



NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGY 2023-2027

Agency for Youth and Sport



Агенција за млади и спорт

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List of acronyms

AYS – Agency for Youth and Sport

EU – European Union

NYS – National Youth Strategy 2023-2027

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

RNM – Republic of North Macedonia

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

1. Introduction

The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 (hereinafter: NYS) is a strategic document that establishes medium-term goals and priorities for the development of youth policies and the advancement of the interests of young people in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM). The main imperative of the Strategy is improving the position of young people in society by setting basic principles of action, goals and measures that offer a reform framework primarily for institutions, as well as other actors in enabling young people to realize their rights, needs and interests.

The Agency for Youth and Sport (hereinafter: AYS) is the key actor in the process of developing the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027. The Strategy reflects the attitudes and priorities of youth for the present and the future of the country and is based on the strategic determination of the Government to work with and for youth, aiming to provide conditions in which the youth will reach their full potential. The National Youth Strategy is a strategic document that arises from the obligations defined by the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, and it is a key mechanism for improving youth policies and recognizing the needs of young people in the country.

The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 along with the Action Plan¹, which is an integral part of the Strategy, is adopted by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and covers a period of five-year (2023-2027). The defined goals and measures are created by youth and institutions cultivating a partnership, in a manner that tries to ensure their feasibility in the given time period, recognizing that the needs of young people are dynamic and variable.

Under the term “youth”, this Strategy shall cover all persons between the ages of 15 to 29.² The used definition of the term youth derives from the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies and is in accordance with the definition of youth used in the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 covers eight priority areas:

1. Youth Participation
2. Youth Informing
3. Youth Work
4. Education
5. Culture
6. Health
7. Entrepreneurship and pre-employment support
8. Security (violence)

¹ Within the framework of the Strategy, two Action Plans are foreseen, 2023-2025 and 2026-2027.

² According to the data from the last population census (2021), the total number of citizens belonging to this category is 326,773 or 18% of the total population.

A large number of horizontal topics and challenges were translated into the framework of priority areas, such as: gender equality, improvement of the environment, dealing with crises and shocks (such as COVID-19), participation in democratic life, membership in the European Union and digital transformation. The policies and principles within the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, were taken into account when defining the goals and measures thereof.

The set goals and action measures are based on the challenges identified by the youth, the status and development needs of the youth sector, as well as the youth trends in the country. The starting point for determining the needs of young people was the *Youth Trends Survey 2022* prepared by the Agency for Youth and Sport, as well as other relevant research in the field of young people. The process of defining the goals and measures took place within eight thematic working groups, additional consultations with young people at the national level, as well as meetings with umbrella organizations, high school students and high school organizations, students and student organizations, youth officers, young councilors, youth branches of political parties, the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia and other relevant actors, through a consultative, inclusive and transparent process. Over 1,000 participants participated in the creation of the Strategy.

The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 aims to contribute to the reduction of barriers faced by young people, which disrupt their full and effective participation in society on the same basis as others. In this context, the foreseen goals and measures aim to provide adequate support for young people, especially those with fewer opportunities³, as well as better recognition of their specific needs through which social, economic, geographical and cultural barriers, and barriers related to all forms of discrimination will be addressed.

The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 foresees indicators for measuring the success, achievements and impact of the Strategy, distributed in each priority area. With this step, the real effects of what is foreseen within the Strategy will be assessed and a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system will be provided.

³ Young people with fewer opportunities are young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers since they face one or more factors and barriers of exclusion (the definition of disadvantaged youth is taken from the European Solidarity Corps).

2. Strategy development process

The development process of the NYS is defined by the “Methodology for developing a National Youth Strategy 2023-2027”, while the problems and challenges faced by young people were initially detected through the *Youth Trends Survey*⁴, prepared for the needs of the AYS. The survey included 1,200 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 from the eight planning regions and was conducted between January and April 2022. A large number of current relevant research was consulted in the process of defining the situation of young people, such as: *Socio-political participation of young people in North Macedonia: Inequality, Uncertainty and Different Expectations*⁵, *Initial Study on Youth Trends in the Republic of North Macedonia*⁶, *Study on the Youth of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018/2019*⁷, *Youth in Crisis 2.0 Effects of the Pandemic on Young People and Recommendations to Institutions*⁸, and *Youth on the Census*⁹, among others.

The process of developing the NYS was initially announced on International Youth Day (August 12, 2022), while the official start was marked on October 17, 2022 at the national “Conference for Determining Youth Goals 23/27”. The foreseen Strategy development process and the need of adopting a new NYS were presented at the Conference. At the event, the participants had the opportunity to participate in the defining of a proposal vision for the Strategy, and the text of the final version of the vision started to emerge.

The Strategy covers eight priority areas: Youth Participation, Youth Information, Youth Work, Education, Culture, Health, Entrepreneurship and pre-employment support, and Security (violence). Seven of the covered areas were also part of the previous Youth Strategy, while the priority area Security (violence) appears as a novelty, which increasingly affects the condition and actions of young people, hence the need for its inclusion in the new NYS.

Eight working groups were formed for the development of the NYS, one working group per each priority area covered by the Strategy. For each working group, based upon a public competition and a transparent selection process, one thematic expert was hired to be in charge of the organization of the working group. The findings and results of the *Youth Trends Survey*, as well as other relevant researches, were the guiding premise for the thematic experts when organizing the work of the working groups.

Over thirty meetings of the thematic working groups were organized for developing the content in the priority areas. When defining the composition of the working groups, a key role was given to young people, institutional representatives – youth officers, youth organisations and organisations for young people, youth umbrella

⁴ Agency for Youth and Sports (2022). Youth Trends Survey. Skopje: Agency for Youth and Sports.

⁵ Gjorgjiovska J. and Galevski, M. (2020). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: Inequality, uncertainty and different expectations. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

⁶ Coalition SEGA (2021). Initial study on youth trends in the Republic of North Macedonia.

⁷ Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2019). Study on the youth of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018/2019.

⁸ Group of organizations (MOF, ZMAI, Reactor) (2021). Youth in crisis 2.0 Effects of the pandemic on young people and recommendations to institutions.

⁹ Reactor, Youth on the census.

organizations, as well as local youth representatives. The process of organizing the working groups was based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and inclusiveness.

A series of additional meetings were organized outside the working groups. In order to achieve a greater degree of involvement in the preparation of the initial text of the Strategy, a two-day consultation was organized with secondary school students, a working meeting with umbrella organizations and student representative bodies, a meeting with the youth branches of political parties and a meeting with the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies within the Parliament of the RNM.

In February 2023, the Agency for Youth and Sport (AYS) published the draft text of the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027. In order to ensure inclusiveness in the process of developing a new Youth Strategy, broad consultative meetings were organized at the national level in March 2023, where the participants had the opportunity to express their opinion on the draft text of the Strategy. Consultations at the national level were held in Struga, Gostivar, Bitola, Veles, Strumica, Kumanovo, Shtip and Delchevo. In addition, three separate meetings were organized in Skopje with: youth umbrella organizations and student representative bodies, young MP's in parliament and youth branches of political parties. During the public consultation process, the draft text of the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 was made available to the general public via the Single National Register of Regulations (ENER). This system also facilitated the submission of proposals, suggestions and notes. The tool U-Report developed by UNICEF was also used in the consultation process.

Based on the received suggestions, comments and notes from the consultations, a revised draft text of the Strategy was prepared in April 2023. In order for the general public to have an insight into the collected notes and the manner in which they are addressed in the revised text, an additional publicly available document was prepared, that documented all the received suggestions and the manner in which they are addressed with the new proposed text on over 40 pages. This step was essential to ensure high transparency within the consultation process itself, as well as accountability to all those participants who contributed to the creation of the Strategy. The revised text of the Strategy was reviewed at a final public conference held on May 3, 2023, attended by 152 participants.

After finalizing the text of the Strategy, the preparation of the first Action Plan for the period 2023-2025 began. This plan was developed within a three-day workshop (July 24-26 in Strumica), involving the participation of representatives from both youth organizations and institutions. They were responsible for the development of the activities related to the eight priority areas, as well as for specifying the financial aspects related to them. Additionally, after the completion of the three-day workshop, additional meetings were organized with the key ministries that have a role in the implementation of the Strategy.

Over 1,300 participants were involved in the overall process of creating the Strategy. Through the broad involvement of young people and the relevant state authorities, the Agency for Youth and Sport ensured that the New Youth Strategy will be a document that reflects the needs of various groups of young people, and simultaneously, will provide institutional support in the creation of the intended goals and measures.

Number of participants in the creation of the Strategy							
Starting conference	Members of 8 working groups	Additional working meetings	Local consultations in 8 cities	U-Report questionnaire	Electronically received comments on the draft text	Final conference	Action Plan 2023-2025
145 participants	311 participants	117 participants	264 participants	236 surveyed young people	8 comments	152 participants	70 participants
						TOTAL	1,303 participants

The key actor of the National Youth Strategy preparation process was the Agency for Youth and Sport, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP, OSCE Mission to Skopje and United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA.

3. Current situation of young people in the RNM

3.1 Horizontal themes and new challenges focused on young people

The wider social, economic and political context, in which this Strategy was prepared, at least in some aspects, is very different from the previous Strategy. The COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying crises, have created new, and in some parts, exacerbated the existing challenges faced by young people. As a result, a large number of young people feel increasing uncertainty and additional stress about their future. At the same time, new topics related to environmental protection and developing environmental awareness, gender equality, non-discrimination, and digitalization are imposed as a priority for young people.

Despite the active measures of the Government to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic inevitably affected the situation of young people. It affected their education, socio-economic well-being and health.¹⁰ Young people who are part of the educational process had to quickly adjust to online education and suffered certain learning losses. Within a brief period, conditions were established that allowed over 90% of young people to engage in remote learning across the entire country. However, some of the vulnerable groups of young people did not always have the necessary conditions at home to smoothly follow the education process, a challenge faced by almost all countries in the world. During the first months of the pandemic, youth unemployment recorded a slight increase, then it was mitigated by active measures in the ongoing crises, and ultimately reverted to pre-pandemic levels. From the aspect of health, although young people were not the most affected age group, some of them faced difficulties in obtaining health services and felt consequences to their general and mental health. The pandemic also affected other aspects of young people's lives, such as socializing and relationships, cultural and entertainment activities, and family well-being.

The RNM, like many other countries, is facing challenges related to environmental protection, wherein young people play an active role in finding solutions. The impact of these challenges is felt by the entire population, but especially by young people. One of the key environmental challenges that the country is facing is the air pollution, which affects the health and the existing ecosystem. Young people under the age of 29 and women are categories of citizens that are particularly concerned about air pollution compared to other age groups.¹¹ Under the influence of climate change as a global problem, the country is also facing more frequent and more intense heat waves, droughts and extreme weather conditions, and research shows that these topics also concern young people.¹² In dealing with these challenges, young people are increasingly participating in environmental movements and actions, and are taking an active role in solving environmental problems, raising environmental awareness and care, and changing the perception of the environment in their local communities. As such, young people are the frontliners in dealing with the harmful effects of air pollution and climate change.

¹⁰ Youth in crisis (2021). Effects of the pandemic on young people and recommendations to institutions.

¹¹ UNICEF (2021). Research on knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding climate change and the environment.

¹² *Ibid.*

Gender inequality and discrimination stands in the way of the full utilization of the human potential among young people. Despite the fact that the majority of graduated students are women, this advantage is later lost in the labor market, where women face higher unemployment than men and are less likely to hold managerial positions.¹³ Additionally, in certain circles, there is still an expectation for young women to choose the so-called female professions, and at the same time, there is pressure from their surroundings that imposes on them the need to have a family, get married and have children, which also prevents them from devoting themselves to their career.¹⁴ There are also stereotypes about the participation of young women in politics. Surveys of young people's perceptions show that over a third of young people think that men are better politicians than women.¹⁵

Technology and digitalization transform society and have a significant impact on the lives of young people. Almost 99% of young people use the Internet every day or almost every day¹⁶, and they see the most benefits in the possibility for social interaction and communication, education, information and leisure¹⁷. According to 2021 Eurostat data, one-third of young people in the RNM use the Internet to attend online courses, which is within the average of the EU countries.¹⁸ In terms of jobs, the number of young people who see themselves as programmers, web designers, computer game creators, and a number of other professions related to the use of technology, is increasing. Remote work is also on the rise. Additionally, in times of developed technology and access to various social media, young people use new tools to make their voices heard. Over a third of young people use the Internet as a tool to communicate with public authorities.¹⁹

3.2. Challenges of young people within the priority areas covered by the Strategy

Unequal access to education and lack of quality is one of the most significant problems that young people are facing. Despite efforts to increase access to education in recent years, a large number of young people with fewer opportunities (such as Roma, persons with disabilities and young people from poor families) record lower participation and completion rates at all levels of education. The results of the PISA study, and of other international researches in which the RNM participates, show low achievement of our students. Half or more of the students do not show a basic level of reading proficiency (55%), mathematics (61%) and natural sciences (49.4%).²⁰ Although children spend 11 years in school by the age of 18, on average they show educational results equal to only 7.3 years of learning.²¹ Dissatisfaction with the quality of education is evident from the perceptions

¹³ Annual Report of the Ombudsman for 2016.

¹⁴ Coalition SEGA and Volunteer Center Skopje. A case study on gender stereotypes of young women's participation in decision-making processes in underdeveloped parts of the Skopje region.

¹⁵ Galevski, M. (2019). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: apathy, optimism or disappointment. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

¹⁶ State Statistical Office (2021). Use of information and communication technology for the first quarter of 2021.

¹⁷ Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2019). Study on the youth of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018/2019.

¹⁸ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_CI_AC_I\\$DV_1122/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_CI_AC_I$DV_1122/default/table?lang=en)

¹⁹ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_BDE15EI\\$DV_1123/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_BDE15EI$DV_1123/default/table?lang=en)

²⁰ State Examination Center (2020). Report on the achievements of students in the Republic of North Macedonia PISA 2018.

²¹ World Bank (2020). Human Capital Index.

of young people themselves. According to the Youth Trends Survey 2022, young people rate their satisfaction with formal education with an average score of 3.5 (on a scale from 1-lowest, to 5-highest).²²

A large number of young people face employment challenges, as a result of the low quality of education and the discrepancy of education, including vocational education and training, with the demands of the labor market. As a matter of fact, unemployment remains the biggest problem for young people.²³ Although the youth unemployment rate is continuously decreasing and has seen a drop of almost 10% in the last few years, from 39.2% in 2017 to 27.6% in 2021, the RNM remains one of the countries with the highest youth unemployment rate in Europe.^{24 25} Furthermore, young people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed compared to other age groups, with one in three young people facing the risk of poverty and social exclusion – especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and rural areas.²⁶ The fact that almost a quarter of the youth in the country belong to the category of persons who are neither employed nor in education/training (NEET).²⁷

The state of affairs with youth unemployment also causes migration movements. Over half of the young people (58%) would move out of the country if given the opportunity, and only 6.9% of them would return to the country.²⁸ In addition to unemployment, the state of the environment and air pollution stand out as one of the main reasons for young people moving away.²⁹ Out of the RNM nationals who have already moved abroad to the OECD countries, as many as 20% of them are highly educated, which is the lowest rate among the countries of the Western Balkans. The number of students from the country who leave to study in OECD countries has almost tripled between 2013 and 2019.³⁰ The prospect of possible membership in the European Union is one of the most significant factors deterring young people from the desire to leave the country and makes them more optimistic about their future.³¹

Brain drain leads to significant losses in human capital. According to the World Bank Human Capital Index, which assesses the productivity of the next generation of workers compared to a benchmark of full education and health, a child born today in the RNM will have a productivity of only 56% of what it could achieve if provided with a high-quality education and in full health.³² It is one of the lowest rates in Europe. Additionally, over four

²² Agency for Youth and Sports (2022). Youth Trends Survey.

²³ UNICEF (2021). Research on knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding climate change and the environment.

²⁴ World Bank (2019). Finding solutions for youth unemployment in North Macedonia.

²⁵ European Commission (2022). North Macedonia report for 2022.

²⁶ Eurostat database, 2022.

²⁷ State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (2021). Labor force Survey.

²⁸ Gjorgjiovaska J. and Galevski, M. (2020). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: Inequality, uncertainty and different expectations. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

²⁹ UNICEF (2020). Born in transition. Analysis of the situation of young people in North Macedonia. Skopje: UNICEF.

³⁰ OECD (2022). Labor migration in the Western Balkans: Models for Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits.

³¹ Galevski, M. (2019). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: apathy, optimism or disappointment. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

³² World Bank (2020). Human Capital Index.

out of five young people believe that the country does not use their potential.³³ It is estimated that the cost of migration within a year can cost the country up to half a billion euros.³⁴

The dissatisfaction of young people with the developments in the country is closely related to their opportunities to participate and to influence the work of institutions and the trust they have in them.

Although the 2020 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies represents an important step forward that provides opportunities and guidelines for the broad and systematic involvement of young people in a series of processes at the central and local level, a series of challenges for even more active involvement of young people in the work of the institutions remains. This is confirmed by the existing research. Over two-thirds of young people believe that they are not adequately involved in decision-making processes.³⁵ At the same time, almost eight out of ten young people believe that the authorities partially or not at all care about them and their needs, and only one-third believe that the authorities are familiar with their needs and problems.³⁶ Additionally, two-thirds of young people have never been consulted by the authorities, neither at the local nor at the central level.³⁷

Within the political representation, there is still room for greater involvement of young people. At the 2020 parliamentary elections, 19.17% of candidates on the electoral lists were persons aged 18-29, and only 3% of the elected members of parliament were under the age of 30.³⁸ At the local level, according to the results of local elections held in 2021, only two of the elected mayors are young, while a more noticeable number of young people are the municipal councilors (17%).³⁹ Regarding voting, over half of young people vote regularly⁴⁰, but at the same time, up to 70% of young people are not interested in politics⁴¹.

The quality of information offered to young people varies and is of limited access. Information that may be of interest to young people is not consolidated within a single space that would allow them to be easily accessible. Furthermore, young people are much less represented in the media than other age groups⁴² and are often portrayed as disinterested, passive and apolitical. The inadequate representation of young people in the media is largely the result of the insufficient participation of young people in the creation of media content, and thus the development of quality content for young people. Although almost 100% of young people use the Internet on a daily basis, it is still noticeable that only 13.7% of young people in the RNM have advanced digital skills, in comparison to the European Union average of 39.5%. In terms of information about social events, almost 90%

³³ Center for Research and Policy Making (2018). European integration and youth mobility: How to go from an outflow to an inflow of personnel?

³⁴ Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2019). The cost of migration in North Macedonia.

³⁵ Agency for Youth and Sports (2022). Youth Trends Survey.

³⁶ Gjorgjiovska J. and Galevski, M. (2020). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: Inequality, uncertainty and different expectations. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Galevski, M. and Gjorgjiovska, J. (2020). Youth political absence. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

³⁹ Gjorgjiovska, J. and Malevski, B. (2022). Deferred Youth Participation - Local elections 2021. Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

⁴⁰ Gjorgjiovska J. and Galevski, M. (2020). Sociopolitical participation of young people in North Macedonia: Inequality, uncertainty and different expectations. Skopje: Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

⁴¹ Coalition SEGA (2021). Initial study on youth trends in the Republic of North Macedonia.

⁴² Fidanovski, K. and Jovanova, E. (2021). More invisible in the media than in politics. Political Thought, 12 (12-2021), p. 84-96.

of young people get information via social networks and internet portals, and the biggest challenge they face in terms of information is incorrect information.⁴³

The participation of young people in creating programs, cultural contents, or policies in the field of culture in the country is also low. Only one out of five young people is involved in this kind of processes.⁴⁴ Although 85.7% of young people believe that culture is important for development and quality of life, their participation in cultural-artistic activity as organizers or participants is low (33.7%) with a demonstrated interest in significant growth (77.6%) if they have adequate opportunities. Participation certainly depends on the opportunities in the living environment, and some of them are related to the existence of spaces for culture and cultural contents. This also represents a significant challenge since 39.8% of young people believe that cultural content is rarely offered in their place of residence.⁴⁵ The (un)availability of information about existing cultural contents and their visibility is also a high-ranking reason for an unsatisfactory cultural offer⁴⁶.

Youth Work has received increased acknowledgment and recognition in recent years, but youth workers need more support. With the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in 2020, youth work in the RNM was defined in a legal act for the first time, and youth work has been formally recognized as an occupation through the adopted standard of occupation for Youth Worker since 2018. Youth work is mainly carried out by youth organizations and organizations for young people, as well as by the small number of youth centers at the local level that have been established in only 6 municipalities so far.⁴⁷ Therefore, youth work is not widely available and sufficiently sustainable, and most of the institutions, young people and other actors and groups in society are still not familiar with the meaning and importance of youth work. There is also a lack of social promotion, as well as inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation in the field of development and recognition of youth work.

Young people also face a multitude of problems related to their physical and mental health. A high 20.4% of the youth in the country are smokers, 58.2% consume alcohol, and 10.4% use psychotropic substances.⁴⁸ Young people are also exposed to challenges related to mental health, mental hygiene and the stigma associated with all the difficulties associated with modern living.⁴⁹ Almost half of secondary school students are currently facing or have in the past faced difficulties related to their mental health⁵⁰, while only 1.5% of young secondary school

⁴³ Agency for Youth and Sport (2022). Youth Trends Survey.

⁴⁴ Mitrovic, D. (2022). National report: Youth needs and visibility of youth programs in the field of culture in North Macedonia, Union for Youth Work (Regional project "Melting Pot").
https://smr.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Nacionalen-lzvestaj_kultura.pdf

⁴⁵ Agency for Youth and Sport (2022). Youth Trends Survey.

⁴⁶ Ibid 42

⁴⁷ By December 2022, based on the Law, youth centers have been established in Bitola, Veles, Kavadarci, Kumanovo, Ohrid and Probistip.

⁴⁸ Agency for Youth and Sport (2022). Youth Trends Survey.

⁴⁹ A study of school-age children and youth (2018). <https://www.iph.mk/en/health-and-health-care-of-school-children-and-youth-in-north-macedonia-2018/>

⁵⁰ Youth Can (2019). Perceptions regarding mental health among secondary school students.

students visit a psychologist or psychotherapist⁵¹. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one-fifth of young people reported a deterioration of their mental health.⁵²

The security of young people and the role of young people in creating safe environments is of utmost importance. The fact that 104 incidents of hate crimes were registered in 2020, 76 of which were on an ethnic ground, 12 on political and 3 on religious grounds, is worrisome.⁵³ According to the data, these cases rarely receive an institutional resolution, which further complicates the situation and affects the trust of young people in the institutions. These incidents mainly involve young people, which emphasizes the importance of working with young people to prevent, as well as to create an environment that builds a culture based on mutual respect and coexistence. From a safety aspect, cyber space and the need to sensitize young people about the threats that exist there are equally as important. As many as 55% of young people declare that they are often faced with bullying online, and 26.7% consider that online harassment by friends and acquaintances is the biggest online threat. Simultaneously, 63% of young people have never received training or formal familiarization with online fact checking, internet behavior for protection against cyber violence, protection of personal data and files, and protection of online content.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Youth Can (2019). Perceptions regarding mental health among secondary school students.

⁵² Youth Can (2019). Perceptions regarding mental health among secondary school students.

⁵³ Helsinki Committee on Human Rights (2021). Hate Crime Annual Report 2020. Skopje: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

⁵⁴ CRPM (2020). Passage4Prevent: Using education to prevent youth online radicalization.

4. Vision and initial principles of the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027

4.1. Vision

Young people are the bearers of positive changes and the key to sustainability and development of society. They realize their needs and rights in a manner that enables them to reach their full human potential.

4.2. Principles

Every young person matters. Early detection of individual needs and provision of timely and adequate support to every young person is above all an ethical obligation of the country, as well as the most economically profitable investment. The individual talents, interests and creativity of young people must be constantly encouraged, including taking care of their mental and physical health. Among other things, this implies creating opportunities for young people to take control of their lives and to actively contribute for positive changes in society. Building on this, the Strategy recognizes that investing in every young person is necessary and leads to lifelong and inter-generational benefits.

Young people have specific needs. In an aging society where number of young people is constantly decreasing (from 24% in 2002 to 18% in 2021), it is crucial that young people are recognized as a category of citizens with specific needs and characteristics, whose development of skills and knowledge implies a targeted approach. Collecting relevant, timely and contextualized data on the situation of young people is of great importance for encouraging the understanding of the needs of different groups of young people and the ways in which they are changing, especially of those young people with fewer opportunities. This Strategy aims to strengthen evidence-based youth policy-making, recognizing that youth issues are constantly changing, depending on trends and needs.

Every young person is different. The recognition of diversity is the basis for guaranteeing the human rights of young people. This viewpoint implies that young people may have different needs in different contexts and that some of them face special challenges in accessing education, employment, health and other segments of public life. Starting from the fact that young people are not a homogenous group, in identifying the different challenges, needs and solutions for young people, it must be taken into consideration that their place of residence, socio-economic status, access to formal education, the presence of disability, gender, sexual orientation, belonging to ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic groups have an important, and often, intersectional influence on their position in society. The Strategy aims to recognize diversities and enable a layered approach to youth issues, as well as to promote activities and policies that are inclusive for all young people, especially young people with fewer opportunities and those whose voices may be overlooked, ensuring that no one will be left behind.

Young people are equal partners in the creation and implementation of youth policies, not just their beneficiaries. A key feature of this approach is the shifting the stand from “making policies for young people” to “creating policies alongside with young people”. This also implies the rejection of outdated views that see young people as a passive category of citizens who lack knowledge due to their age. The Strategy recognizes the responsibility to challenge this view and aims to eliminate these prejudices and all forms of discrimination, with

a view of young people as catalysts of change and the key to the sustainability and development of the country. The RNM emphasizes the right of young people to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of the policies that affect them and recognizes the changes caused by digital communication that create new forms of democratic and civic participation.

Young people have the right to be involved in the adoption of policies that do not affect them directly. Policies that aim to improve the lives of young people can never be limited to this field. Hence, the need for young people to be involved in solving horizontal issues related to gender equality, the fight against discrimination, social inclusion, digitalization, and other topics that affect society. Regardless of the format of involvement, communication with young people must be based on the principle of respect and equality. Within the decision-making processes, free will, the right to choose and the participation of young people are crucial. This Strategy advocates for the elimination of tokenism and the inclusion of youth as “decor” in decision-making processes.

Valuing the position and role of young people in society is also an international priority. The European Union constantly calls on member states to develop coordinated youth policies, emphasizing the importance of having youth strategies, as well as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, who also advocate for similar positions on this issue.^{55 56} In fact, the development of comprehensive youth strategies is a widespread practice for shaping the vision for young people and the development of youth policies.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ United Nations (2018). Youth 2030: Working with and for young people.

⁵⁶ Council of Europe (2020). Strategy for the Youth Sector 2030: Engaging young people with the values of the Council of Europe.

⁵⁷ Available data shows that 77% of OECD countries have drawn up a multi-year youth strategy at national or federal level in the past. See: OECD (2018). Youth Census Report. Engaging and empowering youth in OECD countries - How to bridge the "governance gap".

5. Strategic framework and priority areas

5. 1. Youth Participation



Youth Participation is a process that enables young people to participate and jointly make decisions on policies and programs that directly or indirectly shape the lives of young people. The need to incorporate the youth perspective in the processes of creating and adopting policies is of fundamental importance for strengthening democracy, encouraging active citizenry and building an inclusive society. Although the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Politics provides opportunities and guidelines for broad and systemic involvement of young people, they still face a series of challenges for active involvement in social processes. Accordingly, the priority area “Youth participation” is aimed at improving the quality of youth participation in all spheres of society, as well as strengthening the role of the youth sector, striving for the recognition of young people as an equal partner of the institutions when creating policies in areas which are of their interest, with a wide application of the possibilities offered by the digital space.

Special objective 1: Strengthened influence of young people in all decision-making processes at the local and national level based on an appropriate legal framework

1. Ensuring consistent, effective and efficient implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, strengthening supervision of its application.
2. Continuous analysis of the application and effects of the existing legal framework that regulates youth participation at the local and national level.
3. Adaptation of the existing and adoption of new legal acts (laws and by-laws) that will regulate youth participation at the local and national level in broad consultation with young people, including appropriate control mechanisms that will ensure effective application.
4. Establishing functional mechanisms for systemic inclusion of youth and youth organizations in all planning and policy-making processes that are of the interest of young people, including consultative processes for negotiations with the European Union.
5. Strengthening the capacities of institutions at the local and national level for the application of models for youth participation, with a focus on youth officers, as well as establishing a regular inter-institutional coordination and effective communication with young people.
6. Raising the awareness of the members of the Councils of the local self-government units, as well as the MPs in the Parliament of the RNM about the need of essential application of youth participation in the decision-making and policy-making processes, including the policies for reducing the negative effects of crises.
7. Strengthening the capacities of the municipalities and the City of Skopje for the development and implementation of local strategies for young people, as well as for the support of Local Youth Councils.

8. Continuous strengthening of the capacities of Local Youth Councils and providing support for their representation, introducing innovative practices and mutual networking.
9. Advancing the legal framework for volunteering and ensuring the validation of volunteering.
10. Continuous increase of the resources and capacities of the Agency for Youth and Sport for planning and implementing youth programs and research activities, with a focus on strengthening the Youth Sector.
11. Greater involvement of young people in the processes of urban planning and design of public spaces, as well as providing opportunities for their use.
12. Greater representation of young candidates on the lists of political parties in the parliamentary and local elections and increased visibility and support of young candidates during election campaigns, as well as after they take office.
13. Advancement of the processes of adoption and application of youth policies into the work of the Parliament of the RNM, through the introduction of a special Youth Commission.
14. Greater involvement of young people and youth organizations in the processes of fighting corruption and promoting the rule of law.
15. Raising public awareness among young people about the existence of youth officers in local and national institutions, as well as the possibilities for their mutual connection in the direction of greater involvement in decision-making and policy-making processes.
16. Strengthening the institutional focus on youth through the introduction of a Ministry of Youth based on functional analysis and adequate reorganization of the state administration.

Special objective 2: Increased participation of young people in decision-making processes within educational institutions in the direction of developing and applying modern and advanced educational policies tailored to young people

1. Guaranteeing and promoting high school student and university student participation in the legal framework that regulates high school and higher education, including regular monitoring and corrective measures.
2. Ensuring adequate financial support from schools and higher education institutions for the smooth functioning of representative pupil and student bodies, their activities, as well as other forms of activity of young people within educational institutions.
3. Continuous education and informing of young people on the importance and benefits of youth participation in the educational process.
4. Continuous strengthening of the competencies of members of youth representative bodies in secondary schools and higher education institutions for effective influence in the decision-making processes.

5. Promotion of content for youth participation within the concept of civic education, creation of content for political education that prepare young people for active democratic participation and encouragement of activities that introduce young people to institutions, their work and their role.
6. Improvement of curricula and materials to encourage a democratic rhetoric, open understandings and critical attitude towards authorities and institutions.
7. Continuous strengthening of the competencies of teaching personnel and members of management bodies in secondary schools and higher education institutions for supporting youth organizing and participation of young people in decision-making processes.
8. Ensuring essential and equal involvement of young people in schools and higher education institutions bodies and activities, especially young people with fewer opportunities.
9. Providing support for active systematic involvement of young people in the planning, creation and implementation of curricula and extracurricular activities within schools and higher education institutions, encouraging inter-ethnic cooperation and cohesion.
10. Recognition and encouragement of youth activism in the educational process as an opportunity for personal improvement and appropriate professional development.
11. Introduction of a student ombudsman model in secondary schools as a mechanism for protecting and promoting the rights of young people in the educational process.

Special objective 3: Improved involvement and influence of young people on the development and implementation of environmental protection policies

1. Establishing systemic mechanisms for the participation of young people in decision-making processes related to green policies at the local and national level.
2. Continuous application of programs and mechanisms for initiating and implementing green actions at the local and national level by individual youth, formal and informal youth groups and associations.
3. Developing and implementing campaigns for informing and encouraging young people to participate in the creation of green policies.
4. Strengthening the environmental protection content in the curricula in primary, high school and higher education, encouraging green youth activism.
5. Encouraging volunteer activities for environmental protection, as well as valuing the volunteer engagement.
6. Improving the involvement of young people from rural areas in green initiatives with the support of the civil sector.

Special objective 4: Strengthened youth activism within the digital space

1. Providing access to digital tools for youth participation and improving information technology infrastructure in public spaces, including assistive technology for young persons with disabilities and providing education for their application.
2. Enhancing digital literacy (information technology skills and application of digital tools) of officials in local and national institutions, with a focus on youth officials, to support digital youth participation and digital communication with young people.
3. Promotion and enhancement of existing functional digital tools for youth participation and encouraging young people to use them, including the practice of regular feedback, using the benefits of artificial intelligence.

Special objective 5: Strengthened and sustainable capacities of the youth sector as a partner of institutions in the creation of policies towards a better quality of life for young people

1. Continuous analysis of existing local and national programs and funds in the direction of adapting them to current needs for sustainability and development of forms of youth organizing.
2. Establishing a sustainable system of budgetary (annual) funding of youth-related activities in accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, ensuring equal regional coverage and increased focus on youth in rural areas.
3. Encouraging systemic networking and structural cooperation between forms of youth organizing, young people and decision-makers, at the national, bilateral and international level (especially in European Union countries), within a structural youth dialogue (youth laboratories).
4. Providing affirmative measures to support forms of youth organizing from rural areas, as well as organizations that work with youth with fewer opportunities.
5. Continuous strengthening of the capacities of youth organizations to improve their self-sustainability, as well as encouraging and supporting the formation of new youth organizations, with a focus on less developed regions and areas that target young people with fewer opportunities.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#1. Connecting the EU with young people, #9. Space and participation for all, #10. A sustainable green Europe and #11. Youth organizations and European programs.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
No. of municipalities that have established functional Local Youth Councils (LYC) in accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies	15 (December 2022)	35	60	AYS
% of representation of candidates aged 18 to 29 out of all candidates for: a) parliamentary elections (candidates for MPs) b) local elections (candidates for mayors and councilors)	a) 19.17% (Parliamentary elections, 2020) b.1) 3% young candidates for mayors; b.2) 26.4% young candidates for councilors (Local elections, 2021)	a) 22% b.1) 6% b.2) Maintaining the reference level.	a) 25% b.1) 10% b.2) Maintaining the reference level.	a) The reference data are taken from the Political Absence of Youth study. b) The reference data are taken from the Delayed Youth Participation study.
% of young people (16-29) that use the Internet to communicate with public authorities	37.5% (2021)	42%	47.5%	Eurostat
% of young people (15-29) who believe that young people are adequately involved in decision-making processes	22.5% (2022)	27%	32%	Youth Trends Survey 2022, conducted by the AYS

5.2. Youth Informing



The right to information is constitutionally guaranteed, and youth information implies a system for providing services with specialized service information that is of interest to young people. Free and transparent access to quality, truthful and timely information influences the decisions of young people and whether they will make an active contribution to the community. However, the media often incompletely and inadequately present information, which calls into question the credibility of the information. Furthermore, young people do not have enough opportunities to influence media content and participate in its creation. In most of the media space, there are no youth programs or sections at all, and events organized by young people get less and less space in the media. That is why the priority area “Youth Informing” focuses on creating and sharing quality and comprehensive content for young people, in a language that is understandable and adapted to young people, as well as continuous building of media and digital literacy skills.

Special objective 1: Increased media awareness for Youth Informing, encouraged and supported young people to participate in already existing media content and to create new ones

1. Encouraging dialogue between the media, young people and forms of youth organizing.
2. Enabling greater representation of young people in the media space and giving young people the opportunity to express themselves on youth issues and other socio-political topics of their interest that are not explicitly youth related.
3. Increasing the visibility and media affirmation of young people with fewer opportunities.
4. Increasing awareness and building capacities of the public broadcasting service for the affirmation of youth issues.
5. Strengthening the capacities of journalists and young media workers for involvement and creation of media content for young people in the languages of smaller ethnic communities.

Special objective 2: Young people equipped with knowledge and skills for media and digital literacy who can recognize disinformation and articulate their own interests and views as active citizens in society with a developed critical awareness

1. Synchronization of legislation, strategies and plans in the education system for the development of media and digital literacy in accordance with the European standards and policies in this field.
2. Increasing the awareness of the public for recognizing disinformation, improving media literacy and strengthening critical thinking among young people.
3. Establishing mechanisms for financial support of projects in partnership with the forms of youth organizing related to media and digital literacy for recognizing disinformation.

4. Supporting programs for professional development and further education of teaching personnel for the application of curricula related to media and digital literacy.
5. Institutional support of non-formal educational programs, and media and digital literacy training.
6. Multiplication and affirmation of good practices from existing projects implemented by forms of youth organizing and other professional associations, with a focus on media literacy.

Special objective 3: Provided access to a National Information Platform that is recognized by the youth and acknowledged by the institutions

1. Providing financial support from institutions for the establishment and functioning of the National Information Platform as a space where information from the institutions and forms of youth organizing will be shared.
2. Connecting the National Information Platform with a mobile application and social networks.
3. Upgrading, continuous updating and optimizing existing web pages, social network profiles and other information channels used by the institutions, and connecting them to the National Information Platform.
4. Building the capacities of youth officers to create informational content for publication on the National Information Platform related to their work, opportunities and news for youth from the institution.
5. Encouraging and supporting the creation of informational content for young people on the National Information Platform that will be compatible and accessible for young persons with disabilities.

Special objective 4: Improved communication between young people and the competent institutions at the local and central level in order to promote youth information

1. Improving inter-institutional coordination and cooperation for exchange of information.
2. Strengthening the position of youth officers as a bridge for communication between young people and institutions.
3. Encouraging continuous networking and cooperation between young people, forms of youth organizing, youth services, civil society, media, public service, artisan, journalistic and media organizations, competent institutions and other actors.
4. Increasing trust between young people and institutions at the local and national level.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#1. Connecting the EU with young people, #3. Inclusive societies, #4. Information and constructive dialogue, and #11. Youth organizations and European programs

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
% of young people (16-29) with basic or above basic digital skills	58.2% (2021)	63%	68%	Eurostat
Total no. of visitors of the National Information Platform	There is no such platform at the moment	The platform is functional and records 20.000 visits annually	60.000 visitors in the final year of Strategy implementation (2027)	Statistics on visits on the platform itself
Average score that young people (15-29) give for the quality of information intended for young people in the media	Average score of 2.6 on a scale of 1 to 5 (2022)	Average score of 2.9 on a scale of 1 to 5	Average score of 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 5	The reference level results from the Youth Trends Survey 2022, conducted by the AYS

5.3. Youth Work



Youth Work represents an organized and systematic process of education and support of the authentic development of young people in order to realize their overall personal, social and societal potential and their active involvement in the life of the community. Youth Work plays a central role in providing young people with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need in order to be active citizens in society. Despite the fact that Youth Work has gained increased acknowledgment and recognition in the past few years, most of the institutions, young people and other actors in society are still not sufficiently familiar with the meaning, importance and opportunities offered by Youth Work, and Youth Work has not been fully established as a profession. Hence, the priority area “Youth Work” emphasizes the need for an increased availability of a sustainable and quality offer of Youth Work implemented by professional Youth Workers, within a formally recognized Youth Work system.

Special objective 1: Youth Work is formally, politically and socially acknowledged and recognized as a key approach to support the authentic development of young people

1. Regulating Youth Work and the manner of its implementation through the adoption of appropriate laws and by-laws and revising the existing ones.
2. Increasing the visibility of Youth Work and implementing activities for broad social promotion of Youth Work, non-formal education, volunteering, youth centers and youth work providers, at the local and the national level.
3. Establishing a unified certificate for recognition and evaluation of competencies acquired through informal education, which are not verified by the Center for Adult Education.
4. Increasing cooperation at the local level between youth centers, civil society organizations, educational institutions, sports clubs, local self-government units, the business community and other relevant actors in the field of youth work.
5. Recognizing an umbrella organization of Youth Workers and Youth Work providers as a representative body that will be involved in the creation and implementation of Youth Work policies and measures.
6. Acquainting and educating teaching personnel and other professionals from related professions who work with young people (pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, teachers, sports workers, youth officers, etc.) about the meaning, potential application and methodology of Youth Work and non-formal education in the support of the authentic development of young people.
7. Stimulating the documenting, analysis, monitoring and promotion of positive results, achievements and successful examples from the implementation of Youth Work.

Special objective 2: A functional system has been established to ensure sustainable and quality Youth Work

1. Forming a national intersectoral council responsible for ensuring quality and effective support and development of Youth Work, which will work on the basis of a national strategic document with guidelines, priorities and activities for long-term development of Youth Work.
2. Monitoring, assessment and support of the implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, as well as of other policies in the field of Youth Work.
3. Preparing and adopting national quality standards of Youth Work.
4. Establishing a base of experts for monitoring, assessing, evaluating and improving the quality of Youth Work in youth centers and Youth Work programs based on the adopted quality standards.
5. Establishing a national system for awarding the “Quality Label” as a confirmation of the fulfillment of the adopted quality standards of youth centers and Youth Work programs.

Special objective 3: Increased availability, attractiveness and awareness of Youth Work programs that respond to societal trends and the current needs and challenges of young people, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.

1. Stimulating the exchange of good practices and approaches in Youth Work at the national, regional and international level.
2. Securing funds from the Budget of the RNM, local self-government units and other sources as long-term support to Youth Work providers and strengthening the availability of Youth Work programs.
3. Providing financial support for the establishment and program activities for youth centers in accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies.
4. Strengthening the research on the needs of young people and social trends by conducting analyzes at the local and national level.
5. Implementing activities to support the development of Youth Work programs that focus on gender equality, dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization, human rights, environmental protection and other priority issues in accordance with the needs of young people and current social trends.
6. Increasing the access and strengthening the opportunities of young people with fewer opportunities (such as persons with disabilities and young people from rural areas) to participate in activities of youth centers and other Youth Work providers, and improving the capacities of organizations and youth workers to work with these groups.
7. Creating mechanisms to support the development of programs with innovative and digital approaches in Youth Work.
8. Development, enhancement and promotion of educational materials and other resources, as well as informal educational programs for building the capacities of youth workers.

Special objective 4: The profession of Youth Work is recognized, developed and enhanced

1. Determining and adopting minimum competencies for youth workers.
2. Providing opportunities for formal education and non-formal education for youth workers based on the competencies from the national portfolio.
3. Supporting the process of validation of previously acquired knowledge and experience in the field of Youth Work.
4. Creating study programs for youth work in cooperation with higher education institutions.
5. Increasing the interest in participating in Youth Work programs in formal and non-formal education by providing scholarships and other financial aid.
6. Opening job positions for youth workers in all relevant institutions at the central and local level and providing an adequate salary equal to the amount made by the professionals from related professions who work with young people.
7. Recognizing the youth worker by creating a database of youth workers and introducing the recognition “Youth Worker of the Year” based on an adopted list of criteria.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#2. Gender equality, #3. Inclusive societies, #6. Improving the situation of young people from rural areas, #9. Space and participation for all, and #11. Youth organizations and European programs.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
No. of youth centers established in accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies within the municipalities	6 (2022)	22	42	Calculated for the needs of the Strategy
No. of youth workers who acquired competencies through completion of an adult educational program or a master's degree, or recognized competencies through a validation system	24	85	170	Calculated for the needs of the Strategy based on a database of relevant sources that offer these competencies

5.4. Education



Education is the most structured and systematized manner of influencing the lives of children and young people, enabling them to gain knowledge, form attitudes and develop skills. It plays a vital role in the development of a prosperous society and provides the foundation for personal growth and success among young people. In addition to personal benefits, education also plays a key role in promoting social cohesion and reducing inequality, thereby opening up opportunities to promote social mobility. In the RNM, the quality of education is a subject of ongoing improvement and reforms in recent years. While the country has made significant progress in expanding access to education, the quality of education remains a challenge, and factors such as inefficient

funding, lack of support for teachers and outdated curricula contribute to the need for improvement. Thus, the priority area “Education” focuses on modernizing the education system tailored to young people, including raising the quality of education and the readiness of young people for the labor market, improving the infrastructure, revising the curricula and supporting teachers, as well as increasing the cooperation and mobility of young people within the educational process.

Special objective 1: Young people have equal access to quality education, which equips them for better functioning in modern society

1. Increasing access to education for young people, especially for young people with fewer opportunities, respecting the provisions and rights arising from ratified international agreements.
2. Creating mechanisms for regular monitoring of students’ success at the national level and providing support to pupils and students who face learning difficulties, especially in the context of compensating learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Modernizing secondary school curricula and programs, as well as revising the textbooks.
4. Reviewing the study programs for teachers and increasing the allocation for practical teaching in faculties of education.
5. Continuous professional development of the educational personnel in the direction of strengthening their competencies, including teaching and digital competencies.
6. Providing mechanisms through which young people will be able to express and evaluate their (dis)satisfaction with the teaching, teaching personnel and learning environment, as well as other aspects that affect their satisfaction (including mental health).
7. Encouraging academic integrity within educational institutions.
8. Increased use of ICT in teaching, as well as creating and upgrading digital platforms for collecting curricula/textbooks/videos from classes, i.e. curricula in schools and higher education institutions.
9. Digitalizing administrative services in the educational process for secondary school students and university students.

Special objective 2: The education infrastructure for young people has been improved, and better conditions have been created to realize their potentials

1. Assessing the conditions and needs of schools/higher education institutions, as well as capacities for accommodation (student dormitories and boarding schools) in terms of spatial conditions and required resources for work.
2. Increasing the budget of the Ministry of Education and Culture for infrastructure projects, with a special focus on rural areas and persons with special needs.
3. Modernizing and improving the infrastructure in educational facilities, as well as improving energy efficiency and digital infrastructure.

4. Using the infrastructure in high schools for organizing extracurricular activities of interest to students/young people.
5. Optimizing the school network in high school education for better utilization of available resources, achieving greater efficiency and higher quality of the educational process.
6. Strengthening public-private partnerships to improve the educational infrastructure.
7. Training of school management and technical personnel for efficient management of the facilities and improvement of hygiene conditions.
8. Improving the accessibility of educational facilities for young persons with disabilities and providing appropriately adapted educational materials for uninterrupted participation in classes, such as textbooks, reading materials and other curricula and teaching aids.

Special objective 3: Within the educational process, young people acquire knowledge and skills that make them competent in the labor market and receive continuous support in the process of choosing a profession based on their personal affinities

1. Providing career guidance and counseling for young people in all levels of education (primary, secondary and higher).
2. Enabling systemic support for strengthening the competencies of NEET youth and providing support for their return into the education system.
3. Improving the connections between schools, businesses, civic organizations and higher education institutions and introducing sustainable mechanisms for joint creation and revision of curricula and study programs, as well as their implementation.
4. Increasing the capital investments in secondary vocational education, primarily in occupations that are in demand on the labor market.
5. Strengthening the role of the regional centers for vocational education and training.
6. Increasing the volume of practical education and learning through work in secondary vocational schools.
7. Developing and implementing standards for monitoring, evaluation and certification of practical education among employers within high school and higher education.
8. Strengthening capacities of teachers and professors to foster entrepreneurial spirit among young people and to provide them with better information on innovative and modern workflows in companies.
9. Providing young people with opportunities to acquire entrepreneurial skills within the educational process.

Special objective 4: Young people network, collaborate, learn and share experiences with young people from other educational institutions, inside and outside the country

1. Building the capacities of teaching personnel for mobilizing funds and project management.

2. Preparing a strategic framework for internationalization of education.
3. Promoting opportunities and support for international mobility (incoming and outgoing) of students within schools and higher education institutions.
4. Internationalizing the curriculum, expanding the number of study programs at higher education institutions conducted in foreign languages, and strengthening the networking with foreign universities in the implementation of joint degree programs.
5. Facilitating the educational networking by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalization.
6. Facilitating the process of credit and diploma recognition for students from the country studying abroad and foreign students studying in the country.

Special objective 5: Young people are educated in a spirit of tolerance, respect and acceptance of diversity

1. Encouraging the inclusiveness of educational institutions.
2. Introducing comprehensive sexual education as an elective subject in primary education.
3. Building a culture of coexistence and tolerance by creating opportunities for young people with different cultural backgrounds to learn with/for one another.
4. Young people are educated in a spirit of fostering European values, preventing hate speech, racism, anti-Semitism, denial of the Holocaust and glorification of authoritarian ideologies (and regimes).
5. Strengthening collaboration between schools at the local and regional level through school exchanges/organization of joint activities.
6. Improving the content of textbooks in terms of respecting differences and promoting tolerance.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#8. Quality learning

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
% of 15-29-year-olds not involved in education,	24.3% (2021)	22%	20%	State Statistical Office

employment or training (NEET-youth)				
% of young people who have minimum competencies in: a) mathematics b) reading c) science in secondary education	a) 39% (2018) b) 45% (2018) c) 50% (2018)	a) 49% b) 55% c) 60%	a) 49% b) 55% c) 60%	PISA Study, OECD For the duration of the Strategy, the PISA testing will be conducted in 2025
% of foreign students enrolled in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia	0.2% (2020)	1.5%	3%	Eurostat

5.5. Culture



Culture plays an important role in the development of young people into emancipated, satisfied, self-confident and socially engaged citizens. Therefore, the access and participation of young people in culture are crucial, along with their ability for creative thinking and education through art and cultural practices. The cultural conditions in our country indicate the need to expand the space and opportunities for cultural expression of young people, greater involvement in the creation of cultural policies and better access to cultural content of interest to young people. Building upon this, the priority area “Culture” aims to satisfy the role of young people as cultural content creators, as participants in cultural programs and as an audience. It also implies available infrastructure, such as space for work, creating and monitoring of cultural content, modern education and the opportunity for professional work in the field, as well as support for cooperation between young people in a domestic and international context, which will contribute to building cohesive communities.

Special objective 1: Young people are involved in the creation of cultural policies and are part of the culture funding system at national and local level

1. Encouraging young people to participate in the creation of integrative and inclusive cultural policies at the national and local level by including their interests and needs in the field of culture.
2. Enhancing the existing system of funding culture at the national level in the direction of creating equal opportunities to support cultural production and cooperation of young representatives of the non-institutional cultural sector and the development of new mechanisms for financial support of youth cultural creativity.

3. Establishing mechanisms for financing cultural production and cooperation of young people in local communities.
4. Creating an IT service to support young people and their work in the field of culture in a domestic and international context.

Special objective 2: Young people have accessible spaces for cultural creation and free cultural expression, and participate in cultural creation at the local, national and international level

1. Mapping the capacities of local cultural institutions and homes for culture to support the development of systemic solutions for their utilization in cultural and artistic creation and Youth Work.
2. Providing easily accessible and free-to-use public cultural infrastructure for the cultural and artistic work of young people.
3. Developing program partnerships between young people and public cultural institutions in the direction of joint planning and implementation of cultural and artistic programs of interest to young people.
4. Encouraging municipalities to create a new type of cultural infrastructure for young people through the development of PPPs (Public-Private Partnerships) with civic organizations, associations and alliances of young people operating in the field of culture.
5. Increasing cooperation and networking of young people in the field of culture in the domestic and international context.
6. Strengthening the creativity and innovation of young people and increasing the interest in culture and cultural-artistic work using digital tools/platforms.

Special objective 3: Established personnel policy that stimulates and supports new employment opportunities for young people in the field of culture

1. Informing young people about employment opportunities in the field of culture with deficient professions.
2. Introducing quotas for enrollment in higher education institutions for study programs in the field of art and culture, in accordance with the job offers in specific sectors to reduce the disparity and unemployment among young artists and cultural workers.
3. Upgrading the system for providing subsidies to independent artists from the funds of the national budget to stimulate greater self-employment of young people, representatives of the non-institutional cultural sector and young graduated artists.

Special objective 4: Young people are enrolling in modern educational programs at domestic universities, are engaging in the informal education system and are developing their creative potential through arts and culture programs in high school education

1. Modernizing study programs in the field of arts at higher education institutions in the country to acquire modern and applied knowledge among young people, which are coordinated with European educational processes.
2. Introducing mandatory internships at higher education institutions in the field of arts to acquire practical skills and knowledge and greater readiness for employment among young people.
3. Introducing modern curricular and extracurricular programs to support creative development and artistic practices in secondary schools that will bring culture closer to young people and will encourage interest in their participation in culture.
4. Promoting informal educational programs in public cultural institutions in the direction of sharing knowledge and raising interest among young people in specific cultural activities.
5. Developing mechanisms for the valorization and recognition of knowledge within the formal education system acquired by students and pupils who have attended informal educational programs, developed outside of universities and high schools.

Special objective 5: Young people are informed about and interested in culture, participate in its creation and it is accessible to everyone regardless of place of residence, sex, gender, social origin, religion and other types of affiliations

1. Improving access to culture and opportunities for following cultural events by young people.
2. Facilitating cultural content and programs for young people living in smaller towns and rural areas.
3. Developing interest in participation and involvement in culture among NEET youth through facilitated and easy access to cultural content in the place of residence or through digital platforms.
4. Establishing a support system in culture that will enable the production and dissemination of new intercultural content, as well as the adaptation of existing cultural content for their monitoring by persons belonging to different communities and persons with disabilities.
5. Establishing sustainable digital channels and tools (websites, online radio, social media) to inform young people in the field of culture, increasing interest in youth culture and enhancing its visibility and media presence.
6. Promoting culture as a tool for social integration and social activism.
7. Encouraging the development of creative and educational programs in the field of culture and art within preschools (kindergartens) and primary schools that will encourage interest in culture from an early age and cultivate cultural needs among young people.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#1. Connecting the EU with young people, #2. Gender equality, #3. Inclusive societies, #6. Improving the situation of young people from rural areas, #7. Quality employment for all, #8. Quality learning, #9. Space and participation for all, and #11. Youth organizations and European programs.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
% of 15-29-year-olds who participate in cultural and artistic activities as organizers or participants	33.7% (2022)	38%	43%	The reference level results from the Youth Trends Survey 2022, conducted by Agency for Youth and Sport
% of 15-29-year-olds who have access to cultural content at the local level	15.3% (2022)	20%	25%	The reference level results from the Youth Trends Survey 2022, conducted by Agency for Youth and Sport

5.6. Health



The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Such holistic approach to defining health provides the basis on which all young people can work towards realizing their own potential. Modern living causes a series of difficulties for young people, some of which are related to mental health, substance addiction and maintaining healthy lifestyles. Such difficulties, in addition to the health aspect, are intertwined with challenges in the availability of timely health services and protection. Hence, the focus of the priority area “Health” implies modern health literacy and awareness of every young person, with the aim of developing appropriate tools and availability of services for mental, physical and sexual health, within a healthy living environment. These five aspects of health reflect the comprehensiveness of the WHO definition and empower young people to develop into the best version of themselves.

Special objective 1: Young people who are educated and informed about health

1. Introducing peer education as part of formal education to enhance a culture of health and awareness.
2. Ensuring equal access to health information and health care for all young people, regardless of ethnicity, economic status, gender identity and sexual orientation, presence of disability and place of residence.
3. Institutional, media and digital promotion of verified and scientifically proven health-related information, tailored to the specific target group and ensuring its accessibility through the channels young people use for information, as well as actively combatting health-related disinformation affecting young people (with a focus on vaccines, contraception, sexual health, prevention of drug and other psychoactive substance use).
4. Increasing awareness about the safety, availability, relevance and usage of vaccines and medicines among young people.
5. Building capacities for gathering and processing information from lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic that will help inform and prepare young people for potential future health pandemics.

Special objective 2: Improved mental well-being of young people

1. Opening new and revitalizing existing Mental Health Centers in all regions of the RNM territory and creating the possibility of electronic consultations and counseling aimed at increasing the accessibility of services and reducing wait times for these services for all young people, especially young people from rural areas, young persons with disabilities and youth at risk.
2. Opening counseling centers for psychological help within all higher education institutions, as well as improving access to psychological help and counseling in communities available to all categories of young people.
3. Creating a communication network with competent authorities for easier recognition and reporting of domestic violence and bullying, prevention of psychotropic substance use, internet addiction, and early signs of behavioral and mental disorders in young people.
4. Amending the Mental Health Law with a focus on prevention, education and care for mental health of young people.
5. Establishing mechanisms for accessibility to mental health services for persons with disabilities and their families aimed at psychological support and increasing the degree of their socialization.
6. Expanding and modernizing the scope of the positive list of prescribed drugs for the treatment of mental health conditions that are medically necessary for young people.
7. Training and increasing the competence of school psychologists, teachers and work with parents aimed at rapid and timely prevention and identification of mental health conditions.

8. Activities for improving the well-being of young workers aimed at reducing workplace burnout syndrome, better integration into the workforce and access to mental health services in the workplace.

Special objective 3: Improved lifestyle and quality of life among young people

1. Introducing education on the topic of nutrition and healthy habits led by experts within high school education with the possibility of expansion to peer education.
2. Promoting healthy food and providing subsidies for healthy meals within high schools and higher education institutions.
3. Improving capacities and conditions for nutrition within school cafeterias in educational institutions, pupil and student dormitories.
4. Initiative to provide spaces for physical activity and sports activities that will be free of charge for all young people and accessible for young persons with disabilities.
5. Eradicating bad lifestyle habits by promoting and supporting an active lifestyle.
6. Prevention, education and improvement of the situation of young people regarding the use of nicotine and alcohol.
7. Introducing campaigns for health prevention of substance use, timely and proper treatment and rehabilitation for users, and education and training to empower young people to recognize and help people with addictions.
8. Raising awareness among young people, parents and teaching personnel on recognizing and preventing behavioral addictions (e.g.: gambling, internet addictions, food addiction).

Special objective 4: Young people who are healthy, aware and sexually liberated, with access to sexual and reproductive health services

1. Building capacities to strengthen the accessibility of information related to sexual and reproductive health within extracurricular activities.
2. Raising awareness about sexual freedom and sexual health, appropriately aimed at all young people and adapted for parents, as well as providing specialized training for the entire teaching personnel in order to modernize and embrace sexual education.
3. Improving access to family planning services and modern contraceptives, by placing modern contraceptives on the positive list of prescribed drugs, as well as training health workers and their associates on the benefits of their use.
4. Strengthening existing capacities and improving access to services related to sexual and reproductive health (e.g. testing for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, contraceptives, family planning services,

education and promotion of HPV vaccines among girls and boys), with a special focus on youth with fewer opportunities.

5. Providing free menstrual and sanitary products for young people of all categories.
6. Raising awareness of regular preventative examinations for sexual and reproductive health among young people of all categories.
7. Encouraging the participation of young people in the planning and decision-making regarding education and implementation of plans for sexual and reproductive health, with special focus on peer education.

Special objective 4: Young people live in and create a healthy environment

1. Increasing the awareness of young people about environmental problems.
2. Improving the existing and expanding a new infrastructure for active transport (walking, cycling, etc.), and its accessibility for persons with disabilities.
3. Improving and expanding the waste sorting infrastructure in all schools, higher education institutions, youth centers and youth homes.
4. Increasing the participation of young people of all categories in decision-making and environmental planning.
5. Encouraging research and innovation and their translation into ecological solutions as an opportunity to achieve healthy and ecologically sustainable communities and environment.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#2. Gender equality, #3. Inclusive societies, #5. Mental health and well-being, #8. Quality learning, #9. Space and participation for all, and #10. Sustainable green Europe.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
% of 15-29-year-olds who use: a) cigarettes b) alcohol c) drugs	a) 20.4% (2022) b) 58.2% (2022) c) 10.4% (2022)	a) 17% b) 55% c) 7.5%	a) 15% b) 53% c) 5%	The reference level results from the Youth Trends Survey 2022, conducted by Agency for Youth and Sport

5.7. Entrepreneurship and pre-employment support



Entrepreneurship is the process of starting, organizing and managing a new business venture in order to create value and make a profit, and preparation prior to employment for young people is a set of activities and training in order for young people to acquire skills, knowledge and experiences necessary for employment. The development of entrepreneurship and pre-employment preparation represent opportunities for economic growth and job creation, as well as an opportunity for young people to achieve financial independence and fulfill their career aspirations. Although there is a positive trend of reducing unemployment among young people, the unemployment rate is still high, while the employment rate is low. Entrepreneurship and preparation prior to employment can help address unemployment and contribute to improving the state of the economy and the labor market by providing the skills and resources necessary to start and succeed in their own business and employment. The implementation of strategic goals and activities of the priority area “Entrepreneurship and pre-employment support” aim to encourage long-term financial stability and professional growth of young people.

Special objective 1: Favorable conditions have been created for the support and development of entrepreneurship, innovation and creation of decent jobs for young people.

1. Raising awareness about the benefits of entrepreneurship and stimulating an entrepreneurial spirit among young people.
2. Encouraging and supporting young people to start and develop their own business.
3. Supporting young entrepreneurs in the digitalization of their businesses.
4. Supporting innovations in green economy.
5. Reducing the barriers for formalization among the (self)employed and part-time workers.
6. Developing and supporting smart economic solutions based on the needs and challenges faced by young people.
7. Supporting startups from young people with high potential in strategic sectors for the country.
8. Supporting young entrepreneurs in rural areas for the development of agriculture and tourism.

Special objective 2: Improved supply/demand balance on the labor market, greater inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and narrowing the gap between men and women.

1. Improving soft skills among young people.
2. Increasing the awareness of young people about the labor market outcomes for various occupations.
3. Strengthening career counseling, especially among unemployed young people and those who are not involved in the education or training process.

4. Increasing awareness about the possibilities of secondary vocational education and providing more information about labor market outcomes.
5. Strengthening mechanisms to incentivize companies to increase the participation of young people in their workplace and provide training opportunities to enhance skills.
6. Creating opportunities for young people to communicate with professionals in their field of interest.
7. Activating unemployed young people and those who are not involved in the education or training process.
8. Strengthening the capacities of the institutions responsible for implementation of active policies on the labor market.

Special objective 3: Reduced economic emigration of young people and increased inbound migration through strengthened regional economic policies and the rule of law

1. Developing qualitative and quantitative indicators for a measurable regional data-based approach as a basis for fostering youth entrepreneurship.
2. Involving young people in the process of improving the rule of law and providing equal systemic opportunities for entrepreneurship.
3. Supporting young people from the country living abroad and their involvement in entrepreneurial, creative and developmental activities in the country.
4. Enabling a favorable environment for attracting digital nomads.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#7. Quality employment for all.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
Employment rate, % of persons aged 15-29	33.4% (2021)	35%	37%	State Statistical Office
Unemployment rate, % of population aged 15-29	27.6% (2021)	26%	24%	State Statistical Office

Long-term unemployment rate (12 months or more), % of population aged 15-29	21.1% (2022)	18%	16.5%	Eurostat
Self-employment rate, % of persons aged 15-29	6.8% (2020)	10%	14%	Eurostat

5.8. Security (violence)



Security is a state that implies freedom from danger and threats, and the country, according to its constitutional principles, is obliged to guarantee to all of its citizens. It is a prerequisite for development in all remaining spheres, because if it is threatened, it slows down or prevents the development of the individual, and thus of the society. The RNM is a safe and secure country, but that does not mean that it is immune to all threats, especially in the modern context where threats evolve in parallel with technology. In the context of youth, security is extremely important because youth are considered the most vulnerable category in almost all security parameters. Starting from personal physical security in public spaces and public institutions and up to the digital space where young people spend increasingly more time, institutions are obliged to provide support to young people because otherwise a vacuum is created that causes and can create risks for overall social resilience. Therefore, the priority area "Security" strives to offer an inclusive systemic response to the challenges in terms of personal safety and security faced by young people in a manner that is understandable and suitable for them. This approach will provide an environment in which they can successfully develop in a resilient, strong and cohesive environment.

Special objective 1: Improved conditions for personal physical security and integrity in public space

1. Improving infrastructure for free movement in public spaces within public pedestrian zones, town squares and sports and recreation zones.
2. Adapting and enabling an accessible and free public infrastructure to persons with disabilities.
3. Improved control over security in public transport to avoid threats to the physical security of young people.
4. Frequent security controls in frequented areas to protect young people from threats to personal physical security.

Special objective 2: Strengthened mechanisms to guarantee freedom of expression and fight against discrimination, polarization and extremism

1. Increasing awareness of the inclusion of young people from the Roma population.
2. Increasing awareness of the inclusion and equality of young LGBTI persons and strengthening the implementation of the existing mechanisms for protecting their rights.
3. Systematic addressing of political polarization and its impact on young people through education, with an increased focus on the civic education curriculum for tolerance of different opinions and the right to political self-determination.
4. Stimulating media programs with a focus on successful stories based on inter-ethnic coexistence, achievements of people from marginalized communities and examples of a culture of coexistence.
5. Strengthening the capacities of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination to work with young people, including young people with fewer opportunities, in order to improve its preventative competences and capacities.
6. Improving the communication between young umbrella organizations and the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism.
7. Strengthening mechanisms for early recognition of radicalization and violent extremism and their full implementation.

Special objective 3: Increased trust of young people in institutions and sensitized institutions working with young people that apply an inclusive and proactive approach

1. Increasing the visibility of youth officers within institutions at the local and national level and standardizing a work program in terms of building social cohesion and preventing violence and discrimination among young people.
2. Increasing awareness and improving the capacities of the municipalities for the inclusion of the youth council and youth organizations in the design and implementation of security measures at the local level.
3. Improving the oversight by the relevant authorities over police officers in order to adequately perform their duties and respect the rights when working with young people.
4. Introducing mandatory training of police officers for dealing with cases of gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
5. Introducing mechanisms for institutional support for victims who report gender-based violence and sexual harassment among young women and girls.
6. Starting programs for building trust between young people from the Roma community and police officers.

7. Increasing the capacities of the prosecutor's office, the courts and the Ombudsman in working with young people.
8. Increasing the visibility of the Ombudsman and its competences relevant to young people.

Special objective 4: Increased awareness and implementation of measures for reducing bullying, gender-based violence, cyber security and digital hygiene within educational institutions

1. Integrating cyber security and digital hygiene into the informatics curriculum starting from secondary school.
2. Raising parents' awareness of cyber security and digital hygiene among secondary school students.
3. Raising awareness among young people, parents and educator about the forms and impacts of cyber bullying in order to create a shared approach to make young people resilient to cyber violence.
4. Establishing formalized cooperation between the National Centre for Computer Incident Response and educational establishments in order to increase cyber security awareness.
5. Improving the capacities of pedagogues and psychologists, as well as department heads for building a healthy and safe school environment in the direction of preventing bullying and raising the sense of security of students.
6. Creating and improving mechanisms for reporting, protection and prevention of sexual violence within the educational process.
7. Introducing mechanisms for preventing and sanctioning bullying in high schools.
8. Assessing the effectiveness of measures for reporting and sanctioning perpetrators of bullying and the efforts to correct such behavior.
9. Creating a system for recording cases of bullying in schools at the national level.
10. Creating mechanisms for systemic support within schools for victims of bullying.

This youth area contributes to the following European Youth Goals:

#2. Gender equality, #3. Inclusive societies, #4. Information and constructive dialogue.

Indicators for measuring success in the priority area:

Indicator	Reference level	Transitional value (2025)	Final target 2027	Indicator source
Cyber security curriculum for high	Does not exist as part of the	Prepared draft-curriculum	Also adopted into the teaching	

school Informatics classes	curriculum at the moment			
Establishing a system for recording bullying in schools at the national level	No such system at the moment	The system is in the pilot phase	The system is functional and in use	
% of high school students who feel safe at school	The reference level will be set based on research that will be conducted in 2023	It will be defined after setting the reference level	It will be defined after setting the reference level	

6. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework

A prerequisite for the success of the NYS is to establish effective accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

The goal of the Strategy is to have a high practical value, whereby it will be possible to determine who will implement it, according to which rules the implementation process will be carried out and how its success and impact will be measured. Therefore, there is a need to establish a clear and efficient system of implementation, monitoring and evaluation which, among other things, will overcome the main shortcomings and challenges of the previous two Youth Strategies.

The implementation and monitoring of progress of the NYS is the responsibility of all state institutions identified within the priority chapters, and the operationalization of the Strategy will be achieved according to the action framework, which foresees the development of two Action Plans (2023-2025 and 2026-2027).⁵⁸

The development of Action Plans for the implementation of the Strategy is the responsibility of the AYS, in accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, with previously obtained opinions from the National Youth Advisory Body (after its establishment). Action Plans are based on clearly defined activities that will follow the goals and measures foreseen in the Strategy, appointment of the activity bearers, as well as a financial projection for the cost of the implementation. The adoption of the Action Plans is under the competence of the RNM Government, while the NYS is implemented with financial resources from the RNM Budget.

The monitoring mechanisms are of particular significance to ensure the success of the implementation process of every multi-year policy, including the NYS. In accordance with the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, the Government of the RNM prepares an annual report on the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the Action Plan, which shall be reviewed by the Parliament of the RNM no later than June 30 of the current year for the previous year. In addition, the AYS, as a central coordinating body for the implementation of the Strategy, will monitor the process of fulfilling the Strategy, i.e. the Action Plan. The

⁵⁸ The first Action Plan (2023-2025) is adopted along with the text of the Strategy. The preparation of the second Action Plan (2026-2027) is foreseen during 2025.

coordination process will rely on the resources set in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, namely: youth officers, youth centers and youth offices that will be in immediate and direct contact with the AYS.

As part of the process of monitoring the implementation of the Strategy, the organization of thematic discussions is foreseen. Within the Parliament of the RNM, as part of the relevant committee, an annual thematic discussion will be organized at which the annual report on the implementation of the NYS and the Action Plan from the previous year will be reviewed. The thematic discussion is organized in cooperation with the Club on Youth Affairs and Policies⁵⁹, within the scope of which is the improvement of the status and position, as well as the protection of the interests of young people. At least once a year, the Government of the RNM will organize a thematic session on youth policies at which the progress in implementing the Strategy will be discussed, along with representatives from the institutions, the civil sector, international organizations and other entities working in the field of youth issues and policies. Regardless of these processes, the AYS, within its activities and program, can organize other types of meetings and activities at the local and national level in the direction of promoting the Strategy and reviewing its implementation.

The indicators that are grouped according to the priority areas contained in the Strategy are taken as an indicator of the success of the NYS. The indicators included for the needs of the Strategy are derived from domestic and international sources with a particular degree of relevancy that enable their continuous measurement. The recommendations from the report on updating the EU youth indicators were also followed in the process of selecting the indicators.⁶⁰ Progress in relation to the indicators defined within the Strategy are noted within the annual report on the implementation of the NYS, prepared by the Government of the RNM. The AYS, in collaboration with institutions and civic organizations that work in the field of youth issues and policies, regularly, at least once a year, updates the values of the set indicators. Also, the Agency for Youth and Sport, in the middle of the implementation process in 2025 and at the very end of the implementation in 2027, will also conduct research on the perceptions of young people (a Youth Trends Survey).

The final assessment of the success of the NYS will be determined through an external independent evaluation. The external independent evaluation will be conducted by independent experts/organizations hired by the AYS, within six months, upon the end of the period to which the Strategy refers. The external independent evaluation aims to objectively assess the degree of fulfilment of the indicators provided for at the level of the Strategy and the realization of the activities outlined in the Action Plans. Furthermore, and with the aim of using the experiences from the implementation of this Strategy in the process of creating future strategies for young people, the external independent evaluation will include the determination of: institutional capacities for the implementation of the Strategy, the degree of coordination of the institutions in the fulfilment of the Strategy, the distribution of financial resources provided in accordance with the Action Plans, the involvement of young people and the forms of youth organizing during the implementation of the Strategy, as well as other issues of interest.

⁵⁹ The club is an informal group whose members are MPs aged 35 or below who have an interest in youth issues and policies in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia.

⁶⁰ For more, see Final report on the proposal to update EU youth indicators.

All of the reports in the individual stages of the implementation of the Strategy, as well as the reports from the external independent evaluation, will be made publicly available through the AYS website, as well as through the websites of all competent institutions in charge of implementing activities in accordance with the Action Plans. In addition, the reports will also be shared with the forms of youth organizing. Within the National Information Platform as a youth information service, there will be a space dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and the activities that arise from it.

7. Risk management

Risk	Probability of risk occurrence	Impact of the risk on the achievement of goals	Risk management measures
Fiscal pressures on the Budget of the RNM caused by international economic flows	Middle	Reduced funds for the realization of the goals and activities of the Strategy	Rationalization of the intended goals with a focus on the most prioritized activities that lead to the fulfilment of the system performance indicators
Lack of human resources in the AYS to monitor the implementation process of the Strategy and Action Plans	Middle	Difficulty monitoring the implementation process of the Strategy and Action Plans	Strengthening the existing capacities in the AYS and supplementing them with new ones, as well as improving communication with youth officers
Lack of inter-institutional cooperation	Middle	Slow pace of implementation of activities	The AYS will occasionally organize joint meetings with key institutions that have a role in implementing the Strategy in order to improve compliance and communication between institutions. Furthermore, the regular updating and monitoring of the Action Plan is expected to contribute to the improvement of the implementation of the activities.

8. Connection to other strategies and plans

Recognizing the importance of achieving coherence and synergy with relevant domestic and international strategic documents in the field of youth, especially those created by the Government of the RNM, the European Union and the United Nations, the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 paid special attention to integrating youth policies that are an integral part of the following strategic documents:

European Youth Strategy 2019-2027.⁶¹ The objectives of the Strategy include improving political decisions related to young people, supporting young people to live independently (including reducing poverty and discrimination) and empowering young people to express their civic engagement. The Strategy also envisages the strengthening of intersectoral cooperation at all levels of decision-making in an attempt for interaction, greater engagement of young people and synergy between measures. The Strategy relies on three basic areas of activities: 1) *Involvement* – which means encouraging youth participation in demographic life; 2) *Connecting* – which means connecting young people across the EU and beyond to encourage volunteer engagement, learning through mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding; and 3) *Empowerment* – which implies support for empowering young people through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.

European Youth Goals 2019-2027.⁶² These objectives, 11 in total, reflect the views of the European youth and represent the vision from which the Youth Strategy of the European Union 2019 – 2027 derives. The objectives include: 1. Connecting the EU with young people; 2. Gender equality; 3. Inclusive societies; 4. Information and constructive dialogue; 5. Mental health and well-being; 6. Improving the situation of young people from rural areas; 7. Quality employment for all; 8. Quality learning; 9. Space and participation for all; 10. Sustainable green Europe; 11. Youth organizations and European programs.

Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030.⁶³ The Strategy defines the framework where the youth sector of the Council of Europe will achieve its goal of enabling young people across Europe to actively support, defend, promote and benefit from the core values of the Council of Europe related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

United Nations Youth Strategy 2030.⁶⁴ This Strategy acts as an umbrella framework that aims to strengthen the work of the United Nations with and for young people through three pillars: 1) Peace and security, 2) Human rights and 3) Sustainable development.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.⁶⁵ They represent 17 interrelated goals that address the major development challenges in the world. Each of the listed Sustainable Development Goals is divided into a total of 169 specific goals, the achievement of which can be assessed through measurable results (targets). By

⁶¹ The document is available at the following link: https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en

⁶² The document is available at the following link: <https://youth-goals.eu/>

⁶³ The document is available at the following link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-strategy-2030>

⁶⁴ The document is available at the following link: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>

⁶⁵ The document is available at the following link: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

assessing the degree of achievement of the planned results for each of the defined targets, an assessment is conducted on the degree of accomplishment of the corresponding long-term Sustainable Development Goal, which enables measurability of the realization of the overall Sustainable Development Goals.

Framework for Cooperation on Sustainable Development between the Republic of North Macedonia and the United Nations (2021-2025).⁶⁶ The Framework is the main strategic document that guides the work of all UN agencies working in the country, for the next five years. It was developed in close cooperation with the Government, after an extensive consultative process with organizations and individuals from various spheres of activity and interest.

Progress reports on the Republic of North Macedonia for membership in the European Union.⁶⁷ As documents that determine the general trends of policy making in a comprehensive sense, and in that sense including young people, inseparably connected and observed in the process of creating the new NYS were the reports on the country's progress towards membership in the European Union for 2020, 2021 and 2022. During the preparation of the Strategy, the National Programme for the Adoption of the European Union Acquis 2021 – 2025 was also taken into account.

Strategic priorities of the Government of the RNM. The Government's work program 2022-2024 aims to describe the key priorities to which the Government is committed and the manners in which it plans to introduce and implement the reforms. All five key areas of the program – Accelerated and sustainable economic growth with a better standard of living, social inclusion and development of human capital, rule of law and good governance, promotion of democracy and freedom, EU and NATO integration – also have an appropriate place in the Strategy text.

Declaration on youth and security.⁶⁸ The declaration is a document that emphasizes the need for active promotion of a culture of peace, dialogue, justice, coexistence, trust and reconciliation between young people.

Annex 1: List of institutions responsible for Strategy implementation⁶⁹

- Parliament of the RNM
- Government of the RNM – General Secretariat
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Economy

⁶⁶ The document is available at the following link: https://northmacedonia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/UN-SDCF-MK_macedonian_signed.pdf

⁶⁷ The documents are available at the following links: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-10/North-Macedonia-Report-2021.pdf> https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

⁶⁸ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/7/207266.pdf>

⁶⁹ The competencies of each institution will be defined in details within the Action Plans.

- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
- Ministry of Local Self-Government
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
- Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations
- Ministry of Information Society and Administration
- Secretariat for European Affairs
- Agency for Youth and Sport
- Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
- Agency for Quality of Higher Education
- Agency for Promotion of the Entrepreneurship
- Employment Agency
- Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices of the RNM
- Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Bureau for Development of Education
- Higher education institutions
- State Education Inspectorate
- State Examination Centre
- Institute of Public Health
- Public utilities
- Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
- Macedonian Radio-Television
- Network of national, local cultural institutions and homes for culture
- National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility
- National Centre for Computer Incident Response
- National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism
- Municipalities, the Municipalities in the City of Skopje and the City of Skopje
- Regional and local centers for public health
- High schools
- Health Insurance Fund
- Fund for Innovation and Technology Development
- Centre for Vocational Education and Training
- Adult Education Center