PERCEPTIONS, VIEWS AND CHALLENGES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

RESEARCH ON YOUTH AND SECURITY

OSCE

Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Skopje

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CONTENT

During my tenure as Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative potential of North Macedonia's youth. Their pivotal role in societal processes, from driving social movements to spearheading technological innovation and cultural shifts, is unparalleled. The energy, creativity, and resilience that define young generations offer a beacon of hope for a better future.

This research underscores the proactive role of young people in contributing to security solutions. They are not passive recipients of policy decisions but active contributors with unique perspectives and intrinsic motivation to drive positive change. This positions them as indispensable agents in our collective effort to build resilient societies.

Furthermore, this research strongly emphasizes the critical importance of incorporating the perspectives of young people in security dialogue. They must actively participate as contributors who can provide innovative solutions to security challenges. Their involvement in peacebuilding efforts, policymaking, and community projects is absolutely crucial and beneficial for sustainable security.

I hope this research will inspire policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and youth to engage in meaningful dialogue and action toward a safer, more inclusive society. The insights and recommendations within these pages offer a roadmap for navigating the complex terrain of youth and security, paving the way for a future where young people thrive in an environment of peace and stability.

I would like to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to all young people involved in preparing this publication, including the stakeholders who participated in interviews and focus groups. By doing so, you are not just a part of positive change, but you are leading it.

The OSCE Mission to Skopje remains committed to the youth of North Macedonia. We will continue to support efforts that promote policies that consider the needs and voices of all elements of society in line with OSCE commitments and values.

Ambassador Kilian Wahl,
Head of OSCE Mission to Skopje

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

OSCE Mission to Skopje contracted research and consulting company Indago DOOEL Skopje to conduct nationwide representative research with the following aims:

1. Assess the perceptions, views, and challenges of young people with regard to security and safety in the Republic of North Macedonia;

2. Explore the security concerns and challenges faced by youth in the current socio-political context;

3. Examine the ways in which youth are impacted by security policies and how the practices of meaningful participation of youth in security policies and programming can be increased;

4. Investigate the sources of violence among young people, the potential contributions of youth to security, safety and resilience building in their communities;

5. Examine the factors influencing interethnic relations and cohesion among young people in the country;

6. Collect information that supports the strategic planning of the Mission.

The target group of this research were young people aged 15 to 29 from the Republic of North Macedonia. The sample included a total of 1,235 respondents through a telephone survey. In addition, the research team conducted five (5) semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and eight (8) focus group discussions in the cities of Skopje (2 focus groups), Bitola, Tetovo, Sveti Nikole, Shtip, Strumica and Struga with a total of 63 participants. The survey was conducted in the period of 27 September to 10 October 2023 while focus group discussions took place from 4 to 26 October 2023.

This document presents the preliminary findings, conclusions and strategic recommendations resulting from the research. The research focused in more detail on the young people's perception of security and safety, participation in formal and informal peace processes, the status of the youth and security agenda, issues of countering and preventing violent extremism in the country, youth violence, exclusion and marginalization at all levels. Each of these areas is elaborated in the following sections of this document.

1.2 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

1.2.1 Perception of Security and Safety

This section analysed the perception young people have of the present safety and security levels in the country as well as the perception of security in the next five years. In addition, the section explored the opinions of young people about their biggest problems, and analysed how safe young people find their place of living, their country, and public locations. In the end, this section explored the level of concern with the different phenomena affecting security and safety.

– Young people were asked to rate the security and safety in the country on a scale where 1 is not secure at all while 5 is completely secure. The average grade for security and safety is 3.4 meaning neither secure nor insecure. Following this, although the majority of the respondents (54%) find the country somewhat secure or completely secure (grades 4 and 5 on the scale) still there are 17% of youth who think that the country is not a secure place.

– Regarding the security expectations, the respondents were asked what will happen to the level of security in the country in the next five years. The majority of young people (56%) think that the situation will stay the same whereas more than one quarter (27%) think that the situation will get worse.

– Young people were asked to state how safe they feel in different places. The neighbourhood is the safest place for young people (81% feeling safe) while the digital environment is the least safe place (43% feeling safe). Young women feel less safe compared to young men.

– Regarding safety in the area/city, a higher portion of young people in the Northeast region i.e., in the cities of Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka (15%) feel unsafe compared to other regions (ranging 2% to 9%). In addition, with regard to the perception of safety in the country a greater portion of young people from this region feel unsafe (32%) compared to other regions (ranging 4% to 12%).

– Regarding the feeling of safety in public locations, the majority of young people feel almost equally safe in public transportation (53%) and on public squares, walking places, and bike paths (54%). However, the percentage of those feeling unsafe is slightly higher in public transport (11%) than the public squares, walking, and bike tracks (9%). Whereas the majority of young men (57%) feel safe in public transport, the percentage of young women feeling safe is lower (48%).

– A lack of cultural and sports activities (51%) and a lack of development opportunities (51%) are the biggest problems of the youth at the moment, followed by unemployment and economic problems, which present the biggest problems for 49% of the young people. Nearly one quarter of young people (24%) find safety in their community the biggest problem at the moment.

– Young people are mostly concerned about organized crime (mean value = 7.1 on a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest) followed by natural disasters (mean value = 6.9) and the possibility of armed conflict breaking out within the Western Balkans (mean value = 6.7). The lowest concern of youth is related to groups of sports fans that are sometimes violent

during and after sport events (mean value = 5.7). Young women have constantly higher levels of concern compared to young men. Regarding family violence as one of the factors that endanger security and safety, young women are significantly more concerned than young men.

1.2.2 Participation in Formal and Informal Peace Processes

This section explored the general understanding among youth about peacebuilding as well as their experiences and participation in various activities related to peace and security. In addition, this section analyzed the activities of the authorities related to the safety and security of young people.

– Conceptual knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding by young people is very low. Half of the respondents have not been introduced to the peacebuilding concept and only 26% of youth understand this concept. Those young people who live in multiethnic communities are more exposed to peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities and have therefore been better acquainted with these concepts.

– Following the low levels of understanding of the peacebuilding concept, youth respondents show no activism in terms of participation in actions and initiatives that promote peace and security. Only 6% of youth were active in the past 12 months in the promotion of peace and security, mostly volunteering in cultural events, ecoactions, formal and non-formal educational activities and sports events. The civil protests and political activities are the least popular activities for the promotion of peace and security among young people.

– The majority of young people (87%) haven't heard about the activities of the authorities related to peacebuilding and the security of youth.

– Civil society organizations (CSOs) were selected by almost half of the respondents (49%) as a factor/institution most involved in peacebuilding. CSOs are followed by state institutions (48%) and citizens (45%). Interestingly, young people find that the responsibilities for peacebuilding predominantly on a national level are with the state institutions whereas local government, which should be the first instance in charge of security and peace in the local communities, is only at the fourth place (22%). Regarding the local level responsibilities, some of the municipalities have established Local Prevention Councils, which are recognized as important regarding local security and safety policies, and as such, they should have a significant role, especially in enabling a quick flow of information among the local actors and in undertaking rapid actions to improve the safety and security of the citizens.

1.2.3 Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization

According to the OSCE definition, violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism is "a dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism." This section explores how informed young people are about violent extremism and radicalization. In addition, the section explores the attitudes of young people towards reintegration and resocialization of convicted persons, especially former foreign fighters.

- The majority of youth (53%) find that radicalization is not a problem in their respective community. However, radicalization is a concern for 38% of young people. According to the representatives of interviewed youth organizations, radical ideology is not widely present, but it is found more in some places and communities on the territory of our country.
- Politics is selected as the top driver of radicalization by 58% of respondents, followed by economic differences (40%) and religion (37%). Young people are aware of the presence of radicalization in digital space. 23% of the respondents find digital space an important driver of radicalization.
- Young people in general are not willing to communicate with or live near people who are convicted of terrorist activities/violent extremism or who show signs of radicalization with 73% to 75% of the respondents agreeing with these statements. In addition, 43% of respondents are hesitant to support the resocialization of former foreign fighters or people convicted of terrorist activities and violent extremism.
- Nearly two thirds of youth (62%) believe that the police is the actor with the biggest role in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, followed by international organizations (37%) and civil society organizations (33%). The role of school representatives and Centers for Social Work in the prevention of and response to violent extremism is not sufficiently recognized by young people, as only one quarter of young people (26%) find these actors having such a role. In the Southwest region, civic structures (such as civil society organizations, religious leaders, and leaders of the neighbouring communities) and international organizations play more important roles in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization compared to other regions.
- According to 47% of the respondents, the fight against disinformation is the most important factor in response to radicalization, followed by economic opportunities and employment (44%) and equal distribution of goods and services (40%).

1.2.4 Youth Violence

Violence in the national context is defined in the national strategic framework as: "All forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent act, bullying or exploitation, including sexual harassment." In this section, violence was analyzed in general using the results of the research study and with a special emphasis on youth violence in schools.

- More than half of young people (59%) state that violence is "completely present" or "somewhat present" among youth against only 11% who think that the violence "is not present at all" or "not present". Another 30% have an ambivalent attitude about the presence of violence.
- The top three reasons that motivate violent behaviour among youth are the sense of injustice (40%), disappointment with their social status (39%), and lack of family support (34%). Very closely scores also the lack of support from the institutions (33%).
- Nearly one in every five young persons (18%) included in the research has experienced or witnessed violence or both. Out of those who experienced violence have mainly experienced or witnessed verbal violence (80%) and physical violence (74%). Physical violence dominates in the statements of young men, i.e., 80% experienced or witnessed physical violence compared to 66% of young women. On the other hand, verbal, social and psychological violence dominate in the statements by females; 84% of young women have experienced or witnessed verbal violence compared to 76% of young men. Also, the percentage of young women who have experienced sexual violence (4%) is twice as high as that of young men (2%).
- Although the majority of youth state they feel safe in public locations and places, still, their personal experience with violence and the violent situations they witnessed are worrying. Most young people have experienced or witnessed violence on the street (70%), followed by violence in the school (43%) and violence in parks and bars 42% of each location. In most of the given locations (7/12)[1] a larger portion of young women than young men have experienced or witnessed violence. Especially worrying is data about the violence experienced or witnessed in schools. Namely, 81% of the age group of 15 – 18 have experienced or witnessed violence in school which confirms that violence is largely present in primary and secondary schools.

1.2.5 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a specific type of violence broadly explained as being mean, unkind, or making fun of others by sending or placing hurtful messages and/or pictures on a computer or through a cell phone. The hurtful messages or pictures can be sent via e-mail, cell phones, text messaging, personal websites like Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, and chat rooms.

- Close to half of the respondents (42%) in the research feel "safe" or "completely safe" when using the internet while some 20% do not feel safe. However, a relatively large percentage of respondents (38%) who feel "neither safe nor not safe" may lead to a conclusion that further research is needed to explore the reasons behind this situation and to see if additional education is needed for youth to increase their confidence and articulate their attitudes towards their security on the internet.
- The majority of youth (66%) pay attention to protecting their personal data and information on the internet. Still, 23% neither pay nor do not pay attention to protecting personal data.
- Most of the respondents (72%) do not have experience with their photos, video, or data being used on the Internet without permission. Another 24% know someone who experienced this type of violation on the internet.
- Although the majority of youth in this research (94%) haven't experienced cyber violence, out of those 77 respondents who experienced cyber violence, 51% face it on the social network Facebook, 23% on applications for instant messaging (such as Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal) and 19% on Instagram.
- Youth know where to report cyber violence. When asked about the institutions/instances to whom they would report misuse of personal data and content, 38% would report to the police, 24% to the family and another 21% to the Agency for Personal Data Protection. Young women have more trust to report cyber violence in the family (28%) than young men (19%).

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[1] 12 different public locations were provided as alternatives for response. Young women have experienced violence in 7 out of 12 public locations provided in the research.

1.2.6 Exclusion and Discrimination

In the national legislation, "discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, limitation or provision of a preference based on discriminatory basis, by act or omission, having as their object or effect the prevention, limitation, recognition, enjoyment or realization of the rights and freedoms of a certain person or group on an equal basis with others. This covers all forms of discrimination including disqualification, appropriate adjustment and disallowing access to and availability of infrastructure, goods and services". This section explored the most frequent ground for discrimination for youth, their experience with discrimination and their inclusion in decision-making processes.

– According to nearly one third of the respondents (31%), ethnic background is the first ground for discrimination among youth, followed by 21% of the respondents who find economic status as the first ground for discrimination and 17% who find political affiliation as the first ground for discrimination. 24% of the respondents select economic status as a second ground for discrimination, followed by political affiliation and disability as the second equally important grounds for discrimination (15% of the respondents for both grounds).
– Personally, 84% of respondents have not experienced nor felt discrimination. However, 11% of them have negative experiences of being discriminated. A slightly larger percentage of young women (12%) experienced discrimination compared to young men (9%). Young Roma (32%) in a significantly bigger part experienced discrimination compared to 9% of young Macedonians and the same percentage of Albanians.
– Out of those 11% of youth who experienced or felt discrimination, 33% experienced discrimination based on ethnic background, followed by economic status (19%) and political affiliation (13%).
– Although 11% of the youth experienced discrimination, only 1% have submitted an appeal to a public authority such as the Ombudsman or the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination.
– Three out of four young people (75%) are not informed about the decision-making processes in their community. 86% of young people find themselves not included practically in the decision-making processes in their communities. 86% of youth think that they cannot influence the decisions in their local community. Especially is worrying that the respondents from the Pelagonija region find themselves without any influence on the decisions (99%).
– Two third of young people (66%) are not informed about the decision-making processes in the school/working environment. 73% of young people find themselves not practically included in the decision-making processes in their school/working environment. 73% of the respondents think that they cannot influence the decisions in their school or working environment.
– More than half of young people (57%) find themselves not sufficiently included in their social network/groups of friends. 54% of youth feel they cannot influence the decisions taken within their social networks/groups of friends.

1.2.7 Trust in Authorities and Other People and Inter-Community Relations

This section explores the levels of trust youth has in the institutions but also the inter-personal and inter-community levels of trust.

– Regarding trust in general, the perception of 48% of young respondents is that most people can neither be nor not be trusted. Another 35% think that "people cannot be trusted at all" or "people can be somewhat trusted".
– Most of the young respondents (91%) have someone they trust and would turn to in problematic situations. 85% of the youth respondents have people whom they find close. 82% of youth have people they can count on in times of trouble.
– Young people have divided attitudes about the general trust in people from other ethnic communities, although the majority of 57% of them, in general, do not trust people from other ethnicities, another 43% have trust in people from different ethnic backgrounds.
– Almost equal parts of young respondents evaluate the inter-ethnic/inter-community relations as "neither good nor bad" (46%) and "good" (41%).
– Nearly two thirds of youth (62%) do not agree with the statement "I feel supported by people from other ethnicities". 61% of youth do not agree with the statement "I regularly engage in conversations with people from multiple religions/cultures and beliefs".
– The trust in institutions is generally low ranging from 1.6 to 2.2 on the scale where 1 is "not trustworthy at all" and 4 is "completely trustworthy". The government and the leaders of the political parties (mean value = 1.6) are the least trustworthy, followed by the courts and Parliament (mean value = 1.7). The most trustworthy are police, religious leaders and civil society organizations (mean value = 2.2).

1.3 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

1. The prevailing conclusion resulting from the conducted analysis is that young people in the country do not have clear attitudes toward most of the issues related to their security and safety. They find the country neither secure nor insecure. Regarding the security in the country in the next five years, most young people think that the situation will stay the same, whereas more than one-quarter of young people think that the situation will be worse. The ambivalent attitude prevails for most of the issues across age and ethnic groups as well across the regions in the country. This finding demonstrates that young people do not have sufficient information on security and safety issues that will help them articulate their attitudes. In addition, the ambivalent attitude may also be a result of a lack of understanding and interest in the key concepts, policies and practices and a lack of inclusion of young people in policy-making related to the security and safety of youth.

2. The analysis of the data across the statistical regions reveals specific tendencies of certain regions for almost all of the issues pertaining to security and safety. For example: young people from the Northeast region feel less safe and secure in general, youth from the Pelagonija region feel hopeless regarding their influence on the decision-making process in their respective communities, young people from the Southwest region find digital space the most important driver of radicalization, youth from Skopje region do not have a clear attitude of what is their biggest problem, a significant portion of young people from the Polog region have witnessed or experienced violence etc. These specifics show that there are

existing inconsistencies and a lack of structured approach of the institutions and authorities in addressing young people's safety and security of on policy and operational levels.

3. Young people find the national level institutions as the most responsible for peacebuilding and security whereas the local government, which should be the first instance institution regarding safety and security, is much lower on the list of responsible institutions. This situation partially reflects the general hierarchy in the country with most of the functions being concentrated on the national level. To change this focus of the youth it is important to continue the process of establishment of the Local Prevention Councils as being very important for increasing the role of the local actors in enabling a safe environment and to discuss the potential legal regulation of these bodies.

4. Young people lack information about the manifestation of violent extremism and radicalization on the country level and the approach of the state towards these phenomena. They do not know about the resocialization and reintegration programs for the persons convicted of terrorist activities, what institutions are responsible, what their role is and why this is important for society. Moreover, youth do not recognize and do not know how to protect themselves from this potential threat, especially in the digital space.

5. Youth violence is largely present on various levels. There is strong evidence showing that young people experience or witness youth violence in public places, schools and digital spaces. The data about violence in primary and secondary schools are especially worrying, with verbal and physical violence being recognized as the most frequent. The fact that young women experience or witness violence more often than young men should be taken into consideration in adopting a gender-sensitive institutional approach and in the creation of mechanisms for prevention, protection and reporting of youth violence. In addition, young people experience cyberbullying on social networks, various digital applications and digital platforms. Authorities on national and local levels do not make systematic and sufficient efforts to combat youth violence, especially in encouraging youth, parents and school representatives to report violence to responsible institutions. There is a lack of structured and accurate data about youth violence on the national level that will be easily accessible to all stakeholders.

6. The perception of youth about their safety in digital space is divided. This leads to the conclusion that youth need additional education and practical information on cyber threats as well as on recognizing, preventing and reporting cyberbullying. Consequently, youth are not very much concerned with the protection of their data in the digital space. Misuse of data, personal photos and content on the internet is not frequently experienced among youth. However, in recent years there have been cases of misuse of content on the internet that has led to establishing stalking as a new a new criminal act to be adopted in the Criminal Code. In addition, recent events in the region related to violence of youth in schools against their peers and teachers ended tragically with children as victims. These events have their roots in communication in cyberspace which has triggered a red alarm of the institutions to take more serious measures, pay additional attention to the communication in cyberspace and prevent violence.

7. Young people identify ethnic background as the first ground for discrimination followed by political affiliation and economic status. It should be emphasized that ethnicity and political affiliation have been identified as the main grounds for discrimination in the last ten years by other studies as well, which signals that the efforts to decrease discrimination are not successful and that more needs to be done, including the introduction of some innovative approaches. The political division that exists at all levels of society negatively affects the lives of young people and their futures. The past conflict in the country has been the cause of divided cities, cultures and communities, and this is still present in ethnically mixed communities. Youth from smaller communities other than Macedonian and Albanian more frequently experience discrimination based on ethnic background. Reporting of discrimination is not common among youth in the country, which signals that there is lack of information about the institutions responsible for the fight against discrimination as well as lack of trust and confidence in the procedures for protection of discrimination.

8. The participation of young people in the communities is at a very low level characterized by general disappointment and apathy. Youth find themselves not informed about the decision-making processes in their communities, not included in the decision–making and do not believe in having some influence over the decisions taken in the communities. Youth find the school and working environment slightly more democratic regarding the provision of information about the decision-making processes and participation in these processes whereas the possibility to influence decisions is equally low as in the influence of the decision-making in their communities in general. The trend of alienation among youth is visible. The majority of young people feel excluded from the decisions made within their social network/group of friends and even more of them do not believe in influencing those decisions.

9. Youth in general feel ambivalent about trust in other people or find that people cannot be trusted at all. It is encouraging that the majority of youth have someone to turn to in problematic situations, when they are in trouble, or someone they feel comfortable talking to. The attitudes about inter-ethnic relations seem to be in general the same and even worse than in the past decade. The majority of youth do not trust people from other ethnicities, do not feel supported by people from other ethnicities and cannot regularly engage in communication with people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

10. The public authorities are evaluated by young people as "a little bit trustworthy". The government and the leaders of the political parties are the least trustworthy, followed by the courts and the Parliament. The most trustworthy are the police, religious leaders and civil society organizations.

1.4 PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The decision-makers should involve youth in evidence-based policy development regarding security and safety. It is of utmost importance for youth to be involved in the identification of security risks on local and national level and the design of solutions tailored to the needs and specifics of the regions and local communities.

2. The institutions responsible for youth, safety and security issues should take a proactive approach rather than being reactive on cases of violence, and security and safety threats. A specific cross-sector methodology is needed for the identification, monitoring and reporting the youth violence. In addition, responsible institutions should also introduce rapid-response mechanisms for the cases of youth violence in schools.

3. State institutions responsible for youth, education, security and safety such as the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth as well as the civil society organizations working on youth issues and with youth should establish and implement systematic formal and non-formal educational programs to bring peacebuilding, safety and security concepts closer to youth. The programs need to be tailored to the age groups of young people. All schools in the country should be included in these programs.

4. Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies that regulates the involvement and engagement of youth in national and local decision-making processes should be implemented. Local authorities should give a meaningful role to the established local youth councils and allocate finances for their proper functioning. In those municipalities where there are no local youth councils, they should be established in compliance with the legal provisions of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies. In addition, Local Youth Strategies should be in line with the National Youth Strategy and provide a specific focus on the area of security and safety.

5. The institutional efforts for increasing the security and safety of youth, the trust of the youth in institutions and decreasing discrimination should take a regional approach. To that effect, it is important to further deepen the initial findings from this research and conduct qualitative regional research and analysis that will lead to tailoring the local activities to the needs of young people in the field of security and safety.

6. It is recommended to the municipalities to establish Local Prevention Councils. The Councils may also consider including representatives of the Local Youth Councils and young people in their composition, thus increasing the trust of the youth in the local authorities. Those municipalities that already have these Councils should make efforts and allocate appropriate budgets for the functioning of these bodies. In addition, the possibility for the legal regulation of these bodies may be further explored to bolster the position of these bodies on the local level.

7. The Ministry of Education and Science should support and monitor the implementation of the Guideline for the Procedure for Report and Protection of the Students Victims of Violence in primary schools and should find mechanisms to encourage students, teachers and school support staff to report violence. The Government and the Parliament should accelerate the procedure for adopting the Law on Secondary Education and include articles on protection, prevention and reporting of violence. The Guideline for the Procedure for Report and Protection of the Students Victims of Violence in secondary schools should be prepared, adopted and enter the implementation as soon as possible.

8. Training programs for teachers for prevention, protection and reporting of violence in the schools should be delivered continuously and to all teachers in the country. In addition, similar programs should be designed for primary and secondary school students for systematic formal and non-formal education. Also, the authorities should explore and transfer successful models and practices applied in foreign countries for the prevention of and protection against violence in schools.

9. The Government and state institutions that participate in the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism should allocate sufficient funds for the implementation of the activities concerning youth within the strategic framework for the countering violent extremism and combating terrorism. In addition, civil society organizations and international organizations should cooperate with the state institutions and the local government to develop and provide hands-on information to youth related to the local and national systems for the countering violent extremism and radicalization.

10. Young people should receive continuous education on digital literacy tailored to their age. The Personal Data Protection Agency and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration should plan and implement these kinds of activities in their annual programs in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Moreover, young people should receive continuous education on reporting cyber violence and data misuse. They need to be introduced to the role of responsible institutions such as schools, local government, police and ombudsman and to the procedure for reporting cyber violence. Parents should pay extra focus on their children's exposure to the digital space and be educated via national campaigns about the threats in digital space, the available mechanisms and responsible institutions for reporting cyber violence.

11. The Government should allocate sufficient finances for the implementation of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and provide the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination with appropriate logistics and support to fully exercise its role. Data on cases of discrimination of young people should be properly disaggregated, analyzed and published.

12. The divisions based on ethnic backgrounds in the schools and institutions should be decreased, systematically approached and finally eliminated. The measures in this regard needs to marginalize the negative influence of the political factor and amplify the role of the individuals and their integrity as imperative in interpersonal and professional relations. To that effect, the political parties, youth branches of the political parties and civil society should cooperate in the implementation of a multiethnic integration and should go beyond demonstrating the will to undertake concrete actions. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Science should foster interethnic integration in the schools and create quality conditions conducive to regular communication, support and interaction among students of all ethnicities.

13. The capacities and programs of the Ombudsman regarding protection of the children and youth rights should be expanded and fostered. The Ombudsman as a national independent institution and the Regional Ombudsman Offices should have appropriate financial and human capacities to respond to timely identification and reporting cases of violence of security and safety of youth and especially youth violence in the schools.

14. The National Coordination Body for Protection of Children against Abuse and Neglect should make the data on violence among youth in the country accurate and transparent, and easily accessible for all stakeholders. The body needs to be promoted among youth, parents and teachers to be recognized as a focal point for dealing with youth violence cases.

15. The State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency should invest efforts to make its work more transparent and to bring it closer to the general public, especially to the youth, parents, teachers, and other experts in this field. The annual reports prepared by the State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency and the data about the juvenile delinquency in the country should be publicly available and easily accessible for the general public.

2. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Research Aims

This research assessed young people's perception of security and safety, participation in formal and informal peace processes, the status of the youth and security agenda and issues of countering and preventing violent extremism in the country. The research also addressed youth violence, exclusion and marginalization at all levels. The research provides a comprehensive overview of perceptions of youth on issues such as trust in the authorities and inter-communities' relations in the last decades.

2.2 Research Methodology and Characteristics of the Sample

The target group of this research were young people aged 15 to 29 from the Republic of North Macedonia. For the purposes of this research, a representative sample was developed by using a stratified multistage sampling with the probability proportional to the estimated population size. The sample of respondents was representative of the structure of the total population in the country, in terms of ethnicity, gender, age group, place of living (urban/rural) and statistical region (NUTS 3 level). A representative to target audience sample was achieved by using a dual frame telephone sampling methodology. The sampling error was 2.74% with a confidence level of 95% for a total of 1,200 telephone survey completed.

The sample included in total of 1,235 respondents through a telephone survey. In addition, the research team conducted five (5) semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the national youth umbrella organizations, representatives of institutions such as the Agency for Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education; and Ministry of Internal Affairs - Public Security Bureau, Sector for Police Affairs and Uniformed Police.

Eight (8) focus group discussions were organized in all eight statistical regions with six (6) to eight (8) individuals in each group. The selection of individuals was conducted in cooperation

with the national youth umbrella organizations. The interviews were conducted in Macedonian language while the focus groups were both in Macedonian and Albanian language. The specific characteristics of the sample are presented on the following charts:
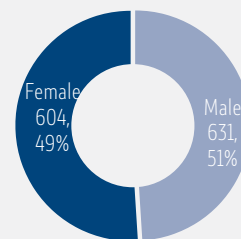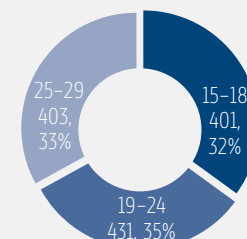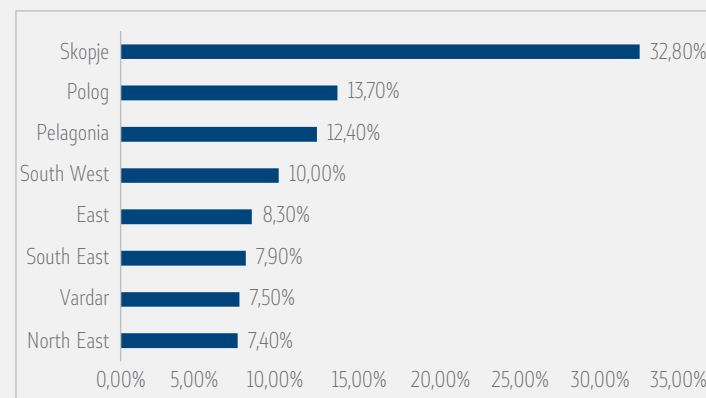

Chart 1: *Gender*
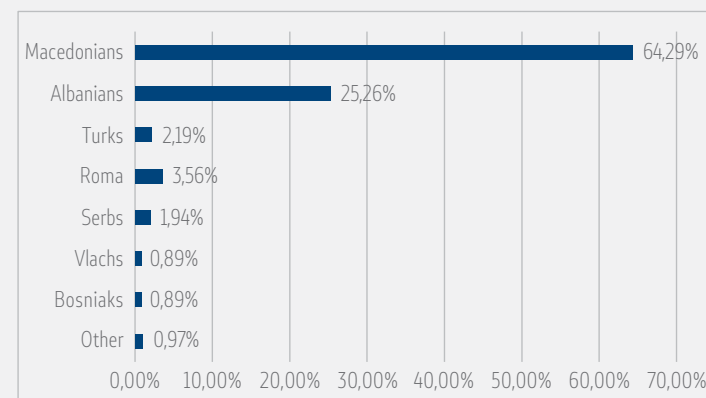

Chart 2: *Age*

Chart 3: *Region*

Chart 4: *Ethnicity*

3. DEFINITIONS

Key definitions below should help the readers to better understand some of the concepts and terms applied in this research. Most of the definitions are laid down in legislative frameworks or elaborations of the concepts widely accepted in the public and the relevant literature.

3.1 YOUTH IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

According to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, young people are all persons at the age of 15 to 29.

3.2 SECURITY AND SAFETY

In the national context, the term public security includes two aspects: first, the public (general) interest and personal (individual, single) security. Public security refers to the security of all people. Personal security refers to the protection of an individual from a danger, a life-threatening situation, protection of physical identity and property of individuals as well as security in exercising the basic freedoms and human rights that belong to an individual.[2]

A comprehensive definition of security in the theoretical framework is provided by Wolfers who states that "security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats towards the accepted values, whereas in a subjective sense, it measures the absence of fear that those values will be attacked"[3]. Objective and subjective security are interlinked and, in most cases, they increase or decrease proportionally. However, an increase in objective security does not always result to an increase in subjective security and vice versa.

In everyday life, the term security is often replaced with the term safety. While security is about a situation where there is an effective rule of law, as well as a combination of human relations through which people can implement their routine activities, the term safety may refer to different things. The term safety is present in criminal law as synonym for security, while in other situations, it may designate a strong belief in something.

3.3 CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is when someone is mean, unkind or makes fun of others by sending or placing hurtful messages and/or pictures on a computer or through a cell phone. The hurtful messages or pictures can be sent via e-mail, cell phones, text messaging, personal websites like Facebook, and chat rooms.

3.4 DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, limitation or provision of a preference on a discriminatory basis, by an act or omission, having as their object or effect the prevention, limitation, recognition, enjoyment or realization of the rights and freedoms of a certain person or group on an equal basis with others. This covers all forms of discrimination including disqualification appropriate adjustment and disabling of accessibility and availability of infrastructure, goods and services.

3.5 VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALIZATION THAT LEAD TO TERRORISM[4]

A dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism.

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[2] Gjurovski, M., "Basis of Security – A Conceptual Security Approaches", Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Skopje 2021

[3] Arnold Wolfers. "National Security as Ambiguous Symbol in Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics". John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore (1962): 149

[4] The terminology "Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism" is consolidated with the Ministerial Declaration for Strengthening OSCE Efforts to Prevent and Counter Terrorism, adopted at the Ministerial meeting in December 2016 (MC.DOC 1/16). The identical terminology is included in the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2023 – 2027).

3.6 VIOLENCE

All forms of physical or mental violence, injuries or misuse, neglect or negligent relation, harassment and child exploitation, including sexual harassment in relation to trust and care by the parents, the legal guardian or another person that has a legally provided care for the child. The National Strategy on Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2020 – 2025) also defines the term abuse and neglect of children as "any form of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual harassment, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other type of exploitation, that potentially may cause threat or damages on the health of the child, its survival, development or dignity in the context of mutual relation of responsibility, trust and power".

4. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The contextual analysis provides relevant information extracted from literature review that relates with the security and safety in wider sense as well with protection and prevention from violence among youth and children. This section is divided into three parts to reflect the specifics of the topic elaborated through legislation analysis, strategic and programmatic framework and institutional mechanisms for prevention and protection from violence.

4.1 LEGISLATION ANALYSIS

– International framework

OSCE participating States have repeatedly recognized the contribution of youth to enhancing peace and security. The following international documents recognize the importance of youth in securing peace and stability and dealing with the safety issues for youth.

The 2014 Basel Declaration on Youth, (MC.DOC/3/14), acknowledges "the potential of young people to contribute to economic, political and social development" and to "support participating States in the implementation of commitments in all three dimensions of the OSCE."

The 2015 Belgrade Declaration on Youth and Security (MC.DOC/5/15) recognizes that "youth and children require particular attention and that their needs, concerns and interests should be addressed in a comprehensive manner."

The 2018 Milan Declaration on the Role of Youth in Contributing to Peace and Security Efforts (MC.DOC/3/18) acknowledges the role youth can play in supporting participating States in the implementation of commitments in all three dimensions. It recognizes the role youth can play in contributing to a culture of peace, dialogue, justice and peaceful coexistence, trust and reconciliation.

UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) is the first Security Council resolution to recognize the important role that young women and young men play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. It urges Member States to consider setting up mechanisms that will enable young people to participate meaningfully in peace processes and dispute resolution. UNSCR 2250 (2015) puts attention on following aspects of the life of youth:

– *Participation*: Take youth's participation and views into account in decision-making processes, from negotiation and prevention of violence to peace agreements;

– *Protection*: Ensure the protection of young civilians' lives and human rights, and investigate and prosecute those responsible for crimes perpetrated against them;

– *Prevention:* Support young people in preventing violence and in promoting a culture of tolerance and intercultural dialogue;

– *Partnership*: Engage young people during and after conflict when developing peacebuilding strategies, along with community actors and United Nations bodies;

– *Disengagement and reintegration*: Invest in youth affected by armed conflict through employment opportunities, inclusive labour policies and education promoting a culture of peace.

UN Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018) of the Security Council "recognized the role youth could play in conflict prevention and resolution and urged the Secretary General and his Special Envoys to take their views into account in security related discussions, and to facilitate their equal and full participation at decision making levels".

United Nations Security Council resolution 2535 (2020), underscored the role of youth in preventing and resolving conflict, as well as in building and maintaining peace, encouraging Member States to include young people in decision-making processes across these areas.

– National framework

While strategic documents provide the strategic intent of the Government to improve and strengthen the role of young people in the country through practical solutions, the Laws[5] provide the legal basis. Relevant laws and policy documents that are specifically related to young people are presented below. The laws are analysed in terms of safety and security of youth and how those areas are regulated within the legal documents.

– Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 10/2020)

This law defines the forms of youth organizing and youth participation on a national and local level. In accordance with the Article 5, the Law explains the basic principles including:

– Equality, equal opportunities and prohibition of discrimination;

– Independence, pluralism and democracy in all forms of youth organizing;

– Transparency and publicity;

– Raising the awareness of the importance of youth and their societal role;

– Multiculturalism, inter-culturalism and inclusiveness in active youth participation;

– Multi-ethnic inclusion and relatedness between youth organisation and the leading of youth-related public policies;

– Responsibility and solidarity among the youth; and

– Inter-institutional cooperation in the design and implementation of youth policies.

Although the Law does not specifically cover the areas of safety and security, the principles of antidiscrimination, multiculturalism and interculturalism refer to open communication, equality and nonviolent behaviour of youth.

– The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 24/2021)

This Law regulates the activities of the institutions in undertaking preventive measures of gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, coordination of the institutions responsible for the prevention of violence and protection of victims, and data collection about gender-based violence and domestic violence. The Law regulates the services provided to the women victims of violence and the right to free legal aid, as well as protection of victims in court procedures and victimization.

– The Law on Sport ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 29/2002)

Article 59 in the Law regulates the responsibilities of the organizers of sporting events and competitions for implementing the measures to prevent violent behaviour of the audience. Furthermore, this article also covers the responsibility of the officials managing the institutions responsible for affairs in sports. The organizers of sporting events and competitions should respect the limits provided regarding the capacity of the facilities. However, the Law does not contain any principles for the prevention of violent behaviour in sporting events and moreover, there are no articles that would regulate the behaviour of fan groups in sporting events. The Law includes repressive measures for violent behaviour.

– Law on Family (consolidated text, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy[6])

The first part the Law regulates the general principles, including the right of the children to be protected by the parents and the obligation of the parents to take care of the children and to protect their children. In the third section, the Law regulates the relations between the parents and their children in more detail and with reference up to the general rights and duties for the protection and care of children, exercising of parental rights, supervision by the Center for Social

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[5] The legislation and documents that regulate the security and safety in the country for all citizens and thus do not contain specific articles on youth, (such as the Criminal Code, The Law on Police, the Law on Ministry of Internal Affairs, Law on Agency for National Security etc.) will not be specifically elaborated because they regulate the institutional set up of the security sector and the separate institutions.

[6] https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/wbstorage/files/zakon_semejstvo_osnoven.pdf

Work and potential deprivation of parenting rights, especially in case of violence against children. In section VI-a, the Law defines the term domestic violence, the situations of violence, victims and perpetrators. In addition, the Law regulates the procedure for temporary measures of protection against domestic violence, as well as penalties and sanctions.

– Law on Social Protection ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 104/2019)

In general, this Law regulates the social rights of the citizens and the provision of social services by state institutions, citizen associations and natural persons. To that effect, young people under specific conditions may exercise certain social rights as family members or as parentless minors. Articles 57 and 63 of the Law prescribe social rights for housing and one-off financial assistance for young people without parents, while in other articles it specifies the right to health and social protection and services for the victims of violence.

A more specific legal framework is available in the child protection area, which also includes the protection of violence against children, justice for children, and protection against violence in the field of education. Since this research includes a target group of young people aged 15 – 18, below is an overview of the key legislation from this area.

– Law on Protection of Children[7] (consolidated version, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy)

This Law regulates the protection of children and the types of protection as well as the establishment and functioning of the institutions and organizations for child protection and care. In Article 4, this Law invokes the principles of acting in the best interest of a child, excluding any form of discrimination and respecting the right of a child to freedom and personal safety.

– The Law on Justice for Children ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 66/24)

The Law defines the terminology related to juvenile justice and the procedures in cases where children are perpetrators of criminal acts, victims or witnesses. The framework within this Law foresees the protection of children in the form of negotiation procedures, and mediation processes, protection during court procedures both for children who are perpetrators as well as children who are victims and witnesses. To reduce the impact of the court proceedings and measures in the development of children, there is a list of measures related to referring children to various educational institutions, centers for early child development, alternative measures, a reprimand etc. Chapter 16 of the Law provides protection and proceeding with the children who are victims of crime and misdemeanours.

– Law on Primary Education ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 169/19 and 229/20) and Guideline for the Procedure for Report and Protection of the Student Victim of Violence[8]

Articles 65 and 66 of the Law on Primary Education provide for prevention and protection of students from violence and the inclusion of activities of prevention of violence in the school's annual curriculum. The Law also foresees penalties for the responsible persons and institutions. In addition, the Guidelines define various types of violence, neglect and misuse of the students in the school context and foresees activities that should be undertaken by the school, school director and school staff in cases of violence against students. Schools are obligated to provide support to the victims of violence, but also to work with the perpetrators.

– Law on Secondary Education[9] (consolidated version, Ministry of Education and Science)

This Law is currently under revision. However, Article 51 of the Law in force forbids physical and psychological bullying of students and counseling measures for children and parents in cases of violent behaviours. According to the interview conducted with the national stakeholders, the draft Law on Secondary Education is being read and will also include articles for the prevention and protection against violence similar to the Law on Primary Education.

4.2 STRATEGIC AND PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK

The strategic and programmatic framework concerning youth contains specific safety and security goals and measures for young people, prevention of violence, protection against violence as well as various mechanisms to report violent behaviour and violation of the rights of young people.

– The National Youth Strategy (2023 – 2027) with the National Action Plan (2023 – 2025) ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 204/23)

For the first time, the third National Youth Strategy includes Security (Violence) as one of the eight topics addressed by the new Strategy. The Security (Violence) topic includes four strategic goals that cover the areas of physical security and integrity in public spaces, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and fight against polarization, discrimination and extremism, trust of young people in the institutions and institutions sensitized to work with young people and awareness regarding the implementation of measures aimed at decreasing peer violence, enhanced cyber security and digital hygiene in the frame of educational institutions.

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[7] Available at: https://dspdp.com.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Zakon-za-pravda-za-decata.pdf

[8] Guideline for the Procedure for Report and Protection of the Student Victim of Violence, Ministry of Education and Science, No. 18-6570/1 from 6 July 2020.

[9] Available at: https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20srednoto%20obrazovanie.pdf

- **National Strategy for Counter - Terrorism (2023 – 2027) and National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2023 – 2027)[10]**

The strategies were prepared by the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism. Both National Strategies are adopted by the Government and represent a continuation of the strategies from the previous period as well as a collective effort of the National Committee to achieve a common understanding of the national goals, vision and mission. These strategies identify the following four (4) common strategic priorities: *prevention, protection, enforcement* and *response*. According to the strategies, the overall mission of preventing the spread of radical ideology and countering political violence is to develop effective, accountable and comprehensive government and social capacities and activities to prevent, protect, prosecute and respond to the radicalization and spread of radical ideology that can lead to political violence, in accordance with the values of the state, in order to enable/promote a secure and prosperous state. Activities designed for young people are in particular integrated within the Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism. The activities with youth in this regard are focused on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization through various lectures, campaigns activities in schools to prevent the spread of this phenomenon. It is important to mention that both strategies identify goals and measures for countering terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism on the internet. Many actors, state institutions, the civil sector, religious communities, and journalists were involved in the development of the new strategies. Several workshops were implemented with the support of OSCE Mission to Skopje, and the findings were used as a basis for the strategies.

- **The National Strategy on Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2020 - 2025) and Action Plan (2020 - 2022)[11]**

The Strategy provides a comprehensive overview of the situation with the violence in the country and presents the national system for prevention and protection from violence, including a legal framework available in this area and the established bodies, mechanisms and institutions. This Strategy defines the term violence against children as "all forms of physical or mental violence, injuries or misuse, neglect or negligent relation, harassment and child exploitation, including sexual harassment in relation to trust and care of the parents, the legal guardian or another person that has a legally provided care for the child". The Strategy also defines the term abuse and neglect of children as "any form of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual harassment, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other type of exploitation, that potentially may cause threat or damages on the health of the child, its survival, development or dignity in the context of mutual relation of responsibility, trust and power." Furthermore, the Strategy defines the various forms of misuse or neglect as well as peer violence – bullying, family violence and violence in adolescent relations.

The Strategy includes six strategic areas: national strategic and legal framework for prevention and protection against violence; advancing the knowledge, practices and supporting values for promotion of zero tolerance on violence; preventive programs for the prevention of violence against children and reinforcing the resilience of families; capacities of the institutions for cross-sectoral response for protection, treatment and support of children; protection and support of children in the juvenile justice system, and system for evidence and monitoring of the situation with violence against children. The Action plan contains a variety of measures included in each of the strategic areas. However, there were no publicly available reports on the implementation of the Strategy and Action plan in order to evaluate the level of implementation and the results achieved so far.

- **National Strategy for Prevention and Justice for Children in the Republic of North Macedonia (2022 - 2027) and Action Plan (2022 – 2023)[12]**

These documents are prepared by the State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency. The Strategy includes 12 strategic areas that address different aspects for improvement of the position of children who are in conflict with the law as well as for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. The Strategy also regulates the counseling programs for students and parents that are implemented in primary and secondary schools to prevent or treat juvenile delinquency and violence in schools. According to the latest data in the strategy, 8,324 counseling sessions with students were implemented in 2021 in primary schools, mostly for school grades, irregular attendance of school, or for unruly behavior. In addition, 8,660 counseling sessions were conducted with parents. Furthermore, there are activities in the strategic area 11 included for raising awareness about juvenile justice.

4.3 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR PREVENTION AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

The key institutional mechanisms for prevention and protection against violence and juvenile justice are the State Council for Juvenile Delinquency and the National Coordinative Body for Prevention of Children against Harassment and Neglect. The establishment of these mechanisms and their role are briefly presented in the following paragraphs.

- **State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency**

The Law on Justice for Children in Chapter 17 regulates the establishment and work of the State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency. The Council is established in 2009 and includes 15 members with a mandate of five years who are elected from the responsible institutions, as well as experts elected through a public announcement. The Council prepares and adopts the Strategy on

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[10] Accessible at: https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/nacionalna_strategija_sne_2023-2027.pdf and https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/nacionalna_strategija_bpt_2023-2027.pdf

[11] State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, National Strategy (2020 – 2025) and Action Plan for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2020 – 2022) available at: https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nspx

[12] State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, National Strategy for Prevention and Justice for Children in the Republic of North Macedonia (2022 – 2027) and Action Plan (2022 – 2023) available at: http://dspdp.com.mk/vesti/promocija-na-nacionalnata-strategija-za-prevencija-i-pravda-za-decata-2022-2027/

Juvenile Delinquency and reports on its work through annual reports presented in the Assembly. The reporting format is established based on a set of indicators. The annual programs of the Council include general activities with no specification about the topics, initiatives, and concrete cooperation planned to be established by the Council. In accordance with the 2020 report, the courts identify and report the biggest number of children victims compared to other institutions while the number of children victims reported by the Centers for Social Work is very low. The role of this Council is to provide recommendations as to how to decrease juvenile delinquency and to motivate responsible officials to work on the prevention of juvenile delinquency. In the 2020 report[13] the Council offered a reminder in that the municipalities fail to implement the obligation to establish Local Councils for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency. These local councils are established in very small numbers and most of them are not functional due to lack of funds.

– The National Coordination Body for Protection of Children against Abuse and Neglect

This body is established based on Government Decision no. 44-7278/1 from 12.12.2017[14] to monitor and coordinate the implementation of activities for protection of the children against abuse and neglect and to prepare annual reports. This body prepared its first report in 2017 on the situation regarding the protection of children against violence according to the defined monitoring indicators. This body shall prepare an annual report every year, however, although these reports, should be publicly available are not easily accessible.

[13] State Council for Prevention of Child Delinquency, Annual Report 2020 available at: https://dspdp.com.mk/category/dokumenti/izvestai/
[14] Government Decision nr. 44-7278/1 from 12.12.2017.

5. FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD RESEARCH

This section includes analysis of the findings collected through a survey and focus groups with young people aged 15 – 29. The section provides overview of the findings per separate areas including:

1. Perception of Security and Safety;
2. Participation in Formal and Informal Peace Processes;
3. Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation;
4. Youth Violence;
5. Cyberbullying;
6. Exclusion and Discrimination; and
7. Trust in Authorities and Other People and Inter-Community Relations.

Each section is concluded with a specific conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 PERCEPTION OF SECURITY AND SAFETY

Perception of young people about security and safety starts with exploring their opinion about the biggest problems, analysing the perception about the current safety and security levels in the country as well a perception of the security in the next five years. In addition, this section explores how safe young people find their place of living, their country and the public locations. At the end, this section explores the level of concern with the different phenomena affecting security and safety.

– Security and safety levels in the country

Young people were asked to rate the security and safety in the country on a scale where 1 is not secure at all and 5 is completely secure. The average grade for security and safety is 3.4 meaning neither secure nor insecure. Following this, although the majority of the respondents (54%) find the country somewhat secure or completely secure (grades 4 and 5 on the scale), there are still 17% of young people who think that the country is not a secure place. The findings broken down by gender and age groups are in line with the findings for the overall sample.
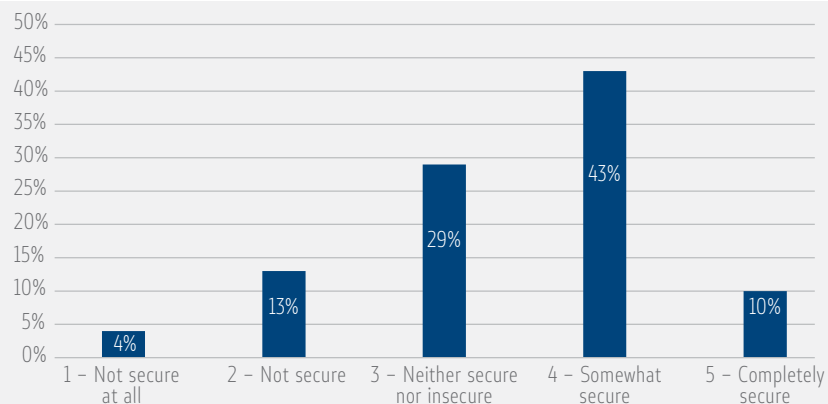
Chart 5: *Current security level*

The analysis by geographic region shows that a bigger proportion of young people from Southwest region (78%) find the country secure and safe compared to other regions. In addition, a larger proportion of young people from the Northeast region (32%) find the country not secure and safe compared to other regions. 32% of Roma and 21% of Albanians find the country not secure, compared to 16% of Macedonians.

Regarding security expectations, the respondents were asked what will happen to the level of security in the country in the next five years. The majority of young people (56%) think that the situation will stay the same, whereas more than one quarter (27%) think that the situation will get worse.
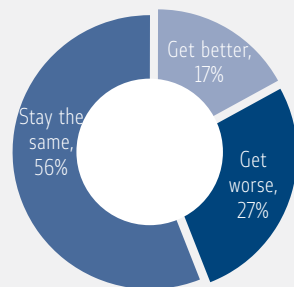
Chart 6: *Security level expectations*

Analyzing the results by region, it is interesting to notice, that the majority of youth (52%) from the Northeast region think that the situation will worsen. The biggest optimists, believing that the situation will improve, are young people from the Southwest region compared to other regions. Additionally, a slightly higher percentage of those living in rural areas (20%) compared to those living in cities (15%) believe that the situation will improve. In addition, almost 1/3 of Albanians are optimistic that the situation will improve, while 1/3 of Macedonians and Roma and half of the Serbs surveyed, think that the situation will worsen.

– Security and safety in the place of living and public locations

The young people were asked to select how safe they feel in different places. The general finding is that young people feel less safe in bigger and virtual places (such as digital space). Specifically, 17% of youth feel unsafe in the digital space, followed by 11% who feel unsafe in their country. 81% of young people feel safe in their neighbourhood, and 70% feel safe in their town.
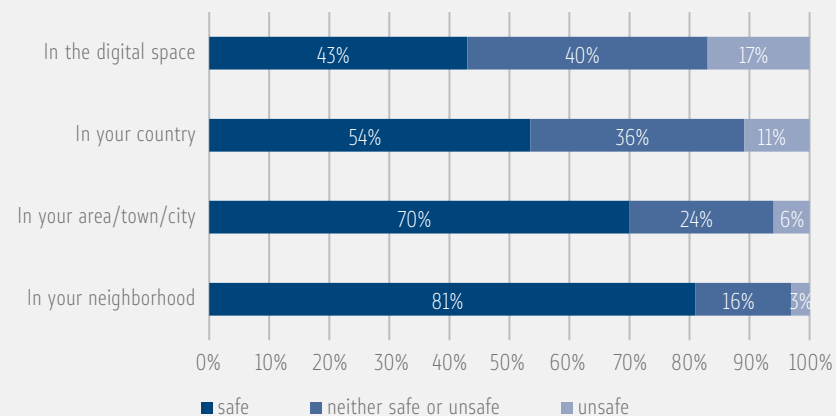
Chart 7: *Feeling safe in public places*

In general, although the majority of young men and young women feel safe in almost all places (except the digital space), the percentage of young women feeling safe is lower than that of young men. In addition, the percentage of young women feeling neither safe nor unsafe is higher than that of young men.

> "As a female, I do not feel safe when I walk on the street at night. I have a feeling that someone might attack me. This is very much present although I haven't personally experienced such a situation."
>
> Female, 16 years old (Struga)

Most of age groups feel safe in the listed places, except for the digital space, where almost equal parts of young people feel safe and neither safe nor unsafe. However, the percentage of young people in the age group 19 – 24 who feel safe is slightly lower than the remaining two age groups.

Considering the geographic regions, in all regions the majority of youth feel safe in their neighbourhoods and cities. The most confident in this feeling are the young people from the Vardar region. However:

– Regarding neighbourhood safety, a large proportion of young people in the Skopje (25%) and Polog (23%) regions feel neither safe nor unsafe compared to other regions (ranging from 3% to 11%).
– Regarding safety in the area/city, a large proportion of young people in Northeast region i.e., in cities of Kriva Palanka and Kumanovo (15%) feel unsafe compared to other regions (ranging 2% to 9%).
– Regarding safety in the country, a large proportion of young people in Northeast region (32%) feel unsafe compared to other regions (ranging 4% to 12%).

The respondents from the focus groups from Polog and Northeast region point out different security concerns such as security on the streets, security in the schools, digital security etc. while those from Vardar and Pelagonija regions feel pretty much safe pointing out: "In general, we are peaceful country"; "Yes I feel pretty much safe."

Albanians as well as Roma, to a slightly greater extent, feel neither safe nor unsafe compared to Macedonians and other ethnicities.

Regarding the digital space, youth from the South West (31%) and North East (23%) regions feel significantly unsafe compared to other regions (where the range is from 8% to 19%). Also, a large proportion of Roma (23%) and Albanians (20%) feel unsafe in the digital space compared to Macedonians (15%).

Regarding the feeling of safety in public locations, the majority of young people feel almost equally safe in public transportation (53%) and on public squares, walking places and bike paths (54%). However, the percentage of those feeling unsafe is slightly higher in public transport (11%) than the public squares, walking places and bike paths (9%).

Chart 8: *Feeling of safety in public transport and public locations*

While the majority of male respondents (57%) feel safe in public transport, the percentage of female respondents feeling safe is lower (48%). Additionally, 40% of female respondents feel n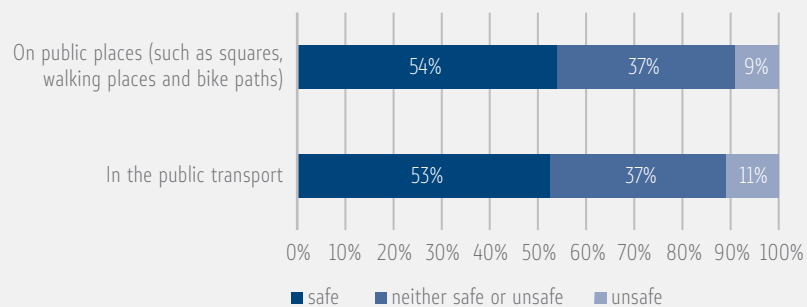either safe nor unsafe compared to 33% of male respondents, while 11% of female respondents feel completely unsafe compared to 9% of male respondents. Regarding safety in squares, walking places and bike paths, the results are similar. Namely, the percentage of female respondents feeling safe is lower than that of male respondents.

"Public transport is important for me. I use public transportation very often. I do not feel safe at all because there are situations when someone will pull out a knife, start a fight, or the bus could catch fire. Simply put, I do not feel very safe when I am in public transportation but I do not have other means of transportation available".

Female, 19 years old (Skopje)

According to the age group, the majority of youth aged 15 – 18 and 25 – 29 feel safe in public transport, whereas those aged 19 – 24 feel both safe (47%) and neither safe nor unsafe (41%). Regarding the safety on squares, walking places and bike paths, the majority of all three age groups feel safe.

Regionally, in Skopje, the Northeast and East regions young people generally feel less safe in public transport and in squares, walking places and bike paths. Namely, 19% of people in Skopje region and 17% in Northeast feel unsafe in public transport compared to other regions, where it ranges from 1% to 9%. In addition, 64% of youth in the East region feel neither safe nor unsafe. Regarding squares, walking places and bike paths, 22% of people in Northeast feel unsafe in these locations compared to other regions, where it the range is from 1% to 14%. Furthermore, 66% of youth in the East region feel neither safe nor unsafe.

"It happened last year during the winter in my neighbourhood in Lisiche, some streets do not have lights. I came late from the faculty, it was very dark and I did not know where to go, which concerned me, I could not arrive home safely".

Female, 20 years old (Skopje)

The majority of Macedonians, Roma and most other ethnicities feel safe on public transport and in squares, walking places and bike paths. Although the largest portion of Albanian respondents (47%) feels safe in public transport and in other public locations (48%), 45% feel neither safe nor unsafe on public transport and 43% fell neither safe nor unsafe on other public locations, respectively.

According to the interview with the representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are annual campaigns aimed at increasing safety in buses and in public places. These campaigns include, among other activities, the distribution of flyers with messages about nonviolent behaviour. These campaigns are very often related to some specific events such as campaigns for the safe celebration of graduation, campaigns highlighting the negative consequences of using firecrackers (especially in the run up to a New Year's Eve), safe driving with no alcohol use etc.

– The biggest problems of youth at the moment

A lack of cultural and sports activities (51% of the respondents) and a lack of development opportunities (51%) are the biggest problems for the youth at the moment, followed by unemployment and economic problems which represent the biggest problem for 49% of the young people. Young women (54%) see the lack of cultural and sports activities as the biggest problem, whereas young men (49%) find lack of development opportunities to be the biggest issue. Youth living in cities find the lack of development opportunities to be the biggest problem, whereas those living in rural areas find unemployment and economic problems and lack of cultural and sports activities to be equally important problems.
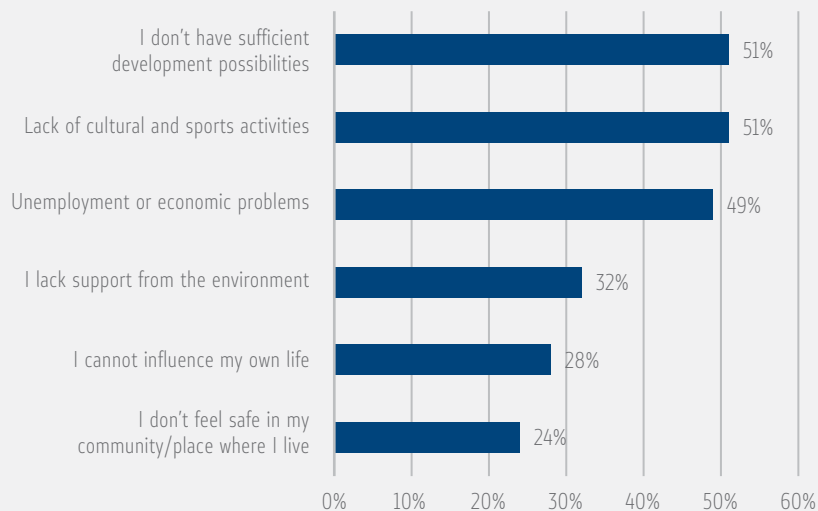

Chart 9: *Biggest problems*

The data analysis shows that these three problems also predominate across ethnicity, regional dispersion and age groups. However, the importance of these three problems varies as follows:

– The analysis by ethnic background shows that for 67% of the Turks and 52% of young Albanians, unemployment and economic problems are the biggest issues, whereas for Macedonians, Roma, Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks and other ethnicities, the biggest problem is the lack of development opportunities.

– According to age category, youth who are 15 – 18 find the lack of cultural and sports activities the biggest problem whereas, for those aged 19 – 29, unemployment and economic problems and lack of development opportunities dominate as the biggest issues.

– The analysis by geographic region shows that in three of eight geographic regions (Vardar, East, Southwest) the lack of cultural and sports activities is the biggest problem. The lack of development opportunities is the dominant issue for the majority of youth living in Southeast and Pelagonija region, whereas unemployment and economic problems dominate for young people in the Polog and Northeast region.

Young people from the Vardar region feel the biggest pressure from the listed problems, as all of them represent the biggest issues for the majority of youth in the region. In contrast, the majority of youth living in the Skopje region do not find any of the listed problems to be the biggest issue. Their attitudes are closely divided on whether the lack of cultural and sports activities and lack of development opportunities "is" and "is not" the biggest problem.

72% of young people do not consider safety in their community to be the biggest problem at the moment, while the remaining options (such as the lack of support from the environment, the lack of control over the own lives) are not the biggest problem for 60% of the respondents.

According to interviews conducted with representatives of youth organizations that cover the national level activities and represent umbrella organizations, the focus of their activities is not directly related to the security and safety of youth. There are only a few examples of organizations undertaking activities for peace and security, and these are usually not conducted on a strategic and programmatic level. Some of these examples are related to education about the negative effects of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorist activities, other with safety in the workplace or with the schools as a safe environment for youth. However, the representatives of youth organizations mentioned that their member organizations conduct a more focused work on the prevention of peer violence in primary and secondary schools.

– Concerns of youth about different phenomena

Young respondents in the research were asked to rate their level of concern about different phenomena that negatively affect safety and security. The rating was made on a scale where 1 is not concerned at all and 10 is extremely concerned. According to the data presented in Table 1 young people have the greatest concern about organized crime (mean value = 7.1) followed by natural disasters (mean value = 6.9) and the possibility of armed conflict breaking out within the Western Balkans (mean value = 6.7). The lowest concern among youth is about groups of sports fans that are sometimes violent during and after sports events (mean value = 5.7). According to the interview conducted with a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are special programs for working with groups of sports fans. These programs were established early in 2007 and since then, there has been constant work with the fan groups. According to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021[15], organized crime also presents the biggest concern for youth on most locations.

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[15] https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/shared-futures-youth-perceptions-peace-western-balkans

#	Phenomena	Mean
1.	Groups of sports fans that are sometimes violent	5.7
2.	Domestic violence	5.9
3.	Hate speech	6.4
4.	Internet safety (cyber security)	6.3
5.	Arrival of migrants and refugees	6.3
6.	International terrorism	6.5
7.	Ultranationalist groups	6.5
8.	Organized crime (1)	7.1
9.	Possibility of armed conflict breaking out in the country	6.4
10.	Possibility of armed conflict breaking out within the Western Balkans (3)	6.7
11.	Natural disasters (2)	6.9

Table 1: *Concerns about different phenomena*

Female respondents consistently have higher levels of concern compared to male respondents. Regarding domestic violence as one of the factors that endanger security and safety, young women are significantly more concerned than young men (the mean value among young women = 6.2 is higher compared to mean value among young men = 5.7). The age group 15 – 18 is the least concerned about all phenomena compared to the remaining two age groups. In addition, the age group 25 - 29 is more concerned about organized crime (mean value = 7.3) than the other two age groups (mean value = 7.1 among 19 - 24 and mean value = 6.8 among 15 - 18 age group).

The analysis by region shows that young people from the Pelagonija region are less concerned about all the listed phenomena compared to their peers from the other seven regions. Young people from Vardar and Southwest regions show bigger greater concern for all phenomena (the means for these two regions are significantly higher compared to the means for the other regions). However, for some of the phenomena (such as the possibility of armed conflict breaking out in the country and in the Western Balkans as well as for natural disasters), concerns of youth from the Polog and Northeast regions are also significantly higher than those of the youth from the remaining regions.

Young people from the Macedonian community show lower concern about all phenomena compared to the youth from all other ethnicities. Youth living in the rural areas show bigger concern for all phenomena than those living in the cities.

Conclusions and recommendations

– Young people find the country neither secure nor insecure. However, a small portion of the youth think that the country is not a secure place. Regarding security in the country over the next five years, most young people think that the situation will stay the same, whereas more than one quarter of young people think that the situation will worsen. The biggest optimists

in this regard are youth from the Southwest region and the biggest pessimist are youth from the Northeast region. In general, young people feel safe in most public places and public locations (public transport, squares, bike paths). As the place becomes physically bigger and undefined the sense of safety decreases. Thus, youth find the neighbourhood the safest and digital space as the least safe. Young people feel less safe on public transport. Young women, in general, feel less safe than young men. Youth from the Northeast region find safety as lower than their peers from other regions.

– A lack of cultural and sports activities and a lack of development opportunities are the biggest problems of the youth at the moment, followed by unemployment and economic problems. These are the predominant issues, although there are some differences in prioritizations across regions, age, gender and ethnic groups.

– One in every four young person's finds safety in their community to be the biggest problem. On the other hand, youth organizations have a limited focus on activities related to the security and safety of youth.

– Young people have the greatest concern about organized crime followed by natural disasters and the possibility of armed conflict breaking out within the Western Balkans. They are almost not concerned about groups of sports fans that are sometimes violent during and after the sport events. Young women consistently show higher levels of concern for every phenomenon compared to young men. Regarding domestic violence as one of the factors that endanger security and safety, young women are significantly more concerned than young men. Youth from the Pelagonija region are less concerned compared to their peers from other regions.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– The Government and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth should include young people in the main processes and mechanisms in the country and on the local level for policymaking, information sharing, discussion and planning of peace and security.

– The Law on Sport should include specific articles that forbid violence in sports venues and further foster the principles of safe behaviour of youth taking part in sports activities or as members of fan groups.

– Youth organizations in the country should design strategic programs focused on the security and safety of young people.

5.2 PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL PEACE PROCESSES

This section explores the general understanding among youth about peacebuilding, as well as their experiences and participation in various activities related to peace and security. In addition, this section analyzes the activities of the authorities related to the safety and security of young people.

– General knowledge of peacebuilding concept

Youth respondents were asked to rate their general understanding of the peacebuilding concept on a scale where 1 is "I am not introduced" at all and 5 is "I am completely introduced". The data shows that conceptual knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding among young people is very low, with nearly a quarter (26%) rating their understanding as high (grade 4 and 5). In addition, as presented in Chart 10, the main concern is that half of the respondents are not introduced to the peacebuilding concept at all.
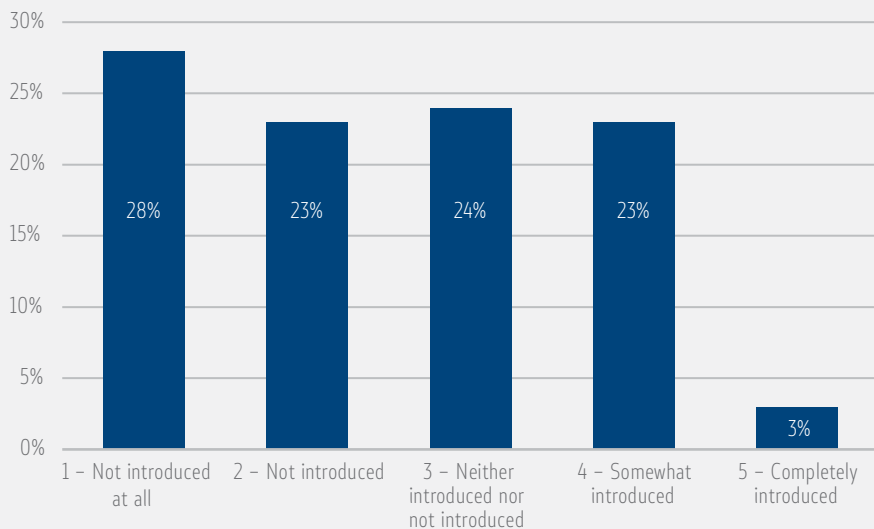
Chart 10: *Understanding the peacebuilding concept*

High school students are less familiar with the peacebuilding concept compared to the other two age groups. Specifically, 59% of youth aged 15 – 18 are not introduced to the concept, compared to age groups 19 – 24 (48%) and 25 – 29 (43%). Male respondents are slightly less knowledgeable about peacebuilding (51%) compared to female respondents (49%). Youth from Skopje, Polog and Pelagonija regions are significantly less familiar with the peacebuilding concept (around 61% not introduced), compared to their peers from the Vardar and the Southwest region (18% and 11% not introduced).

> Understanding of peace: "When there is no war"; "When everything is peaceful"; "Mental and physical wellbeing"; "Cooperation"; "Absence of concerns".
>
> Male, 22 years (Strumica)

The youth from the Albanian ethnic community have a better understanding of the peacebuilding concept compared to their Macedonian peers and those from other ethnicities. Specifically, only 36% of Albanians are not introduced to the peacebuilding concept compared to 75% of Serbs, 73% of Roma, 53% of the Macedonians and 52% of Turks. It is expected that young people who live in multiethnic communities are more exposed to peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities, and thus are more familiar to these concepts.

– Youth activism for peace and security

Following the low levels of understanding of the peacebuilding concept, youth respondents show minimal activism related to participation in actions and initiatives that promote peace and security. Specifically, 94% of the respondents haven't volunteered in such activities in the past 12 months (Chart 11). This was also observed in the focus group discussions where most participants had not participated or volunteered in activities promoting peace and security. Most of the activities and volunteering experiences of youth in the focus groups were related to the Red Cross, environmental actions, youth organizations, scouts, international exchange projects in culture and non-formal education, sports activities etc. In general, in the Western Balkan countries, including North Macedonia, there is a sense of apathy and low levels of activism among young people in all segments of society. According to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021, "Relatively few young respondents reported taking part in any kind of civic activity in the past 12 months although the proportion ranged from a low of 8.5 percent in Albania to a higher 32.2 percent in Montenegro, with an average of 19.5 percent of youth in the region participating in civic activity in past 12 months".
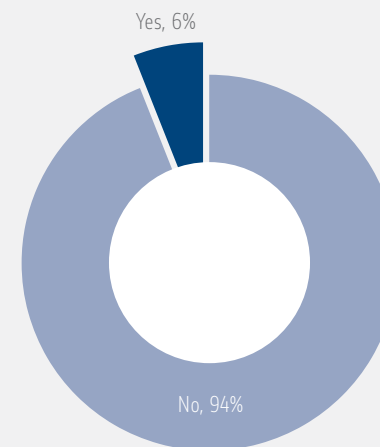

Chart 11: *Volunteering in peace and security activities and initiatives in the past 12 months*

Youth representing the age group 18 – 24 are the least active (95%) whereas the age group 25 – 29 is the most active (93%) in volunteering in activities that promote peace and security in the past 12 months. Youth from Southwest region who have shown a better understanding of the peacebuilding concept in the previous question, are also more involved in activities and initiatives that promote peace and security (13%) compared to their peers from the remaining regions (ranging from 2% to 4%). Young Albanians also show greater involvement, with 9% of the respondents participating in activities that promote peace and security. Their Macedonian and Roma peers show 5% involvement.

The majority of that 6% (70 respondents) of youth who were active in the past 12 months in the promotion of peace and security mostly volunteered in cultural events (56%), followed by youth volunteering in eco-actions (49%), formal and non-formal educational activities (47%) and sports events (46%). Civil protests (16%) and political activities (13%) are less popular than all the listed events for the promotion of peace and security. A significant portion of those who volunteered in citizens' protests and political activities were males. Young women (67%) compared to young men (46%) are more active in cultural activities and in formal and non-formal educational activities (55% females vs. 41% males) (Chart 12). For comparison, according to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021, young people from the Western Balkan countries engage mostly in "helping poor and marginalized populations, promoting democracy and human rights and politics". According to the same study, "fewer young women were interested in politics than were young men".
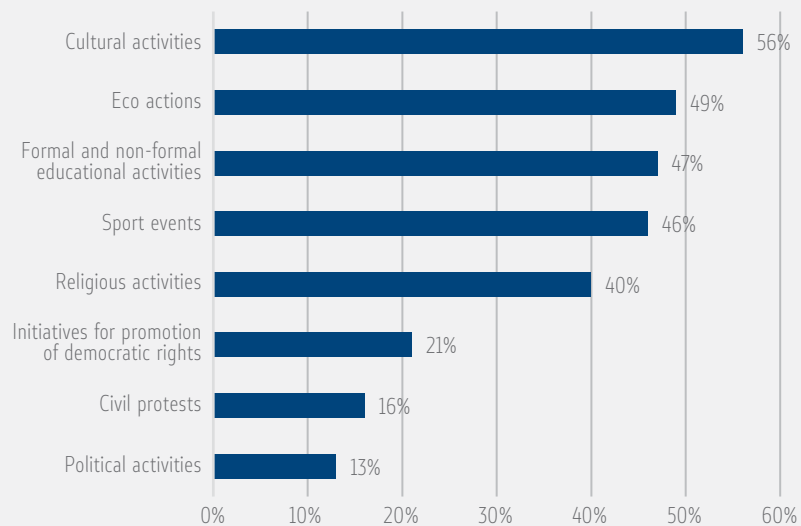

Chart 12: *Volunteering in different types of activities that promote peace and security*

While high school youth, as expected, follow the general trend of volunteering mostly in cultural, eco and sports activities, youth aged 19 – 24 mostly took part in cultural activities (65%), eco actions (55%) and religious activities (50%). A significantly larger proportion of Albanian youth (81%) and half of the Roma respondents volunteer in formal and non-formal educational activities compared to only 27% of Macedonians. Additionally, 78% of Albanian youth and half of the Roma respondents volunteer in religious activities that promote peace and security compared to Macedonians (only 14%). Interestingly, 1/3 of Albanian youth are active in citizen protests, while this figure is only 8% among Macedonians, with no participation in citizen protests by other ethnicities. Furthermore, all Roma respondents volunteered in cultural activities, initiatives for promotion of democracy and eco-actions, while none of the Roma respondents participated in political activities, citizen protests and sports activities.

> "I am a volunteer in NGO Multikultura and I participate in many training events. I am also a member of the Youth Council. We conducted one volunteering action to help people affected by the earthquake in Türkiye by collecting clothes. Also, another volunteering action was dedicated to helping people with special needs."
>
> Female, 19 years (Tetovo)

The analysis by region is conducted on a small base of respondents (only 70 respondents) predominantly youth from the Polog region (21 respondents), Skopje (16 respondents) and Southwest (also 16 respondents). Consequently, the analysis shows that youth from the Polog (76%) region have the highest percentage of youth who volunteered in cultural activities compared to other regions. The Polog region dominates with volunteering of youth in formal and non-formal educational activities (86%) and religious activities (67%) compared to other regions. Youth from the Skopje region show less interest in participating in cultural activities (31%) compared to other regions, whereas youth from the Southwest region shows less interest in participating in formal and non-formal educational activities for the promotion of peace and security.

– Activities of the authorities related to peacebuilding and security of youth

Respondents were also asked about the activities of the authorities related to peacebuilding and the security of young people. Most of them (87%) haven't heard about these. Females are more informed (15%) compared to males (11%). Additionally, the age group 25 – 29 is more informed about these activities (16%) compared to the remaining two age groups ranging from 11% to 12%. (Chart 13).
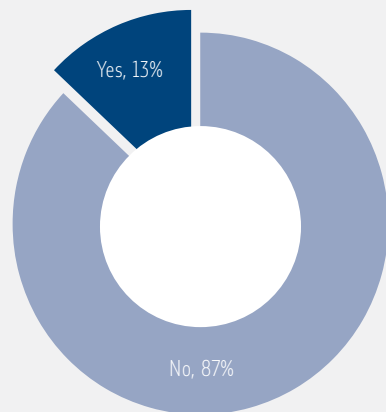
Chart 13: *Level of information about peace and security activities of the authorities related to youth*

Respondents from the focus groups share examples of activities such as training, lectures, and regional schools on peace and security, predominantly organized by CSOs. Some of these activities, for example, are organized with a follow up activity by young people who after the training should develop and propose solutions on how to improve the security in the city. In addition, a few respondents also mentioned some activities organized by the authorities, such as educational sessions by the police in schools on how to improve security in public traffic and how and where to report potential security threats, as well as activities by school support staff for the prevention of violence, such as a workshop on the prevention of violence organized by the school psychologist.

> "At the moment, we are working on a project with the National Youth Council regarding security in traffic. Also, we have had activities for antidiscrimination and intercultural dialogue with an aim of decreasing hate and stereotypes among various groups of youth. Representatives of the religious communities were present too."
>
> Male, 22 years (Strumica)

Youth living in rural areas (15%) are slightly more informed than those living in cities (12%) about the activities of the authorities related to peacebuilding and security. Also, Turks (19%) and Albanians (17%) are slightly more informed compared to Macedonians (12%). The regional analysis shows that youth from the Northeast region are more informed about the activities of the authorities for peacebuilding and the security of youth (23%) compared to their peers from other regions (ranging from 9% to 16%).

Young respondents in the survey were also asked to select the top three most involved factors/institutions in the issue of peacebuilding. Table 2 presents a list where civil society organizations are selected for the top position by almost half of the respondents (49%). The list continues with the state institutions (48%) and citizens (45%). It is interesting that young people assign the responsibilities for peacebuilding predominantly to national level entities and state institutions, whereas local government, which should be the first instance for security and peace in the local communities is in fourth place according to 22% of the respondents. This situation partially reflects the general hierarchy in the country with most of the functions being located on the national level.

According to an interview with a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry conducts a spectrum of educational activities in schools for prevention of violence and to increase security and safety among young people. Regarding local level responsibilities, the representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs finds the establishment of the Local Prevention Councils to be important. Some municipalities have established Local Prevention Councils. Local Prevention Councils are recognized as important in the local policies for security and safety and as such, they should have a significant role, especially in enabling a quick flow of information among the local stakeholders and undertaking rapid actions to improve the safety and security of the citizens. These bodies may also consider including youth in their composition, thus increasing the trust of youth in local government. In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has developed a Strategy for Inclusion and Communication with the Community (2024 – 2026)[16] aimed at the inclusion of community members in the protection of public security and safety and the identification and resolution of security threats in cooperation with the police on a local level. One of the measures foreseen with the Strategy is inclusion of youth in the implementation of the strategy.

#	Factors/Institutions	% of respondents
1.	Civil Society Organizations	49%
2.	State institutions	48%
3.	Citizens	45%
4.	Municipality	22%
5.	Religious organizations	21%
6.	Political parties	20%
7.	Businesses	8%

Table 2: *Institutions concerned with the peacebuilding*

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[16] Ministry of Internal Affairs, Strategy for Inclusion and Communication with the Community (2024 – 2026), available at: https://mvr.gov.mk/Upload/Editor_Upload/strategii/Strategija%20komunikacija_PO684887.pdf

The age group 19 to 24 finds that civil society organizations are slightly more concerned with peacebuilding compared to the remaining two age groups. Young high school students aged 15 – 18 find the state and the civil society organizations equally concerned. Youth from the Vardar and Polog regions find citizens most concerned with peacebuilding compared to other regions, which find both the civil society organizations and state institutions concerned with peacebuilding. It is interesting that only 9% of young people from the Northeast region find the local government concerned with peacebuilding, which is significantly lower compared to results for other regions, ranging from 20% to 38%. This may be related to the general finding that the young people from the Northeast region feel less secure.

Conclusions and recommendations

– Conceptual knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding by young people are very low. The main concern is that half of the respondents are not introduced to the peacebuilding concept. Those young people who live in multiethnic communities are more exposed to activities for peacebuilding and conflict resolution and thus more familiar with these concepts.

– Youth respondents show low activism and interest for participation in actions and initiatives that promote peace and security. The activism of youth in peacebuilding activities is bigger among those who show an understanding of the peacebuilding concept. In addition, youth from Polog region are more active than their peers from other regions. The types of activities undertaken towards peacebuilding include cultural events, eco-actions, formal and non-formal educational activities, and sports events.

– Civil protests and political activities are less popular than all listed events for the promotion of peace and security. Young Albanians are significantly more active in civil protests whereas both Roma and Albanian youth are more included in religious activities for the promotion of peace and security.

– Young people do not have information about the activities of the authorities related to peace and security. Those that have some information list educational activities, lectures, prevention activities against violence in schools.

– Civil society organizations are listed in the top position of the authorities concerned with peace and security, followed by state institutions and citizens. Young people place the responsibilities for peacebuilding predominantly on a national level and with state institutions, while local government, which should be the first instance for security and peace in the local communities, stands much lower on the list of responsible institutions. This situation partially reflects the general hierarchy in the country with most functions being located on the national level.

– Local Prevention Councils are recognized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs as important body in security and safety on the local level. The inclusion of youth in these bodies and their activities related to peace and security may increase the trust of young people in the local authorities.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– State institutions responsible for security and education should continue and foster implementation of formal and non-formal educational programs to bring peacebuilding, safety and security concepts closer to youth. The programs need to be tailored to the age groups of youth. All schools in the country should be included with these programs.

– The municipalities should establish Local Prevention Councils. Those municipalities that already have these Councils should make efforts and allocate sufficient budget for the functioning of these bodies. The Councils may also consider including representatives of the Local Youth Councils and young people in their composition, and thus increase the trust of the youth in the local authorities. In addition, a possibility for legal regulation of these bodies may also be considered in particular with the Law on Local Self Government or other relevant legislation.

– Local self-government units in cooperation with the local institutions responsible for peace and security, as well as the Local Prevention Councils (in those municipalities where they exist), should prepare and finance youth activities for promotion and fostering peace and security. The implementation of these programs should be organized in cooperation with the established Local Youth Councils and Youth Centers that are the legal responsibility of the local government.

5.3 COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION

Like many countries in the region and Europe, North Macedonia has not remained immune to the negative influence of extremism and radicalization. According to the OSCE definition, violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism is "a dynamic process in which one person at the end accepts the terroristic violence as possible and, moreover, legitimate course of action. Although it might not always lead to this, it may ultimately direct the person to engage in terrorists' activities and to take part in them."[17] This section explores how informed youth are about violent extremism and radicalization. Additionally, the section explores the attitudes of young people regarding reintegration and resocialization of the convicted persons, especially former foreign fighters.

– Youth perception of the presence and influence of radicalization and violent extremism

The majority of youth (53%) find that radicalization is not a problem in their respective community. However, for 38% of young people radicalization is a concern. This finding is in line with the opinion of some of the representatives of interviewed youth organizations who said that the radical ideology is not widespread, though it is present more in some specific places and communities on the territory of our country.

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[17] The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe, OSCE.
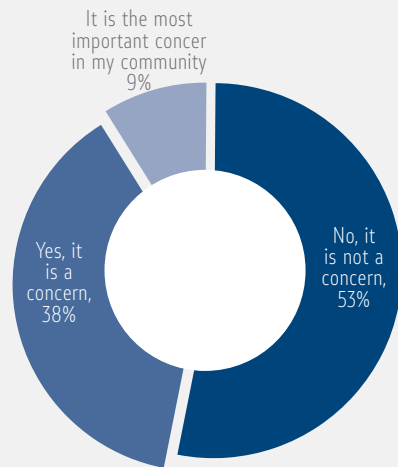
It is the most important concer in my community 9%

Yes, it is a concern, 38%

No, it is not a concern, 53%

Chart 14: *Perception of radicalization*

A significantly larger portion of youth from the East (76%) and Polog (47%) regions think that radicalization is a problem, compared to other regions (data ranging from 7% to 39%). Also, 24% of youth from the Vardar region find radicalization the biggest problem in their community.

> "Radicalisation for me is associated with terrorism. There are some groups that attract young people to these phenomena."
>
> Male, Struga

Youth were asked to select the three most important factors that drive radicalization. Politics is selected at the top of the list by 58% of respondents, followed by economic differences (40%) and religion (37%). Politics dominates as an important driver in the Skopje region (67%) compared to other regions, where it ranges from 50% to 57%. Youth living in the cities attach significant importance to politics (61%) compared to those living in rural areas (54%). The economic differences dominate in the Southwest region compared to other factors and to other regions. Religion dominates in Pelagonija and Skopje.

It is interesting that young people are aware of the presence of radicalization in the digital space. Twenty three percent of the respondents find digital space an important driver. In addition, youth from the Southwest region find digital space an equally important driver of radicalization as politics. Those living in the rural areas (27%) find the digital space a more important driver compared to the respondents living in the cities (20%). The digital space is an important driver of radicalization according to young Albanians (37%) and young Roma (25%) compared to 18% of Macedonians.

Youth included in the focus group discussions spoke about a number of threats and security concerns in the digital space. They may not point out directly the radicalization as one of the threats, but provide examples of communication with adults who they do not know, threats of abuse personal data, photos, and security concerns related with their profiles on the social networks.

Youth included in the research are generally not willing to communicate or live near people convicted of terrorist activities/violent extremism, or who show signs of radicalization, with 73% to 75% of the respondents agreeing with these statements (levels 3 and 4 on the scale). Chart 15 shows the attitudes of the respondents in particular situations on a scale where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 4 is "strongly agree". In addition, it is visible that 43% of respondents are reserved when it comes to supporting resocialization of former fighters or people convicted of terrorist activities and violent extremism (level 1 and 2 on scale).
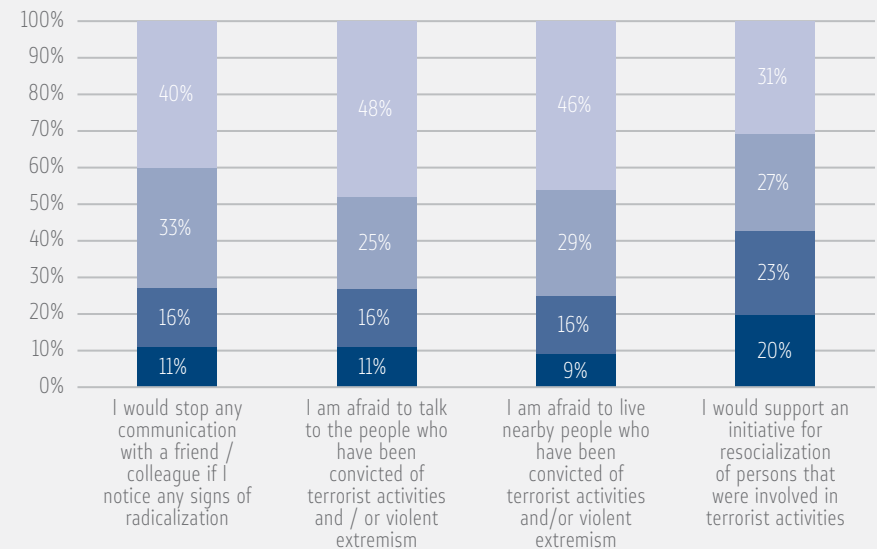
Chart 15: *Attitudes of youth towards people convicted of terrorist activities/violent extremism*

– The role of the public and institutions in preventing and responding to violent extremism and radicalization

The respondents were asked to determine the role of different actors in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization. Sixty two percent of the youth find the police as the actor with the biggest role in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, followed by international organizations (37%) and civil society organizations (33%).

Although young Albanians (48%) also find the police playing the biggest role in the countering violent extremism and radicalization, this percentage is smaller compared to Roma (75%) and Macedonians (67%); while other ethnicities range from 44% to 50%. Following this, young Albanians (37%) find religious leaders to have a more important role compared to Macedonians (27%) whereas for 36% of Roma the role of the Centers for Social Work is especially important compared to other ethnicities, which range from 20% to 29%.
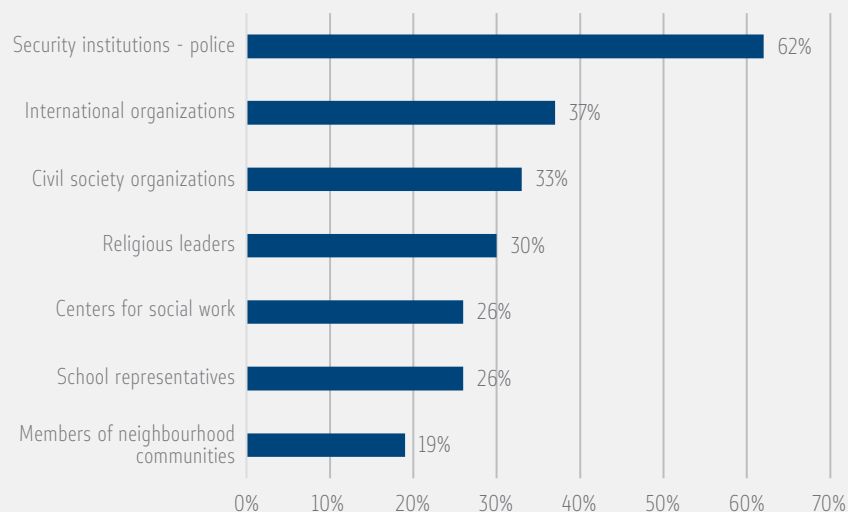
Chart 16: *Role of public and institutions in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization*

In the Southwest region, civic structures (such as civil society organizations, religious leaders, and leaders of the neighbouring communities) and international organizations have more important roles in the countering violent extremism and radicalization compared to the police. International organizations have an especially important role according to the respondents from the East region. According to the data, the role of school representatives and Centers for Social Work in the prevention of and response to violent extremism is not sufficiently recognized by young people.

"I must emphasize that regarding the presence of violent extremism and terrorism our organization provided an opinion to the Government whereas the state security services reacted timely and all returnees in the country and extremist movements are appropriately treated which limited the negative influence and spillover among youth on local level".

National stakeholder, youth organization

The respondents find the fight against disinformation is as the most important factor in response to radicalization according to 47% of the respondents. This finding is related to the previously explained perception of youth about the importance of digital space as one of the drivers of radicalization. Namely, digital space is the most frequently used channel of communication by young people that makes them exposed to various information. To protect themselves, young people need to possess critical and analytical skills and basic education about the influence of radicalization and violent extremism. The fight against disinformation is followed by economic opportunities and employment (44%) and equal distribution of goods and services (40%). Males and females follow the same trend about the importance of different factors in response to radicalization.
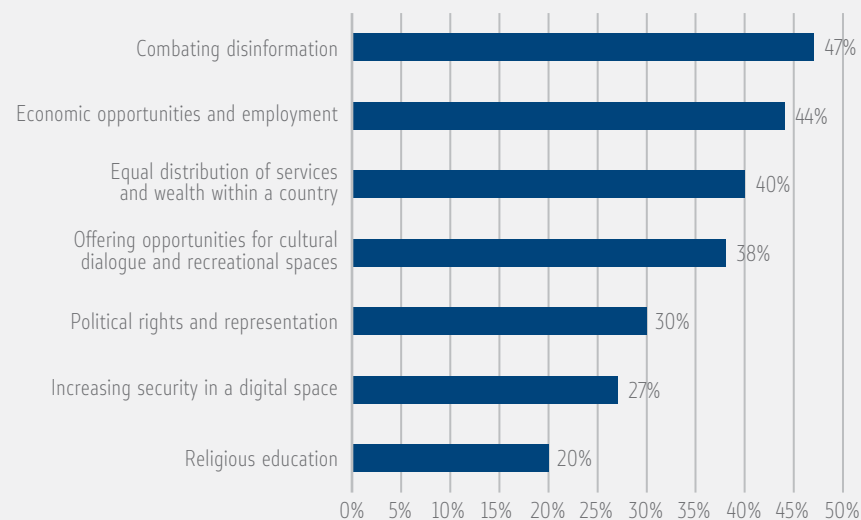
Chart 17: *Factors in response to radicalization*

The fight against disinformation and economic opportunities and employment are equally important in response to radicalization according to the age group 19 – 24. Youth in this age group become exposed to the labour market and are thus expected to find economic opportunities and employment to be critical. These two factors are also equally important for youth who live in the cities. Those living in rural areas select cultural dialogue (39%) as almost equal to the economic opportunities and employment (40%). According to 36% of young Albanians, cultural dialogue is as important as the economic opportunities and employment, whereas for 48% of young Roma, cultural dialogue is the second most important factor in the response to radicalization. In addition, cultural dialogue is a significantly more important factor in the Vardar, East and Pelagonija regions compared to other regions. In the Southwest region, increasing security in the digital space is a significantly more important factor (60%) in response to radicalization compared to the remaining regions ranging from 9% – 43%.

Conclusions and recommendations

– Young people are, in general, informed about radicalization and find that radicalization is not a problem in their respective communities. However, more than 1/3 find radicalization to be a problem.

– Politics is selected as the top driver of radicalization, followed by economic differences and religion. It is interesting that young people are aware of the presence of radicalization in the digital space.

– In general, youth are not willing to communicate with people convicted of terrorist activities/ violent extremism and are not supportive of their resocialization.

– For youth, the police have the biggest role in the countering violent extremism and radicalization, followed by international organizations and civil society organizations. In the Southwest region, civic structures (such as civil society organizations, religious leaders, and leaders of the neighbouring communities) and international organizations have more important roles in the countering violent extremism and radicalization compared to other regions.

– The role of school representatives and Centers for Social Work in the prevention of and response to violent extremism is not sufficiently recognized by young people.

– Youth find the fight against disinformation to be the most important factor in the response to radicalization. Namely, digital space is the most frequently used channel of communication by young people that makes them exposed to various information. To protect themselves from disinformation, youth need education and critical thinking skills. Other factors in the response to radicalization are economic opportunities and equal distributions of goods and services.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– Government and state institutions that participate in the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism should allocate sufficient funds for implementation of the activities countering to youth within the strategic framework for the countering violent extremism and combating terrorism.

– Civil society organizations and international organizations should cooperate with the state institutions and local government to develop and provide hands-on information to youth related to the local and national systems for the countering of violent extremism and radicalization.

5.4 YOUTH VIOLENCE

Violence among youth is one of the key concerns not just in North Macedonia but also in the Western Balkan countries and internationally. Violence in the national context is defined in the national strategic framework as: "All forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent act, bullying or exploitation, including sexual harassment[18]." In the following section,

[18] National Strategy on Prevention and Justice for Children in the Republic of North Macedonia (2022 – 2027) and Action Plan (2022 – 2023) available at: http://dspdp.com.mk/vesti/promocija-na-nacionalnata-strategija-za-prevencija-i-pravda-za-decata-2022-2027/

violence will be analyzed in general using the results of the research study, and comparisons will be drawn with similar studies about violence and especially youth violence in schools.

– Perceptions about youth violence

Young respondents were asked about the extent of violence among youth. Fifty nine percent of young people state that violence is "completely present" or "somewhat present" among youth against only 11% who think that violence "is not present at all" or "not present". A slightly higher percentage of females (61%) find that violence is "completely present" or "somewhat present" compared to 56% of males. In addition, a slightly larger portion of the age group 19 – 24 find that violence us "completely present" or "somewhat present" (61%) compared to the remaining two age groups both with 57%.
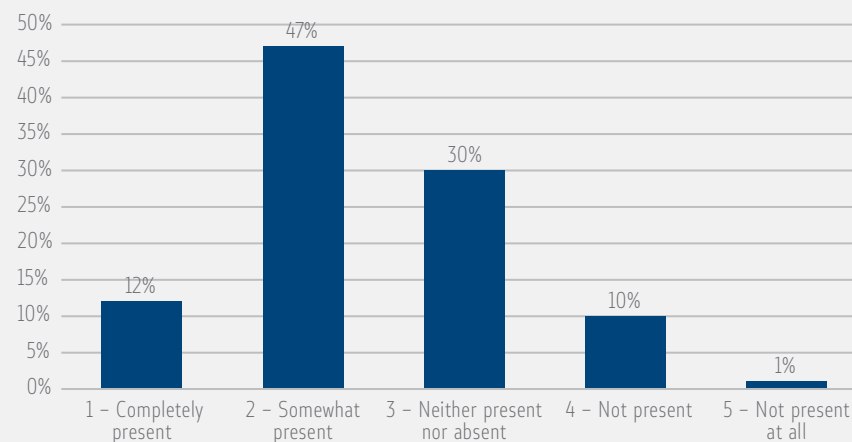
Chart 18: *Presence of violence among youth*

A smaller portion of young Albanians (47%) find violence present among youth compared to Bosniaks (82%), Serbs (75%), Roma (66%), Macedonians (63%), Turks (59%) and Vlachs (45%). Youth from the Polog (35%), Pelagonija (40%) and Southwest (41%) regions also find that violence is not as present compared to the youth from the other five regions (ranging from 64% to 78%). A higher percentage of youth from the cities (61%) find violence to be present than those living in rural areas (56%).

The data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs show a slight increase in violence, especially peer violence and cyber violence. There is an increase in the numbers of both the victims of violence and young people who are perpetrators of criminal acts. In 2022, the number of children victims of violence was 62, while in 2023, the number was 74. Practice within the Ministry of Internal affairs shows that young people are exposed to safety threats and violence especially in public places and in cyber space. Their focus is on preventive activities and measures with youth from primary and secondary schools whereas other institutions such as the Agency for Youth and Sport had activities that include youth above 19 years.

The top three reasons that motivate violent behaviour among youth are the sense of injustice (40%), disappointment with their social status (39%) and lack of family support (34%). Also, lack of institutional support scores very closely (33%). Equal proportions of young women and young men find the sense of injustice and disappointment with their social status to be the top reasons. In addition, young women find the lack of family support and lack of support from institutions to be equally important factors that motivate violent actions.
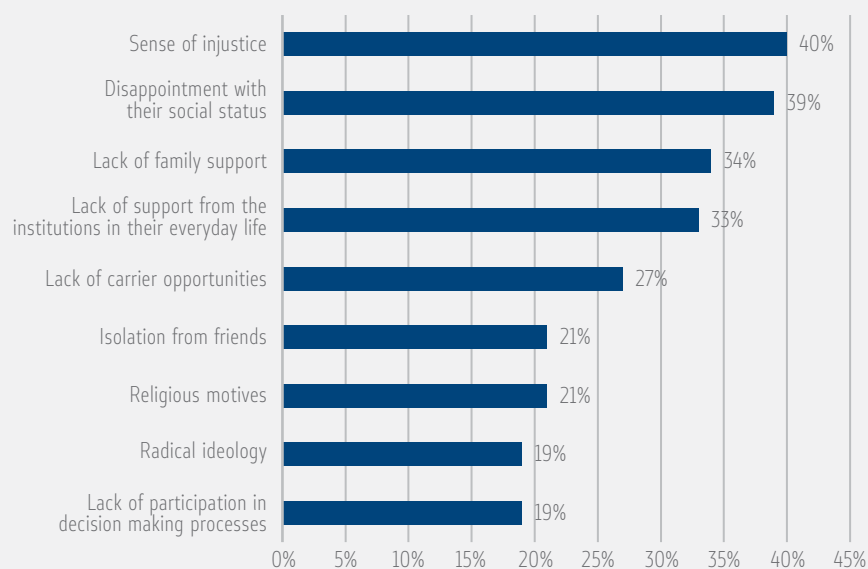
Young Albanians (27%) select radical ideology as the third most important reason for violent behavior, whereas young Roma (32%) cite the lack of carrier opportunities. The responses of other ethnicities, such as Vlachs, Bosniaks, Serbs and Turks are generally distributed between the sense of injustice and disappointment with their social status, while the remaining factors receive significantly less attention. The disappointment with their social status dominates in the group of high school students, while university students find the sense of injustice to be the dominant factor. A significantly higher portion of youth in the Southwest region (67%) selects disappointment with their social status as the dominant factor compared to other regions ranging from 12% to 48%. The sense of injustice dominates in the Pelagonija and East regions.

From the interviews with the national stakeholders in the field of education, it is evident that the state is aware of school violence both in primary and secondary schools. Different mechanisms are deployed to ensure prevention and protection of students from violence. There is a specific department for counseling for parents established within the Ministry of Education and Science that deals with cases of violence. Violence can be reported on the e-mail address designated for this purpose. Primary schools are obligated to implement the Guidelines for the Procedure for Reporting and Protection of Student Victims of Violence and integrate in their charters and annual programs activities aimed at prevention and protection against violence. In addition, the Bureau for Development of Education implemented in 2022 and 2023 a cycle of training for teachers and school support staff in primary schools on the topic of protection against violence. The conclusion is that the budget for training is not sufficient, although there is a need and willingness to implement the training programs.

– Experience with violence

18% of youth included in the research have experienced or witnessed violence, or both. A larger portion of youth in the age groups 15 – 18 and 19 – 24 (16%) have witnessed violence compared to the age group 25 – 29 (13%). A significantly higher percentage of youth from the Polog region (25%) have witnessed violence compared to youth from other regions (ranging from 5% to 17%). A larger portion of young Roma (32%) have witnessed violence in the last 12 months compared to Macedonians (15%). The other ethnic communities range from 15% to 18%, whereas only 9% of young Albanians have witnessed violence.

Chart 19: *Factors that motivate violent behaviour*

Chart 20: *Experience and witnessing violence*

Most youth with experience in violence have experienced or witnessed verbal violence (80%) followed by 74% who have experienced or witnessed physical violence. The remaining types of violence such as s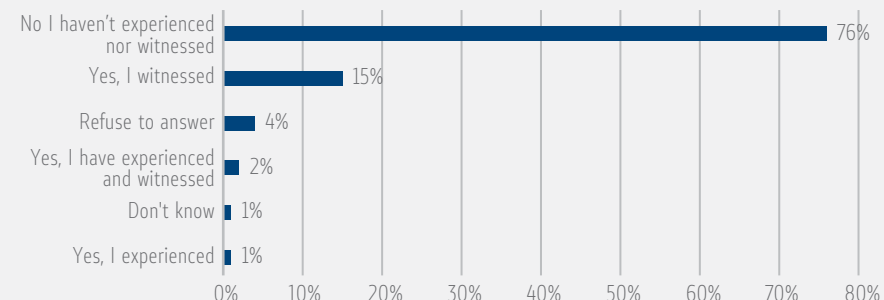ocial, psychological, digital and sexual are reported in a significantly lower percentage. According to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021, an average of 12% across the countries have experienced violence in the form of hate speech online and offline.

Physical violence dominates in the statements of young men. Eighty percent of young men experienced or witnessed physical violence compared to 66% of young women. In addition, verbal, social and psychological dominate in the statements of young women. 84% of young women experienced or witnessed verbal violence compared to 76% of young men. A larger portion of young women experienced sexual violence (4%) compared to young men (2%). According to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021, "in most locations, women experienced significantly more sexual harassment than men".

Youth in the age group of 15 – 18 more often experience both physical and verbal violence, whereas psychological violence is more prevalent in the age group 25 – 29. Young Albanians (81%), Roma (76%) and Vlachs (67%) experience physical violence more often compared to Macedonians (69%). All respondents from Serbian and Turkish ethnicity have experienced physical violence. Verbal violence is less prevalent among young Albanians (69%) compared to Macedonians (82%), Roma (82%), and Turks (80%). All respondents from Bosniaks and Vlach ethnicity have experienced verbal violence.All other types of violence (psychological, social and violence via Internet) are more prevalent among young Albanians compared to Macedonians, Roma, Serbs, Turks, Vlachs and Bosniaks. Five percent of Albanians and 6% of Roma experienced or witnessed sexual violence compared to 2% of Macedonians. Other ethnicities such as Turks, Serbs, Vlachs and Bosniaks have not experienced or witnessed sexual violence.

"The information we collect regarding the violence come from the expert staff. The data are usually collected for the age group 6 - 10, 11 - 14 and 15 - 18 years. In the last year the data show that the violence is prevalent in the age group 10 - 14, with peer violence as dominant type. Boys are more often victims of physical violence whereas girls of psychological violence."

National stakeholder, public institution

In the Southwest region, psychological violence is equally present as physical and verbal violence. Sexual harassment is present in the Vardar (8%), East (5%), Polog (4%) and Skopje (2%) regions, whereas in the other four regions, there is no sexual violence experienced or witnessed by the respondents.

According to the data in the research, it seems that violence in institutions and working spaces is less present than violence in public places such as parks, streets, bars as well as compared to home and school. The experience of youth respondents shows that most of them experienced or witnessed violence on the street (70%), followed by violence in schools (43%) and violence in parks and bars 42% of each location. In most of the given locations (7/12) a larger portion of young women than young men experienced violence as a victim or witness. The difference is especially significant for the violence experienced or witnessed in the house of a friend, where 15% of young women reported violence (as a victim or witness) compared to 5% of young men.

Young people in the focus group discussions share examples of physical violence on the streets when groups of young people fight among each other on a previously arranged time and place. They also point out that drugs and various psychoactive substances are presents in schools, in public places and on cultural events which may also influence the violent behaviour of young people. The use of various types of psychoactive substances on cultural events for youth was also confirmed by the representative of the Ministry of Internal affairs as a security risk.
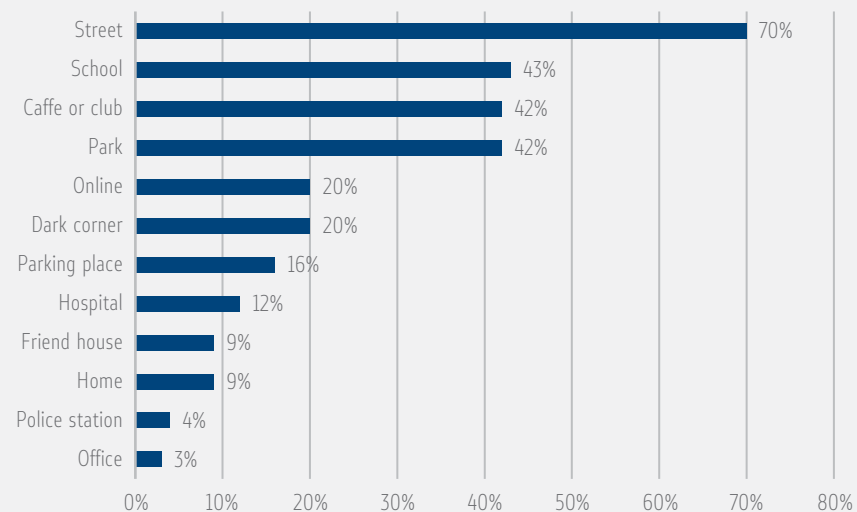
Chart 21: *Violence in different locations*

Especially worrying is data about the violence experienced or witnessed in schools. Namely, 81% of the age group 15 – 18 have experienced violence in school which confirms that violence is largely present in primary and secondary schools. Also, 13% of this age group have experienced or witnessed violence at home, which is a significantly higher portion compared to the age groups 19 – 24 and 25 – 29. In the age group 19 – 24, experiencing or witnessing violence in clubs and bars prevails. A significantly higher percentage of youth from the Albanian community experience or witness violence at home (32%), in school (56%) and in hospital (29%) compared to their Macedonian peers and the overall sample.

Youth from the focus group discussions point out that bullying is very much present in schools. They share examples of bullying, verbal violence and discrimination in schools. For example, if a young man attends a textile school that enrols predominantly young women, he will for sure experience verbal violence from his peers. The same happens if a young women attends a school that enrols predominantly young men.

According to the data from the newest Research on Child Rights conducted by the Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiative "Step by Step" and the Ombudsman in 2023[19] with 600 seventh to ninth grade primary school students, 43% confirm that violence is present in schools, while 46% have been victims of violence. In addition, 40% of students find verbal violence to be the most present followed by physical violence and emotional harassment.

Conclusions and recommendations

– Violence is present among young people in the country. 18% of youth experienced and/or witnessed violence whereas these numbers are much higher for youth in primary and secondary schools. In addition, national stakeholders also confirm that violence is present and list a variety of measures to prevent and combat violence. However, the application of these measures in practice and reporting school violence to responsible institutions are still lacking.

– Most youth identify a sense of injustice, disappointment with their social status and lack of family support as the main reasons for violence. The lack of support from institutions also scores very closely. For younger groups, their social status is the primary reason for violence.

– Verbal violence is mainly present among youth followed by physical violence. Young women mostly experience verbal, psychological and social violence, whereas young men are mostly victims or witnesses of physical violence. Young women more often experience sexual harassment than young men.

– Violence in institutions and workplaces is less present. Young people experienced or witnessed violence mostly in public places such as parks, streets, and bars and violence among peers in schools. Young women share significant experiences or witness violence in the house of a friend.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– The Ministry of Education and Science should further the implementation of the Guidelines for the Procedure for Reporting and Protection of Student Victims of Violence in primary schools and find mechanisms to encourage students, teachers and school support services to report violence.

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[19] Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives "Step by Step" and Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia, "The Rights of the Children in Our Schools", Skopje 2023.

– The Government and the Parliament should accelerate the procedure for adopting the Law on Secondary Education and include articles on the protection, prevention and reporting of violence. The Guideline for the Procedure for Report and Protection of the Student Victim of Violence in secondary schools should be prepared, adopted and implemented as soon as possible.

– Training programs for teachers on the subjects of prevention, protection and reporting of violence in schools should be delivered on a continuous basis to all teachers in the country. In addition, similar programs may be designed for primary and secondary school students for systematic formal and nonformal education. Also, the authorities should explore and transfer successful models and practices applied in foreign countries for prevention and protection of violence in schools.

– The Ministry of Internal Affairs and local authorities should make security assessments of public places such as streets, parks and bars and undertake additional measures to maintain the safety of youth, especially for young women.

– The National Coordination Body for Protection of Children against Abuse and Neglect should make the data on violence among youth in the country accurate and transparent, and easily accessible for all stakeholders.

5.5 CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is a specific type of violence broadly explained as when someone is mean, unkind, or makes fun of others by sending or placing hurtful messages and/or pictures on a computer or through a cell phone. The hurtful messages or pictures can be sent via e-mail, cell phones, text messaging, personal websites like Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, and chat rooms. According to the young people in the focus groups included in this research, as well as numerous research papers conducted in the past three years, cyberbullying is especially prevalent on social networks among peers. Recent events in the region related to violence of youth in schools against their peers and teachers ended tragically with children as victims. These events have their roots in communication in cyberspace which has triggered a red alarm for institutions to take more serious measures, pay additional attention to the communication in cyberspace and prevent violence. In fact, in our national context, most of the national stakeholders and representatives of the civil society organizations interviewed in this research define violence through the existing peer violence in schools that happens mainly on social networks.

– Perceptions of youth about security in cyberspace

Forty two percent of respondents in the research feel "safe" or "completely safe" when using the internet while another 20 % do not feel safe. However, the relatively large percentage of respondents (38%) who feel "neither safe nor not safe" may lead to a conclusion that further research is needed to explore the reasons behind this situation and to see if additional education is needed for youth to increase their confidence and articulate their attitudes towards their security on the internet.
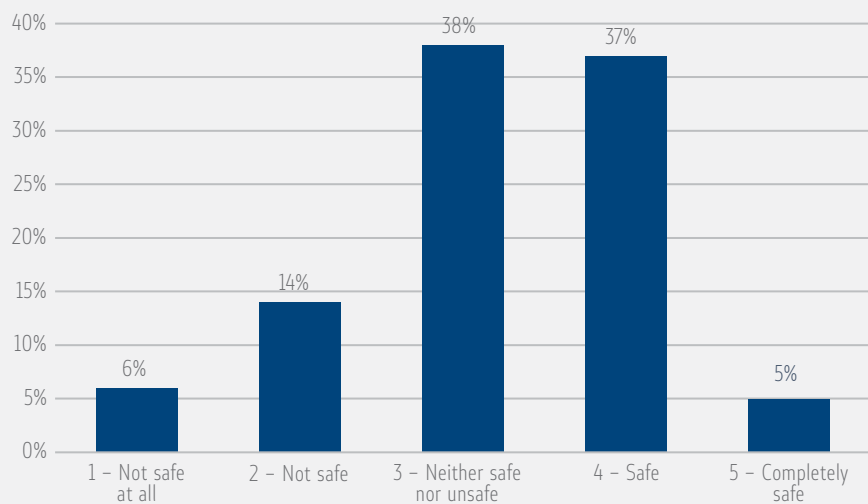
Chart 22: *Security and safety in the cyberspace*

Focus group discussions conducted in all eight regions reveal similar situations in which youth are divided between the feeling of being safe on the internet and the feeling of being neither safe nor not safe.

> "I don't feel safe, on the website there is notification "accept all cookies" and if you click on this and if the page is not secure it may access our personal information and all info that is in the laptop, the pin code and registration number."
>
> Female, 17 years (Struga)

The feeling of being neither safe nor not safe is especially highlighted by youth from the Albanian community (48%). Young Bosniaks (55%) and Roma predominantly feel safe (48%) compared to 45% of Macedonians and 32% of Albanians.

The majority of youth in the East region feel neither safe nor unsafe (56%) which is significantly higher compared to other regions ranging from 26% to 41%. Youth from the Southwest region feel exceptionally unsafe (19%) compared to other regions that range from 1% to 11% whereas youth from Pelagonija region in the majority feel "safe" or "completely safe" (56%).

The majority of youth (66%) pay attention to protecting their personal data and information on the internet. Still, 23% of youth neither pay nor do not pay attention to protecting personal data. Females are less careful (64%) compared to males (68%). Youth from the Northeast region (80%) and the South West region (77%), responding to their feeling of being unsafe on the internet, are especially careful with their personal data compared to other regions and to the overall sample.

Young Serbs (79%) and Albanians (71%) are more careful with their personal data compared to Turks (67%), Macedonians (65%), Vlachs (65%), Roma (50%) and Bosniaks (45%).
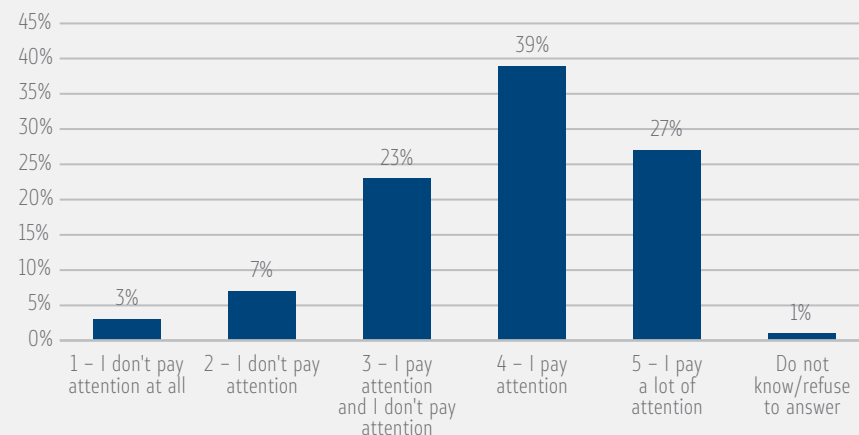
Chart 23: *Protecting personal data on the internet*

– Experience with violation of security and safety in cyberspace

The majority of respondents (72%) do not have experience with their photos, video, or data being used on the Internet without permission. Another 24% know someone who experienced this type of violation on the internet.
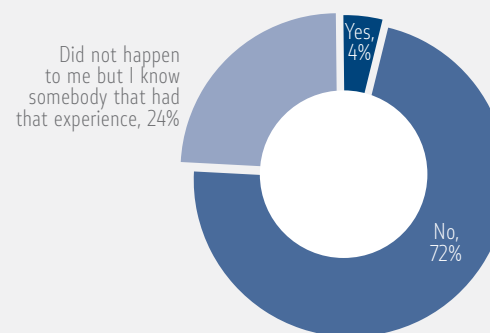
Chart 24: *Experience with misuse of personal data*

In addition, there were cases in North Macedonia when photos and materials of young girls and women were taken from their personal profiles on social networks and shared on the internet. One of those cases is the Public Room (Javna soba group on Telegram[20]), where men illegally distributed nude photos of girls and women (including minors) mostly from North Macedonia. On 13 February 2023, the Government adopted the proposed changes to the Criminal Code related to the criminal act of stalking that is now foreseen with the article 144-a ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 36/2023). The criminal act of stalking has been proposed and adopted to increase the protection of women from attacks and harassment, including harassment on the internet. Defining and adopting this criminal act as part of the Criminal Code was a result of protests and actions of CSOs and citizen activists in 2021 related to the Public Room case.

A significantly larger portion of youth from the Vardar region (48%) know someone whose data were misused on the internet, compared to their peers from other regions (ranging from 12% to 23%). Youth from the focus groups share a variety of examples where their peers have been exposed to violation of their personal data on the internet. This shows that violence of this kind is present in cyberspace and youth from North Macedonia are under direct threat of it.

The majority of youth in this research (94%) haven't experienced cyber violence. However, youth from Polog (10%) and Skopje region (9%) have experience with cyber violence more than youth from other regions that range from 1% to 7%.

> "Violence as a phenomenon is not just physical or the violence that is happening in our everyday lives, it is also online violence. Online violence is new phenomenon, and we still do not have mechanisms to combat it. From our research and communication, we can say that this type of violence is very prevalent among youth, much more than physical violence."
>
> National stakeholder, youth organization

According to the representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, easy access to the internet space and various content offered digitally represent a real threat to the new generations. Children and young people can easily access the internet in their homes and may establish communication with adults very easily without the protection by their parents, protection of their data and personal information, and as such, they become victims of cyber violence. The Ministry is undertaking various activities to prevent cyber violence and educate young people about internet threats and ways to protect personal data.

Out of those 77 respondents who experienced cyber violence, 51% face it on the social network Facebook, 23% on applications for instant messaging (such as Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal) and 19% on Instagram. Young women (57%) experience cyber violence on Facebook more than young men (45%) who on the other hand face more violence during instant messaging (30% of young men against 16% of young women). Around 1/3 of the respondents in the age group 15 – 18 face cyber violence on Instagram which leads to a conclusion that this group uses Instagram more than those aged 19 – 29.

[20] https://meta.mk/en/public-room-telegram-group-for-sharing-nude-pictures-closed-moi-of-north-macedonia-informs/
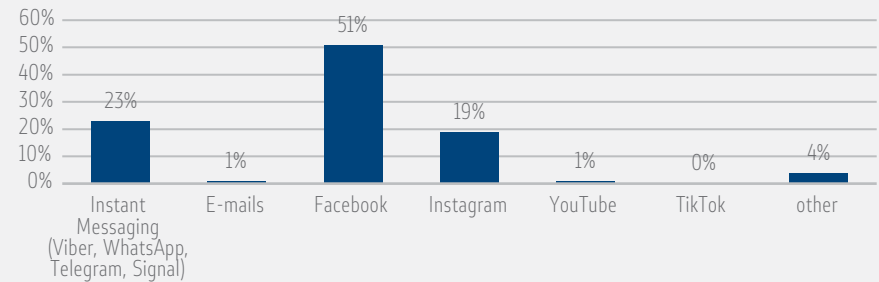
Chart 25: *Frequency of cyber violence on various social networks and applications*

Young Albanians have divided experiences regarding cyber violence. Most of them face violence on Facebook (38%) and another 29% on Instagram. Young Serbs equally face cyber violence on instant messaging and Instagram. Macedonians and Turks mainly experience cyber violence on Facebook. All Roma respondents face cyber violence only on Facebook. Facebook is the most frequently used social network in the Pelagonija, Southwest and Southeast regions since all respondents from these regions report experiences with cyber violence just on Facebook. In addition, respondents from the focus groups most frequently use Instagram and TikTok as well as Snapchat and YouTube.

When it comes to reporting a misuse of personal data and content to institutions, 38% of youth would report to the police, 24% to the family and another 21% to the Personal Data Protection Agency. Thus, it is noticeable that youth could recognize the relevant authorities for reporting data violations in cyberspace.
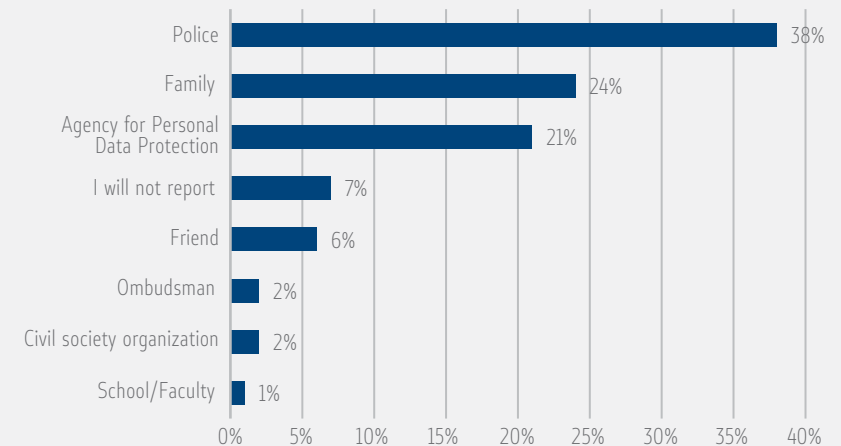
Chart 26: *Reporting violations of personal data and content*

Young women have more trust to report cyber violence in the family (28%) rather than reporting to the institution compared to young men (19%). A significantly higher percentage (40%) of youth from the age group 15 – 18 would report cyber violence to the family compared to the remaining two age groups (ranging from 10% to 21%). The age group 25 - 29 is more educated about the role of the Personal Data Protection Agency in dealing with personal data violations since a larger portion of this group (30%) compared to the remaining two age groups would report cyber violence to this institution. Regionally, youth from the Polog region will mainly report cyber violence to their family (50%) while youth from the Southeast region to the police (61%).

Conclusions and recommendations

- The perception of youth about their safety in digital space is divided. This leads to the conclusion that youth need additional education and practical information on cyber threats as well as recognizing, preventing and reporting cyberbullying. Consequently, youth are not very much concerned with the protection of their data in the digital space, although they are informed about that and some undertake data protection activities.

- Misuse of data, personal photos and content on the internet is not frequently experienced among youth. However, in recent years there have been cases of misuse of content on the internet that have led to a new criminal act on stalking to be adopted and included in the Criminal Code to protect females from attack in cyberspace.

- Cyberbullying is not frequently experienced by the youth in the research. However, the representatives in the focus groups and school staff confirm that violence "migrated" on social networks with hate speech and verbal violence being the most present types. Following this, youth experiences show that they are mostly exposed to cyberviolence on Facebook.

- Youth in primary and secondary schools report cyber violence to the family whereas those above 24 years of age are more introduced to the role of the Personal Data Protection Agency and would report the violent act to the police or in the Agency.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

- Young people should have continuous education on digital literacy tailored to their age. The Personal Data Protection Agency and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration should plan and implement these kinds of activities in their annual programs in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

- Young people should have continuous education on reporting cyber violence and data misuse. They should be introduced to the role of responsible institutions such as schools, local government, police and ombudsman and to the procedure for reporting cyber violence.

- Parents should pay extra focus on their children exposure to digital space and be educated via national campaigns about the threats in digital space, the available mechanisms and responsible institutions for reporting cyber violence.

5.6 EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, limitation or provision a preference based on a discriminatory basis, by act or omission, having as their object or effect the prevention, limitation, recognition, enjoyment or realization of the rights and freedoms of a certain person or group on an equal basis with others. This covers all forms of discrimination including disqualification appropriate adjustment and disallowing access to and availability of infrastructure, goods and services.

– Perceptions of youth on discrimination

According to 31% of the young respondents, ethnic background is the first ground for discrimination among youth, followed by 21% of the respondents who find economic status as the first ground for discrimination and 17% who find the political affiliation as the first ground for discrimination. 24% of the respondents select economic status as a second basis for discrimination, followed by political affiliation and disability as the second grounds for discrimination.

	First discrimination ground	Second discrimination ground
Ethnicity	31%	12%
Economic status	21%	24%
Political affiliation	17%	15%
Sexual orientation	9%	9%
Disability	8%	15%
Religion	7%	11%
Gender	5%	7%
Age	2%	5%
Do not know	0%	2%
Other	0%	
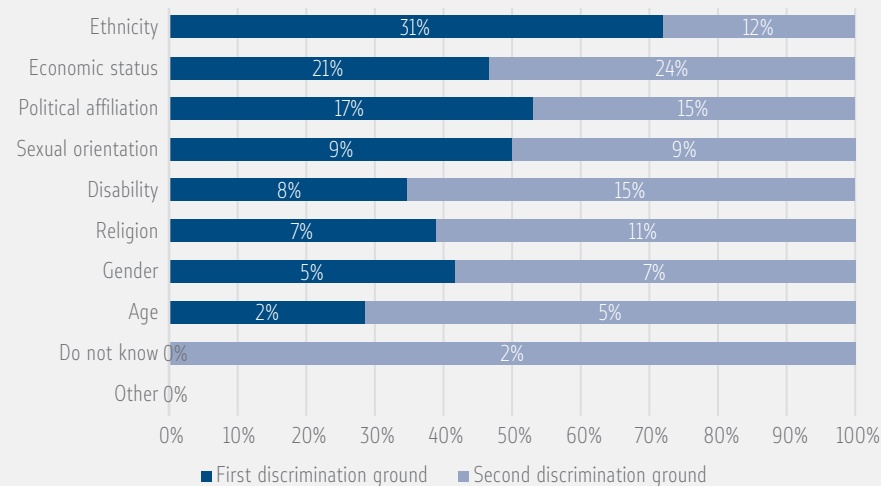
Chart 27: *Discrimination grounds*

19% of youth in the age group 25 – 29, identify equally the economic status and political background as the first grounds for discrimination. A significantly higher percentage of young Roma (50%) and Albanians (40%) identify ethnic background as the first ground for discrimination compared to 26% of Macedonians.

In the Vardar, Southwest and Pelagonija regions ethnic background is not rated as the first ground for discrimination. Namely, 34% of youth from the Vardar region identify political background as

the first ground for discrimination. In the Southwest region for 26% of the youth, sexual orientation is the first discrimination ground. In the Southeast region, religion appears as the first ground for discrimination along with economic status.

Regarding the most common second ground for discrimination, young women in the sample identify disability as a more common ground compared to political background. Disability is also a more common ground of discrimination among youth aged 15 – 18. Religion is a more common ground for discrimination for Albanians compared to disability and political background. For Macedonians, disability is a more common ground for discrimination compared to Albanians and other ethnicities. Gender appears as a second ground for discrimination in Polog region. In the Northeast region, the political background is the second most common ground for discrimination compared to other regions where economic status dominates as the second most common ground for discrimination.

> "There is gender discrimination on workplaces where men are given priority compared to women."
>
> Female, 19 years (Tetovo)

– Experience with discrimination

Eighty four percent of youth respondents have not experienced nor felt discrimination. However, 11% of them have negative experiences of being discriminated against. A slightly larger percentage of females (12%) have been or felt discriminated compared to 9% of males. As per age category, a bigger part of youth aged 25 – 29 experienced discrimination (13%) than the remaining two age groups ranging around 10%. Young Roma (32%) in a significantly bigger part experienced discrimination compared to 9% of Macedonians and the same portion of Albanians. Discrimination is evidently present especially in Polog region (17%), East (16%) and Southeast (16%). It is interesting
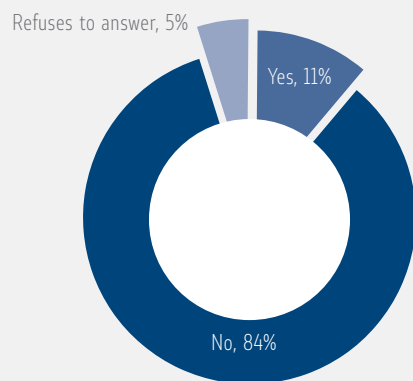
to note that 15% of the respondents from Polog region refuse to answer this question which may signal that the discrimination may be even bigger, but the respondents do not feel safe to report it.

The experiences of the respondents who were discriminated against or felt discrimination confirm the overall perception of the most common grounds for discrimination among youth. Namely, 33% of youth were discriminated on ethnic background, followed by economic status (19%) and political background (13%).

For females, gender is the second most frequent reason for discrimination. Economic status is the first reason for discrimination in the age group 15 – 18. For Macedonians, economic status is a stronger reason for discrimination compared to Albanians and other ethnicities who are mostly discriminated based on ethnic background.

According to the "#SharedFutures - Youth Perceptions on Peace in Western Balkans", UNDP 2021, "discrimination based on age, political affiliation or ethnicity were also frequently reported. When it comes to gender discrimination, in all locations young women reported much more gender discrimination than did young men".

Although 11% of youth in the sample were discriminated against, only 1% have submitted an appeal to a public authority such as the Ombudsman or the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. In Polog region, 6% reported discrimination while 4% of Albanians also reported discrimination compared to smaller percentages of Macedonians and other ethnicities.

Another frequently mentioned ground for discrimination is the physical appearance and the dressing style of young people. These grounds were mainly discussed by the participants in the focus groups.

– Participation of youth in local communities, school/workplaces and with friends

To analyze how discriminated/excluded or included are the respondents in the survey, they were asked to evaluate their participation in the decision-making process in the local community, in the school/working environment, or in their group of friends on a scale where 1 is the lowest participation and 4 is the highest. The greatest participation and influence are noted in the social network/group of friends (mean value = 2.3) whereas the lowest participation in the decision-making process in the municipality (mean value = 1.6).

Refuses to answer, 5%
Yes, 11%
No, 84%

Chart 28: *Youth experiencing discrimination*

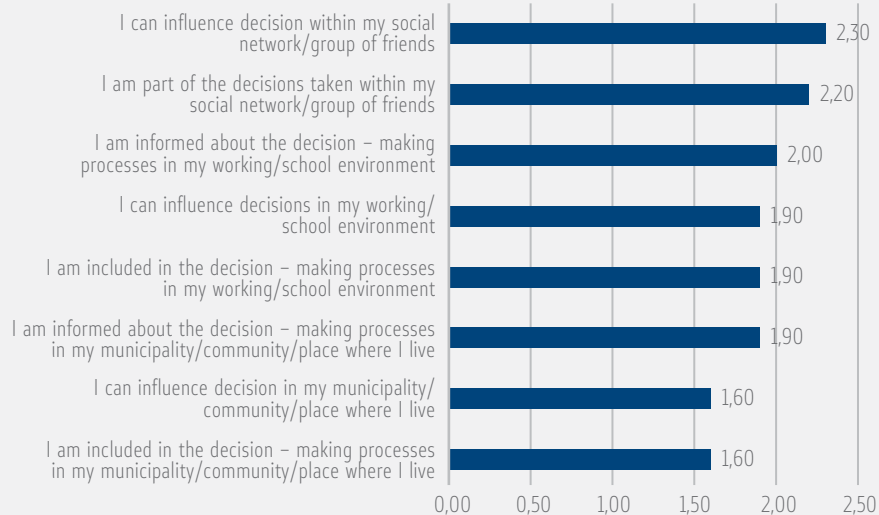|	
I can influence decision within my social network/group of friends	2,30
I am part of the decisions taken within my social network/group of friends	2,20
I am informed about the decision – making processes in my working/school environment	2,00
I can influence decisions in my working/school environment	1,90
I am included in the decision – making processes in my working/school environment	1,90
I am informed about the decision – making processes in my municipality/community/place where I live	1,90
I can influence decision in my municipality/community/place where I live	1,60
I am included in the decision – making processes in my municipality/community/place where I live	1,60

Chart 29: *Mean values for participation in the decision-making processes*

The participation on the community level in more details is as follows:

– Regarding the level of information about the decision-making processes in their community, 75% of the respondents are not informed. Females feel slightly less informed than males while a significant percentage of the age group 15 – 18 find themselves not informed (84%). Similarly, 93% of the respondents from the Pelagonija region and 88% of youth in the Polog region find themselves not informed. Roma (93%) finds themselves less informed compared to Macedonians (75%) and Albanians (73%).

– Consequently, those who find themselves not informed are also less included in the decision-making. If 75% of the youth are not informed about the decision-making processes, 86% find themselves not practically included in the decision-making processes in their communities. Females are slightly less included than males as well as the age group 15 – 18. Youth from Pelagonija and Polog are less included in the decision-making processes compared to their peers from other regions. Roma (95%) are less included than Macedonians (85%) and Albanians (84%).

– Eighty-six percent of the respondents think that they cannot influence the decisions in their local community. Particularly concerning is that the respondents from the Pelagonija region feel they have no influence on the decisions (99%). Also, 95% of Roma feel they cannot influence decision making in their community.

The level of information, participation in the decision-making and influence on the decisions in school and work environment are also low although more optimistic compared to the data about community participation. Namely:

– Regarding the level of information about the decision-making processes in the school/work environment, 66% pf the respondents are not informed. Females feel slightly less informed than males. Eighty one percent of the respondents from Pelagonija region, 77% of youth in the Vardar and 73% in Polog regions feel they are not informed. Eighty five percent of Turks and 82% of Roma find themselves not informed as well as 78% of Albanians and 61% of Macedonians.

– Consequently, those who find themselves not informed are also less included in the decision-making. If 66% of the youth were not informed about the decision-making processes, 73% find themselves not practically included in the decision-making processes in their school/working environment. Young women are slightly less included than young men. Youth from the Pelagonija, Vardar and Polog regions are less included. 84% Roma and 81% Turks are not included as well as 79% of Albanians and 70% of Macedonians.

– Seventy-three percent of the respondents think that they cannot influence the decisions in their school or working environment. This percentage is even bigger for young Turks (93%) and young Roma (89%).

> "I am not satisfied with how they treat us on the faculty during exams... priority is given to those older who can come at any time whereas we must be there early in the morning and wait sometimes until late in the afternoon hungry and without strength. Priority is given to those students who know the professors and those who are from Shtip instead of those outside Shtip. There were situations when the professors told us to come tomorrow after all day waiting and I do not have finances to travel every day to the faculty."
>
> Female, 29 years (Sveti Nikole)

Regarding inclusion in the decision-making in their social network/group of friends the experiences of the youth are divided although the dominant 57% are those youth who feel that they are not sufficiently included. Youth from the Vardar and Pelagonija region do feel more excluded from their social networks/groups of friends compared with their peers from other regions while in the Polog region, those who feel included in the decisions taken within their networks/groups of friends dominate. Similarly, the results show that youth have divided opinions regarding their influence on the decisions taken within their social networks/groups of friends. Predominantly, 54% of youth feel they cannot make a significant influence on the decisions taken within their social networks/ groups of friends. Another 46% are more confident in having influence over decision-making with their friends.

Conclusions and recommendations

– For young people in the country, ethnic background is the first ground for discrimination followed by political affiliation and economic status. As the second ground for discrimination, young people find economic status, followed by political affiliation and disability. Ethnicity and political affiliation have been identified as the main grounds for discrimination in the last ten years by other studies too which signalizes that the efforts to decrease discrimination are not successful and more needs to be done including introducing some innovative approaches.

– The political division which exists at all levels of society unfortunately has a negative impact on the lives of young people and their future. The past conflict in the country caused divided cities, cultures and communities and this is still present in the ethnically mixed communities. In this regard, a significantly larger percentage of young Albanians and Roma in the research find ethnicity as the first ground for discrimination than the Macedonians and other ethnicities.

– The experiences with discrimination exist, although for a relatively small portion of youth. Albanians, Turks and Roma experience discrimination more often than their Macedonian peers. Females more often experience discrimination related to gender than males.

– Reporting of discrimination is not common among youth in the country which signals that there is a lack of information about the institutions responsible for the fight against discrimination as well as a lack of trust and confidence in the procedures for protection against discrimination.

– The participation of young people in communities is at a very low level characterized by general disappointment and apathy. Youth find themselves not informed about the decision-making processes in their communities, not included in the decision-making, and do not believe in having some influence over the decisions taken in the communities.

– Youth find the school and working environment slightly more democratic compared to community. Still, the possibility to influence decisions is equally low as in the communities in general.

– The trend of alienation among youth is visible. The majority of young people feel excluded from the decisions made within their social network/group of friends and even more of them do not believe in influencing those decisions.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– Decision-makers should involve youth in evidence-based policy development regarding security and safety. It is of utmost importance for youth to be involved in the identification of security risks on local and national level and the design of solutions tailored to the needs and specifics of the regions and local communities.

– The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies that regulates the involvement and engagement of youth in national and local decision-making processes should be implemented.

– Local authorities should give a meaningful role to the established Local Youth Councils and allocate finances for their proper functioning. In those municipalities where there are no Local Youth Councils, they should be established following the legal provisions of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies. In addition, Local Youth Strategies should be in line with the National Youth Strategy and give a specific focus on the area of security and safety.

– The Government should allocate sufficient finances for the implementation of the Law on Protection against Discrimination and provide the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination with appropriate logistics and support to fully exercise its role. Data on cases of discrimination of youth people should be properly disaggregated, analyzed and published.

5.7 TRUST IN AUTHORITIES AND OTHER PEOPLE AND INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

– Perceptions of trust

Regarding trust in general, the perception of young respondents is that most people can neither be nor not be trusted. Namely, 48% of youth select this option on a scale where 1 is people cannot be trusted at all and 5 is people can be trusted at all. Another 35% think that "people cannot be trusted at all" or "people can be somewhat trusted".
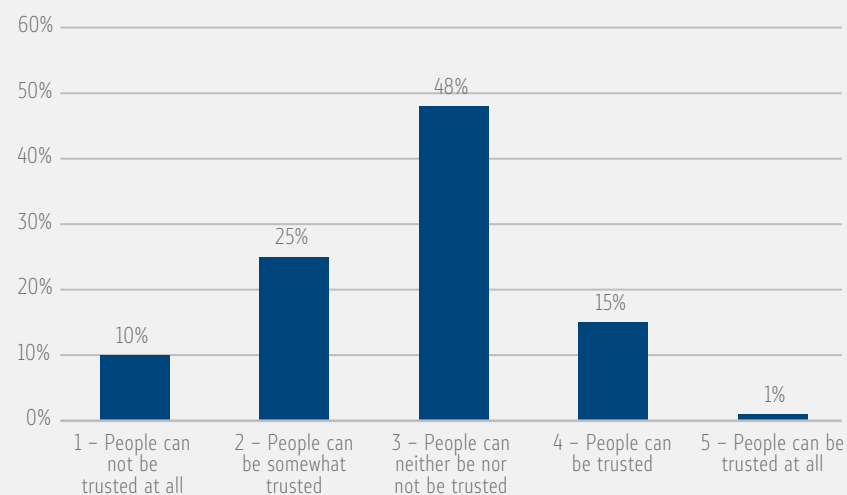

Chart 30: *General trust in people*

The categories 19 – 24 and 25 – 29 have slightly less trust in people compared to youth aged 15 – 18. Roma and Turks trust slightly more in people compared to Macedonians, Albanians and other ethnicities. People from the Southeast region have significantly lower trust in people compared to other regions.

Youth respondents in the sample were asked to confirm or deny a list of statements related to the support they get from other people. The data show that youth in general can find support in other people they trust and to whom they can turn in case of problems or trouble.
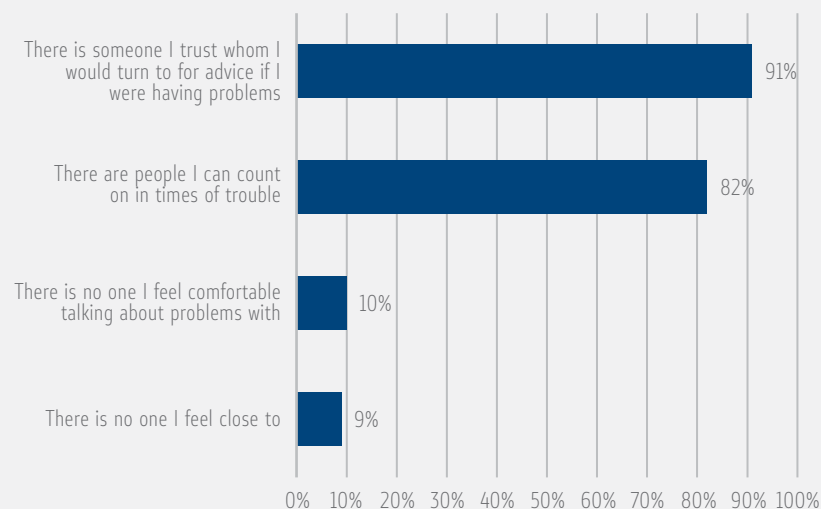
Chart 31: *Attitudes of youth regarding trust I other people*

Namely:

 – Ninety one percent of respondents have someone they trust and would turn to in problematic situations. Seventy seven percent of young Albanians have someone they trust and to whom they may turn in problematic situations which is significantly lower compared to young Macedonians, Roma, Turks and other ethnicities. Also, a significant part of youth from the Polog region (20%) compared to others do not have someone they trust and can turn to when having problems.

 – Consequently, only 10% of youth do not have someone with whom they feel comfortable and could talk to about their problems. However, a significantly larger proportion of youth from the Pelagonija region (21%) do not have someone with whom they feel comfortable and could talk to about their problems. Fifteen percent of young Albanians choose the same option of not having someone they feel comfortable around. Another 14% of young Albanians do not know or refuse to answer the question.

 – Eighty five percent of young respondents have people who they find close. However, this percentage is lower in the Pelagonija (76%) and Polog (72%) regions as well as for young Albanians (71%).

 – Eighty two percent of youth have people they can count on in times of trouble. However, this percentage is lower in the Polog (59%) and Southwest (72%) regions as well as for the young Albanians (70%).

– Attitudes about inter-ethnic relations

The survey respondents were asked to evaluate their attitudes about people from other cultures and ethnicities. Young people have divided attitudes about the general trust in people from other ethnic communities, although 57% of them in general do not trust people from other ethnicities, another 43% have trust in people with different ethnic background.
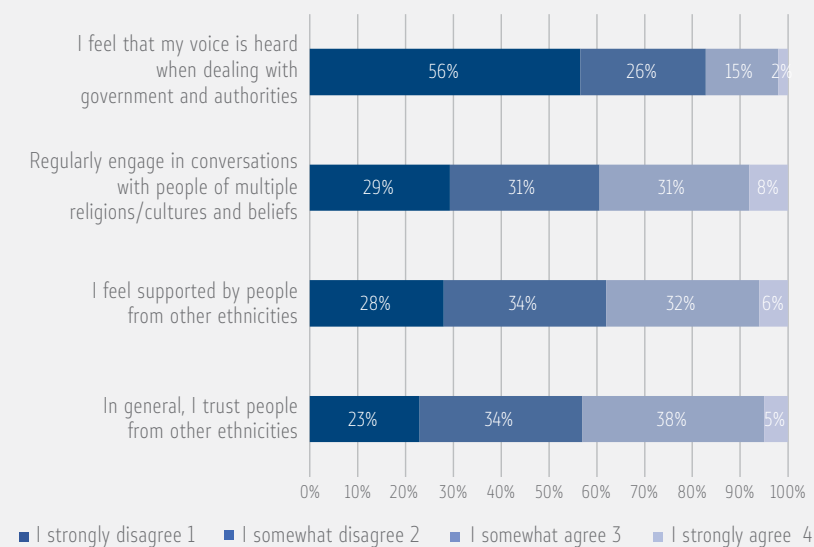
Chart 32: *Attitudes regarding trust in people from other ethnicities*

Young women (58%) have slightly less trust in ethnicities compared to young men (55%). Also, youth from the age group 15 – 18 (60%) have less trust than the other two age groups. Youth from the Southwest and Polog regions have less trust in people from other ethnicities compared to other regions. In addition, people from the Southeast, Pelagonija and Northeast have more trust in people from other ethnicities. Albanians (67%) have less trust in people from other ethnicities.

According to the Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019 conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung[21] "it can certainly be demonstrated that Macedonian and Albanian citizens in 2018 trust each other less than they did in 2013".

62% of youth do not agree with the statement "I feel supported by people from other ethnicities". Disagreement with this statement is more present within the age group 15 – 18 (65%) as well as among youth from the Southwest (79%) and Polog region (80%) and among the young Albanians (71%).

The results are similar for communication with young people of multiple religions/cultures and beliefs. 61% of youth do not agree with the statement "I regularly engage in conversations with people of multiple religions/cultures and beliefs". Disagreement with this statement is more present within the age group 15 – 18 (68%) and among the young Albanians (66%). However, youth from the Northeast region (67% agreeing with the statement) more regularly engage in communication with youth from other ethnicities and cultures compared to their peers from other regions.

> "I had a colleague Macedonian, and the conversation with him was not going well. I realized could not socialize with him."
>
> Male, 22 years (Tetovo)

Almost equal parts of young respondents evaluate the inter-ethnic/inter-community relations as "neither good nor bad" (46%) and "good" (41%).
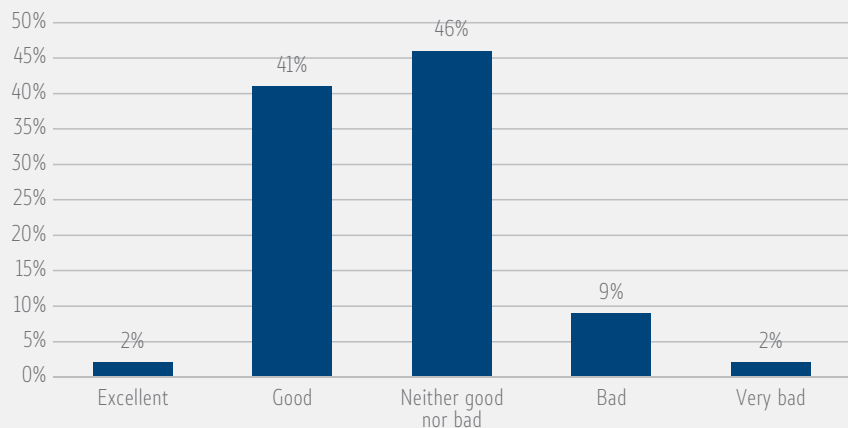
Chart 33: *General assessment of the inter-ethnic/inter-community relations*

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[21] Youth Study in North Macedonia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2019.

45% of the age category 15 – 18 believe that inter-ethnic/inter-community relations are good. A larger portion of young Albanians (52% believe that inter-ethnic/inter-community relations are neither good nor bad compared to Macedonians (45%), Serbs (42%), Roma (36%) and other ethnicities. Youth from the Skopje, Northeast and East regions believe that inter-ethnic/inter-community relations are worse than their peers form other regions.

– Trust in authorities

Respondents in the survey were asked to evaluate their trust in public institutions on a scale where 1 is not trustworthy at all and 4 is completely trustworthy. The trust in public authorities is generally speaking low, ranging from 1.6 to 2.2 on the scale. Public authorities are generally evaluated as "a little bit trustworthy". Table 3 shows the levels of trust for the various institutions.

#	Phenomena	Mean
1.	Parliament	1.7
2.	Government	1.6
3.	Leaders of political parties	1.6
4.	Police	2.2
5.	Local religious officials	2.2
6.	Highest religious authorities in your religion	2.2
7.	Health institutions on local level	2.1
8.	Health institutions on national level	2.1
9.	Courts	1.7
10.	Municipality	2.0
11.	International organizations	2.1
12.	Civil society organizations	2.2

Table 3: *Levels of trust in various institutions*

The Government and the leaders of the political parties (mean value = 1.6) are the least trustworthy, followed by the courts and Parliament (mean value = 1.7). The most trustworthy are police, religious leaders and civil society organizations (mean value = 2.2).

> "I wanted to share my opinion about the health institutions because I completed medical high school. During my practical work in health institutions, I did not like the attitude of the employees towards patients. Employees were never polite, in a hurry, as they had more important things to do than care about their patients. I am thus worried about our safety as patients as well as for our health in general."
>
> Female, 19 years (Skopje)

The Parliament is the most trustworthy for youth from the Polog region and the least trustworthy for youth from the Northeast region.

The Government is the most trustworthy for the youth from the Polog region and the least trustworthy for youth from the East and Northeast regions.

The leaders of the political parties are the most trustworthy for the youth from the Polog and Vardar regions and the least trustworthy for youth from the East region.

The police is the most trustworthy for the youth from the Vardar region and least trustworthy for youth from the East region.

Local religious leaders and religious leaders on the national level are the most trustworthy for the youth from the Southeast region and the least trustworthy for the youth from the Northeast region.

Health institutions on local and national level are most trustworthy for youth from the Vardar region and the least trustworthy for youth from the East region.

The courts are the most trustworthy for youth in the Vardar and Pelagonija regions and the least trustworthy for youth from the Northeast region.

The local government is the most trustworthy for youth from the Vardar region and the least trustworthy for youth from the Pelagonija region.

The international organizations are the most trustworthy for youth from the Vardar and Southwest regions and the least trustworthy for youth from the East region.

The civil society organizations are the most trustworthy for youth from the Vardar and Northeast regions and the least trustworthy for youth from the East and the Polog region.

Conclusions and recommendations

– Youth in general feel ambivalent about trust in other people or find that people cannot be trusted at all. However, the majority of youth have someone to turn on in problematic situations, in trouble, or someone they can talk to and feel comfortable. This feeling of trust and having someone close is lower among the young Albanians as well as young people from the Pelagonija and Polog region.

– The attitudes about inter-ethnic relations seem to be in general the same and even worse than in the past. As in other studies, the majority of youth do not trust people from other ethnicities, do not feel supported by people from other ethnicities and cannot regularly engage in communication with people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, this lack of trust in other ethnicities is especially emphasized among young Albanians and among females.

– Public authorities in general are evaluated by young people as "a little bit trustworthy". The government and the leaders of the political parties are the least trustworthy, followed by the courts and Parliament. The most trustworthy are police, religious leaders and civil society organizations.

– Youth from the Polog region generally have greater trust in Parliament, the Government and the leaders of political parties compared to their peers, while their trust in the police is lacking.

The recommendations following the above list of conclusions are as follows:

– Promotion of values such as mutual trust and respect and nurturing good intercultural and interethnic cooperation should become imperative for authorities at all levels of society. Youth should witness and experience the benefits of nurturing these values in reality, and for that to happen, the authorities have the main responsibility.

– Authorities need to strengthen and further implement more substantial programs for intercultural and interethnic cooperation at the level of schools and local communities. Simple information sharing and learning about the traditions and customs is not enough.

– The divisions based on ethnic backgrounds in the schools and institutions should be decreased, systematically approached and ultimately eliminated. Measures in this regard need to marginalize the negative influence of political factors and amplify the role of individuals and their integrity as imperative in interpersonal and professional relations. To that effect, the political parties and civil society must cooperate in the implementation of multiethnic integration and should go beyond demonstrating the will toward undertaking concrete actions. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Science must foster interethnic integration in the schools and create quality conditions for regular communication, support and interaction among students of all ethnicities.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

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5. UN Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018).

6. UN Security Council Resolution 2535 (2020).

7. Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies ("Official Gazette of the RNM", no. 10/2020).

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10. Law on Family (consolidated text, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy).

11. Law on Social Protection ("Official Gazette of the RNM", nr.104/2019).

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7. ANNEXES

7.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A - Demographics

A1 Sex (gender)	1. Male 2. Female 3. Other 4. Don't want to answer
A2 Age group	1. 15 – 18 2. 19 – 24 3. 25 – 29
A3 Highest completed level of education	1. Primary 2. Secondary 3. Higher 4. Master 5. PhD 6. Without formal education
A4 What is your ethnic background?	1. Macedonian 2. Albanian 3. Turkish 4. Roma 5. Serb 6. Vlach 7. Bosniak 8. Other (please specify): _____
A5 Who do you currently live with?	1. Alone 2. With both parents 3. With my mother 4. With my father 5. With my partner or spouse 6. With friends/relatives 7. Something else, what? 8. No answer

		Respondent		
A6 What is your current status?	A6.1 Employed full-time	1		
	A6.2 Employed part-time	2		
	A6.3 Work independently/ free-lance	3		
	A6.4 Unemployed	4		
	A6.5 Pupil	5		
	A6.6 Student	6		
	A6.7 Agricultural worker	7		
	A6.8 Company owner	8		
	A6.9 Other	9		
A7 What is your religion?	1. Catholicism 2. Orthodoxy 3. Islam 4. Protestantism 5. Judaism	6. Coptic 7. I am an atheist 8. I have no religion 9. Other 10. Don't want to answer		

Section B - Perception of security and safety

		Yes	No	N/R
B1 What is the biggest problem you face at the moment?	1) Unemployment or economic problems	1	0	99
	2) Lack of cultural and sports activities	1	0	99
	3) I don't feel safe in my community/place where I live	1	0	99
	4) I don't have sufficient development possibilities	1	0	99
	5) I lack support from the environment	1	0	99
	6) I cannot influence my own life	1	0	99

B2 In your opinion, what are the current security levels in the country? Please rate on a scale where 1 is not secure at all and 5 is completely secure.	1) Not secure at all 2) Not secure 3) Neither secure nor insecure 4) Somewhat secure 5) Completely secure
B3 In your opinion, what will happen to the levels of security in the country in the next five years?	1) Get better 2) Get worse 3) Stay the same

B4 To what extent do you feel safe...	Safe	Neither safe or unsafe	Unsafe
...in your neighbourhood?	3	2	1
...in your area/town/city?	3	2	1
...in your country?	3	2	1
...in the digital space	3	2	1
...in the public transport	3	2	1
...on public places (such as squares, walking places and bike paths)	3	2	1

B5 To what extent are you concerned about these phenomena? Average scores (1: not at all concerned, 10: extremely concerned).	1) Groups of sports fans that are sometimes violent 2) Domestic violence 3) Hate speech 4) Internet safety (cyber security) 5) Arrival of migrants and refugees 6) International terrorism 7) Ultranationalist groups 8) Organized crime 9) Possibility of armed conflict breaking out in the country 10) Possibility of armed conflict breaking out within the Western Balkans 11) Natural disasters

Section C - Participation in formal and informal peace processes

C1 How would you evaluate your knowledge about peacebuilding concept? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means "I am not introduced at all" and 5 means "I am completely introduced about the peacebuilding".	1) Not introduced at all 2) Not introduced 3) Neither introduced nor not introduced 4) Somewhat introduced 5) Completely introduced

C2 In the past 12 months, have volunteered in an activity/initiative/action that promotes peace and security?

1. Yes
2. No

		Yes	No	N/R
C3 (If yes on C2) What kind of activities/ initiatives/actions have you volunteered in?	1) Sport events	1	0	99
	2) Cultural activities	1	0	99
	3) Initiatives for promotion of democratic rights	1	0	99
	4) Formal and non-formal educational activities	1	0	99
	5) Religious activities	1	0	99
	6) Civil protests	1	0	99
	7) Eco actions	1	0	99
	8) Political activities	1	0	99

C4 In the past 12 months, have you heard about activity of the authorities related to peacebuilding and security of youth?

1. Yes
2. No

	Actors	Rank
C5 In your opinion who in the society is mainly concerned with peacebuilding? Please rank.	Citizens	1
	State institutions	2
	Local Government	3
	Civil Society Organizations	4
	Business	5
	Religious organizations	6
	Political parties	7

Section D - Countering violent extremism and radicalization

D1 Do you think radicalization is a concern/the important concern in your community?	0) No, it is not a concern 1) Yes, it is a concern 2) It is the most important concern in my community

D2 Rank the following factors from 1-8, where 1 is the most important and 8 is the least important driver of radicalisation:	1) Politics	
	2) Economics	
	3) Religion	
	4) Territorial inequalities	
	5) Transnational dynamics	
	6) Culture and leisure	
	7) Digital space	
	8) Discriminatory practices	

D3 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	I strongly disagree	I somewhat disagree	I somewhat agree	I strongly agree
	1	2	3	4
1) I would stop any communication with a friend / colleague if I notice any signs of radicalization.				
2) I am afraid to talk to the people who have been convicted of terrorist activities and / or violent extremism.				
3) I am afraid to leave nearby people who have been convicted of terrorist activities and/or violent extremism.				
4) I would support an initiative for re-socialization of persons that were involved in terrorist activities.				

D4 Rank the following actors from 1-7, where 1 has the strongest and 7 the weakest role in countering violent extremism and radicalization:	1) Civil society organizations	
	2) Religious leaders	
	3) School representatives	
	4) Members of neighbourhood communities	
	5) Security services - police	
	6) Centers for social work	
	7) International organizations	

D5 Rank the following factors from 1-7, where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important response to counter radicalisation:	1) Political rights and representation	
	2) Economic opportunities and employment	
	3) Religious education	
	4) Equal distribution of services and wealth within a country	
	5) Combating disinformation	
	6) Offering opportunities for cultural dialogue and recreational spaces	
	7) Increasing security in a digital space	

Section E - Youth violence

E1 In your opinion to what extent is violent behaviour present among young people? Please rate on a scale where 1 is completely present and 5 is not present at all.	1) Completely present
	2) Somewhat present
	3) Neither present nor absent
	4) Not present
	5) Not present at all

E2 In your opinion what are the top three reasons that motivate young people to take violent actions?	1) Disappointment with their social status
	2) Lack of participation in decision making processes
	3) Lack of support from the institutions in their everyday life
	4) Lack of carrier opportunities
	5) Radical ideology
	6) Religious motives
	7) Sense of injustice
	8) Lack of family support
	9) Isolation from friends

E3 In the past 12 months, have you experienced or witnessed any type of violence?
1. Yes, I have experienced and witnessed
2. Yes, I experienced
3. Yes, I witnessed
4. No, I haven't experienced nor witnessed

98) Refuse to answer [DON'T READ]
99) Don't know [DON'T READ]

E4 If yes on E3, please answer what type of violence have you witnessed and/or experienced:	Type of violence	Yes	No	N/R
	1) Physical violence	1	0	99
	2) Verbal violence	1	0	99
	3) Social violence	1	0	99
	4) Psychological violence	1	0	99
	5) Online violence	1	0	99
	6) Sexual violence	1	0	99

E5 If yes on E4, please answer where you have experienced or witnessed the violence.	Location of the violence	Yes	No	N/R
	1) Home	1	0	99
	2) School	1	0	99
	3) Hospital	1	0	99
	4) Park	1	0	99
	5) Street	1	0	99
	6) Caffe or club	1	0	99
	7) Parking place	1	0	99
	8) Dark corner	1	0	99
	9) Police station	1	0	99
	10) Friend house	1	0	99
	11) Office	1	0	99
	12) Online	1	0	99
	13) Other			

Section F - Cyberbullying

F1 How safe do you feel while using the internet? Please rate on scale where 1 is not safe at all and 5 is completely safe.	1) Not safe at all
	2) Not safe
	3) Neither safe nor unsafe
	4) Safe
	5) Completely safe

F2 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means I don't pay attention at all, while 5 means I pay a lot of attention, how much attention do you pay to protecting your personal data online?	1) I don't pay attention at all
	2) I don't pay attention
	3) I pay attention and I don't pay attention
	4) I pay attention
	5) I pay a lot of attention
	Don't know / Refuse to answer [DO NOT READ]

F3 Have you ever experienced a situation where your data, photo of video were used on internet without your consent?

1. Yes
2. No

   Did not happen to me but I know somebody that had that experience

F4 Have you ever been cyberbullied?

1. Yes
2. No

F5 If you were cyberbullied online, where did it happen:

1. Instant Messaging (Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal)
2. E-mails
3. Facebook
4. Instagram
5. YouTube
6. TikTok
7. Other _____

F6 Where would you report the violence on the internet of misuse of your personal data and content?

1. Family
2. School/Faculty
3. Friend
4. Civil society organization
5. Police
6. Agency for Personal Data Protection
7. Ombudsman
8. I will not report

Section G - Exclusion and discrimination

G1 Please select the two (2) most common grounds of social exclusion/discrimination that occur among young people in the country (INT. Read)

Ground	First ground for discrimination	Second ground for discrimination
Ethnicity	1	1
Religion	2	2
Gender	3	3
Sexual orientation	4	4
Political affiliation	5	5
Economic status	6	6
Disability	7	7
Age	8	8
Other, what _____	9	9
Don't know / Refuses (int.: don't read)	10	10

G2 Have you personally experienced discrimination or felt discriminated?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Refuses to answer

G3 On which grounds did you feel discriminated against?

1. Ethnicity
2. Religion
3. Gender
4. Sexual orientation
5. Political affiliation
6. Economic status
7. Disability
8. Age
9. Other, what _____
10. Don't know / Refuse to answer (INT.: don't read)

G4 Have you ever submitted an appeal to the institutions (such as the Ombudsman and Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination)?

1. Yes
2. No

G5 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	I strongly disagree	I somewhat disagree	I somewhat agree	I strongly agree
	1	2	3	4
1) I am informed about the decision-making processes in my municipality/community/place where I live.				
2) I am included in the decision-making processes in my municipality/community/place where I live.				
3) I can influence decision in my municipality/community/place where I live.				
4) I am informed about the decision-making processes in my working/school environment.				
5) I am included in the decision-making processes in my working/school environment.				
6) I can influence decisions in my working/school environment.				
7) I am part of the decisions taken within my social network/group of friends.				
8) I can influence decision within my social network/group of friends.				

Section H - Trust in authorities and other people and inter-community relations

H1 Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted? Please tell me on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that people can't be trusted and 5 means that most people can be trusted.	1) People cannot be trusted at all 2) People can be somewhat trusted 3) People can neither be nor not be trusted 4) People can be trusted 5) People can be trusted at all

H2 How do you feel about the following statements concerning the support you get from others?		Yes	No	N/R
	There is someone I trust whom I would turn to for advice if I were having problems.	1	0	99
	There is no one I feel comfortable talking about problems with.	1	0	99
	There is no one I feel close to.	1	0	99
	There are people I can count on in times of trouble.	1	0	99

H3 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	I strongly disagree	I somewhat disagree	I somewhat agree	I strongly agree
	1	2	3	4
1) In general, I trust people from other ethnicities.				
2) I feel supported by people from other ethnicities.				
3) Regularly engage in conversations with people of multiple religions/cultures and beliefs.				
4) I feel that my voice is heard when dealing with government and authorities.				

H4 How trustworthy do you find the following institutions/authorities?	Not at all trustworthy	A lit bit trustworthy	Moderately trustworthy	Completely trustworthy
	1	2	3	4
1) Parliament				
2) Government				
3) Leaders of political parties				
4) Police				
5) Local religious officials				
6) Highest religious authorities in your religion				
7) Health institutions on local level				
8) Health institutions on national level				
9) Courts				
10) Municipality				
11) International organizations				
12) Civil Society Organizations				

H5 How do you evaluate the inter-ethnic/inter-community relations in the country?

1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Neither good nor bad
4. Bad
5. Very bad

7.2 DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

Guideline

Please read and explain the questions in simple language that can be understood by a young person and be mindful about the composition of the group. Explain the questions if needed but avoid influencing/leading the answers of the participants and providing your own interpretation of a question.

Please ensure participants are not asked or probed to reveal any personal, confidential or intimate details about their life and that all young people present participate in the discussion. However, do not engage anyone directly or force a response.

Introduction:

Indago DOOEL Skopje for the purposes of the OSCE Mission to Skopje (OSCE) is conducting research about youth and security in North Macedonia. The aim is to see young people's perception of security and safety, if they participate in formal and informal peace processes, as well as to discuss the issues of countering and preventing violent extremism in the country. Moreover, the OSCE would like to learn more about youth violence, exclusion and marginalization at all levels as well as the trust in the authorities and inter-communities' relations in the last decades.

We would be very grateful if you would answer questions for us. It is anonymous, in other words, no one will know your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, we are only interested in knowing your choices, opinions and feelings. The focus group discussion is confidential (we will not ask for your name and we won't pass on any information you give us).

Part 1: Perceptions of security, involvement in peace and security activities

In the beginning, we would like to hear from you about your volunteering experiences (if any) or about your participation in different activities organized by some clubs, organizations, or maybe the school/faculty.

(Discussion should bring out how active young people are outside their regular school/ faculty/work activities. Volunteering and activism are taken as preconditions to assess the interest and potential of youth for active contribution and citizenship. This opening will provide more specific info about the experience of young people with volunteering, do they understand the term volunteering, do they take part in some volunteering activities, and of what kind. Young people who do not have volunteering experience will share info about their activism in general, maybe their membership; in some organizations or in sports clubs).

Could you please tell us about some peace and security actions that were implemented in your community or city, that you took part, or were informed about? What was your experience and what were the effects?

[Discussion should bring out the specific actions (if any) undertaken at the community/city level related to peace and security, the likes and dislikes of the participants about these activities, the experience of the participants with these actions, who participated, the perceptions and experiences with the organizers, do they feel trustful about this kind of activities, do they need more activities of this type or maybe they have a really scarce knowledge on the topic of peace and security].

Please describe to us your security concerns. The concerns you have may be related to your school, faculty or work environment. In addition, you may want to share security concerns linked to your city or the country in general.

(Discussion should bring out how secure young people feel in their environment including school/ faculty or work. Security concerns may reveal various types of threats related to physical security, or violent behaviours in different environments such as peer violence, social violence or mobbing. The discussion should also generate information about the general perception and opinion of the young people on how secure their town is as well as what the top security issues in the country from the perspective of the youth are).

Could you please describe if specific groups of young people experience in particular security issues? Who are these groups, and why are they in particular under threat?

[Discussion should bring out the level of security of some specific groups of young people such as LGBTI, Roma and others and the reasons and conditions that are related to their security).

Could you please describe the digital activity of young people in your environment? What are the most popular social networks and applications? What kind of security concerns for you and your friends raise the social networks and communication in digital space?

(Discussion should bring out the most popular social networks and types of communication in digital space and how safe they are. The discussion should also show the level of information of young people about potential security concerns and if they recognize and identify potential security threats).

Part 2: Discrimination, political polarization, exclusion, violence

Could you please describe any discrimination or political polarization in your school/faculty or work environment? What are the reasons for that and who is undertaking these discriminatory practices? What were the negative consequences and whether someone did do something to help in these situations?

[Discussion should bring out whether they or their friends have experienced negative incidences based on discrimination on ethnicity, gender, political or another base, what happened that lead to these situations and what happened afterward).

How often do you argue with your parents, brother/sister/partner? What do you do in that situation and what do they do? How do you resolve these fights?

(Discussion should bring out if participants have direct experience with domestic violence, how often, how it is demonstrated, and is it resolved in some way).

How often do you argue with your mates or colleagues? What do you do in that situation and what do they do? How do you resolve these fights?

(Discussion should bring out if participants have direct experience with peer violence, how often occurs, how it is demonstrated, and is it resolved in some way).

What are the mechanisms that you and your friends have to react in situations of violence, discrimination or security concerns? Have you ever reported such behaviour to some of these mechanisms and what was your experience? Can you trust these mechanisms?

(Discussion should bring out how informed young people are about the existing mechanisms for combating discrimination, violence and other security threats and how functional these mechanisms

are. In addition, the discussion will provide info on how trustful these mechanisms are and if not, why they do not believe).

Part 3: Radicalization, violent extremism, inter-community relations

Could you please describe any situations or experiences when you or some of your friends were in contact with or under security threat by some radical groups, issues, or information related to radicalization and violent extremism? Have you or someone else reported these cases and to whom? If not, why?

(Discussion should at first bring out if young people understand the terms radicalization and violent extremism. Secondly, the discussion may reveal some specific cases of radicalization personal experiences or witnessed situations and provide info on how that happened, what were the consequences and what was done (if something) to prevent further situations of this kind).

How do you feel about cooperation, learning and working with people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds than yours? How often do you meet young people from different ethnic backgrounds and how would you describe your mutual communication?

(Discussion should reveal if young people trust their peers or co-workers from different ethnic backgrounds and if not, what are the reasons for that. In addition, the discussion should bring out if young people feel secure or threatened in communication with people from different ethnic backgrounds).

Part 4: Trust in institutions

Could you please describe your behaviour in public institutions? How do you feel when you go to the institutions to ask for some service or to request information?

(Discussion should provide information on how the participants act in communication with the institutions, how secure they feel and if they trust the institutions).

How would you describe the communication of the employees in public institutions with the citizens? What is good and what could be improved? What are the most important factors to increase the trust of young people in the institutions?

(Discussion should provide information on how the public administration completes its duties and role and about some proposals on how this can be improved in order to better serve youth needs).

Part 5: Recommendations of participants

What does a secure life and environment mean for young people in North Macedonia?

How can security be improved to satisfy the needs of young people?

What could be the biggest challenge in building a more secure society for youth?

What could accelerate building a more secure society for youth?