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# Mapping of active rural youth and CSO's in the Eastern and South Eastern Planning Region

Research Analysis  
within the project

“Rural Youth Assisting Macedonia in EU integration”

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## Methodology and sampling

### Key findings:

- 310 responses gathered through the field research using structured questionnaire
- 16 interviews with CSOs active in the southern and the south eastern region of Republic of Macedonia using semi-structured questionnaire

The research team managed to reach the targeted number of respondents in a period of two weeks which prevents major events to influence on the answers.

For the purpose of this research, the team used a combined methodological approach, considered appropriate for the examination of the two main target groups – quantitative approach for the high school students and qualitative approach towards the CSOs in the region. The high school students included in this research were being disseminated a structured questionnaire by the field researcher engaged with the project, while for collecting the input of the CSO representatives, appropriate interview questions were created. The questionnaire was constructed in a way that would give clear vision in few categories: (1) the demographic structure of the sample, (2) (dis)satisfaction with the everyday life and the opportunities given in the everyday life, (3) point of view towards the European Union and general knowledge in the area and (4) civic engagement and prioritized areas that need the biggest improvement.

This project targets the Eastern and the South East region of Republic of Macedonia, namely, the rural areas<sup>1</sup> in this region of the country. The preliminary target of the 300 respondents, foreseen in the project resembles the representative sample of the region, therefore this finding could be considered as representative with a margin of error +5%. Apart from the representativeness of the sample, the research includes data from a wide geographical area of the both regions, including respondents from the biggest and the smallest municipalities.

The questionnaire was distributed to previously selected high schools, targeting students from third and fourth year of high school. The selection of the schools was done with consideration to the number of students from small rural municipalities enrolled. The selected municipalities were, Stip, Kocani, Vinica, Delcevo, Strumica,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this project, we are not using rural area as in its orthodox sense, but considering areas with population fewer than 30.000 residents



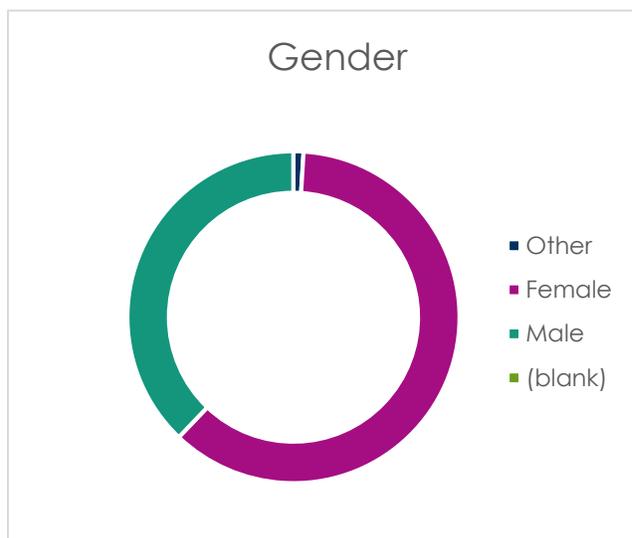
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Gevgelija, Radovis (as one of the bigger municipalities that have high schools). The number of participants in the research in the different high schools was determined proportionally to the number of students enrolled in the schools.

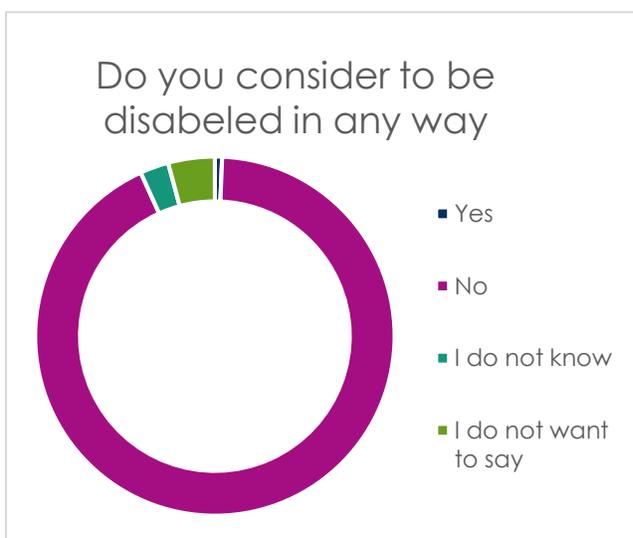
The text below contains more detailed descriptions of the overall structure of the groups covered with the research as well as the specific and outstanding findings of the research.

### Demographic characteristics

Due to the previously determined geographical region and target groups of this project, the demographic data that will be presented does not have wide range of variety – the average respondent in this research is a high school student that identifies with the gender assigned at birth and does not consider himself/herself to have any disability.



Row Labels	Count of Gender
Other	3
Female	189
Male	117
(blank)	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>309</b>



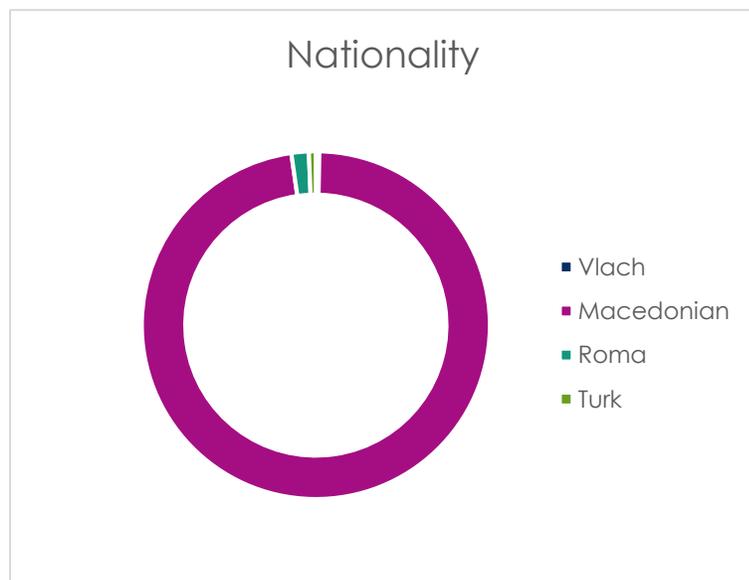
Row Labels	Count of 4) Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way
Yes	2
No	287
I do not know	8
I do not want to say	13
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>310</b>

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As visible from the charts and tables above, the vast majority of the respondents do not consider themselves to be disabled in any way. There is almost insignificant number of respondents that declared that they “do not know” if they are disabled or not, which might indicate flaws in the education system regarding the general perception of the people with disabilities.



Majority of the respondents declared themselves to be with Macedonian ethnicity (302), the minorities covered with the survey are Roma (5), Turk (2) and Vlach (1). The chart visible on the left, although not much diverse is still accurate representation on the demographical structure of the youth enrolled in formal education in Southern and South Eastern region in Republic of Macedonia.

### **(Dis)satisfaction with the everyday life and the opportunities given in the everyday life**

#### Key findings:

- The highest percentage regarding the dissatisfaction in the everyday life in the youngsters in the region is the access to the public transportation (23,9% said that they are totally dissatisfied with it), mostly describing the access to local public transportation in the region. Regarding the other aspects of the everyday life, numbers give the impression that the respondents are either not much interested in the particular issues or have not formed strong point of view towards them, taking in mind that the majority declared to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with them [access to public health, opportunities for independent living, access to quality education, career opportunities, etc]. Another outstanding finding worth noting is that the vast majority consider the cultural and entertaining activities to be satisfying to their needs.
- When asked for their individual perception on “Are their peers from the EU countries facing same challenges on daily level” , 21,5% of the respondents said that they do not think that the EU youth faces same challenges, but 20,9% declared that the EU youth faces same challenges – depending on



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which EU country they are coming from.

This particular section of the questionnaire was included in the research for the purpose of assessing the needs and challenges of young people in rural areas, as well as the level of influence they pursue during decision making processes in their community. Bearing in mind that the target group is constituted of high school students that still have not been given the chance to face issues outside of their local communities [majority of them], the questions were accordingly constructed.

In the first part of this section respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on few topics, giving them space to add important topic for them and rate it. For this and for all the following questions that required rating, the respondents were instructed to do the rating accordingly to the school system, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest level of importance/satisfaction.

	1	2	3	4	5
Education opportunities available within reasonable distance of the place of living					
Accessibility of the public transportation					
Availability of the public information on regional level					
Accessibility to health care services					
Opportunities for professional development					
Opportunities for independent living outside of the parents' home					
Opportunities for cultural life and entertainment					

From the first overview it is notable that one of the burning issues is the public transportation. This does not come as any surprise, but indicates that the mobility issue remains unsolved for the rural areas, despite the efforts made in the capital towards this particular topic.

Available below is the visual order of the (dis)satisfaction among youth with the public transportation vs. the availability of the public information on regional level. The chart below indicates that youngsters in this region are far more satisfied with how much public information is available to them, than they are with the available public transportation which is necessary<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile, in the public discourse in the Republic of Macedonia there is frequently mentioned information that 11% of the residents of the country (in total) have ever submitted a request for free access to public information.

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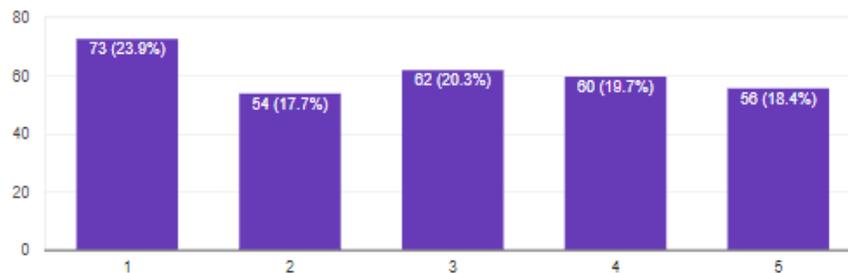
<sup>2</sup> In the region this research refers to, there are no high schools in the villages and all the high school students



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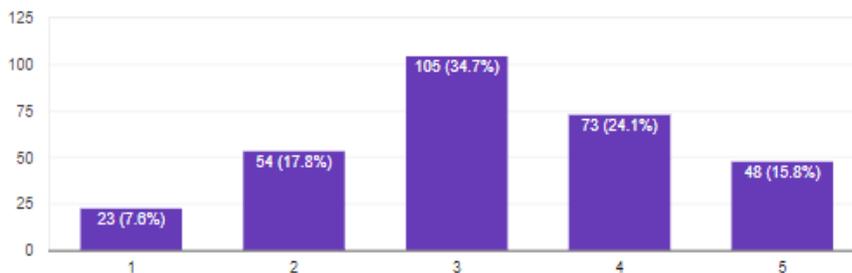
### Availability of the public transpiration

305 responses



### Availability of access to public information

303 responses



The opportunities for leading independent life by themselves seem to be the next major issue youth is dealing with in this region. Keeping in mind that statistics show that the average Macedonian citizen gets the first employment on the age of 26 [depending on the gender] this information should not be considered a discovery but rather considered as something that is growing into well-known fact that youth is aware of.

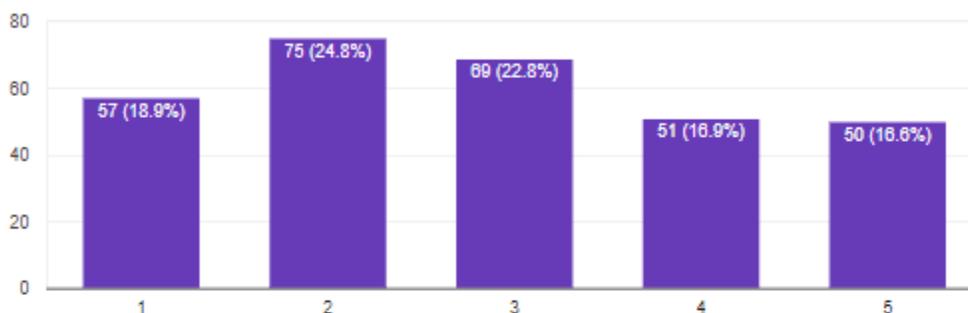
Despite of the existing and legitimate dissatisfaction with the opportunities for independent living and leading lives of their own, youngsters do not seem to have any major concerns regarding the opportunities for their cultural enlightenment and consider the opportunities for cultural and entertaining activities fairly satisfying.



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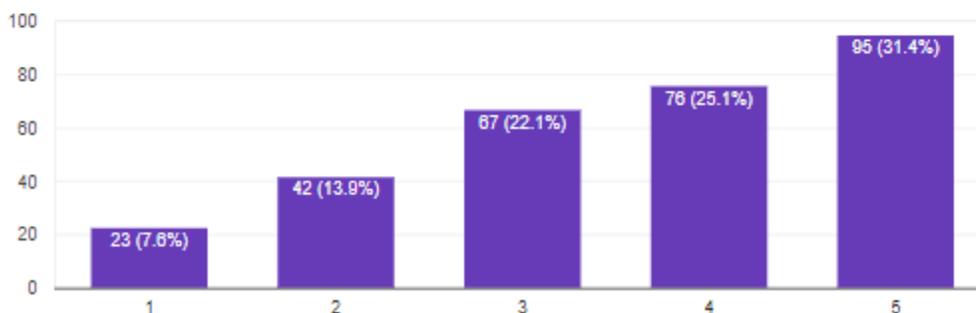
### Opportunities for independence and independent living outside of parents` home

302 responses



### Opportunities for cultural and entertaining activities

303 responses



Moreover, when we asked the CSOs from the region which are the most burning issues and crucial needs of the youngsters in the rural areas most of them prioritized the lack of employment possibilities, informal education and soft skills. Besides this, a significant difference we stumbled upon was the fact that even though the majority of the students responded that they are pleased with the level of culture events in their local areas, most of the CSOs respondents stated that there is an obvious deficit of these types of events.

As for suggestions on what would not only improve the life of the young population, but also attract many of them to the rural areas, the CSOs think that the investments in agriculture and tourism have the potential to create many new job positions and draw the attention of this group towards these locations. The infrastructural challenges that residents from this areas are facing on daily level were also noted in the CSO`s

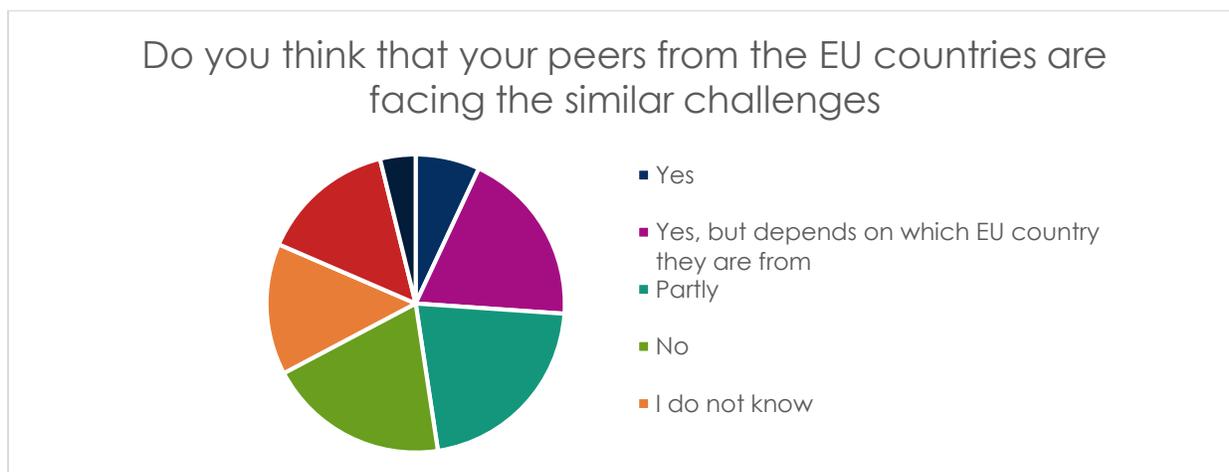
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responds regarding what is considered as needed for making rural areas more attractive for youth.

The pie below represents the point of view of the youngsters regarding the similarities of the lifestyles led by youngsters in Macedonia and the EU member countries. Seems like Macedonian youngsters perceive that the nature of the challenges goes in line with the individual country of residence (19%). This indicates that the perception for the EU is not wholesome and equal for all the member countries. Close to the 19% that think that peers challenges resemblance depends on the country of residence, another 2% declared their opinion to be that their peers are not "fighting the same fights as they do".



As for the Civic Society organization the survey showcased that even though there is a huge interest for learning the EU practices of similar organizations, most of the respondents claimed that they are not well informed or have never had experience in collaborating with any other European group. Due to this most of them think that the EU integration can be beneficial for them because of:

"Possibilities for better mobility, networking and exchange of practices and experience, as well as many new opportunities for funding"

### **Influence on decision making processes**

#### **Key finding:**

- Regarding the level of influence youngsters have in the decision making processes there is much more diversity in the answers. The majority of the respondents are not satisfied nor dissatisfied with the level of influence they have in the decision making processes in the school (29,9%), but only 13,3% are totally satisfied with regarding the same issue. Moreover, 34,1% are totally unsatisfied with the influence on the decision making processes in their



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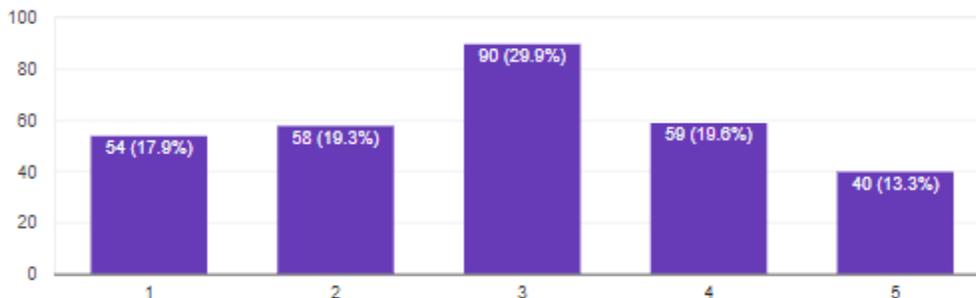
municipality and only 5,8% are satisfied with it. The vast majority of the respondents said that they are satisfied with the freedom for making personal decisions (38,8%), but at the same time the percentage of the majority remains similar with the declaration that they are not satisfied nor dissatisfied with the freedom they have to publicly say their opinion in the school and the municipality without barring any consequences.

At this section the results indicate general dissatisfaction and issue with the inclusiveness of the decision making processes on local level.

**2. Are you satisfied with the level of influence you have in the the decision making processors (5- completely satisfied; 1- completely unsatisfied)**

**In your school**

301 responses

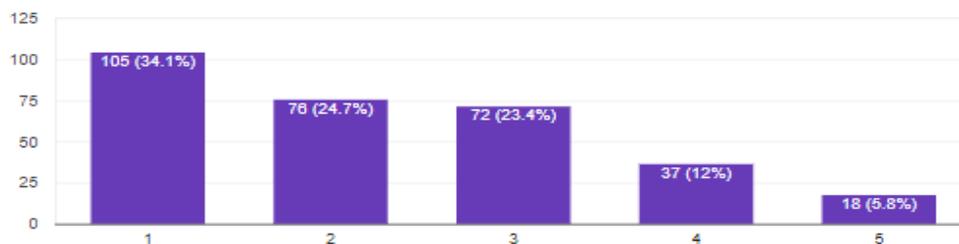




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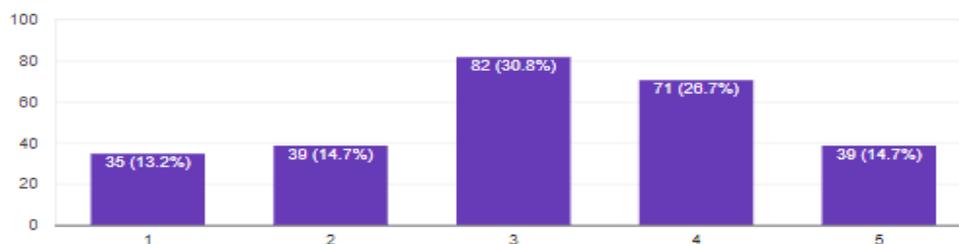
### In your municipality

308 responses

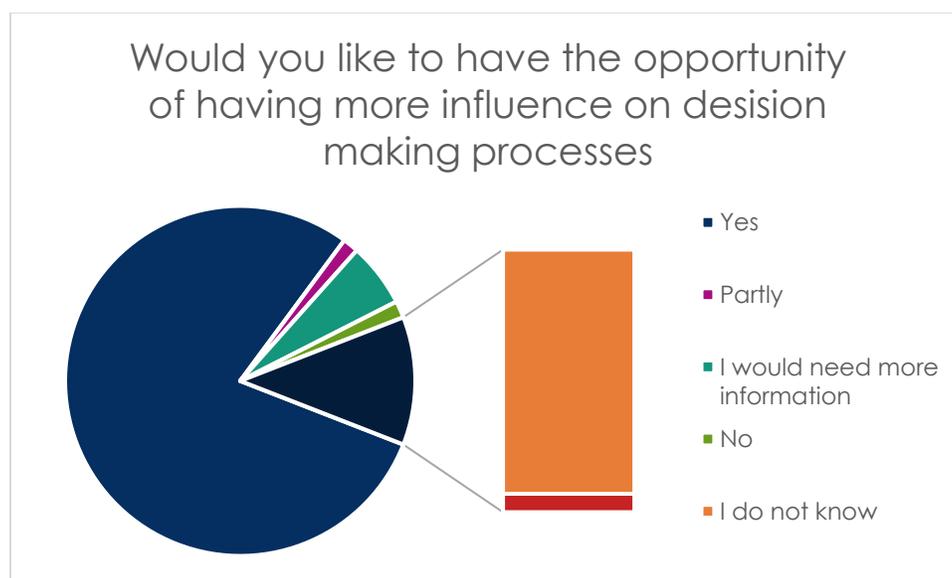


### In the organization that you are member of

266 responses



From the charts exposed above, it is clearly visible that youth are not completely satisfied with their influence on any of the mentioned areas, despite of the data that says how they would be interested of having higher level on influence on those.





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Similar to the responses of the students above, the CSOs strongly believe that there is a lack of youth participation in the decision making and policy making processes especially on a local level especially in youth related policies. As for the reasons why the younger population is not so keen on active engagement in these processes the opinion of the CSOs can be perfectly summed up with the following response from one of the respondents:

“The participation of young people in the decision making processes is very low mainly because there is an absence of information, no one targets or motivates them and they feel like nothing ever depends on them and that they can’t impose any changes”

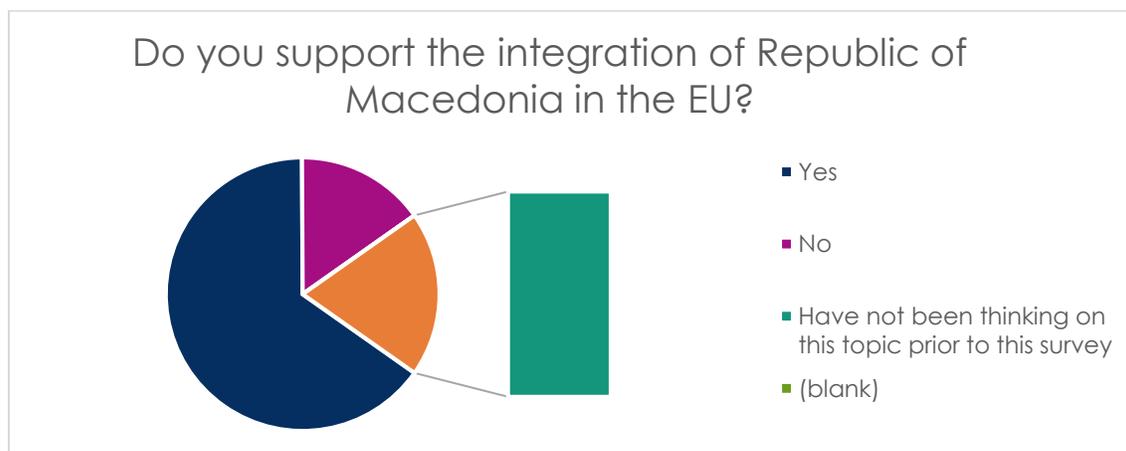
### EU integrations and space for improvement of current situations

Key findings:

- In the section that reflects on the views towards the EU, the vast majority 65,1% support the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU, while the narrative that associations have shared regarding the EU integrations, indicates creating better future, in general, but not with any specific characteristic for the EU. Even though the majority of the respondents were able to correctly identify some of the European values mostly abstract ones, when it comes to more concrete values, the similar majority is noted in recognizing non EU values as EU values (such as cheap work force and increasing of the taxes).

In this section of the questionnaire the focus was put on the perception of young people on the areas that would gain the most improvement if the Republic of Macedonia becomes a full member country of the European Union.

As visible from the chart below, not only the majority of the respondents have positive attitude towards the EU but they also foresee, or at least hope for significant changes and improvement in almost all of the mentioned areas of interest.

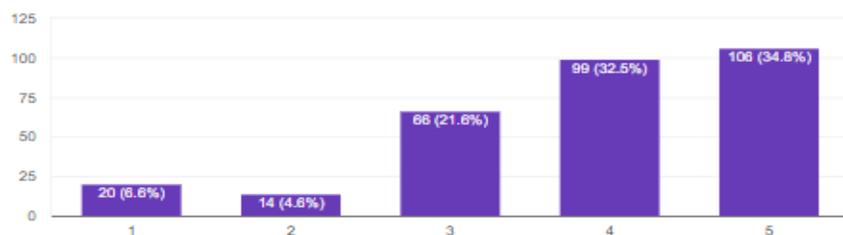




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### Cultural life

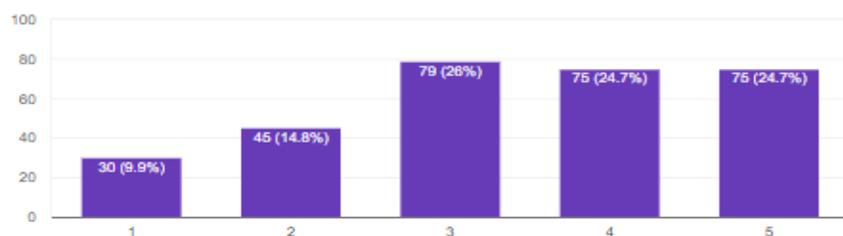
305 responses



Even though the majority of the respondents said that they are fairly satisfied with the cultural and entertaining opportunities that are available to them, the chart above indicates that youngsters are following youth trends in the EU and have general idea what their peers are up to these days, therefore they see potential for significant improvement in this area.

### Understanding among different ethnic communities

304 responses



The health and social care services in rural

areas in Republic of Macedonia are a challenge on their own for decades, now. Due to the lower number of residents in those areas, there are fewer than needed institutions, hospitals, medical staff etc. The infrastructure in the geographical area has also played its role in the building of the issue throughout the years.

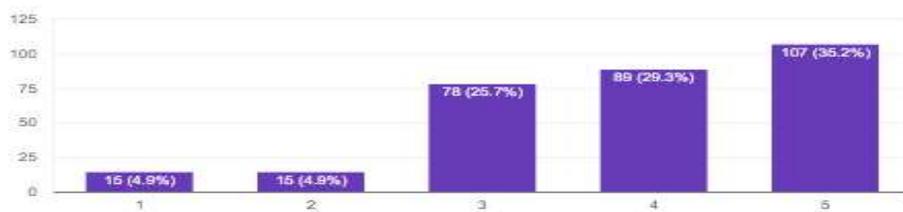
Despite the general familiarity of youngsters from the region with the trends that EU youth is following, from the responses given from the CSOs there seems to be discrepancy regarding this question. Namely, the CSOs are not as much involved in following and pursuing the European practices their European colleagues have established and only insignificant number of CSOs declared that they have established collaboration with EU CSOs acting in rural areas.



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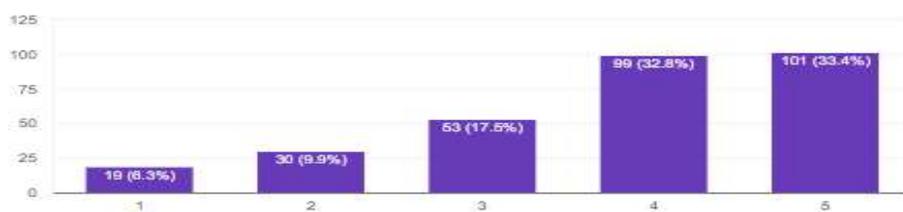
### Health and social protection

304 responses



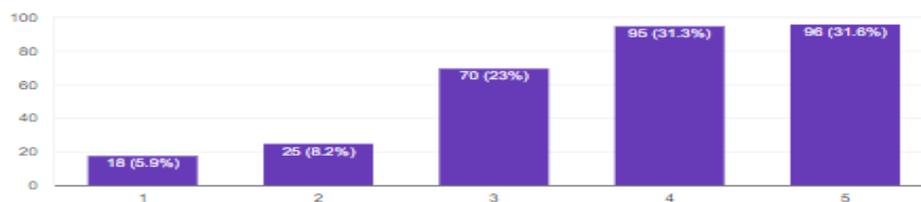
### Opportunities for independent living

302 responses



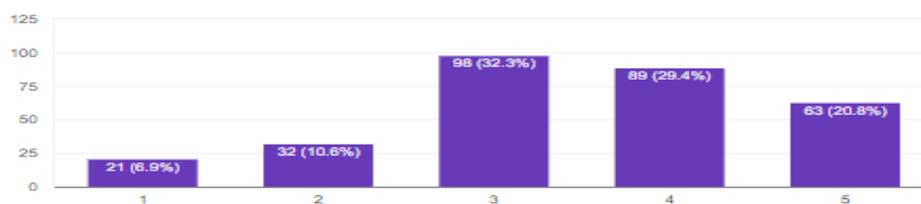
### Human rights

304 responses



### Minority rights

303 responses





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## **Recommendations**

All in all, the main role of this analysis was to present the difficulties that the high school students and the CSOs from the rural areas are facing and in that manner to inspire us in offering potential solutions.

Firstly, in order to improve the mobility that is one of the biggest issues as presented above, it is crucial for the infrastructure and public transportation to advance according to the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. This means that youth from those regions should be enabled to observe mobility as normal part of their lives, as a basic necessity and not a luxury.

Additionally, modernization of the agriculture can conceivably open much needed new working places. The level of youth unemployment in these areas can also be decreased by offering workshops on soft skills that the educational system for the moment is failing to provide. This directly correlates with the many times noted need for creating more opportunities for youngsters from rural areas and making rural areas more attractive for young people.

Aside from this, targeting the thirst for knowledge on the topic of the values, the possibilities and the meaning of the EU by giving them not only theoretical but practical knowledge too is probably the key element that can further integrate both the high school students and the CSOs into the great European family.

In conclusion, with regards to the opinion of the respondents of the research, the main difficulties in the region are, apart from infrastructural development, youth participation in policy and decision making processes, better information of the EU integration processes and EU in general, as well as employability of youth in the region which causes a large amount of brain drain.

Based on the results, the research team, recommends development and implementation of the following workshops targeting youth from the region:

- Youth activism
- Methods for participation in policy and decision making processes
- Leadership and other soft skills and employability skills
- EU, EU Institutions and Macedonia's integration in the EU