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СФЕРА ИНТЕРНЕШНЛ

YEP! YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PLATFORM

PRO LOCAL

This activity is part of the project "Youth Inclusive Communities", implemented by the National Youth Council of Macedonia - NMSM, in partnership with the Foundation for Local Community Development - Shtip, SFERA International Bitola and the Youth Empowerment Platform JEP - Gostivar, with financial support from the European Union. The main goal of the project is to improve local governance through increased inclusiveness and social influence of young people in local democratic life.

The process of preparing the "Analysis of Specific Youth Needs and Problems in Rural Pelagonija" was conceived, organized, implemented and monitored by the Citizens' Association for the Promotion of Development Processes Pro Local Bitola within the framework of the initiative "Different Needs - Identical Rights".

CONTENTS

List of abbreviations.....4

Introduction and methodology.....5

Analysis of the Legal Framework Related to Youth and Youth Policies.....7

Statistical data related to youth and youth trends.....10

Field research results.....12

Recommendations.....26

Attachments.....29

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVRM	**Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia**
CSO	**Civic organization**
Local government	**Local government unit**
EU	**European Union**
Youth Law	**Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies**
IT	**Information and computer technology**
LMS	**Local Youth Council**
NMSM	**National Youth Union of Macedonia**
RSM	**Republic of North Macedonia**
UKLO	**University of St. Kliment Ohridski – Bitola**
UNDP	**United Nations Development Programme**

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis of specific youth needs and problems in rural Pelagonija (hereinafter referred to as the "Analysis") was developed as part of the initiative "Different needs – identical rights" implemented by the Citizens' Association for the Promotion of Development Processes Pro Lokal from Bitola within the framework of the project "Youth Inclusive Communities". The project is implemented by the National Youth Council of Macedonia, Foundation for Local Community Development (FRLZ) – Shtip, SFERA International – Bitola and Youth Empowerment Platform JEP – Gostivar. The project activities aim to improve the implementation of local services envisaged in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy and to strengthen local youth civil society organizations to advocate for social inclusion, including young people. with disabilities and young people from vulnerable groups in local politics and decision-making processes, encouraging them to volunteer, youth activism and youth work to protect the interests of young people. The analysis was prepared in the period January-February 2024, in accordance with the guidelines for its content, the process of its preparation and the deadlines defined by Pro Local.

The preparation of the Analysis included a set of multidisciplinary primary and secondary research tools as well as tools for providing feedback from the target groups that were involved in providing input for its content. The basis for the implementation of these tools was the excellent cooperation that Pro Local has with the target groups of the initiative, i.e. young people in rural areas of the region, municipal administrations, decision-makers in local governments (mayors and presidents of municipal councils) and the civil sector in Pelagonija whose primary focus of action is in the youth and youth policies sector. When preparing the Analysis, special focus was placed on the efficient collection of quality statistical data and data on trends in the youth sector as well as demographic, socio-cultural and economic parameters that define the needs and problems of young people in rural areas in the region. As the first cluster for data collection, relevant statistical sources such as local, regional and national strategic documents, the State Statistical Office and municipal databases were taken. As a second level of data source, strategic and analytical documents and publications produced by the civil society sector in the country and the Pelagonija region working in the field of youth and youth policies were used. Special attention in this section was paid to the interpretation of the collected data and their correct articulation in the given context of the region.

Related to this, the second set of tools used in the preparation of the Analysis included primary data collection, i.e. field visits and interviews with relevant representatives. of the nine local governments in the region including the mayors and/or secretaries of the municipal administration, nominated youth officers in each LSGU and representatives of the youth councils/centers in the municipalities in the region. As a second component, interviews were also conducted with representatives of civil society organizations and informal groups operating in the youth sector in the rural areas of the municipalities in the Pelagonia

region during the field visits. For the needs of the primary research, purpose-built questionnaires were used, the content of which was developed and determined by Pro Local as the implementer of the initiative.

After collecting primary and secondary data, they were synthesized and the relevant findings were formulated as a first draft version of the Analysis. After receiving feedback and comments from the Pro Local team, a final version of the document was prepared, the content of which will be shared with all parties involved in the process of its preparation and stakeholders of the project which will be used as input for further activities of the Pro Local initiative. Below in the text is a chronological overview of the specific Activities carried out during the document preparation process:

1. Conducting desktop research on relevant documents and legal acts related to youth policies and local strategic documents for youth from the municipalities in the Pelagonia region region;
2. Development of questionnaires for youth, CSOs and decision-makers in rural secondary schools in the Pelagonia region to scan specific youth needs/problems in relation to at the place of residence;
3. Organization and holding of nine focus group meetings with youth and civil society organizations (CSO) 1 focus group meeting in each municipality of Pelagonia;
4. Conducting interviews with decision-makers (1 interview per LSGU) in all 9 Pelagonia municipalities: Bitola, Prilep, Demir Hisar, Novaci, Mogila, Resen, Dolneni, Krivogaštani, and Krushevo;
5. Preparation of a list of recommendations and possible solutions to the presented needs and problems that were identified based on the discussions with the research participants;
6. Preparation of the first draft of the Analysis of Specific Youth Needs and Problems in rural Pelagonia, its revision by Pro Local;
7. Incorporating feedback and preparing a final version of the document.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELATED TO YOUTH AND YOUTH POLICIES

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies[1] (hereinafter referred to as the Youth Law) is the highest legislative framework regulating the forms of youth participation. organizing, participation of young people in the process of creating youth policies and adopting decisions relating to them, strategic documents at national and local level, the activities and measures undertaken by the state administration bodies and local government units self-government for the advancement of the position of young people in society as well as informing and jointly planning activities related to and for young people. The purpose of the Law is to protect and satisfy the needs and interests of young people through the creation and implementation of policies for youth at all levels, with an intersectoral approach and inclusion of young people in these processes, but also their active information, support for youth organizing and encouragement of youth activism, volunteering, personal, professional and social development of the young.

In the Youth Law, youth participation is defined as a process that enables youth participation and joint decision-making on policies and programs that directly or indirectly shape the lives of young people. The category of "youth" is for the first time legally regulated as persons aged 15 to 29 years[2]. With this age limit, Macedonian legislation follows the law of the European Union (EU), where all persons aged 15 to 29 are defined as youth.

The Youth Law also establishes the institutional set-up at the local level, which is under the jurisdiction of the local self-government. Thus, the Law provides for the establishment of a local youth assembly, a body in which youth organizations, youth organizations, political youth groups, student organizations and other forms of youth associations can be members, which do not have to be registered on the territory of the municipality, but should have activities in the municipalities in whose local assembly they wish to participate. Membership in the annual youth assembly is made through delegates up to 29 years of age who must be residents of the municipality. The local youth assembly, through direct voting, elects members of the local youth council, which is a body that has an advisory and representative role in the scope of youth issues and policies in the municipalities. The local youth council has the right to proposes the agenda of the municipal councils, initiates issues of interest to young people before municipality, to participate in the processes for creating youth strategies and policies. The number of members in the council is odd and does not exceed 1/3 of the number of councilors of the municipality, but not less than 5 members.

[1] *Official Gazette No. 08-327/1, January 14, 2020*
[2] *Analysis - Active youth participation at the local level*

The national and local youth strategies are strategic documents that determine the goals and priorities for the development of youth policies, plan the promotion of youth interests and determine the organizational and financial measures for their implementation. Youth strategies contain action plans for implementation with defined activities, dynamics, activity bearers and budget projections. The national youth strategy is adopted by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia for a period of 5 years, and the local youth strategy is adopted by the municipal councils. In addition, the Law also provides for youth services in accordance with the needs of young people and in order to improve the youth standard and activism. Youth offices should be established in municipalities and represent the primary point of access for young people, but also a center for coordinating youth work. Youth centers are spaces/places where programs for young people are implemented in order to improve their well-being, personal, social and professional development and other aspects of their lives. Youth workers are responsible for working with young people in youth centers. These spaces are created in cooperation between municipalities and forms of youth organization. A youth officer is a person responsible for the operation of the office. for youth, coordinating youth activities and implementing and monitoring youth issues interest in youth at the local level in each municipality. Contact information for youth officers should be publicly available. For the implementation of the obligations under the Law on Youth and Youth Policies, at least 0.3% of the state budget is allocated, while at least 0.1% of the municipal budgets are allocated annually.

The implementation and effects of the implementation of the Youth Law at the national, regional and local levels is a regular part of the activities of the most relevant organizations in the country that operate in the youth sector, youth policies and youth advocacy and are part of the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYMC)[3]. By cross-referencing the data from The NMSM monitoring report on the implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies[4] and the field research that preceded the preparation of this document, It can be concluded that the legal solution has not yet been fully implemented and that some of the deadlines related to the establishment of the bodies at the national and local levels have not been met. At the national level, the National Youth Assembly and the National Advisory Body for Youth Policies have not yet been established, while Local Youth Councils exist in only 19 municipalities, i.e. in only 23% of the total number of municipalities in the country. Regarding the local processes related to the Law and its implementation, the conclusion is that municipalities continue to show little interest in implementing their legal obligations, and one of the biggest challenges is the establishment of youth offices. Particular challenges in implementing the legal solution arise in smaller and rural municipalities, most often due to the limited human and material resources available to them. necessary for the LSGU to implement all obligations stipulated in the Law on Youth. Additionally, in smaller and rural municipalities, the problem of the small number of young people living on their territory, whose initiatives and proactivity should meet the goals and objectives, is becoming more and more present. the postulates of the law itself.

[3] *https://nms.org.mk/*
[4] *https://nms.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring_Izvestaj_Broshura_2023_MKD.pdf*

At the level of the Pelagonia region, the situation is not drastically different compared to the situation at the national level. Youth strategies with action plans have been adopted in 5 municipalities: Kruševo, Bitola, Novaci, Resen and Krivogaštani. Since these are documents that were adopted either before the adoption of the Law on Youth (e.g. the Strategy of Kruševo) or in 2024, the implementation of their content and possible effects have not yet been subject to monitoring and evaluation. On this occasion, it should be noted that the preparation of the strategic documents of the Municipality of Novaci, the Municipality of Krivogaštani and the Municipality of Resen was carried out with the support of Pro Lokal. Additionally, as part of a more comprehensive set of activities of Pro Lokal, three local CSOs working in the field of youth in these three municipalities were also allocated municipal space for work.

In the coming period, activities for the preparation of strategic documents with action plans on the topic of youth and youth policies should be undertaken by the remaining municipalities: Prilep, Demir Hisar, Dolneni, Mogila, and the Municipality of Krushevo, whose strategy covers the period until 2023. In the municipalities that have active strategic documents, the adoption of new annual action plans aimed at a more efficient and inclusive local youth policy. Regarding the existence of a youth office, no such office has been established in the Pelagonia region (there are 11 in the whole country). The Municipality of Bitola is the only municipality that has established a Youth Center and regarding the nomination of a youth officer, seven of the Pelagonia municipalities (all except Dolneni and Krivogaštani) have such a nomination. A local youth council has been established in the municipalities of Bitola, Prilep and Krivogaštani. Regarding the financing of youth policies, only the Municipality of Bitola and the Municipality of Prilep have allocated and disbursed a specific budget for youth. Thus, in 2022, the Municipality of Bitola paid 1,415,943 MKD to youth organizations, the same amount refers to funds paid to forms of youth association, which amounts to 0.08% of total expenditures and 0.16% of total expenditures of the basic budget. In the same year, the Municipality of Prilep paid 65,000 MKD for the same purposes, or 0.02% of total expenditures of the basic budget. The Municipality of Bitola allocated 180,000 MKD from the planned funds for youth to strengthen the capacities of the youth officer and members of the Youth Council, as well as for the preparation of a Youth Strategy.

3. STATISTICAL DATA RELATED TO YOUTH AND YOUTH TRENDS

The statistical data on youth available at the national level show worrying trends, especially in the number of young people living in the country as well as in the area of migration and emigration. In the period from 2002 to 2021, when the last census was completed, the number of young people aged 15-29 in the country decreased by 32%, i.e. 154,000 fewer young people were counted[5]. In 2022, the percentage of young people in the total population was 24%, while in 2022 it fell to 18%.[6] In addition, in 2022, about 100,000 residents of the country are missing who in 2002 were young people aged 15-29 and today would be the working-age population aged 35-39 years old.

According to the draft National Youth Strategy, technology and digitalization are transforming 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 day, and most benefit from it young people see the opportunity for social interaction and communication, education, information and entertainment[7]. The same document also notes that unequal access to education and the lack of quality of the educational process are some of the more significant problems facing young people. Half or more of the students do not demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in reading (55%), mathematics (61%) and natural sciences (49.4%). Although by the age of 18 children spend 11 years in school, on average they show educational results equivalent to only 7.3 years learning.

According to a survey on youth trends conducted by a group of non-governmental organizations in the country[8], 90% of young people in the Republic of Macedonia have never been part of a civil society/non-governmental organization or initiative that works on issues related to society, while only 20% of them can imagine themselves joining any of the activities of a civil society/non-governmental organization or initiative in the future. Additionally, according to the Youth Development Index of Macedonia, 76.1% of young people have never volunteered. According to the same research, it was found that the greatest satisfaction among young people is created by the opportunities for free expression and free thinking, enrollment in faculty (74.6%) and postgraduate studies. The greatest dissatisfaction is created by the opportunities, or rather the impossibilities, for employment (39%), economic independence (34.1%), solving the housing issue (35.2%) and political action (36.7%). The current standard of living for 42.8% of young people is average, for 32.9% it is good, while 10% of young people have a poor or very poor standard of living. In the country, according to the size of the place of residence, the most satisfied with the quality

[5] *Radio MOF, https://www.radiomof.mk/infografik-kade-ischeznaa-mladite-na-popisot/*
[6] *Reactor, Youth on the List*
[7] *https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/nsm-23-27_draft.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2N1l5NnXD3diqp4nF-ZPewW4WOHuKup6yWcOnR3YGguD1xWN3rbfy80sI*
[8] *https://segaorg.mk/images/pdf/Pocetna_studija_MK_final.pdf*

of life are young people who live in cities with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and the least satisfied are those with 301 to 800, or 1,011 to 5,000 inhabitants[9].

From the available data at the regional level, the number of young people in the municipalities of Pelagonija measured between the two censuses is decreasing in both urban and rural municipalities. Thus, Bitola has lost 7,345 young people, Prilep 5,418, Demir Hisar 555, Dolneni 429, Krushevo 546, Krivogaštani 296, Mogila 426, Resen 1,253 and Novaci 223. The number of graduates in 2020 in the Pelagonija region was 834, or 3.7 graduates per 000 population, 900 graduates in 2021 and 4.2 graduates per 000 population, while in 2022 the number of graduates dropped to 841 and graduates per 000 inhabitants fell to 4.0. The number of students enrolled in secondary education in the region for the period 2022/2023 is 7,920 students[10]. In summary, data on young people at both the state and Pelagonia region levels indicate a continuous trend of youth emigration over the past 20 years, which is also confirmed by census/statistical results. Young people as part of the working age population population in the Pelagonia region by economic activity and age, show relatively stable trends without a tendency to increase: in 2020, young people aged 15-19 participated with 1.1% in the total labor force, in 2021 0.9% and in 2022 0.8%[11]. Young people in the region aged 20-24 years old participated in the total labor force of the region with 6.9% in 2020, with 6.2% in 2021 and with 6.6% in 2022. Young people aged 25-29 years old participated in the total labor force of the region with 11.9% in 2020, with 11.8% in 2021 and with 11.1% in 2022. Regarding the specific participation of young people in the work of local self-government, research conducted by relevant civil society organizations in the region and based on field visits and meetings with[12] representatives of the municipalities, it can be concluded that this is at an extremely low level.

In accordance with the above, it is evident that state institutions, including local governments, must develop and implement clear guidelines and policies to improve the opportunities of young people in the state and municipalities, but also to create conditions for brain gain, as opposed to brain drain.

[9] *"Youth (unequal) opportunities and needs – Research on the challenges and needs of young people according to the size of their place of residence" – Youth Educational Forum*
[10] *MAC STAT Data Base*
[11] *MAC STAT Data Base*
[12] *Analysis of the degree and forms of citizen participation in the work of local governments of the municipalities of Resen, Dolneni, Krivogaštani and Krushevo, Pro Lokal, 2023*

4. FIELD RESEARCH RESULTS

In addition to data on the implementation of the Youth Law as well as data on youth trends obtained through secondary research of statistical data and relevant documents, the preparation of the Analysis also included field research in all municipalities of Pelagonija in order to obtain direct information about the needs and challenges faced by young people in rural areas of the region. The field work included direct interviews with 18 young people from all municipalities in Pelagonija, 9 decision-makers in the region (8 mayors and 1 council president) and 9 civil society organizations that are well acquainted with the local context in which young people operate. The field research was carried out during the last week of January and the first week of February 2024. A detailed overview of the persons interviewed during the process as well as the questions according to which the interviews were conducted are provided as an annex to the Analysis.

4.1 INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH

Within the framework of the field research, a total of 18 interviews were conducted with young people from all municipalities in the region. The selection and selection of the young people who were part of the interviews was transparently carried out by Pro Local through a public call with clearly defined criteria for participation[13]. The interviews with the young people were conducted at locations in their places of residence. The questionnaire used during the interviews aimed to initiate dialogue, to encourage young people to think through a constructive flow of conversation and prevent limiting the analytical component of the process. During the conversations with the young people were discussed topics such as:

- The advantages of living in your hometown,
- The limiting factors of the local environment,
- Cooperation and communication with local institutions and organizations,
- Public infrastructure,
- Opportunities for sports, recreation, education, informal education, work and internships,
- The overall enabling environment (mentoring, leadership, support),
- The security situation and access to public healthcare,
- Environment, mental health,
- Technology and digital resources and their impact on the quality of life of young people.

During the interviews, young people also gave recommendations for improving the situation in rural areas so that they become a better place for young people to live. The main conclusions from this part of the field research are presented below:

Young people in rural Pelagonia love their place of residence because of the advantages it offers them in terms of compactness, availability of resources, nature, and local culture and tradition. geographical

[13] *Public call for the inclusion of 18 young people from rural areas in the municipalities of Bitola, Prilep,*

proximity to urban areas while preserving their sense of home, allowing them to connect with their community, family and friends. Multiculturalism and mutual respect are also present in these environments and young people appreciate this exceptionally. appreciate.

Young people in rural areas in Pelagonija have a great sense of community among themselves. Members of all generations know each other well and share common visions. about the environment they want to continue living in. They are proud of the multiculturalism and multi- confessionalism that is present in their environments.

The challenges that young people in rural areas face are related to the small number of residents, emigration for a better life, limited modern cultural offerings (absence of theater, cinema), limited opportunities for sports and recreation, lack of extracurricular education and training, poor public infrastructure and public transport, the way the public sector manages public waste, the dominant presence of local mentality and prejudices. resulting from it, the underdeveloped economy, low incomes and existential challenges. Some of the respondents also responded that the lack of transparency of municipalities is one of the problems they face in their daily lives.

Young people in rural areas in Pelagonija complain that they do not have enough recreational and extracurricular activities available to them. In their opinion, these activities in rural areas occur spontaneously, in the form of initiatives or project activities, and not systematically, so the limitation covers both their scope and their quality. Young people want to have more opportunities such as informal education, various trainings, recreational activities or the opportunity for some form of volunteer engagement. Some of the interviewed young people in the region also stated that they often travel to neighboring municipalities outside the Pelagonija region just to be part of some interesting extracurricular or recreational activity for them.

Related to extracurricular and recreational activities, young people in rural areas in the Pelagonia region wish that their places of residence had more libraries, info-centers, resource centers, opportunities for informal education outside of class, sports halls and infrastructure for outdoor sports, opportunities for learning foreign languages, career counseling, soft skills training, educational activities (lectures) in schools and opportunities for practice in all social sectors. In the absence of this type of opportunity, young people in rural areas note the emergence of games of chance in their places of residence as a hidden danger. Although the majority of young people do not approve of involvement in this type of activity, however, the risk of engaging in deviant behavior in the absence of quality educational and recreational habits among young people will constantly grow.

According to young people, health services are partially available but of insufficient quality in most rural areas in Pelagonija. Most of the rural parts of the municipalities in the region have basic health care for the needs of young people, although the lack of doctors and medical staff is a problem in all of them. In some

of the areas, there is a lack of ambulances, and in some areas there is either no pharmacy at all or their working hours are limited. Also, the institutional setup of the fire protection system is not at a satisfactory level, so it needs to be improved in most of the rural municipalities in the region. Private health care in rural areas is partially present, but it is not available to all residents due to high prices.

Young people in rural areas have divided opinions about local employment and/or internship opportunities in the public or private sector. Some of them (60%) believe that there are sufficient employment or internship opportunities in their areas, while some (40%) believe that local opportunities do not meet their needs in terms of choosing options in different economic branches. According to the latter, employment or internship opportunities are limited to the type of local economy and its diversification (e.g. agriculture and hospitality). Young people believe that new IT trends provide an opportunity for their engagement in global industrial flows, but they need additional education and specific improvement of their technical knowledge. According to young people, a key factor that can contribute to increasing their employability is the level of education.

Young people in rural areas of Pelagonija do not know and are not sufficiently involved in the development initiatives of their local governments that are related to the lives of young people. All interviewed young people believe that they should be part of the planning and implementation processes of local policies that directly affect them. In addition, this does not only apply to youth policies, but also to the overall operation of local self-government. If young people show a concrete initiative, they can receive certain information of a public nature or be included in public processes, but according to the interviewees, it is better if youth inclusion functions systematically as a regular practice of the LSGU as opposed to if it is happens at the request of young people. Some of the young people (20%) also responded that compared to In previous years, there has been a trend of improving the situation regarding this issue, but all agree that there is a need for their additional information and education on this topic. Although there are legal solutions for the inclusion of the young population in development initiatives, LSGUs, young people do not use them enough because they do not know about them and/or are not informed about them in a way that is accessible and understandable to them. In the huge influx of information in their everyday lives, young people face the challenge of receiving quality information from municipalities for their possible inclusion, which is why they most often use initiatives arising from the civil sector for that purpose.

Related to this, young people in rural areas believe that the channels of communication with public institutions, primarily local self-government, need to be improved and become more efficient. In addition, communication should be two-way and enable the flow of information from/to both sides. Public administration needs to be more up-to-date and efficient in its communication with the public in general, and as for communication with young people, it is necessary to use modern IT communication tools that are everyday for young people. Young people, on the other hand, believe that they need to show greater proactivity and initiate communication with all institutions that have jurisdiction over areas that are important to them. According to the interviewed young people, some of the rural areas in the region have

schools with teaching staff who are extra-initiative and who share with students all the information that is important for young people and include available funds, programs, educational events, local initiatives and events, etc.

Young people in the rural areas of Pelagonija believe that there are not enough opportunities for inclusion in the public life of the community in their areas. In doing so, they consider schools or the civil sector to be the main institutions for inclusion. Schools do not always have enough self-initiative teaching staff who are prepared to initiate/support youth inclusion outside the formal curriculum, while the civil sector in rural areas is either not (organically, locally) present or is not sufficiently developed (where it is present, it has limited resources). Young people in the rural areas of the region want to be part of the activities of the civil sector and believe that this sector can represent and advocate for them before the local government. Where they exist, the inclusion bodies established under the Youth Law have not yet achieved their role in this process.

Young respondents consider their community (as an informal system of people and networks) and their municipality (as a system of institutions and bodies) to be partially inclusive and diverse in terms of representing the needs of young people. In rural areas and smaller municipalities, efforts for youth inclusion and transparency in the public sector need to be increased.

The civil society sector, together with (some of) the schools, is taking concrete steps to include young people in local processes, but they are facing limitations in terms of staff, finances, technical resources and space. The impressions of young people are that the public sector is not restrictive but that it lacks proactivity and initiative for inclusion of different social segments. If young people ask for support, in most cases they receive it. Part of young people (55%)

They also believe that the focus of public sector policies is not primarily on youth policies but on other areas of the scope of work.

Young people in rural areas in Pelagonija believe that their settlements do not have sufficient conditions (space, staff, organizations) to support their creative expression. This is especially true for art, music and other cultural activities. The importance of this issue is further emphasized by the fact that the interviewed young people believe that their peers have creative potential, and they even know young people in their communities who have. a variety of talents, but they do not have a sufficiently enabling environment for their development and promotion.

Young people believe that rural areas do not have a sufficiently well-developed formal and informal support system that would include mentors and leaders and would cover other areas besides culture and art. Young people believe that the civil sector and the forms/services of support provided for in the Youth Law can play a huge role in improving the situation in this area.

Young people in rural areas of Pelagonija face a reduced quality of life due to public transport and infrastructure. Public infrastructure in rural areas is not sufficiently developed, outdated and depreciated. Public transport is not well organized, information on existing lines is lacking, the number of public lines connecting rural settlements with the municipal center is unsatisfactory, vehicle frequencies are rare and the connection of rural municipalities with urban centers of the region and the capital of the country through public transport is extremely complicated. Young people from small municipalities who study outside their place of residence face enormous challenges arising from difficult mobility and constantly rising transportation prices. In some of the rural municipalities in Pelagonija Some of the existing railway stops have been abolished, which requires young people to travel on their own to a larger urban area (Bitola, Prilep) and then travel by train to Skopje and/or vice versa. In some rural areas, young people have also faced the non-use of legally guaranteed public transport to and from school, due to the untimely implementation of tender procedures of municipal administrations.

In terms of safety, young people consider their environments to be relatively safe, with the exception of traffic culture, which needs to be improved , mostly through regular sanctioning of traffic violations. reckless drivers.

In terms of mental health and psychological well-being, young people in rural Pelagonija notice the occurrence of unfavorable conditions such as alienation, asocialization, abuse of social media in terms of excessive use, involvement in games of chance even by minors against the law and, rare, but still present, the occurrence of the use of light psychotropic substances. A special challenge for the mental well-being of young people in rural environments is noted in the increased presence of monotony and emphasized prejudices/taboos related to the mental health of young people which are the result of the small environment and the specific cultural milieu of the local community. School services are generally available to respond Regarding these issues, however, young people have an additional need for extracurricular educational activities and events related to these topics because professional help is relatively expensive and inaccessible to them. According to the respondents, bullying is also prevalent in some rural areas and the systemic reaction to this phenomenon is insufficiently decisive.

In terms of the environment and natural resources, young people from rural areas in Pelagonia consider polluted air, lack of water as the main challenges. waste management, dumping of garbage in illegal landfills and their burning, the lack of recycling facilities, impunity as a local phenomenon and the lack of sufficient urbanized green spaces. A particular problem that was noted by all participants (although technically not included in the environmental category) were street dogs. In addition to a communal problem, this is also a security problem that affects young people the most directly. Some of the participants in the interviews also indicated that environmental problems are not the same in all parts of the municipalities, that is, that the central parts generally face fewer challenges compared to peripheral and more remote rural settlements.

In terms of technology and digitalization, young people in rural areas of Pelagonija have access to an internet connection just like their peers in urban areas and consider these tools an inevitable part of their everyday lives. Although they use the internet for socialization, information exchange, education, promotion and communication, according to all respondents, IT tools are not used enough, neither in volume nor in quality, for education, information or for seeking employment opportunities. Young people in rural areas of Pelagonija most often use the internet and IT technology as a hobby and as a tool for joining social networks. networks.

In their recommendations for improving their municipality as a place to live, young people from rural areas list: construction of infrastructure for sports and recreation, improvement of public infrastructure and introduction of efficient public transport, establishment of youth centers and other service infrastructure according to the Youth Law, creation of human resources in the local government and the community in general that will work on youth problems, strengthening cooperation with local institutions and the civil sector, organization of a greater number of cultural events, greater awareness of young people about their rights and obligations, involving young people in local processes, strengthening the educational infrastructure (formal and informal), creating youth networks and knowledge exchange, more greenery and a cleaner environment, and better distribution of municipal resources in all parts of the municipalities, not just in the central part.

4.2 INTERVIEWS WITH CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS

Within the framework of the field research, a total of 9 civil society organizations from each municipality in the region were interviewed, which have experience in working with youth and youth policies.[14] The selection of civil society organizations that were part of the interviews was carried out by Pro Lokal based on the organization's past experience and work in other projects, specifically with the civil society sector in Pelagonija, which works in the area of youth.

The interviews with the representatives of the organizations were conducted at locations in their places of work and the questionnaire used during the interviews aimed at conversation and dialogue. outside the framework of a structured question-and-answer format. During the conversations, there were discussed topics such as:

- The role of the organization in working with youth in the municipality,
- Challenges that CSOs face in the implementation of their activities/programs,
- Influence of CSOs on various aspects of the lives of young people in the municipality,
- Cooperation between the public sector and CSOs with the aim of improving the situation of young people,
- Areas of youth policies that need to be improved at the local level,
- How do CSOs deal with social, economic, cultural and ethnic diversity? in its action,
- Cooperation between CSOs and the business sector towards improving the situation of young people,
- Access to information and educational resources, technological and innovation challenges.

[14] *The full list of organizations with their contact details is provided as an attachment to the Analysis.*

The following text provides a systematized overview of the main conclusions from this part of the field research:

Civil society organizations in the Pelagonia region play a key role in supporting young people in their inclusion in local processes and their transformation into agents of change, contribute to building better personalities of young people, offer additional sources of education and cultural education for young people, networking, exchange of knowledge, represent a unique opportunity for young people for non-partisan association and represent a good tool for responding to the needs of young people. Some of the interviewed CSOs responded that they are the only CSO on the territory of their rural municipality and that they make maximum efforts to realize their mission.

CSOs believe that the biggest challenges facing young people in their community are infrastructure problems, insufficient communication with the public sector, relatively weak support from local government units, incomplete implementation of the Youth Law, political influences, insufficient involvement of young people in the civil sector, the absence of available information that are the opportunities that CSOs offer, the present interdependence among both CSOs and youth, and the limited capacity of CSOs (people, resources).

Through their organizational mission and vision, CSOs positively influence the attitudes of young people in the local environment, improve the views and values of young people, act as a mediator of change and provide guidance for improving the conditions of young people. CSOs also provide support through career counseling, strengthen the inclusion of young people, and advocate for the views of young people. and work to respond to the needs of young people. Some of the CSOs (30%) also responded that they initiate a more active and fun youth life in the municipality.

The most important programs and initiatives that CSOs implement to improve the situation of young people include: career counseling, volunteerism, strengthening capacities for entry into the labor market, internet youth radio, support in advocacy and lobbying for young people, education and facilitation, environmental actions, participation in regional initiatives supported by a foreign donor (e.g. Dutch Embassy, CIVICA Program), putting a youth hub into operation or managing promotional IT tools. Some of the CSOs (70%) also responded that they implement a large number of activities in cooperation with schools in the local environment, primarily events of a cultural nature, and some (75%) also participate in the formation of bodies for the implementation of youth policies according to the Law on Youth (youth center, youth council).

Related to this, CSOs measure the success of their work through the projects they implement, the results achieved, the degree of networking of young people, the partnerships established, their advocacy activities, the number of young people and the number of volunteers involved in their work. CSOs that are

the only forms of the civil sector on the territory of their municipalities also responded that their very formation and work can be considered as an indicator for success.

In terms of cooperation between CSOs and local governments, the interviewed organizations responded that their cooperation is institutional within the framework of legal mechanisms and includes regular meetings and communication, as well as the inclusion of LSGUs in CSO project activities. The general attitude of all CSOs regarding cooperation with LSGUs is that it is good/solid.

The cooperation of CSOs with other CSOs at the municipal level is good, but relatively limited due to the fact that other CSOs working on youth issues either do not exist at all or, if they do exist, operate with limited capacity. Their cooperation is based on mutual respect for the mission of each CSO, involvement in project activities and coordination in planning development activities. At the level of the Pelagonia region, the cooperation between CSOs operating in the youth sector is exceptionally good and functions excellently with visible results.

Specifically, regarding the support that CSOs receive from LSGUs, the assessment is that it exists within the framework of the implementation of the legal solutions of the Law on Youth (formation of bodies and organs, carrying documents). CSOs also receive support from LSGUs in the implementation of project activities (assistance in providing logistics, resources), but it is necessary to work on improving this relationship, especially in the area of proactivity and initiative of young people/CSOs. Some of the young people in rural areas also receive direct support from LSGUs in the form of scholarships.

When asked which areas of youth policy need to be improved, CSOs without exception answered that the priority is the implementation of the content of the Youth Law (formation of local youth council, youth center, youth assembly, nomination/certification of youth officer, youth office, youth program and finances and adoption of a Youth Strategy). In those municipalities where legal obligations are partially implemented, they should be fully implemented and the bodies/documents should become operational and functional. Transparency and accountability in LSGUs should also be strengthened and youth policies should be given priority. Additionally, CSOs responded that activities for education, social protection of youth should be strengthened in order to influence the reduction of migration. Work should also be done on inclusion, opportunities for sports and culture, but also on increasing proactivity to the young.

Regarding the inclusion of CSOs in shaping youth policies at the local level, the interviewed CSOs responded that they do so through project activities, through the local youth council and participation in the work of the municipal council or informally through municipal councilors. Some of the CSOs also responded that they participate in various debates, organize networking events for all target groups, forums, surveys, and the like.

In this regard, CSOs believe that there is a need to strengthen the support and resources they receive from LSGUs in order to improve their work with youth. Specifically, this would include more funding (according to the Youth Law), access to public resources, especially public sports fields, greater transparency, greater flow of information using digital communication channels, primarily social networks, providing space for youth, and establishing and putting into operation all bodies provided for in the Youth Law.

CSOs in the region working in the youth sector believe that they offer young people the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in the local community, but there is still work to be done on greater inclusion of young people, familiarization with their rights and obligations, and greater proactivity in contributing to more significant changes in the local community. Maximum effects in this area would certainly be achieved through further promotion of the cooperation of CSOs with local government units and public institutions.

Additionally, CSOs provide access to relevant information for young people from all areas of their lives through their activities, physical offices or web tools. CSOs offer young people direct access to local government units (ULGs) but also influence local government units and public institutions to become more accessible to young people (e.g. the Agency for Employment of the Republic of Macedonia). Some CSOs offer support to young people in taking advantage of specific employment opportunities/educational tools (e.g. *the Youth Guarantee)*.

The cooperation of CSOs with the business sector in order to improve the situation of young people is desirable but needs to be improved. The majority of the interviewed CSOs (70%) confirm that there is cooperation with the local business sector in the provision of internship and career counseling for young people but also in support of the project activities of the youth themselves organizations.

The biggest challenges that CSOs face in implementing their program activities are administrative obstacles, insufficient support from local government units, low transparency of institutions, the need for continuous strengthening of internal capacities, networking, insufficient involvement of youth from the community, the small number of youth in smaller communities, and finances.

Regarding the existence of social, economic, cultural, ethnic diversity and marginalized groups in rural areas in Pelagonija, all CSOs have the same working approach which implies inclusion, integration, transparency, non-discrimination and zero tolerance towards prejudices and stereotypes. The top and only priority of CSOs is working with young people who have potential, skills, knowledge and motivation regardless of their social, economic, ethnic or religious affiliation. Regarding the support of marginalized groups, some CSOs implement activities in partnership with other CSOs that work exclusively on this topic.

CSOs recognize technological and innovation challenges as an opportunity to improve their work, specifically, by using them in communication with young people, for sharing information, for

implementing specific activities (digital mapping of illegal landfills, for example). Some of the organizations that were included in the interviews have members in their bodies who are IT experts and whose knowledge is constantly made available to young people in the local community.

The recommendations that CSOs made for improving cooperation with LSGUs in support of youth needs and policies include: full and consistent implementation of the Law on Youth and greater involvement of youth in the creation and implementation of local policies. Ensuring direct and more frequent communication and coordination with youth ("youth to be asked") which will lead to a strengthened sense of responsibility and youth activism. Local self-government to be more up-to-date in informing youth and advocating for their interests, and the civil society sector to be more active in the role of mediator between youth and local self-government.

4.3 INTERVIEWS WITH DECISION-MAKERS

As the third component of the field research process, interviews were conducted with decision-makers in the LSGUs in the region, i.e. 8 mayors and 1 president of a municipal council[15]. Additionally, with the ultimate goal of presenting the situation with youth policies more comprehensively, members of some of the municipal administrations were also included in the field research process. During the interviews with decision- makers, among other things, the following were discussed: the following topics:

- Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies,
- Existing youth policy of the municipality,
- Cooperation and support of young people by the municipality,
- Involvement of youth in local politics,
- Cooperation with the business sector towards improving the situation of young people in the municipality,
- Job opportunities, housing, public infrastructure and safety for youth in the municipality,
- Programs, initiatives and opportunities for education and training of youth in the municipality.

The conclusions from the field research are presented below in the text.

In the context of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies and with the ultimate goal of connecting with the young population in both urban and rural areas of the municipality, all LSGUs are making efforts to implement the solutions of the existing Law. Rural municipalities in the region are unanimous that the existing Law on Youth does not help them in resolving the situation with young people because a) the law imposes obligations equally on large urban municipalities and smaller rural municipalities, b) the law does not differentiate between the number of young people in the municipality itself (larger municipalities have a larger number of young people and therefore their needs are greater and more complex compared to rural municipalities which have a much smaller number of young people and the quantity of youth needs and proactivity is consequently lower), and c) the technical, financial and personnel capabilities of rural municipalities for the implementation of legal obligations are seriously

[15] *A full list of the decision-makers interviewed is provided in the appendix to the Analysis.*

limited. These LSGUs have very small municipal budgets, most often one employee covers several areas of the municipality's mandate, so the necessary specialization, time and focus among public servants related to the topic of youth and youth policies are not present to a sufficient extent. Rural municipalities also believe that the Law is not flexible enough to enable the establishment of regional/inter-municipal mechanisms to achieve greater effects in the creation of youth policies and increase the benefits of their implementation in rural areas through sharing resources, knowledge or technical and material means and/or through association and cooperation of municipalities in the region. As a result of all this, in less than 1/3 of the municipalities the legally prescribed organizational infrastructure has been fully established, in most it exists only partially and in

In a small number of rural municipalities, it has not been formed at all. In larger urban municipalities, support towards young people is mainly carried out through public calls, financial and logistical support to youth initiatives and making a nominated youth officer available to young people.

In terms of existing strategic documents for youth policy development, not all municipalities in the region have a youth strategy with an action plan. At the time of preparation of the Analysis, the municipalities of Novaci, Krivogaštani, Resen and Bitola had such a document. The timeframe of the Kruševo document expired in 2023.

According to decision-makers in the region, young people in their municipalities, including those from Rural areas face the following challenges: disinterest, apathy, low trust in institutions, few opportunities for employment and realization of the young person in the profession in which he was educated or is currently working. Also, young people do not have sufficient communication with decision-makers, and the language used by institutions does not correspond to to the young.

In response to this, what the municipalities are doing is enabling greater communication between the youth officer and the young people and through educational institutions they are trying to implement more activities from non-formal education. A small part of the municipalities are also making concrete efforts to enable new investments in which young people would be employed. Also, the municipalities, through their administrations, are trying to respond to the needs of the young people as quickly as possible and to encourage them to get involved in the decision-making processes. Almost all the municipalities in the region have financial support for program and project youth activities.

As the best ways to involve young people in the work of the municipality and the shaping of local policies, the interviewees mentioned: active cooperation and communication, taking specific initiatives for dialogue by municipalities, through councilors in the Municipal Council, members of the local youth council or through forms of direct democracy, i.e. referendum, initiative, petitions and complaints, public meetings, public forums and surveys or through organizing informal groups by submitting initiatives, suggestions and questions to the municipality.

In terms of supporting educational opportunities for young people, the larger municipalities in the region have specific mechanisms such as memorandums of understanding for cooperation with higher education institutions, enabling internships for students in cooperation with the University of St. Kliment Ohridski Bitola, organizing open events to promote high schools and faculties, encouraging non-formal education, personal progress and increasing youth participation through programs and projects, and providing financial support to talented individuals. primary and secondary school students. Related to this, all municipalities in the region have concluded specific partnerships (UKLO, UNDP, NMSM, local organizations whose scope of work is youth) to provide better conditions for education and employment for young people from all parts of the municipality but also in order to raise the level of activity of young people in the municipality.

Additionally, all municipalities in the region consider it necessary to implement investments/activities/programs for skill building or vocational training for youth in cooperation with local industries. Although limited due to the lack of interest of larger businesses in supporting such initiatives, there are still examples in the region where municipalities cooperate in this direction with local businesses (e.g. catering) or there are examples of involving youth in cross-border project activities in which the municipality was a participant and which aimed to build the capacities of youth. Some of the municipalities in the region consider that the adoption of a local youth strategy should, among other things, advance these issues related to the young.

The activities that municipalities undertake to address employment opportunities and career development for young people most often include including young people in the available measures in accordance with the national operational plan for employment, connecting young people with businesses in the municipality in accordance with their employment needs, organizing a fair of employers from the country and abroad and supporting local educational institutions in implementing programs and their own initiatives for developing the potential of young people in specific areas such as journalism, sports, hospitality, etc. As a positive example of contributing to improving the employment and internship situation of young people in the region, one of the initiatives of Pro Local, through which 5 young interns were recruited and engaged in local government units, 5 in civil society organizations and 4 in private sector companies in Pelagonija, is.

In terms of the inclusiveness of youth policies at the local level, all municipalities in the region practice fully inclusive and non-discriminatory policies that are accessible to young people from all backgrounds, regardless of their cultural background, sex, gender, age, ethnicity or religious affiliation.

When asked how the municipality encourages the participation of young people in civic activities and decision-making processes, most of the municipalities responded that they do so through the bodies and nominations established under the Law on Youth, through secondary schools on their territory and/or through organizing tribunes and public consultations and forums in the communities and they also use

their websites through a specific tool intended for young people (Municipality of Kruševo). Municipalities also use their administrations and the local civil sector to increase the participation of young people in local policies.

In terms of transparency of communication between local government and youth and municipal efforts to keep young people informed, all municipalities in the region are considered open and transparent. Representatives of the municipalities and the municipal administration are always available to the youth of the municipality and try to inform them about all opportunities of their interest. What needs to be done for municipalities to get closer to young people additionally is the use of appropriate communication tools, customized presentation of municipal data and active listening to the needs of young people. In this regard, as part of its activities, Pro Local is coordinating the process of developing a digital two-way tool for direct communication between young people and youth officers that will be available in all Pelagonia municipalities. In addition to the new communication channel that will be established and will enable direct communication between the local government and the youth, an additional benefit of this initiative is the fact that each municipality has undertaken the obligation for the youth officer to establish communication with the youth from its territory through direct IT communication.

To connect and communicate with young people in their territory and to solve some of their problems, municipalities also use digital tools and IT technology, i.e. promoting specific measures on the municipality's website, sharing information through social media but also through specialized IT tools (*mCommunity* - Municipality of Bitola).

As a mechanism for collecting feedback from the youth community which would then be used in the creation of local policies, municipalities in the region use them communications with youth civil society organizations, information is received through representatives of the Municipal Council, municipal employees, through members of the local youth council, through social networks, through public consultations and conducting "online" questionnaires.

One of the top priorities of all municipalities in the region is the improvement of recreational and cultural spaces that respond to the interests and needs of young people. Thus, all municipalities responded affirmatively to undertake specific activities in this area, such as: upgrading facilities for youth centers and equipping them with all necessary devices for smooth operation, purchasing a stage with lighting, sound system and other facilities, upgrading fitness zones, reconstructing a cinema hall for holding cultural and youth activities and reconstruction of a museum building with a library. Additionally, some of the success stories related to youth development and youth policies in rural areas in the region include: implementation of infrastructure projects in rural municipalities (through direct participation of young people and through approval of initiatives by municipal councils through formal procedures), establishment of civil society organizations for youth in rural areas that will work on projects for young people with the support of the municipality, initiation of processes for the establishment of a local youth

council in some municipalities, creation of youth strategies, implementation of various initiatives (e.g. "From youth to youth" in which, through focus groups and workshops (young people initiated proposals and prepared a catalog of project proposals), establishment of an "in & out" cinema, creation of a youth journalism club, etc.

The adaptation, i.e. improvement of the municipality's responsiveness to the constantly changing needs and challenges of young people, is planned by the LSGUs in the region through the implementation (and possible future improvement) of the Law on Youth, through the establishment of local youth council, through the creation of a youth multicultural center, through the creation and adoption of a local youth strategy and annual youth programs, by allocating an item in the budget for youth, through active participation and implementation of the requests and needs of young people through the local youth council, by creating new digital tools for communication, ensuring greater visibility of municipal councils and greater involvement in communication with councilors, adopting urban plans that will open up space for housing for young people and attracting investments, which will expand opportunities for career development.

Municipalities in the region are dealing with environmental challenges and ecological problems that can affect the well-being of young people and future generations through implementing local initiatives, by improving and increasing the level of implementation of local policies related to environmental problems, through the clearing and dislocation of illegal landfills, through continuous subsidies for the purchase of bicycles and inverter air conditioners for households, cooperation with local/national environmental NGOs, implementation of awareness-raising campaigns and procurement of equipment and infrastructure projects for waste management.

At the time of preparation of the Analysis, no municipality had launched or implemented a specific initiative/ activity in the area of mental health and well-being of youth.

In order to ensure a completely safe and secure environment for young people, all municipalities in the region are undertaking activities that fall within their jurisdiction. In some municipalities Employees initiate training and workshops on the dangers of addiction, one of the smaller municipalities is undergoing training and testing on cybersecurity, and all municipalities organize regular field controls of the local prevention council as well as the municipal council for the prevention of child abuse.

Due to the limited legal mandate, local governments in the region have limited opportunities to improve the availability of housing options for young people. For young people in larger For urban municipalities, this is a serious challenge due to rising prices as a result of the greater demand for housing, while rural municipalities face difficulties in the preparation of urban planning documentation (e.g. Krusevo is under *lex specialis law)* which is a prerequisite for alleviating the situation of young people in this area.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Full implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in all municipalities in the region. Although rural municipalities have objections regarding the content of the Law because in the section on delegating obligations to LSGUs, the legal solution does not distinguish between a small or large municipality, a municipality with a larger or smaller number of young people living on its territory, urban or rural, financially stable or LSGUs that have financial difficulties, However, the implementation of the content of the law should be an imperative that can contribute to improving the situation of young people in rural areas.

This should mean:

- preparation of a Youth Strategy or monitoring its implementation and the implementation of action plans where they exist,
- the establishment of a Youth Assembly,
- opening a Youth Center,
- establishing a Local Youth Council,
- nominating a youth officer and
- allocating budget funds for youth in the amount provided by Law.

The implementation of the Law on Youth in Rural Areas will address most of the previous the identified problems, especially in the area of communication between the young population and municipal services, the correct identification, articulation and addressing of the needs and problems of young people, reducing the disinterest in public policies present among young people and will address the need to strengthen their sense of responsibility for local conditions.

Additionally, LSGUs in the region need to support the professionalization of youth officers through training and workshops in order to specifically familiarize them with their competencies and responsibilities, but also to ensure continuity in this position. In order to more effectively implement the legal solutions, activities are needed to strengthen the administrative capacities of both the services and CSOs in each rural municipality, which may include the creation of documents (manuals) on the administrative procedures for establishing and managing the bodies and nominations provided for in the Youth Law and which fall within the competence of LSGUs, as well as creation and implementation of educational programs to strengthen the capacities of representatives of local youth councils and youth officers.

In terms of the content of the municipal budget, it is advisable to introduce a separate budget item for youth with the aim of transparency and accountability on how funds for youth are spent policies. In this way, the total amount of the municipality allocated for the implementation of projects initiated/proposed by young people will be precisely measured in the context of the provisions defined in the Law on Youth.

Budgetary support for youth in municipalities should be realized through the introduction of regular annual grant schemes (such as the example of the Municipality of Bitola), which will be separated from the other public calls for funding and will have a special intended to promote local youth policies.

One of the possible mechanisms for achieving greater effects in the creation of youth policies and increasing the benefits of their implementation in rural areas is the regional approach, which would imply sharing resources, knowledge and technical and material means through the association and cooperation of municipalities in the region. To formalize this, as well as to address the identified need for differentiation of urban from smaller and rural municipalities, i.e. creating a legal solution according to their characteristics (available budget, available human resources, number of young people in the municipality), an upgrade of the Law on Youth and Youth Policies is required.

Addressing local problems and challenges. Municipalities should intensify their efforts in addressing local problems that fall within their scope of work and that affect the entire population, not just the youth. In the context of rural areas in Pelagonija this means:

- increased concern for the environment with an emphasis on better waste management, dislocation of illegal landfills and introduction of an organized system of waste collection and disposal and increasing the number of landscaped green areas. Young people are educated about the possibilities of recycling and waste selection, so they are demanding the installation of a systemic solution and appropriate equipment for this. In addition, rural municipalities need to focus on waste management in the peripheral parts of the municipality and not only in the central part of its territory where the concentration of residents is higher.

- Opening libraries, info-centers, resource centers and increasing opportunities for informal education outside of class, creating more opportunities for learning foreign languages, career counseling, soft skills training, educational activities (lectures) in schools and enabling practice in all social sectors.

- Solving the problem of stray dogs. Due to the nature of their everyday lives, young people are exposed to attacks by stray dogs more than other residents, and addressing this communal problem is a priority for them.

- Construction of municipal infrastructure for sports and recreation. Rural areas abound with public space that is either neglected or has no specific purpose and which can easily be transformed into useful content for young people.

- Introduction of efficient public transport. The first priority in public transport at the local level is its organization according to the needs of economically vulnerable categories of residents of the municipalities, primarily young people. This means introducing lines with a sufficient frequency of movement and in time terms when these users have the greatest need for public transport. Additionally, LSGUs in the region need to synchronize local public transport with other public lines that

connect with larger cities in and around Pelagonija, and especially with the city of Skopje. Although at the time of preparation of the Analysis, the railway lines between Bitola, Prilep and Skopje were with minimal frequency of traffic (once every 24 hours), however, this type of transport is still used to the greatest extent by young people studying in the capital. In addition, decision-makers in the region should use their political/ public function and lobby for the return to use of railway stops that previously existed on the territory of their municipality and are now excluded from traffic due to rationalization of railway operating costs. A third priority of public transport is the promotion of regional cooperation through which larger urban municipalities can help smaller neighboring rural municipalities and support the introduction/extension of regular lines of their public transport to, and from, these smaller municipalities.

- Improving health and fire protection in rural areas, i.e. organizing an ambulance, opening a sufficient number of pharmacies with extended working hours and modernizing the fire protection service.

Strengthening the role of civil society organizations in the creation and implementation of youth policies in rural areas. Rural areas in the Pelagonia region have a lack of civil society organizations working in the field of youth and youth policies. Those that are present either have limited resources or are relatively new in their existence and face certain challenges, so they need additional education and networking for more active involvement in local policies. Civil society organizations can be a key factor in strengthening the social setup for supporting youth in rural areas and can especially contribute to establishing or strengthening communication between youth and local government, in the absence of full/effective implementation of legal solutions or when this is caused by objective reasons.

LSGUs in the region should intensify communication with the civil sector through their administration, through the members of the municipal council and should strive to provide greater technical and financial support for their work. A key challenge in this process is the clear alignment of both LSGUs and CSOs that the joint cooperation is in the same direction and with the same goal, and that is improving the conditions of young people living in the local environment. Strengthening the role of civil society organizations will increase the recognition and trust of young people towards these entities and will enable their use as a mechanism for efficient communication of young people with the municipality and the public sector in general.

6. ANNEXES

1. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUTH FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE PELAGONIA REGION FOR ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC YOUTH NEEDS/ PROBLEMS IN RURAL PELAGONIA

1. What do you like most about living in your municipality?

2. Can you share some challenges or problems that you encounter daily in your life that are related to with the place of residence?

3. How would you describe the sense of community among young people in your municipality?

4. Are there enough recreational and extracurricular activities available for young people in the municipality?

5. What educational resources or what type of educational support do you think are lacking for young people in your municipality?

6. How would you rate the availability of employment or internship opportunities for young people in your municipality?

7. Are there any worrying situations/phenomena regarding security in the municipality and is there a need for any systemic improvement of security in the municipality?

8. How familiar are you with and/or are you part of the local government's development initiatives related to youth and/or programs intended for youth?

9. Do you think that the municipality has sufficient conditions (space, organizations) to support the creative expression of young people in the form of art, music or other cultural activities?

10. Are there any challenges in the municipality related to transportation and public infrastructure that affect young people's access to the most necessary public sector services such as education, health, social services, culture, sports?

11. How would you describe the overall support system for youth in the municipality, in terms of mentoring, leadership, knowledge sharing, public engagement, funds and programs...

12. Are there any gaps in the flow of information or communication channels between youth and the institutions of the system at the local level that you think need to be improved?

13. What opportunities for civic engagement or community participation for young people are available in your municipality?

14. How inclusive and diverse do you consider your community (informal system of people and networks) and municipality (official system of institutions and bodies) to be in terms of representing the needs of young people?

15. What challenges do young people in your municipality face in terms of a quality living environment and sustainable use of natural resources?

16. Do you (and if so, how) do you think technology and digital resources can be better used for the benefit of young people in your municipality?

17. In your opinion, what changes or improvements would you like to see in the municipality to make it a better youth-friendly municipality?

18. How easy is it to get quality healthcare in your municipality, especially if you are a young person?

19. Are there any issues related to the mental health and well-being of young people in the municipality that you believe are not receiving enough attention?

2. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS OF CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE PELAGONIA REGION FOR ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC YOUTH NEEDS/PROBLEMS IN RURAL PELAGONIA

1. What is the role of your organization as part of civil society in working with youth in the municipality?

2. What are the most significant challenges you see when it comes to addressing the needs of youth in your community?

3. How does your organizational perspective influence the different aspects of youth life in the municipality?

4. What are the most effective programs or initiatives that your organization implements to support youth?

5. How does your organization collaborate with local government to influence youth policies?

6. Is there cooperation between different civil society organizations to support youth and what does this cooperation look like?

7. How do you measure the success of your activities in meeting the needs of young people?

8. In your opinion, which areas of youth policy need to be improved or developed in the municipality?

9. Do young people have sufficient opportunities to participate in decision-making processes through your organization?

10. What are the most significant challenges you face in securing support and resources for your youth development activities?

11. How does your organization address social and economic inequalities among youth in the municipality?

12. How do you meet the needs of youth who are part of marginalized or vulnerable communities?

13. How do you integrate and support different cultural and ethnic groups among young people in your programs?

14. Do young people have sufficient access to information and educational resources through your organization?

15. How does your organization respond to the technological and innovation challenges faced by young people?

16. What types of support do you receive or do not receive from local government in your efforts to support youth?

17. Are there opportunities for cooperation between your organization and the business sector to support youth?

18. How do you get involved in shaping local policies related to youth development?

19. Is there a need for changes in support and resources from local government that would advance your work with young people?

20. What are your recommendations for improving cooperation between civil society organizations and local government to support youth needs and policies?

3. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DECISION-MAKERS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE PELAGON REGION FOR ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC YOUTH NEEDS/PROBLEMS IN RURAL PELAGONIJA

1. In the context of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, how is the municipality currently connected to the young population and what initiatives or programs does it have to respond to their needs?

2. Can you provide an overview of the existing youth policies and strategies in the municipality?

3. What specific challenges do you think young people in your municipality face and how is the local government addressing these challenges?

4. How transparent is the communication between local government and young people and what efforts are made to keep them informed?

5. In what ways can the community, including youth, actively participate in shaping and influencing local policies and programs?

6. How does the municipality encourage youth participation in civic activities and decision-making processes?

7. Is there a mechanism for collecting feedback from the youth community and how is their voice taken into account in policy making?

8. How does the municipality promote educational opportunities and support for youth?

9. Does the municipality plan to invest in skills building programs or vocational training for youth in collaboration with local industries?

10. How inclusive and diverse are youth policies at the local level and do they ensure representation of all young people (gender, place of residence, social status)?

11. What steps are being taken to address employment opportunities and career development for young people?

12. What partnerships or collaborations does the municipality have with local organizations, schools, or businesses to improve opportunities for youth?

13. What steps are being taken to address employment and career development opportunities for young people?

14. Are there specific initiatives aimed at promoting mental health and well-being among young people? in your municipality?

15. Are there plans to improve recreational and cultural spaces that respond to the interests and needs of young people?

16. Does the local government have mechanisms/activities to improve housing for young people in the municipality?

17. How does the municipality use technology and digital platforms to connect with young people and respond to their concerns?

18. Can you share any success stories or notable achievements related to youth development? and the policies in the municipality?

19. What measures have been taken to ensure the safety and security of young people in the municipality?

20. How does the municipality plan to adapt to the needs and challenges of young people developing in the coming years?

21. How does the municipality deal with environmental problems that may affect the well-being of young people and future generations?

4. List of decision-makers and officials from the municipalities who were part of the field research process

First and last name	Municipality	Contact	Mayor
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5. List of civil society organizations that were part of the field research process

Name of representative	Civic organization	Contact	Municipality
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Jasmina Kotevska	TsKI SKY – Demir Hisar	nebo.cci@gmail.com	Demir Hisar
Maria Evtimovska	Eco Guerilla Prespa	contact@ecogerilaprespa.org .mk	Resen
Elena Geroska	Pro Lokal	cso.prolocal@gmail.com	Bitola
Marija Taskoska	Youth Council Prilep	contact@ycp.org.mk	Prilep
Steve Janceski	Urban Nest	urbanognezdokgr@outlook.com	Krivogaštani

6. List of young people who were part of the field research process

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ЕУ со ТЕБЕ

Analysis of specific youth needs and problems in rural Pelagonia

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Национален младински совет на Македонија

ФОНДАЦИЈА ЗА РАЗВОЈ НА ЛОКАЛНАТА ЗАЕДНИЦА

СФЕРА ИНТЕРНЕШНЛ

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