youth are part of these councils (Chart 57), 21% did not want to participate, and more than 34% are not familiar with this type of organization (Chart 58).

Chart 57. Engagement in local youth councils



None of the involved CSOs was a member of the Youth Council in the municipalities at the time of the conducting of the focus group. They believe that local youth councils "... are formed pro-form and function only as such. Over 80% of young people in urban and rural areas do not recognize the local youth councils as tools, nor do they recognize the council members, and somewhere the council president uses that position to achieve some benefit or usually ends up as an employee in the municipality and here the work of the Council completely fades."

### ***B. CSOs' response to youth needs in times of pandemic***

The civil society organizations (including the ones working with youth) that participated in the focus groups, when asked about the way of communication with their constituents and their involvement in the project activities, generally concluded that the communication with the constituents was equally intensive for everyone.

Chart 58. Reasons for lack of participation in local youth councils



Additionally, some CSOs stated that there had been attempts for some of their officials to be part of the LYC, but after applying, they have no knowledge of how the selection was made. They believe that the process was influenced by political parties and that the members of the local youth councils were also junior members of the political parties. This is cited as a significant problem for such a body to be able to function smoothly.

Finally, CSOs emphasized that "youth councils are not active after the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in 2020, which obliges each municipality to establish its own council." With that, the practices were non-unified, so the Agency for Youth and Sports stopped them and gave specific directions to avoid the moment of partisanship.

All interviewed CSOs indicated a significant change in the way they contact and communicate with young people from their target groups with the onset of the pandemic. However, CSOs have already overcome this problem and conclude that the initial adjustment to online transfer was more critical. Generally, in the beginning, communication problems appeared due to the physical barrier. The activities of all organizations have undergone significant

changes with the advent of the pandemic, especially in terms of the transfer from physical presence activities to online activities (especially in rural areas), lack of adequate and/or sufficient devices to follow and/or participate in online activities (large family, young people from socially vulnerable groups), as well as widespread unfamiliarity with online tools.

All CSOs emphasize that there have been changes in the number of young people involved in their activities and/or in their organization, and some could not realize them at all in any form other than with physical presence. Activities that have mobility and cooperation at the core have lost much of their value, the youth spirit has been lost, or they have not achieved the effect they would have had with physical presence.

Additionally, most CSOs indicated a reduced interest in participating in the activities, as well as technical inability to participate. It is emphasized that with the adjustment and transfer of activities online, the interest of young people was lower than for activities with physical presence, especially for new projects. CSD representatives stated that the main reasons for this were fear of the unknown, insufficient interest, digital fatigue, loss of motivation due to slow response from institutions, and the absence of the social moment through the informal socializing they have after the activities with physical presence.

"There is lethargy, insufficient involvement, and lack of vision of where the country is going. They are bothered by the high level of corruption, partisanship, clientelism, polluted air, insufficient care for the environment, lack of career centers, non-subsidizing businesses," said a representative of CSOs in the focus groups.

Those CSOs that already had online activities before the pandemic, such as their platforms, portals, websites, etc., continued to involve young people in related activities, through writing and translating texts, exchanging information and educational materials, disseminating recommendations for protection against COVID-19, and the like. The pandemic, in few cases, has had a positive impact. Holding activities online allowed some CSOs to reach young people from smaller places where previously they didn't have a presence, so online clubs allowed young people from these places to join the clubs through online

classes. CSOs plan to keep these online clubs after the pandemic ends.

Of the 14 CSOs in the focus groups, only four reported that young people in their target group approached them with a request for a solution to a problem they were facing and that the cases in which young people approached them were more common before the pandemic than during the pandemic. In most of these cases it a matter of an individual problem that requires help to be solved, or a referral to an appropriate institution or organization, or, as stated, "they are stuck in the system, so they need help to exercise a right." In this regard, CSOs usually act as the link that connects them with the solution, and the organization itself rarely provides the final solution in that case.

The most positive examples are from organizations that offer assistance for social entrepreneurship but emphasize that these were not systemic solutions, but solutions to specific problems of certain young people, often for social businesses. The accession of young people to CSOs was also noticed after the information that a local youth union would be formed. Many young people approached CSOs so their voices could be heard.

However, the remaining organizations, twice as many, note that outside the project work it rarely or never happened that a young person approached them as CSOs, much less offered a solution to some of the problems that affect them.

Some of them point out that young people did not know exactly where to turn to and would not seek to claim their rights. According to CSOs, awareness among young people about their rights is low, they are discouraged from approaching any institution, especially state institutions, and reporting any problems. This is because they were often rejected from there, ignored, and were given no directions to get help from the institutions, so they were often disappointed and did not report the problem. The CSOs also highlight the problem of "confusing political and non-governmental sectors" and that "they confuse political party with civil society organization". More than half of CSOs emphasize the growing apathy of young people towards seeking solutions to their problems in general, especially in smaller places. However, they point out that enthusiasm and vigor were generally greater before the pandemic.

All CSOs stated that they paid equal attention to the requirements of the donor and to the needs of the target group (youth) in creating their projects and stressed that both parties had to be satisfied. Initially, the challenges, needs, and preferences of young people were detected (whether from previous projects or by research), and then they tried to place the knowledge within the framework of the donor's requests. CSOs believe that this was a normal and desirable process. On the other hand, one CSO emphasizes that it strives to generate its own funds to become less and less dependent on foreign donors, because their requests did not always go in favor of what they considered necessary for the country, including young people.

### **B.1. CSOs and COVID-19**

As highlighted in the methodology section, the selection of CSOs included in the focus groups was made according to the relevance of their work to young (and marginalized) groups. All organizations, as we have previously pointed out, faced problems with inability to carry out project activities with physical presence. Some of the activities have already started to be realized online, but they believe that it does not have the same effect as the physical presence. Project activities have undergone changes in terms of budgeting due to the difference in costs for the implementation of activities online and in person. The other part of the activities, which they were not able to implement through an online platform, was postponed (for which at the time of the focus group CSOs did not have specific data regarding their continuation). However, this implies a reduction, i.e., the so-called freezing of funds planned for that activity.

In general, the organizations noticed an increased membership, volunteers, and staff, as well as an increased number of associates. Most of them were more actively engaged in certain activities during the pandemic, especially activities that included donations and assistance to vulnerable categories, information, door-to-door campaigns to avoid clustering, and so on.

Among the many challenges that arose in communication, one problem in the internal work of several CSOs was the convening of the annual Assembly because the Statute did not allow them to convene an electronic Assembly. Therefore, they made statutory changes so that an online

Assembly could be held. They also pointed out how much they do not have – and really need – crisis management strategies, which they did not previously consider to be important as documents, but now have proven to be crucial.

Only one CSO reported that they were approached by a donor with an offer to conduct workshops during the pandemic, along with other CSOs, but this was "for a short period of time and with a small number of activities". Another CSO noted that in their work so far, "there have been very rare conversations with donors where they offer 'do you need help' or 'we have an idea, would you like to implement it'", but not during the pandemic.

All the other CSOs said that the donors did not approach them directly to work on a specific problem or activity but stressed that for the current projects they had when the pandemic started, the donors gave "suggestions or instructions on how to adjust the activities without compromising quality", were "quite open to how can we – together – create a way the project can be implemented, despite the pandemic."

One positive example pointed out by a CSO is when a donor allowed funds left over from other unrealized projects due to the pandemic to be directed towards the creation of a digital platform, although this was not previously envisaged. "When we take into account that the platform was created from scratch, it was a significant financial assistance for us as an organization to realize this platform," said the representative.

### **B2. Cooperation among CSOs, and between CSOs and state institutions**

Most of the surveyed CSOs during the focus groups stated that their cooperation with other CSOs is at a high level both before and during the pandemic. One participant pointed out the problem in the NGO sector regarding "fear of cooperation, everyone is afraid that someone will steal their idea, take the money", but most added that it was during the crisis that they achieved even deeper cooperation, strengthened networking and mutual support, with a common goal – to help their respective target groups. One respondent stressed: "Either we will move forward together, or we will sink individually."

More than half of the surveyed CSOs signed various memoranda of understanding with other CSOs, and umbrella organizations received new members during the pandemic. Several organizations also reported an increase in the number of volunteers/activists during the pandemic.

*"Because we did not have much work in the field, the member organizations of our coalition became much more connected with each other, whether by supporting local initiatives, jointly applying for projects on a partnership basis, so the cooperation is even stronger than before."*

*"The cooperation is excellent, we signed a series of memoranda so that we could cooperate. This way we will be able to apply for projects together, and in general, contribute to improving the lives of young people. We also have good cooperation with the media, through them, we gain visibility."*

In a similar tone with the representatives of the institutions and the representatives of the CSOs, they mention that although they have intensively cooperated with some of the public institutions, there is room for improvement of such communication and cooperation. Most often they cooperated with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Government, Agency for Youth and Sports, MLSP, the body in the Assembly formed by young MPs, the Cabinet of the President, Ministry of Health, City of Skopje, Council of Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs.

Regarding the cooperation with the local self-government, positive and not so positive experiences are noticed. Great satisfaction was expressed by the cooperation with the Municipality of Kisela Voda, Municipality of Staro Nagoricane, Municipality of Bogdanci, Municipality of Krivogashtani, Municipality of Gostivar, Municipality of Prilep, Municipality of Gazi Baba. A more intensive effort for cooperation is made by CSOs towards a part of the smaller municipalities, which "were not coordinated and did not know how to cope (with the pandemic)... if you do not call them repeatedly at least 3-4 times a week they will forget about you".

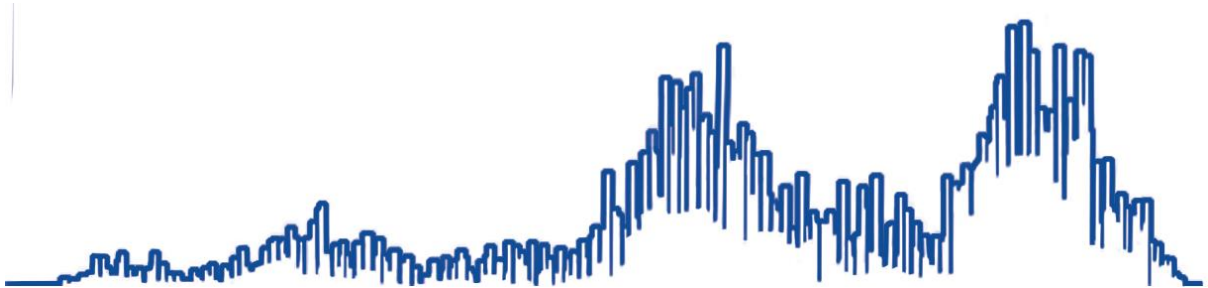
CSOs shared a dose of skepticism regarding the first attempt to cooperate with local self-government, and public institutions in general. CSOs whose target group is young people from rural areas are looking forward to

excellent cooperation. On the other hand, CSOs targeting the socially vulnerable and marginalized persons, share that despite the good cooperation with the institutions in some of the activities, they addressed their reaction to the government institutions "that they have forgotten the NGO sector a little", and there is a statement that they had good enough cooperation with the institutions, but were often somehow "stumbled". "Unfortunately, the institutions perceive us as critics, and not as collaborators, as it should be", is one of the negative comments regarding this cooperation, with another CSO adding that "... it was a challenge to wait for a long time for an answer because the institutions are probably not well coordinated, and it was not known whether some projects would be approved or not."

From the conducted interviews, regarding this issue, from the Special adviser for youth and sport and a representative from the Agency for Youth and Sports, we received information that they have already received nominated officials from a larger percentage of municipalities and that they will be announced by end of June 2021.

CSOs, when asked about the manner of selecting a donor, most often stated that the most common donors for their activities were foreign donors. All organizations had activities carried out with the support of foreign donors. A small number of activities are supported by the state, both before COVID-19 and during the pandemic. Two organizations used state support in terms of measures to deal with the pandemic, one of them received compensation for part of the salary of the employees in the organization (for 3 people in a period of 4 months), and one received one-time financial assistance (MKD 50,000.00), to continue its activities. One organization received financial support just before the pandemic started, but the activities were not implemented because the pandemic started, and the funds were canceled. Therefore, one of the participants believes that the state should pay attention to the civil sector and allocate an amount from the budget to deal with the pandemic. "But we did not have support, except for the one for COVID-19 from the Council for Cooperation between the Government and the civil society sector, from the General Secretariat, before the New Year."

# COVID-19 AND VULNERABLE YOUTH



## Context and Research questions

Efforts to flatten the curve during the COVID-19 pandemic often fail to consider how social distancing could affect vulnerable youth. Social support systems vital to the physical, mental, and emotional health of youth, such as schools, public parks, community centers, and recreational youth programs, are experiencing strains on their ability to provide services. Intersecting identity factors, such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and intellectual or physical disability, and socio-economic disadvantage may exacerbate the vulnerability of young people (e.g., homeless youth, young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), young migrants). (OECD 2020)

Restrictive measures and the closure of schools and kindergartens have made the volume of unpaid care work that is predominantly performed by women in North Macedonia "more visible" (before the crisis, 72% of unpaid work at home was performed by women). Working women faced the exceptional challenge of combining work responsibilities, homework (cooking, laundry, cleaning, disinfection, shopping, etc.), caring for children and other family members, helping with schooling/educating children, and many more additional activities that are part of everyday life during a pandemic crisis (including home care for patients with COVID-19 which directly exposes them to the risk of infection) (Reactor 2020a). Petkovska (2020) concludes that the sectors most affected by the crisis, and where most of the workers' rights violations occurred at the same time were those sectors where most of the employees were women. In the reports for violations of workers' rights in the Helsinki Committee from March to June 2020, 70% of the total number of reports were filed by women.

Within a period of only five months after the pandemic outbreak, more than one-eighth of women faced changes to the number of employed or income-earning household members. Because of the pandemic, they are living in non-income households or households with only one employed or income-earning member. This situation is more prominent among women respondents from Albanian, Roma, and Serbian ethnic communities. (Pavlovski, Antikj, Frishchikj, 2021)

We shall therefore elaborate on some of the findings (already presented above) from the perspective of

gender, place of living (urban vs. rural), ethnicity, LGBTQ+, people with disability, and single parents.

Although the level of digitalization and digital literacy in rural areas in North Macedonia have already been at an exceptionally low level, the latest study shows that the pandemic has pushed to the surface many of the problems deriving from this situation for people living in rural areas. The lack of trust in institutions and low digitalization has pushed people from rural areas to further risk their safety and lives by resolving administrative issues in person instead of online. (Rural Coalition 2020)

Some of the issues we shall look at are the government measures, education, work and balance between home and work obligations, the challenge to afford to pay for basic needs, family violence, and civic activism and volunteering.

## Findings

The findings presented in the previous chapters (coming from all four methods of inquiry) depict the answers from the whole sample of young people, CSOs, and Institutions available to us. Nevertheless, to be able to test some of the existing theories and hypotheses pointing to some potentially vulnerable youth groups (in general and in time of pandemic) we shall elaborate some of the results by accentuating the differences in opinions between different demographic strata. We shall focus on place (rural vs. urban), region, gender, ethnicity, identification of youth with the LGBTQ+ community, physical or mental disability, and being a single parent. The presented data is not exhaustive, and the share of these categories from the whole sample is presented in the methodology section (Graphs 1, 2, 3, 5, 13)

CSOs in the focus groups note several problems and challenges, which, according to them, were not present only now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, but they existed before. They emphasize that "now it has been visible how many problems young people have, especially in rural areas and smaller places." "The pandemic simply pounded young people in rural areas to the ground"; "The problems have not changed before and after Covid, only they are highlighted now," said CSO representatives in the focus groups.

As already mentioned, in some cases, the pandemic also had a positive effect on the online activities of some CSOs. Online access has enabled these organizations to reach young people from smaller places where they did not previously have a physical presence, so online clubs have enabled young people from these places to join clubs through online classes. The pandemic also pointed to the need for digitalization and increasing the level of digital literacy of young people, especially in rural areas, which opened the door to several CSOs to a whole new level of youth work to be able to successfully implement the planned projects in future.

But the challenges are stronger when it comes to marginalized communities. A special challenge in this regard is noticed by CSOs working with young people with specific development, young people from socially vulnerable categories, and young people from rural areas. Among those who work with young people with disabilities, from socially vulnerable groups and rural areas, the loss of the opportunity for direct encounters and physical interaction is reflected in the way they work with young people. "Getting in touch with them was difficult, and at first, for some, it was completely impossible", stated one CSD representative.

From the current activities that were stopped, paused, reorganized, etc., activities with the more specific groups (young people with disabilities, young people from rural areas) were completely stopped. Transfer of online activities proved difficult - lack of internet access and stable connection is especially problematic in rural areas, and lack of adequate and/or sufficient devices to follow and/or participate in online activities is a problem especially for large families and young people from socially vulnerable groups.

The most common problems for young people in the pandemic, according to CSD representatives, appeared in the education system. Even though the percentage of youth that did not continue their education during the pandemic was 11% (see Graph 20) we have noticed that the negative effect is larger for smaller ethnic communities than for the ethnic Macedonians. Namely, while 14% of ethnic Macedonians did not continue their education, 22% of the Albanian youth and 33% of the young people belonging to the smaller ethnic communities did not continue with education. A special emphasis on

Roma youth should be put, because more than 80% of the Roma respondents stopped their education in times of pandemic. In addition, among male respondents, the percentage of those that have not continued the education (21%) is higher than among female respondents (12%). Almost 15% of the respondents living in rural areas have not continued their education, while 10% of those living in urban areas. Finally, the higher proportion of those respondents that have not continued their education (but have not answered that it does not apply to them) could be found in the upper age categories (mostly above 25).

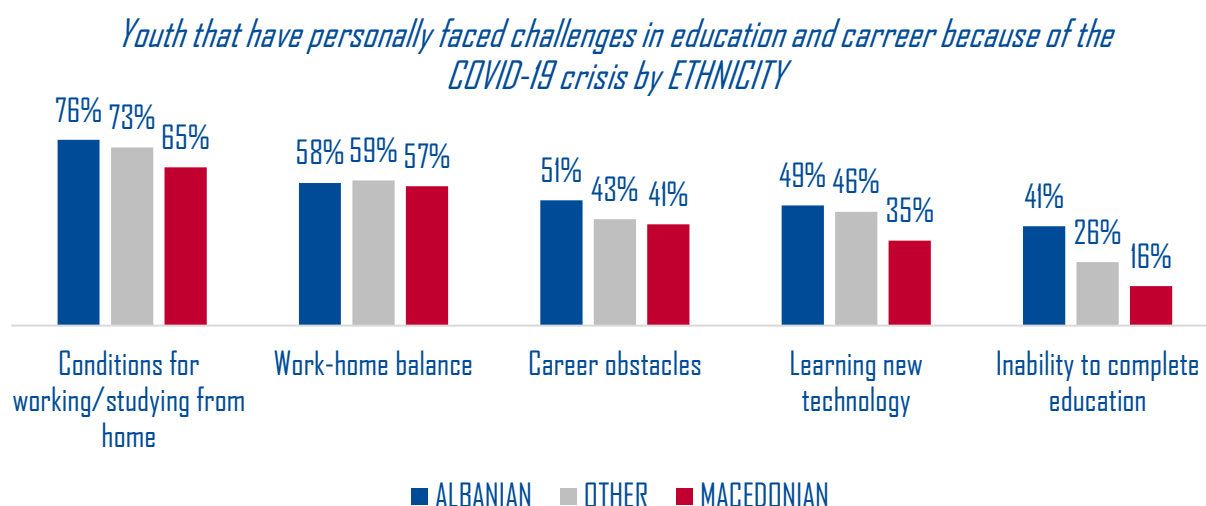
Regarding the most common obstacles for quality online education, SCO representatives convey negative experiences from their target youth, regarding: irregular access to electricity and reliable internet, insufficient devices for following online schooling, poor quality of the education system, unprepared educators for the new way of teaching, insufficient adaptation of the process to all categories of students, especially those with atypical development, for young people with hearing impairments "no educational content was available, neither within the formal nor in informal education ... they were not provided with a sign language interpreter". In addition, "teachers are not ready to use online tools, the quality of formal education and the focus of young people when listening to online lessons is reduced. We are talking about a so-called 'lost generation' of young people," said one representative. CSOs, whose target group is young people with atypical development, share that an additional challenge for them is "the small number of social contacts, with peers, and facing discrimination. "The poor-quality education system does not provide them with all the necessary materials, we want to have an inclusive education system, we do not have educational assistants, the teachers are not prepared", stated one CSD representative.

When we look at COVID-19 challengers for education, work, and work-home balance, the survey results show that non-majority ethnic communities face them more than the ethnic Macedonians. Chart 59 illustrates how conditions for work/studying from home is the biggest challenge young people have encountered, but the ethnic-Albanians and the smaller ethnic communities have faced it to a higher degree (76% of the ethnic Albanians facing this challenge, 73% of Others and 65% of ethnic Macedonians).

The same trend is present for career obstacles, learning new technology, and the challenge to finish education,

while there is almost no variation in terms of ethnicity for the "work-home balance" variable.

Chart 59. Youth that has personally faced challenges in education and career because of COVID-19 crisis by ethnicity.



The survey shows that young people in rural areas have indeed faced greater challenges in education stemming from the pandemic. Chart 60 shows that the biggest differences between rural and urban youth are in the unstable internet connection (15% more this challenge occurs in rural youth than in urban youth), lack of equipment (31% of rural youth and 14 % of young people in urban areas), the problem of regularly affording

Internet access (difference of 16%) and lack of help from an adult (teacher, parent, sibling). On the other hand, young people from rural areas showed a lower percentage of lack of motivation than those in urban areas. (Chart 60). Additionally, urban youth spent more time caring for another family member (53%) than rural youth (where 42% said they spent more time on this). (Chart 61)

Chart 60. Online learning challenges by place of living

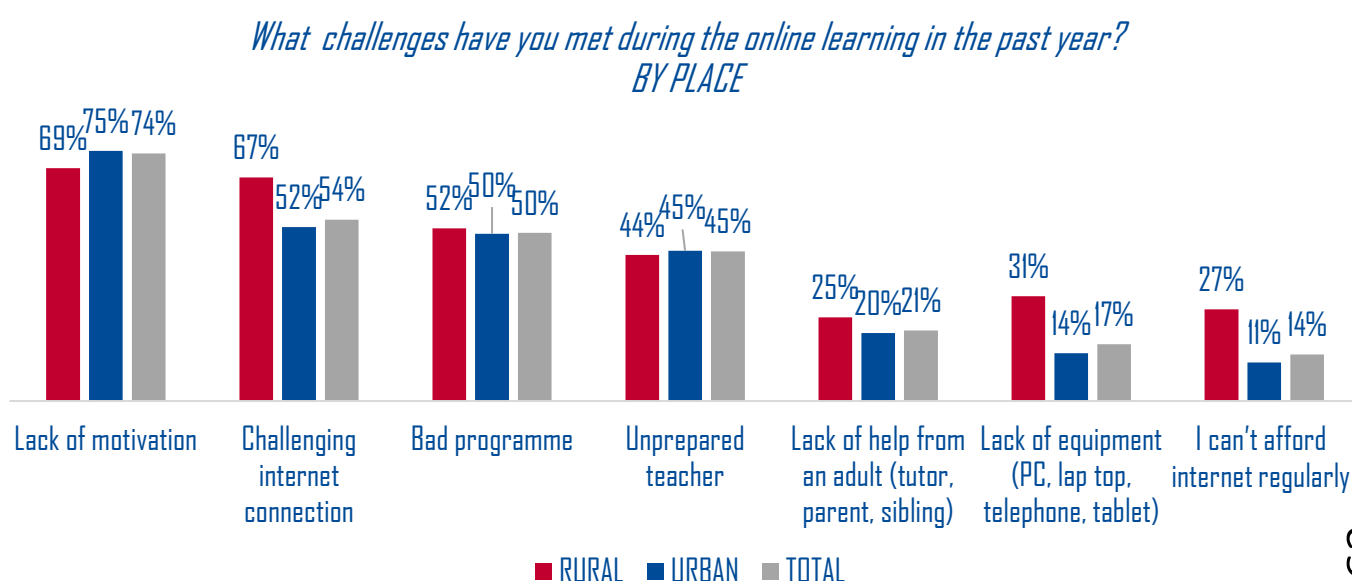
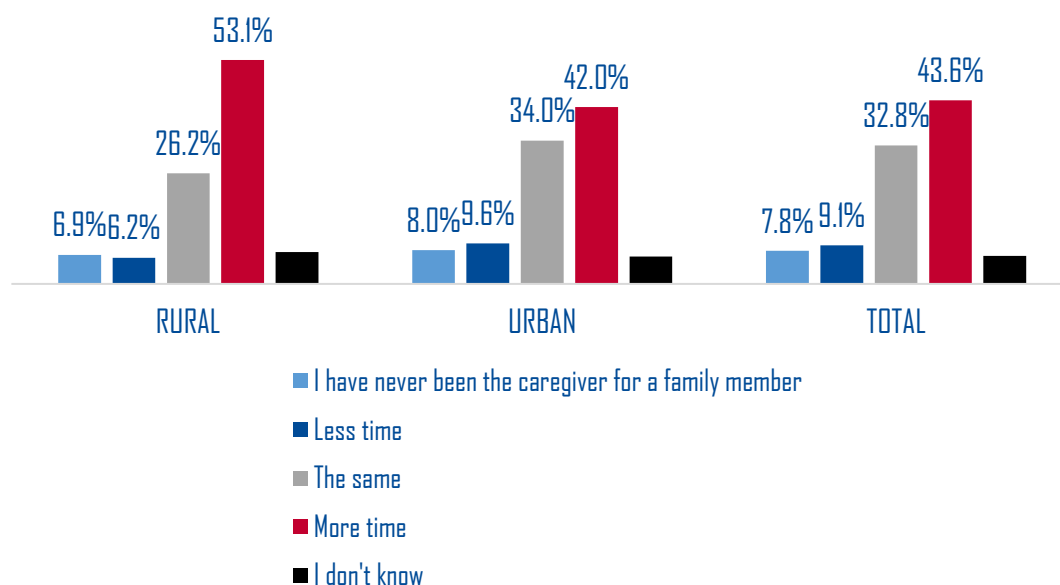




Chart 61. Time spent in care for family members by place of living

*Would you say you spend more or less time taking care of other family members (siblings, kids, elderly people, people with disabilities, people with illness) during the pandemic? BY PLACE*



According to focus group CSOs, the next challenge for young people is employment, and reduced income/economic power complicates their position in society. During the pandemic, "a significant number of young people (20% compared to other age groups) lost their jobs" due to unregulated legal obligations regarding employment. Young people often worked in catering and service companies, as freelancers. Young people with disabilities "do not have enough employment opportunities and those offered are not adapted," said one CSO representative.

Survey findings show that the pandemic had a greater negative impact on the workplace for the male respondents (31%) than the female (20%) (Chart 62a), and almost the same negative impact on youth from rural (by 26%) and urban areas. (24%). (Chart 62a) However, finding a job is assessed as more difficult by rural youth (52%) than by urban youth (48%). (Chart 63 b) There is no significant difference in perceptions regarding this question in male and female respondents. (Chart 63a) From Chart 62c, however, as expected, we note that in Skopje (which is a richer region) the impact on young people in terms of work is less negative than in the poorer regions (Northeast, Pelagonija, and East).

Chart 62a. COVID-19 impact on work by sex

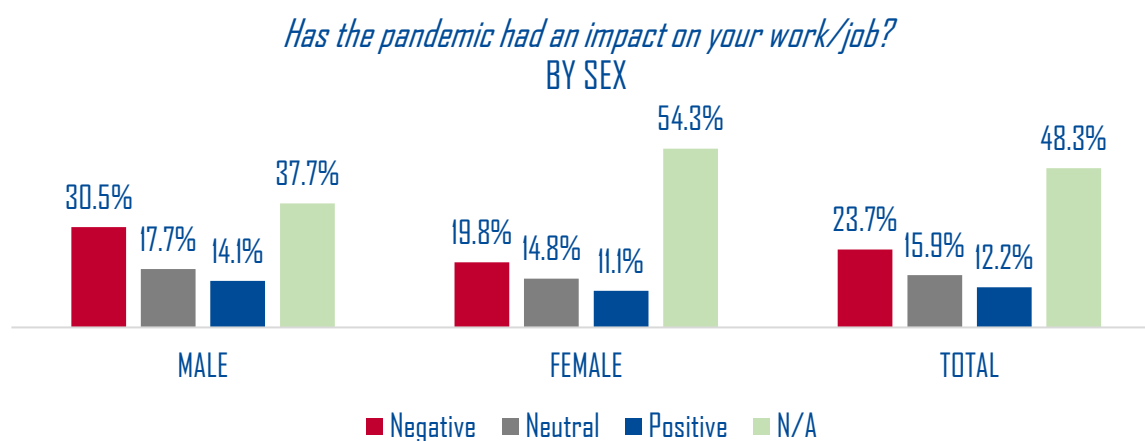


Chart 62b. COVID-19 impact on work by place

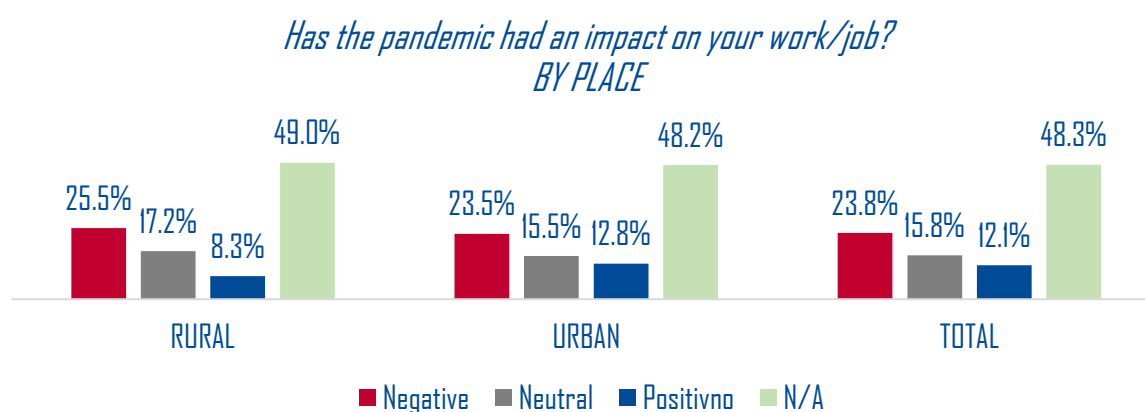


Chart 62c. COVID-19 impact on work by region

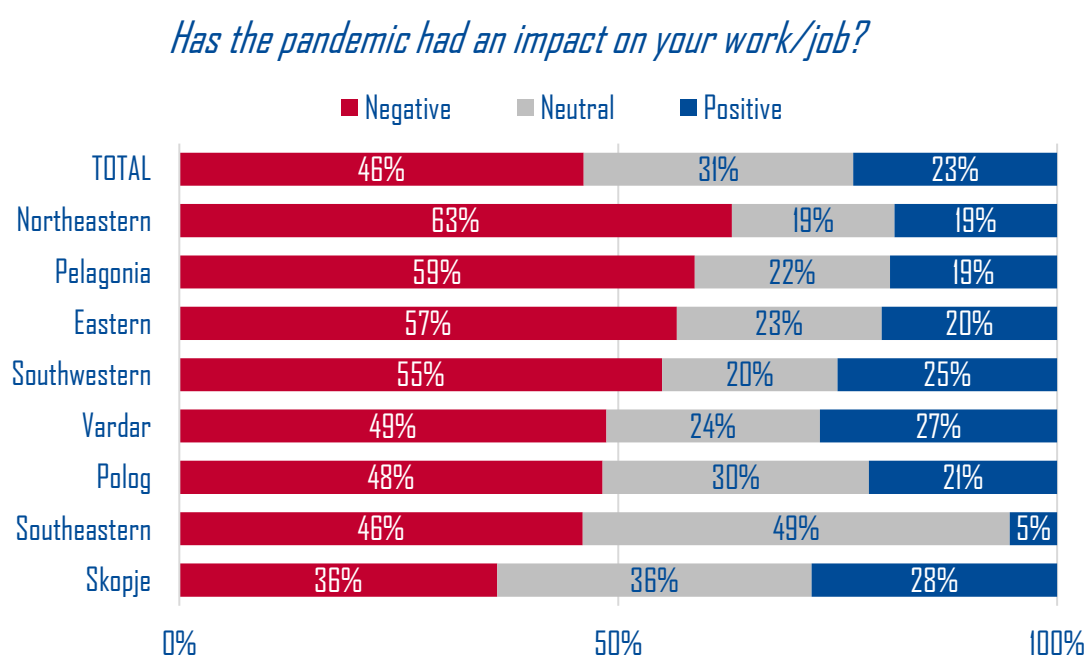


Chart 63a. Difficulty finding a job by sex

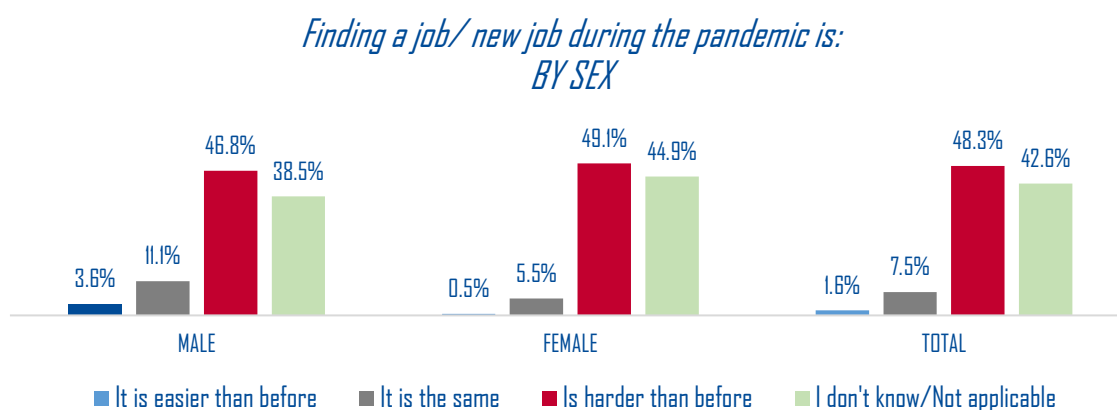
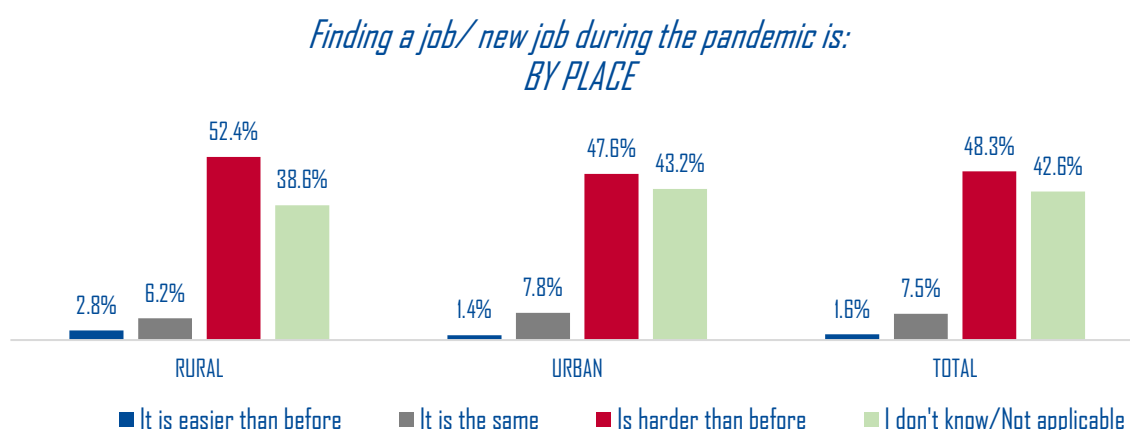


Chart 63b. Difficulty finding a job by place of living



The comparative figures in Charts 64a show that young people from rural areas have greater difficulty in providing basic means of living and meeting basic expenses. In terms of place of residence, the most noticeable are the differences in the possibility of paying for utilities, providing finances for a vacation, transportation costs, and money for clothes. (Chart 64a). In terms of ethnicity, we note (Chart 64b) that non-majority ethnic communities have more difficulty than ethnic Macedonians in meeting utility costs, contingencies, finances for vacation, clothing, and transportation. The Roma community has demonstrated the highest level of financial challenge to afford clothes, unexpected costs, and debts, the Albanians have demonstrated to have the highest challenge to pay utilities, afford holidays and pay for unexpected costs.

Social life and quality of life, in general, are emphasized as an additional problem by the representatives of CSOs. "Young people from smaller towns were not involved in creating policies related to their problems and demands in any way, neither through the local self-government nor in any other way". CSOs working in rural areas point out that "you can no longer find young people in small places", and where there are, "there is great apathy. It is very difficult to find someone who wants to volunteer, to come and help you in what you want to do, they think that there is some ulterior motive in everything, they think that they would come in vain and no one understands the benefit of contributing to the community, the local community of which we are all part as citizens."

Chart 64a. Financial difficulties in pandemic by place of living

*Has your household faced some of the following difficulties during the pandemic?*  
BY PLACE

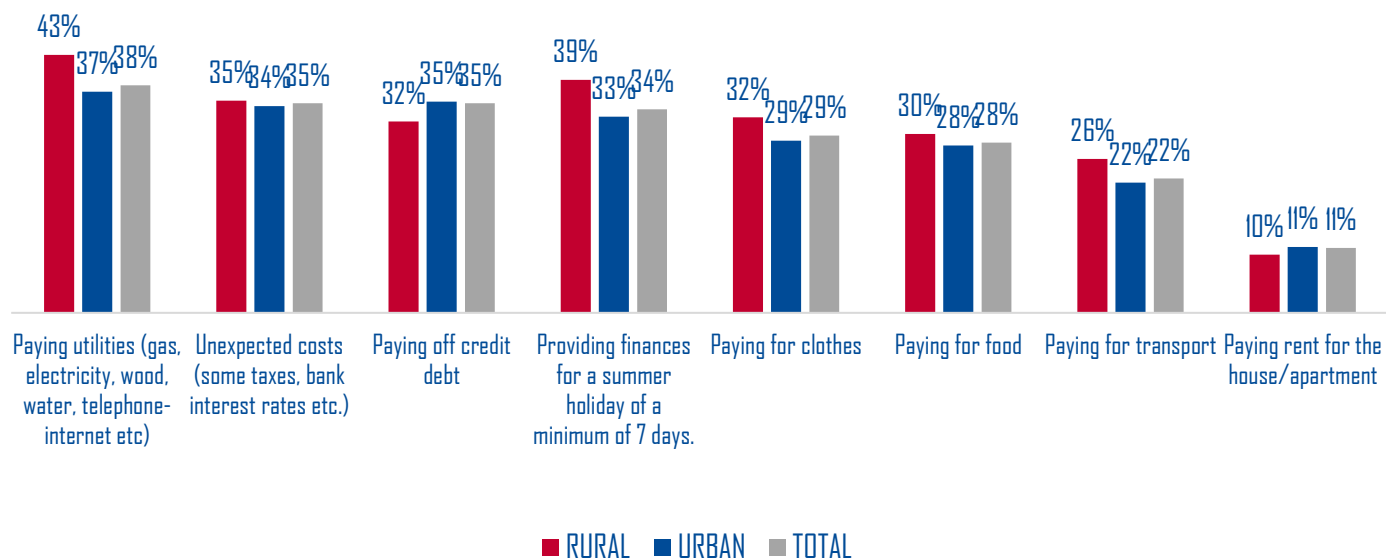
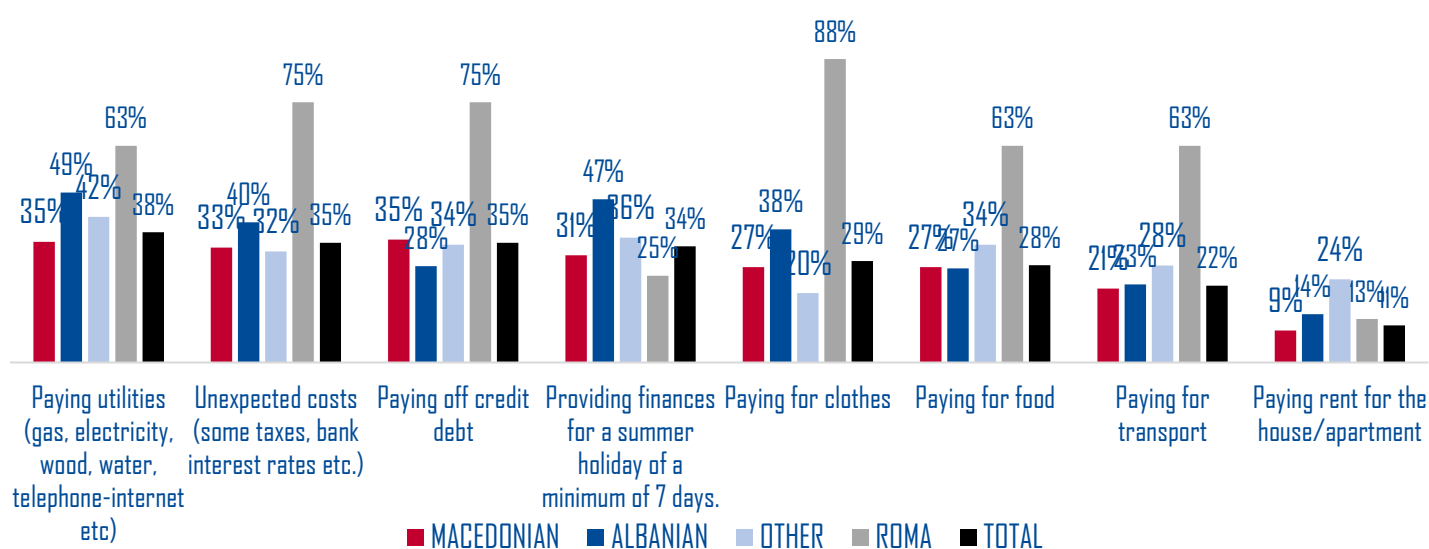


Chart 64b. Financial difficulties in pandemic by ethnicity

*Has your household faced some of the following difficulties during the pandemic?*  
BY ETHNICITY



The survey shows that, on average, although at a low level (20%), male and female respondents participated almost equally in youth organizations. (Chart 65a) On the other hand, younger people participated more in these organizations; of those aged 15 to 19 even 47%, and of those aged 25 to 29 16%. (Chart 65b) Additionally, there is no difference between the degree of membership in youth organizations among young people from rural and

urban areas (Chart 65c), which could be explained by the method of collecting these data, i.e., online survey. Namely, young people who are excluded from access to the Internet and social life, including CSOs, may not have reached this survey. This possibility could "falsely" overestimate the share of rural youth who are part of youth organizations.

Chart 65a. Engagement in youth organization by sex

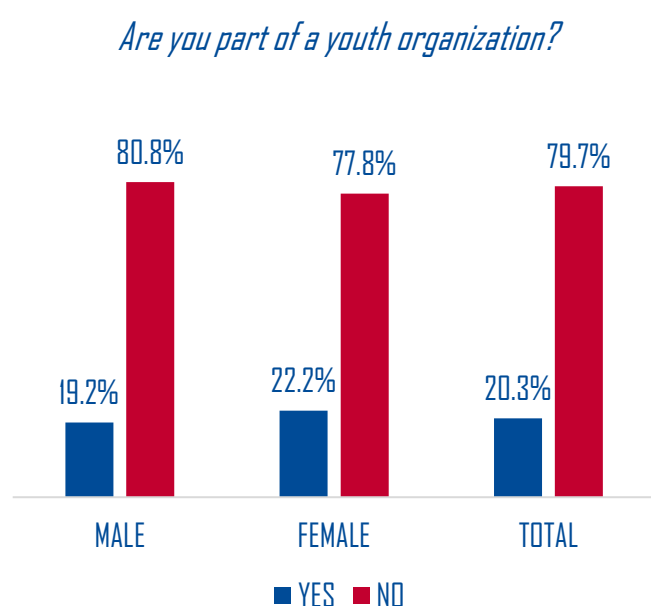


Chart 65b. Engagement in youth organization by age

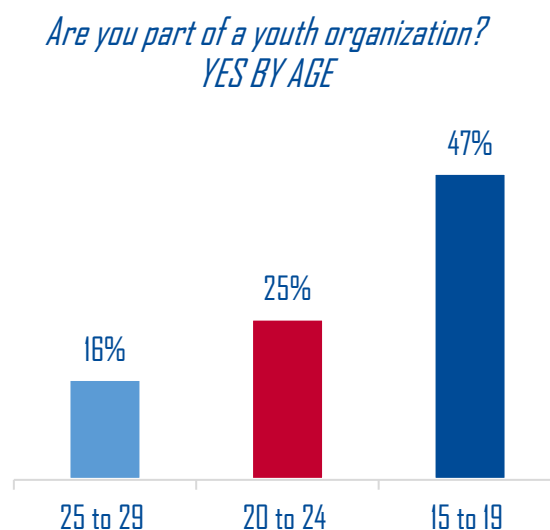
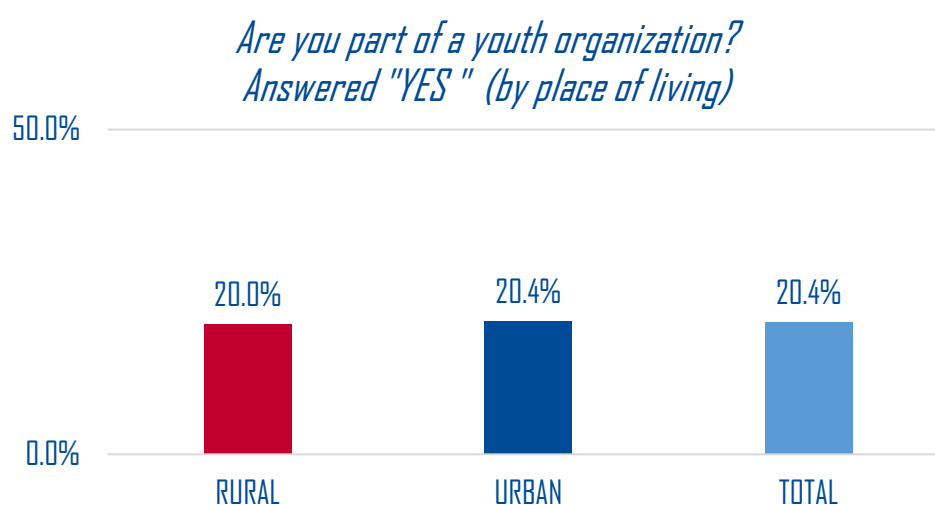


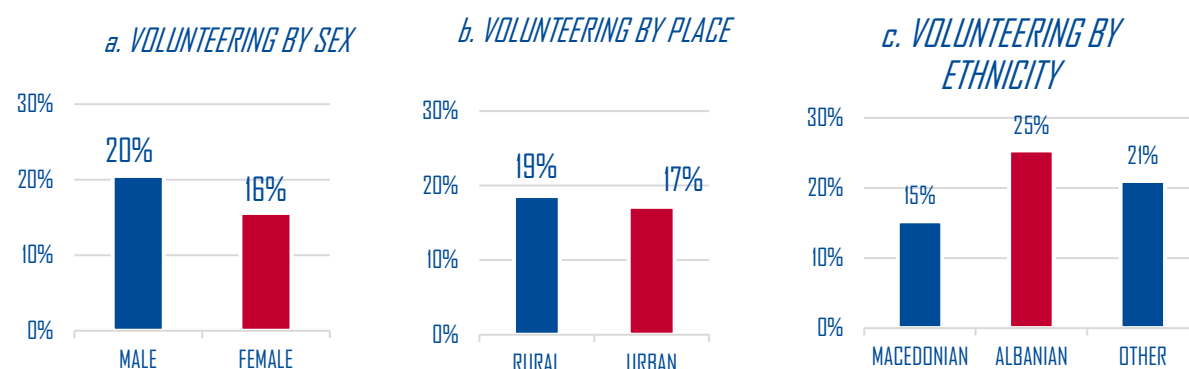
Chart 65c. Engagement in youth organization by place of living



While male respondents volunteered more during the pandemic than females (by 4%), rural youth compared to those in urban areas (by 2%) and young people from other ethnic communities more than ethnic Macedonians

(by 10%). Among the ethnic Albanians, there is the highest number of young people that have volunteered during the pandemic. (Chart 66 a, b, c)

Chart 66 a, b, c. Engagement in volunteering by sex, place, and ethnicity

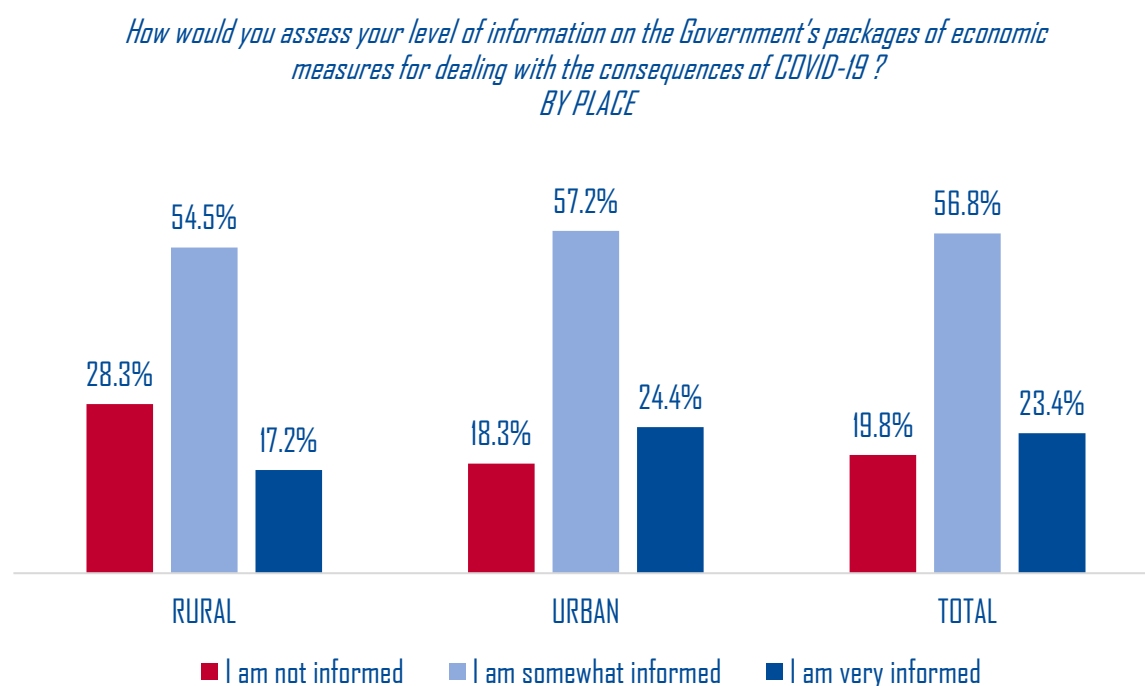


Regarding the government's economic measures to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, more than half of CSOs believe that the non-use of measures by young people is primarily because information on economic assistance during the pandemic did not reach all young people (especially those in rural areas and from socially

vulnerable categories) or have faced technical challenges in applying for state assistance.

The survey shows a difference of 10% between uninformed young people from rural areas and those from urban areas, which confirms this hypothesis. (Chart 67)

Chart 67. Information on Government measures by place of living



From Chart 68a we can see that there is no difference between the youth from rural and urban areas in the number of unused measures, but the rural ones have a smaller number of one and a larger number of three and more measures used. On the other hand, the smaller ethnic communities by 3% did not use any measure at all, and by 10% less used one measure (Chart 68b). Utilization

of two or more measures is noticed in the smaller ethnic communities, which in absolute numbers is still quite a low level of utilization of the measures. Roma youth has the highest rate of youth that has not used any measure (63% of Roma), the Albanian community 53%, while 47% of the Macedonians and 40% of the Other smaller communities have not used a single measure,

Chart 68a. Benefiting from Government measures by place of living

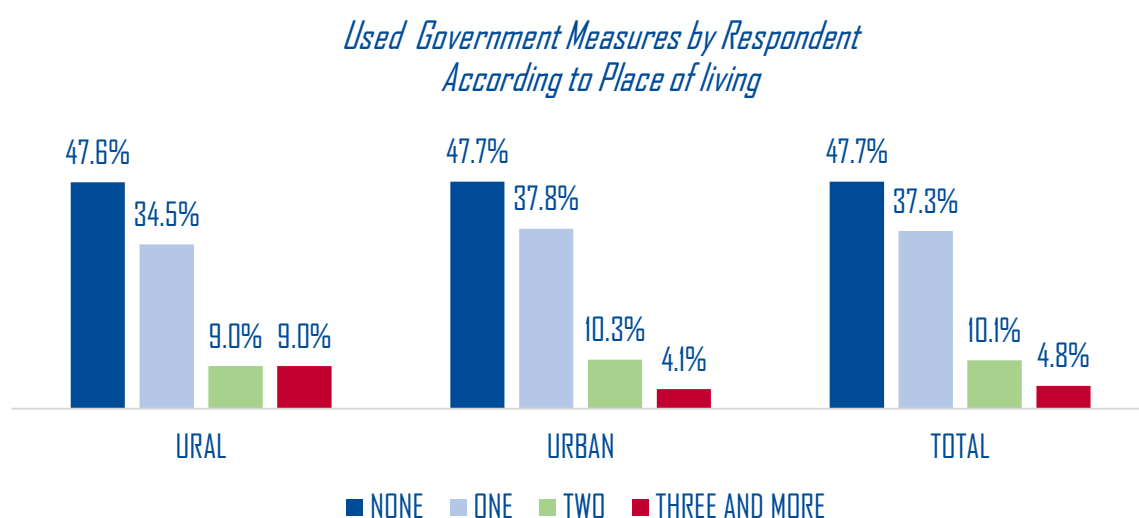
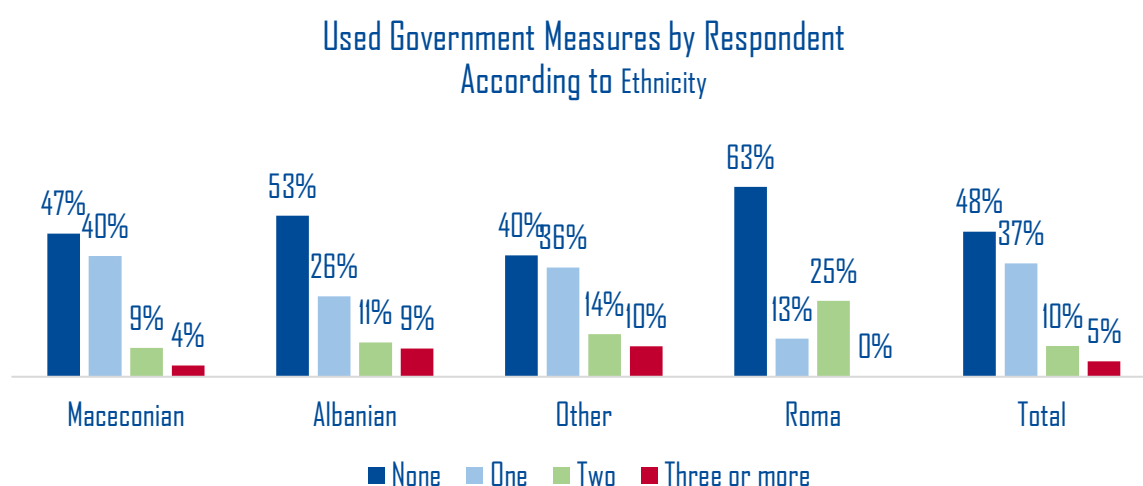
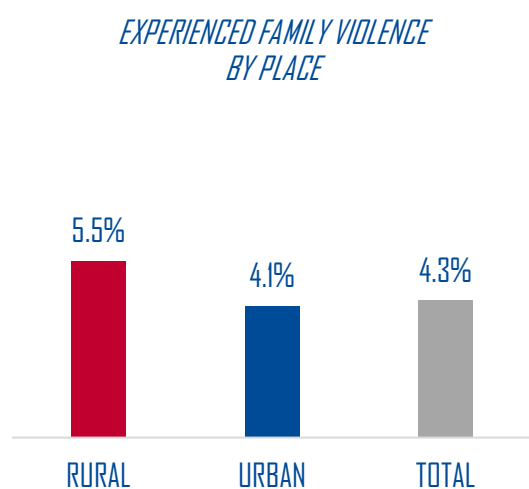


Chart 68b. Benefiting from Government measures by ethnicity



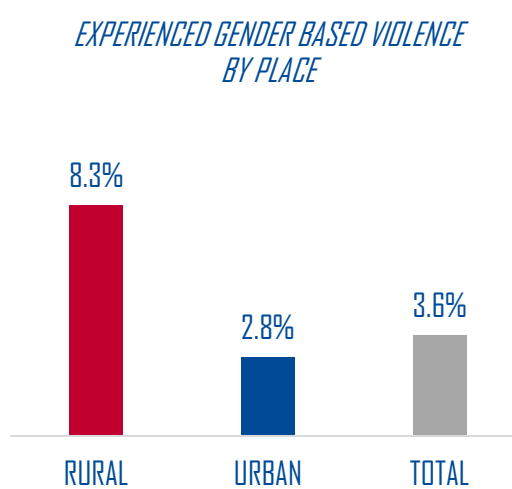
CSDs in focus groups also point to an increase in domestic violence "... in smaller towns either there are no shelters or if there is for sure the abuser would know where the victim is." The survey shows that 4.3% of young people reported domestic violence during the pandemic, which occurred by 1.4% more in rural than in urban areas. (Chart 69)

Chart 69. Experiencing family violence by place of living



Regarding gender-based violence, on the other hand, although generally to a slightly lower degree (3.6% of respondents), a significant difference can be noticed in terms of place of residence, with the fact that in rural areas 8.3% of young people reported such violence and 2.8% of young people in urban areas. (Chart 70)

Chart 70. Experiencing gender violence by place of living



When asked if they think they have the opportunity for professional development, people with physical disabilities mostly think "no" (39%), followed by people with atypical development (38%) and single parents (33%). (Chart 71). To the question "In my daily life others treat me with respect", the respondents generally answered positively (90% answered "yes" or "somewhat

yes"). Single parents and people with physical disabilities think that this is not the case with them (31% answered "no" to both). (Chart 72) The LGBTQ+ youth surveyed generally see opportunities for their professional development and believe that others treat them with respect (33%) or to some extent with respect (48%).



Chart 71. The feeling of having access to opportunities for occupational development by vulnerable youth

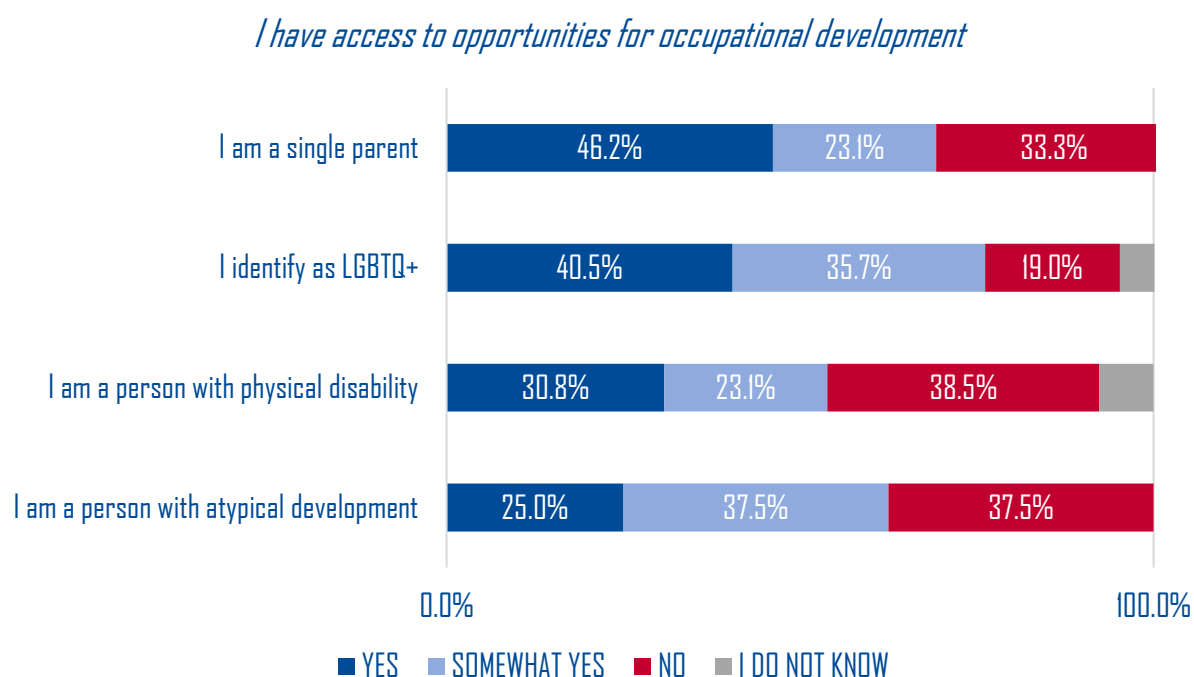
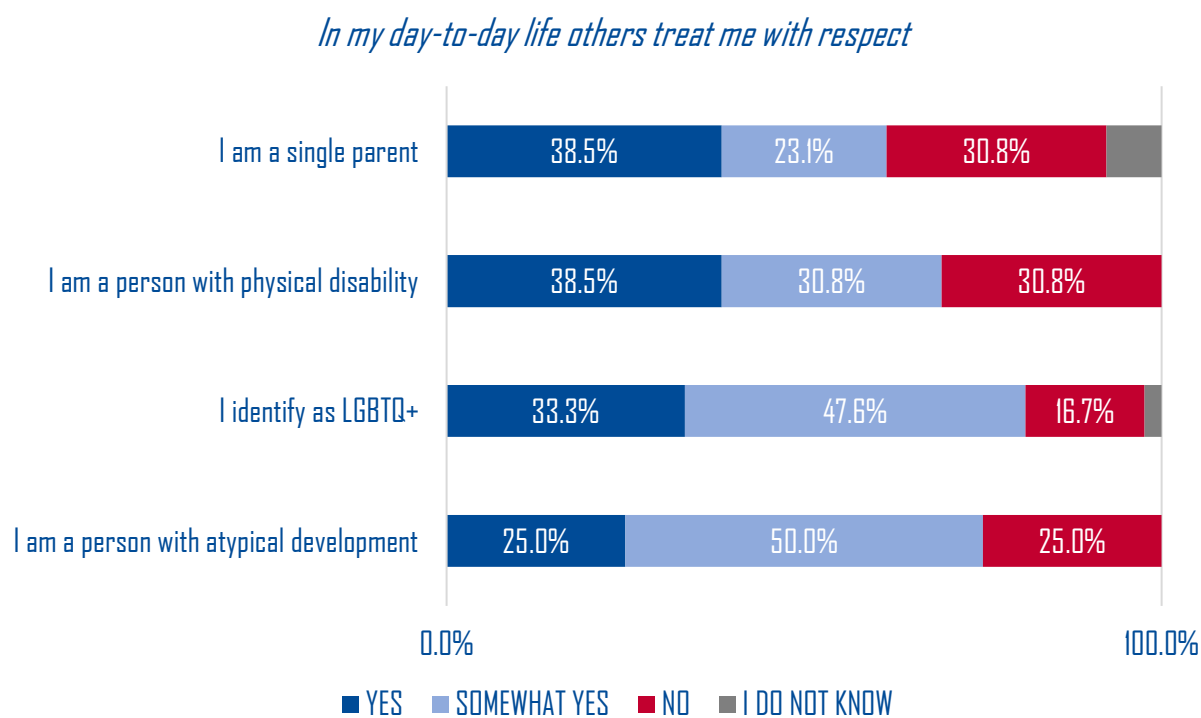
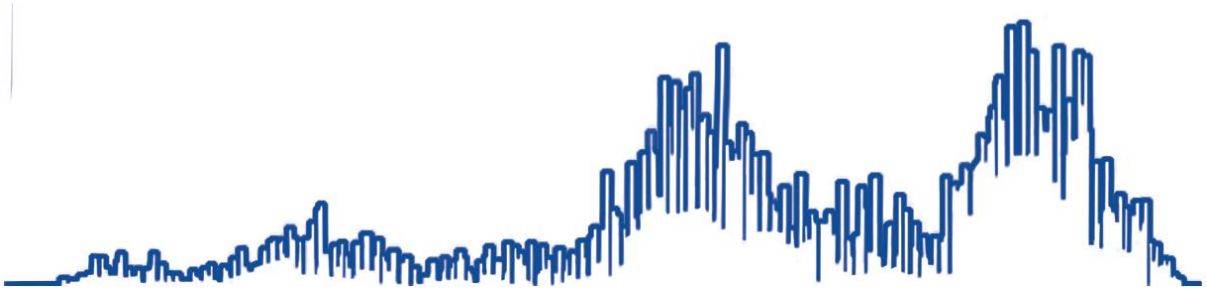


Chart 72. The feeling of being respected in day-to-day life by vulnerable youth categories



# CONCLUSIONS



## **Institutional setup and political framework**

A general conclusion from the thematic analysis of strategies, legislation, and measures addressing youth position tells us that the governments have acknowledged the issues, but it lacks in action. The legislation on youth is only at its beginnings, with institutions struggling to find a leading and coordinating institution in youth matters. Many youth issues are dispersed in different sectors and institutions. This makes it hard to follow what measures are devised and implemented by whom. While all main documents and measures address youth in general, there is a lack of a specialized or intersectional approach towards vulnerable youth. At the same time, action and operational plans do not offer a view on how the situation has changed with the implementation of the devised measures, and the existing strategies and action plans should be revised in line with the new situation and do not respond to the global health crisis. Finally, the government should focus more on the challenges that youth persons faced in the pandemic, not only economic but educational and mental and physical health-related, and offer more concrete and focused measures.

## **Government measures**

The measures introduced by the Government are not structural, having in mind the long-term effects of the pandemic on the economy. Half of the respondents-young people consider them inefficient. They are informed at a high degree regarding the economic measures, and yet, half of the respondents did not use any measure (especially men and older age groups). The most used measure is the "The domestic payment card of MKD 3000". Several categories of young people, such as independent artists, have been neglected from these measures. The long-term effect of these policies is questionable, and more so, they could threaten social equality due to the favorable positions they constructed for employers rather than employees.

## **Education**

Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted the population. It affected not only the pupils and students, but families, institutions, and the whole society. Due to the COVID-19, 11% of youth in North Macedonia have

stopped their education and many of them have been negatively impacted and met different challenges. Additionally, physical distance from the classroom required new technologies and equipment, parental supervision, and learning new teaching methods. Although there were numerous organized donations of computers/tablets by private companies, individuals, humanitarian organizations as well as local municipalities for students to be able to follow the teaching, still 17% of the youth do not have the needed equipment and almost 14% cannot afford a regular internet connection.

## **Socio-economic situation**

The data from the survey of young people show that the pandemic had a mostly negative impact on the socio-economic situation of the respondents, with one-third of them reporting that the pandemic was an obstacle to be with their partners. Half of the respondents faced an increased volume of domestic responsibilities and time spent providing care for family members, especially female respondents; as well as with reduced income and/or working hours, and at the expense of that - difficulties in settling the basic costs, of which in the largest percentage for utilities. Also, 8% of the total number of respondents lost their job, which seriously affected their family budgets. Two-thirds of young people said they would leave the country as a consequence of the pandemic, which is a strong indicator of their dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation.

## **Emotional well-being**

We can conclude that to improve their emotional health, young people often invest time in watching TV, series, movies, surfing the Internet and spending quality time with family, and least in volunteering and writing. The Internet, as a tool, is most often used for following social media, and the least for educational purposes, webinars, and volunteerism, which is additionally noticed by the ways of communication, where social media ranks highest on the list. Physical contacts, which are the biggest challenge to overcome, youth are relishing in the park or at home with friends and rarely do it in a hobby group or youth associations. All data indicate that young people almost do not volunteer and pay too little attention to

extracurricular educational methods and non-formal education. The strongest challenge faced by young people is the limited freedom of movement, as well as the deteriorating epidemiological situation in the country. At the bottom of the list are again the challenges of smooth volunteering, youth activism, and civic participation, which further point to the fact that young people are not much focused on volunteering, solidarity, and empathy.

The rising level of anxiety and panic in general, as well as the negative effects of the campaign for the solidarity of young people with the elderly, confirm the initial hypothesis regarding emotional health, which is somewhat confirmed by the proportion of people who have become more violent than before. Finally, contrary to the initial assumptions of the authorities where young people were put on the wall for non-compliance with the measures, only a small number of them say that they violated the quarantine and curfew at the expense of private secret parties, and most of them believe that for overcoming the pandemic the necessary measures are vaccination and compliance with the measures.

### **Civic engagement and volunteering**

The data from the survey suggests that a minority of young people participate in volunteer or civic activities that contribute to society. The percentage of citizens who were members of some organization, group, or club did not significantly change in the years before and during the pandemic. The law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies offering a framework for increasing youth voice and engagement, the data shows that only one-third (32%) of the youth have been active/ members of some organization and only 6% of the respondents were part of the councils. Moreover, with the law on volunteering the process is regulated and the volunteering effort for the volunteer and the broader community are recognized,

still, only 29% of the respondents volunteered before the pandemic and 17% volunteered during the pandemic.

### **CSDs and youth engagement**

The health crisis significantly changed the way of communication and coordination between CSDs and youth. The challenges that they are facing are the result of the transfer from physical to digital communication and online activities. There are decreasing numbers in involving of youth in CSDs activities because not all youth has a possibility to engage online and not everyone is familiar with the electronic tools.

### **Vulnerable youth**

Women, young people from rural areas, and non-majority ethnic groups demonstrated a higher degree of vulnerability to certain pandemic challenges. Women's balance between home and work duties has been shaken, and rural women faced more family and gender-based violence. Youth from the rural areas faced a more challenging time in school, in terms of technology and support for studying, they have been also more affected financially and unable to a higher degree to pay for the basic utilities, clothes, transportation, and holiday. They have also been less informed regarding the economic measures, less engaged in social life and volunteering, and find searching for a job in pandemic much harder than youth from urban areas. Non-majority ethnic groups are negatively affected by the lack of information on the government economic measures, and just as rural youth, they have more trouble covering the everyday living expenses and utilities than the ethnic Macedonians. Finally, young people with a physical disability consider that other people do not treat them with respect in everyday life and that they have much fewer professional opportunities than others.

## ENDNOTES

- i. The selection of CSOs for the focus groups was done based on a thorough desk analysis on the civil society sector (mainly relying on the register from the Government Sector for Cooperation with CSOs and CIVIKA MOBILITAS' dataset). We have listed 40 main CSO organizations and umbrella organizations (networks) working directly with youth or marginalized/vulnerable groups. Then we have made the narrower selection based on CSOs' visible activities in the past three years and invited the ones that have shown recent activity. CSOs and CSO Networks participating in the focus groups are: Humanitarian and Charitable Roma Association „Mesecina“ – Gostivar, SPPMD Institute Macedonia, Civil association for the assistance of homeless and socially disadvantaged families and individuals KINDNESS, HOPS Healthy Options Project Skopje, Local Development Agency Struga (LDA), Info Front- Prilep, Mladiinfo International, Association for Legal Education and Transparency LET STATION, Association for multicultural integration Inclusion Ohrid, The Center for Youth Activism Krik, MDF-Youth Educational Forum, Rural Coalition – Kichevo, The National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM), Volunteers Centre- Skopje.
- ii. According to the estimates for 2020, 60% of North Macedonia's population live in urban areas (Reference), yet it is highly likely that young people have largely emigrated (in urban areas or abroad). These estimates do not account for this. Data shows low birth rates in rural areas, as well as a general trend of lowering numbers of the population. Accurate and recent data is not available due to the lack of Census data since 2002, therefore it is difficult to assume how many young people live in rural areas. (Rizankoska and Trajkoska Naumoska, 2020). Be that as it may, the youth from rural areas' share in the sample is possibly somewhat lesser than the real figure due to two technical reasons: the question phrasing in our survey (i.e., we ask about the current place of living, not the official registered residency, which most likely differs for those young people living in bigger urban areas/and the Capital), and the fact that due to the pandemic limitations (safety travel risks mainly) we have predominantly relied on online pooling, which means that the survey could have not reached some of the rural youth that lack technical/internet equipment. The fieldwork was done with the assistance of CSOs working in rural areas, nevertheless, the possibility that some rural youth has been unintentionally excluded stays. One additional significant factor is the reluctance of young people to say they come from rural areas, which in online surveys could be one limitation. We have, however, gathered a large sample of 1002 young people from North Macedonia (somewhat close to a national general survey), 151 of which from rural areas from the eight regions. Therefore, we were able to run crosstabulations and make inferences regarding the particularities of youth coming from rural areas.
- iii. Two main factors explain the higher percentage of women included in the sample. The first one is of a methodological nature. Female respondents were more responsive to the online survey (distributed via social media ads). The second one is from a theoretical point of view. Namely, the consulted literature on COVID-19 indicated that the pandemic has had a higher negative influence on women, therefore, we decided that the overrepresentation of women could be of benefit for the special questions such as the one on the balance of work and domestic chores. We have, nonetheless, run a robustness check analysis on two random samples to test for biased responses related to gender.
- iv. The ongoing strategy covers the period 2016-2025 [<http://strategijazamladi.mk/sites/default/files/Нацонална-стратегија-за-млади-2016-2025.p>] and follows the previous 10-year strategy that covered the period 2005-2015.
- v. Link to its activities. <https://www.sobranie.mk/2020-2024-aktivnosti-ns-article-konstitutivna-sednica-na-klubot-za-mladinski-prashanja-i-politiki.nspx>
- vi. Links to the methods for online learning. <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-методика-на-настава-на-далечина-финално.pdf>; <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-воннаставни-активности-од-далечина-финално.pdf>; <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-спроведување-училишни-клубови-и-секции-од-далечина-2020-21-финално.pdf>; [https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo\\_za\\_nastavnicite\\_za\\_ocenuvanje.pdf](https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo_za_nastavnicite_za_ocenuvanje.pdf); [https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo\\_za\\_realizacija\\_na\\_nastavata\\_vo\\_posebnite\\_uchilishta.pdf](https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo_za_realizacija_na_nastavata_vo_posebnite_uchilishta.pdf)
- vii. All relevant institutions have been invited for interviews, and despite our team's considerable attempts to schedule interviews, some institutions were unresponsive.
- viii. Interviewed representative, Interview 4
- ix. The report provided by the Employment Service Agency
- x. Interviewed representative, Interview 1 and 6

- xi. <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Koncept%20za%20dalecinsko%20obrazovanie-design-MK-with%20logos.pdf>
- xii. Government of North Macedonia. Government economic measures for dealing with the crisis from COVID-19. <https://vlada.mk/ekonomski-merki-covid19>
- xiii. Information on the status of the realization of economic measures for dealing with COVID-19. Available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/24854>
- xiv. <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-методика-на-настава-на-далечина-финално.pdf> ; <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-воннаставни-активности-од-далечина-финално.pdf> ; <https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Упатство-за-спроведување-училишни-клубови-и-секции-од-далечина-2020-21-финално.pdf> ; [https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo\\_za\\_nastavnicite\\_za\\_ocenuvanje.pdf](https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo_za_nastavnicite_za_ocenuvanje.pdf) ; [https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo\\_za\\_realizacija\\_na\\_nastavata\\_vo\\_posebnite\\_uchilishta.pdf](https://www.bro.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Upatstvo_za_realizacija_na_nastavata_vo_posebnite_uchilishta.pdf)
- xv. The Special adviser for youth and sport, during the interview, shared that six organizations in total (without mentioning their names) were included in the process of preparation of the government economic measures for dealing with the pandemic.
- xvi. UNSHM's FB announcement. <https://www.facebook.com/unshm.mk/photos/pcb.798543274072164/798543177405507>
- xvii. Government of North Macedonia. Zaev for the Sate Exam: Mutually agreed solution that guarantees quality of the high school graduation exam and guarantees registration in the Universities home and abroad. Available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/24279?fbclid=IwAR2AyaZuLLOHmG27WmQil5a3tDatbOKmxP-W8hfS2Dnn71W0HUPi9pREko>
- xviii. The TV-Classroom is a collaboration between the Ministry, the Bureau for the Development of Education, UNICEF, children's television producers OXO and national broadcaster Macedonian Radio and Television, and provides programs for younger children. The E-Classroom builds on the UNICEF-supported Eduino online learning platform: a platform that was already in place in North Macedonia to support early learning and that was due to be launched later in 2020. Instead, UNICEF and implementing partner SmartUp - Social Innovation Lab mobilized every available resource to make the platform available immediately, expanding the scope of this one-stop-shop for educational content to cover lower primary, primary, lower-secondary education for all children aged 6 to 14.
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## APPENDIX I QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SURVEY WITH YOUTH

On the 11th of March, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic, better known as the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact has been felt in all the countries in the world and young people have not been exempt from the difficulties coming with the restrictions, lockdowns, and other safety measures.

Social/emotional/mental state

1. How would you say your personal feelings of empathy and solidarity with other people changed with the beginning of the pandemic?

They have declined

Remained at the same level

They have increased

I do not know

2. How has the COVID-19 campaign for responsibility and solidarity of young people with the elderly and vulnerable groups affected your stress level?

It has decreased

It didn't affect me

It has increased

I don't know

3. What 3 of the following aspects of the pandemic were most difficult for you to overcome the:

Restriction of movement (curfew/social

distancing/intergenerational gap)

Travel restrictions (closed borders for holidays, personal matters, work)

Worsening of the epidemiological situation (rising numbers of infected/deceased/insufficient medical supplies and patient accommodation).

Restriction of social contacts (gatherings, concerts, clubs, kafana)

Restrictions for family celebrations (weddings, graduations)

Restriction on visiting temples, cemeteries, observing holidays

Closing of schools, e-learning.

Unfavorable conditions for activism, volunteerism, civic participation.

4. Has your level of anxiety changed during the pandemic?

It decreased

Remained the same

It increased

I don't feel anxiety.

I prefer not to answer.

5. Who has been your biggest support during the pandemic? (up to 2 answers)

My parents

My siblings

Other family member(s)

My boyfriend/girlfriend/partner/husband/wife

A close friend

Informal socialization with friends

My colleagues

A teacher

School staff

A professional (psychologist, therapist, support group)

Scouts or other youth-focused club

CSDs

Municipality programs

I had no support

I didn't need support.

6. Compared to the period before the pandemic, to what extent have you

Used medicine (Ibuprofen, Ketonal, antidepressant)?

Used substances (marijuana, opiates, ecstasy, cocaine)?

Consumed Alcohol?

Gambled?

Experienced illegal activities?

Been violent (verbally and physically)?

Never

Less than before

The same

More than before

I do not know

7. How did you spend most of your leisure time during the pandemic? (up to 3 answers )

Listening to music

Reading

Expanding my knowledge using the open access online courses

Watching TV, series, movies etc.

Watching informative/educational program, documentaries on TV

Practicing sports/workout.

Online surfing

Hanging out with friends

Escaping lockdown to party (in secret)

Shopping/Online shopping

Arts and crafts

Gardening

Spending quality time with my family

Writing

Volunteering

I do nothing, I relax

Other

8. Where do you and your friends/peers usually gather? (Up to 2 answers)

Park  
Coffee shop  
School  
Friend's house  
Hobby club/associations  
Kafana/Restaurant  
Private/secret parties  
Nowhere  
Other

9. What is the most common way to communicate with your friends/peers?

Email  
Text  
FB/Messenger  
Twitter  
TikTok  
Youtube  
Instagram  
Phone  
Viber  
Whatsapp  
Telegram  
In person  
Online forums  
Other

10. To what extent have you been participating in the following online activities? (never, sometimes, very often)

Workshops/ Webinars  
Conferences/ Lectures  
Meetings  
Gaming  
Volunteering  
Connecting on social media

11. Have you personally faced challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (yes - no - not applicable)

Lowered family income/budget  
Increase in household chores  
Insufficient help in providing care for family member(s)  
Work-home balance  
Conditions for working/studying from home  
Physical health issues  
Mental health issues  
Reduced contacts with friends  
End of relationship  
Gender based violence  
Family based violence  
Career obstacles  
Learning new technology  
Inability to complete education  
Obstacles to be with my partner

12. Have travel restrictions affected you in terms of? (yes/no)

Studying abroad  
Reuniting with family/partner  
Visiting relatives/ friends abroad  
Exploring/ traveling for leisure  
Emigrating  
Working abroad

13. Has the pandemic motivated you to think about emigrating from the country?

No  
Somewhat yes  
Yes

14. What do you believe would be the solution to the pandemic? (up to 2 answers)

Vaccination  
Some other medical solutions  
Herd immunity (natural infection of the vast majority)  
Time (the virus will go away by itself).  
Following safety measures (masks, distance, hygiene) will eradicate the virus  
When political elites decide so  
I do not believe there is a solution to the pandemic  
I do not believe there is a serious problem to start with  
I do not know  
Other

Government measures

15. How would you assess your level of information on the Government's packages of economic measures for dealing with the consequences of COVID-19

I am not informed  
I am somewhat informed  
I am very informed

16. How would you assess the efficiency of the Government's packages of economic measures for dealing with the consequences of COVID-19

not efficient  
somewhat efficient  
very efficient  
I don't know

17. Which one of the following measures have you been the beneficiary of? (multiple answers possible)

Minimum wage for the months of April and May, as well as contributions through the Ministry of Culture for independent artists  
Monthly salary (cash benefit) for citizens who lost their jobs due to the crisis, in the amount of 50% of the average salary of the employee

Compensation of MKD 7,000 per household for persons without employment or persons who were part of the informal economy  
 Voucher of MKD 6,000 for domestic tourism  
 Domestic payment card of MKD 3000 (this measure covered all employees with a net salary of less than 15,000 who don't have other income.)  
 Financial support up to MKD 6,000 for young people for co-financing for trainings or for participation in a university or accommodation in dormitories  
 Voucher of MKD 30,000 for co-financing trainings, trainings for skills and knowledge of information technology to enable faster employment.  
 Cash compensation for citizens who lost their jobs from March 11 to April 30.  
 Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for young people aged 16 to 29 who were not covered by previous measures  
 Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for single parents  
 Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for unemployed passive job seekers  
 Payment card in the amount of MKD 6,000 for independent artists, filmmakers, cultural workers and entertainers  
 Minimum gross salary in the amount of MKD 21.776 for the months of October, November and December 2020 for the registered tourist guides  
 Financial support for Roma entrepreneurs by creating a "Matching Fund for Entrepreneurship for Roma"  
 None of these measures

Have you filed a complaint regarding not getting financial aid from the Government from the measures you consider apply to you?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Does not apply

#### Activism/ volunteering

18. Have you been active in some organization before the pandemic?  
 No  
 Yes

19. What kind of organization have you been/are active in?  
 Political party  
 NGO  
 Humanitarian organization  
 Interest group  
 A syndicate/Union  
 Business association  
 Hobby group  
 Sport group  
 Agricultural cooperative  
 Other

20. Which of the following statements do you identify with? (yes-no)  
 I volunteered before the pandemic

I continued volunteering during the pandemic  
 I started volunteering during the pandemic  
 My volunteering engagement was interrupted  
 I stopped volunteering because of the pandemic  
 I plan to start volunteering soon

21. What kind of volunteer job have you done during the pandemic? (multiple answers possible)

Distribution of food and hygiene products to vulnerable groups  
 Helping the elderly  
 Helping families with tutoring  
 Helping medical staff  
 Helping in NGO work  
 I did not volunteer during the pandemic  
 Other

22. How has volunteering work influenced you? (yes-no)  
 It increased your personal satisfaction/happiness  
 It helped you spend your time doing good deeds.  
 It helped you feel physically active/healthy.  
 It helped you stay mentally strong  
 I did not volunteer

23. What motivates you to volunteer/ help other people?  
 I want to help other people  
 I want to meet new people/ friends  
 My relatives help, too  
 I think I will learn new things/ skills  
 It helps me in my career development  
 I had a free time to do that  
 That is part of my religious beliefs  
 Other  
 I never volunteer

24. Are you part of a youth organization?  
 Yes  
 No

26. If no, why? (up to 3 answers)

I don't have time for that  
 I need to take care of my family  
 I need to study  
 I do not know any youth organization where I can be involved  
 I am shy, I don't make friends easily  
 I do other things in my free time  
 I have illness or disability that prevents me from engaging  
 The youth organizations exist for the project purposes only, they do not help the youth  
 I think youth organizations are not transparent enough  
 Other

27. Are you part of the local youth councils?  
 No  
 Yes

28. If no, Why?

There is no local youth council in my municipality

I am not familiar with this kind of organization

I do not have time for that

I do not know how to join them

I do not want to be part of it

Other

Family/ Household

29. Would you say you spend more or less time taking care of other family members (siblings, kids, elderly people, people with disabilities, people with illness) during the pandemic?

Less time

The same

More time

I have never been the caregiver for a family member

I don't know

30. Have you changed your home during the pandemic?

No

Yes, I have moved from home due to lack of space

Yes, I have moved back with my family due to lack of finances

Yes, I needed care from others

Yes, somebody needed my care

Yes, I moved back from abroad

Other

31. Has your household faced some of the following difficulties during the pandemic?

Paying rent for the house/apartment

Paying for food

Paying utilities (gas, electricity, wood, water, telephone-internet etc)

Paying for transport

Paying for clothes

Unexpected costs (some taxes, bank interest rates, etc.)

Providing finances for a summer holiday of a minimum of 7 days.

Paying off loan debt

Education/ work

32. How would you define your current situation? (multiple answers possible)

I have a permanent full-time employment contract

I have a permanent part-time employment contract

I have a temporary full-time employment contract

I have a temporary part-time employment contract

I have occasional job(s)

I am self-employed

I am in occupational training

I have no job, but I am actively looking for a job

I have no job and I am currently not looking for a job

I am still in school

I study and work

Other

33. Have you continued with your education during the pandemic?

No

Yes

Does not apply

34. Has the pandemic had an impact on your education in terms of? (negative, no impact, positive, does not apply)

Active and continued following lessons/ classes

Ability to follow classes (technical conditions)

Quality of studying/knowledge

Motivation to study

Fair grading

Extracurricular activities

Quality of educational process

Opportunities to participate in competitions/ activities

35. What challenges have you met during the online learning in the past year

Lack of equipment (PC, lap top, telephone, tablet)

Challenging internet connection

I can't afford internet regularly

Lack of help from an adult (tutor, parent, sibling)

Bad program

Unprepared teacher

Lack of motivation

36. Have you gained new skills, learned something new thanks to the online seminars, training, and courses available during the pandemic?

No, I have not been informed about such options

No, I had no interest

Somewhat yes

Yes, to a great extent

Other

37. Has the pandemic had an impact on your work/job?

Yes, it had a positive impact (more work/finances)

Yes, somewhat positive

It had no impact at all

Yes, somewhat negative impact (decrease of hours/finances, scope etc.)

Yes, extremely negative (I lost my job)

I lost my job, but found employment elsewhere

Not applicable

38. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "to a great extent", how much negative impact has your job loss had on the family/household budget?

"not at all" 1 2 3 4 5 "to a great extent"

39. Finding a job/ new job during the pandemic  
 Is harder than before  
 It is easier than before  
 It is the same  
 I don't know/Not applicable

#### DEMOGRAPHY

40. Sex  
 Male  
 Female

41. Age  
 (Possibility to put between 15 and 29)

42. Ethnicity  
 Macedonian  
 Albanian  
 Turkish  
 Vlach  
 Roma  
 Other

43. Mother Language?  
 Macedonian  
 Albanian  
 Roma  
 Turkish  
 Serbian  
 Bosnian  
 Croatian  
 Other

44. Do you fluently speak/ actively use any other  
 language?(multiple)

Macedonian  
 Albanian  
 Roma  
 Turkish  
 Serbian  
 Bosnian  
 Croatian  
 English  
 German  
 Russian  
 French  
 Italian  
 Spanish

Other  
 I don't speak other languages

44. Place of residence (City/ village)

46. Type of municipality you live in

Rural  
 Urban

47. What is your completed formal education at the moment?  
 Uncompleted primary education  
 Primary education  
 Secondary education  
 Higher vocational education  
 University degree  
 MA  
 PhD

48. Marital status  
 Single  
 Married  
 I live with a partner  
 Divorced  
 A widow/er  
 I prefer not to answer  
 Other

49. How many people live in your household including yourself?  
 (numeric)

50. How many minors (under the age of 18) live in your household  
 including yourself?  
 (numeric)

51. Which of the following statements applies to your situation?  
 (yes- no)  
 I am a person with physical disability  
 I am a person with atypical development  
 There is a person with physical disability in my household  
 There is a person with atypical development in my household  
 I identify as LGBTQ+  
 I am a single parent

52. I identify with the following statement (multiple):

In my day-to-day life others treat me with respect  
 I have access to opportunities for occupational development  
 There are many barriers stopping me from achieving success  
 I often feel that I am excluded from making decisions about things  
 that affect me

## APPENDIX 2 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOCUS GROUPS WITH CSDs

### Before COVID-19

1. Have you used state aid (any specific measure) and from which donors are you usually funded before the pandemic.
2. Can you name a few (max 3) youth related projects you've implemented before the covid? What activities have you usually implemented before COVID-19? Have there been any changes?
3. Do you directly communicate with your constituents when creating and implementing your projects / activities and in what way? Do you and how much do you consider their requirements and needs, or are projects more focused on the requirements of the donor?
4. Have young people approached you with a request for a solution to a problem they face before the pandemic?

### During COVID

1. Have you used state aid (any specific measure) and from which donors are you usually funded during the pandemic.
2. Can you name a few (max 3) youth related projects you have been implementing during the covid? What activities did you usually implement during COVID-19? Have there been any changes?
3. Did COVID-19 have an impact on your project activities (interruption or change of activities, reduced/re-allocated budget)? What kind of impact? Did you face layoffs, increased staffing, etc.?
4. Is there more or less demand from youth about CSDs activities? Have young people approached you with a request for a solution to a problem they face during the pandemic?

5. Were you approached by a donor during the pandemic and asked to work on a specific problem / activity?

### Challenges

1. What challenges do young people face distinguishing in young people from urban, semi-urban, rural, marginalized groups?
2. Have your organization experienced changes in its engagement with youth?

### Cooperation (before and during COVID-19)

1. Have you cooperated with the municipalities and in what way before the pandemic? (Local youth councils)
2. Have you cooperated with the municipalities and in what way during the pandemic? (Local youth councils)
3. Have you collaborated with other organizations and on what activities before the pandemic?
4. Have you collaborated with other organizations and on what activities during the pandemic?

### Governmental COVID-19 measures

1. What government measures directed towards young people are you familiar with?
2. Do you think government measures are appropriate and effective for young people? Were you consulted in the process of preparing the economic packages?
3. Which institution did best, did you have any contact?

## APPENDIX 3 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH INSTITUTIONS

### Programs and policies (for youth, for marginalized groups)

How has your institution responded to the challenges of the pandemic regarding the youth? Has your institution adopted special programs to support young people in dealing with the pandemic?

1.1. How do you monitor and evaluate the process of implementation of the measures / programs? Do you have a suggestion or idea how existing (or new) programs can be upgraded / improved?

1.2. Does your institution develop / has your institution adopted special programs for young people from marginalized groups (Roma, youth from rural areas, with disabilities, LGBTQ+), etc.? If so, what are the effects and results of these policies?

1.3. Do you think that budget allocations are sufficient for quality measures and policies for young people (including pandemic management policies)?

### Legal framework

Do you think that the new Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies sufficiently protects and guarantees the rights of young people and is consistently implemented?

2.1. Does your institution derive certain rights or competencies from the new Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies? If so, how is the implementation process going?

2.2. From which laws, bylaws, etc. does your institution derive its competencies related to youth?

### Policy making (for youth)

How does your institution create policies (for youth and, if applicable, pandemic management policies)? What type of data is taken into account when formulating youth policies / programs (generally in a pandemic situation)?

3.1. Does your institution collect data or use data from another institution?

3.2. Do you think that there is good coordination and cooperation between the institutions?

3.3. To what extent does your institution involve CSOs and stakeholders in the policy-making process? Which stakeholders did you involve in creating specific policies (measures) to deal with the pandemic?

### Volunteering and involvement of young people in the work of institutions

Does your institution involve young people in its work and how? Are there special internship and volunteer programs?

4.1. Has your institution noticed any changes to these programs since the beginning of the pandemic?

### Additional questions by institutions

For the Agency of Youth and Sport

How do you assess the new Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, given the role allocated to the Agency of Youth and Sport in it?

How far are you with the implementation and monitoring of youth-related activities? (With the new law, the process of creating a National Youth Strategy falls into the hands of the Agency and the agency has an obligation to establish a research center on various topics related to youth?)

For the Special adviser for youth and sport

Is the implementation of these programs monitored?

Which of these policies resulted from working with a youth advisor/counselor?

Were there any special meetings with youth organizations during this period?

Have you had direct meetings with young people? And what is the result of those meetings?

For the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education:

What are the biggest challenges pupils and students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Do all pupils and students attend classes regularly?

What measures have you taken to overcome the challenge of not having adequate internet and teaching technology?

How do you follow the realization of the teaching activities?

National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility  
What challenges did your institution face with the onset of the pandemic?

How did the pandemic affect the implementation process of current projects and what measures did you take to amortize the negative effects (such as travel, physical mobility and distance, lockdown in the country and abroad, etc.)?

For Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

What support does the state provide for social security and integration in the labor market of young people and society as a whole?

What programs and measures do you have to reduce youth unemployment?

What are the key activities of the social centers with the advent of the pandemic?

How do you assess the work of the social centers in implementing the measures for youth employment and their social protection, protection of vulnerable categories of young people, etc.?

For the Employment Agency

Do you inform young people about open calls for employment and how? How did you communicate with the youth during the pandemic?

What kind of professional and career guidance do you offer and what is the interest of young people?

Are there successful examples of long-term employment, successful self-employment, micro businesses, etc.?

What do you think needs to be improved in the Agency's services to young people?

Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance

What are the biggest challenges that young people face during COVID-19? When designing the measures, do you take into account the needs of the youth and what type of measures have been taken to reach the youth?

What has been the effect of those measures?

Ministry of Health

How does your institution analyze the effects of the pandemic on the psycho-emotional fitness and physical health of young people? Are there any studies at the moment?

To what extent (are) the needs of young people taken into account in the policy-making processes for dealing with the pandemic (measures to help and protect against COVID-19)?