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COUNTRY PAPER
ON MICRO-LEVEL DRIVERS

Drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism
in the light of individual dynamics in MENA and the Balkans

NORTH MACEDONIA

Lidija Georgieva, Vlado Kambovski, Elena Mujoska Trpevska, Naum Trajanoski

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Acronyms

CoE	Council of Europe
EUFES	European UnionFES Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
MASAMLSP	Macedonian Academy of Arts and ScienceMinistry of Labour and Social Policy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLA	National Liberation Army
SSO	State Statistical Office
PVE	Prevention of violent extremism
VE	Violent extremism
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Introduction

This analysis is based on the research of the perceptions of young people in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) regarding violent extremism and radicalisation at a micro level. The purpose of the analysis is to show how young people perceive violent extremism based on seven already established drivers: religion, transnational dynamics, territorial inequalities, free time and cultural opportunities, politics, digitalization and economic factors. Young people are one of the most important groups in any society and vital part of the modern-day democracies. Although there is no universally accepted definition of the term youth, we proceed with the North Macedonia's legal definition of youth as a category of population aged 15-29 years.[1]

Recognising the importance and role of youth in future democratic development, this analysis is a quantitative continuation of the qualitative studies produced by the Macedonian CONNEKT project team in the past years. All those studies postulate that the contemporary challenges of violent extremism and radicalisation are complex, multifaceted and multi-layered, hence only such an interdisciplinary and mixed methods research might be able to provide certain answers for the micro-level developments and future guidelines. Young people's responses to questions about their perceptions of violence in the past and present can be used to assess their attitudes toward violence and whether they recognize prevention policies, as well as how they are developed and implemented.

Today, we are confronted with violence stemming from the structures of non-democratic societies and their institutions, as well as other forms of direct, cultural and structural violence (Freedom House, 2023; Global Peace Index, 2020).[2] However, we should avoid the pitfalls of failed policies that rely on one-sided responses and exclusive use of force for the solution. As various forms of violence and their consequences multiply and the societies are often not resistant or prepared to cope with the changes, the need for preventive, hybrid peace policies becomes imperative.[3]

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY, CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

RNM is one of the Yugoslav successor states that gained independence in 1991 by avoiding the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. However, the state faced internal challenges related to the democratic transition and economic transformation, while the identity and the identity markers of its dominant ethnic group,

[1] According to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies 2020 (no. 08-327/1h, 14 January 2020), the term 'youth' is defined as individuals within the age range of 15 to 29 years (Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2020)

[2] Global freedom status ranged the country 68 out of 100, as a "partly free country" based on criteria of political rights and civil liberties. As of 2023, Macedonia has been ranked 68 out of 100 countries, classifying it as a 'partly free' country in terms of political rights and civil liberties, according to Freedom House's Freedom in the World report (Freedom House, 2023).

[3] The concept of hybrid peace, as coined by Oliver Richmond (2020), refers to 'hybrid forms of peace' that transcend the boundaries of traditional liberal peace frameworks. These forms of peace emerge in various global contexts, defying strict categorisation as either liberal or strictly local. Hybrid peace is shaped through political contestation involving a diverse set of actors, their preferences, and security interests. Consequently, the development of hybrid peace policies is a response to local needs and international support for addressing specific issues, including Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).

Macedonian, were challenged by the state neighbours in the course of the first post-Yugoslav decades. There were several critical moments for the country that caused divisions and political instability.In 2001, shortly after the end of the Kosovo War, an ethnic Albanian rebel group attacked the state security forces and provoked armed clashes in Macedonia. The conflict was settled with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA).[4] The threat of escalation of the military actions in the state provoked a more expeditious reaction from NATO and the EU, both in terms of support of the conflict management process andthe post-conflict peace-building activities. The constitutional amendments of the OFA hence introduced substantial changes in the state that sought to guarantee the human, ethnic and cultural rights of the non majority-communities at the national and local level. With the new territorial organization at the local level (2004), as an OFA provision, the number of municipalities decreased from 123 to 84. The ethnic Macedonians, who by and large saw this political arrangement as a mean of shifting the minority-majority ration in the state, cast a referendum against this solution that turned to be unsuccessful. For some observers, the territorial reorganization was yet another instrument to localize ethnic tensions, while for others, it was a new form of insecurity in the state. We dwell upon this issue in more detail in the section on territorial inequalities.[5]

The domestic political scene was also overwhelmed by the divisions stemming from the name dispute with Greece and the efforts to break a deal – which lasted for almost 30 years. Once the name issue was solved, other obstacles on the state's EU integration agenda appeared: firstly, manifested as France's objections to the accession methodology and afterwards, as Bulgarian objections to the state's interpretations of history and memory. The dispute was surpassed in mid-2022, however, the bitter feelings of unjust support for Bulgarian positions by the EU remained.

The oppositional parties in the Macedonian political block reject any further acceptance of Bulgarian provisions as they allegedly deny Macedonian identity, history and language, such as the including of the Bulgarian minority in the constitution of North Macedonia. This standpoint has the mobilizing power against the two most recent bilateral agreements which the state signed with Bulgaria (2017) and Greece (2018).

In the previous country reports, we argued that albeit the novel approaches to PCVE in the state, violent extremism and radicalisation remain a serious challenge in the state. Moreover, we argued that the issues related to violent extremism and radicalisation, as well as the perception of them among the citizens of North Macedonia, is both dependent on the national context – such as the state's history, multiethnicity, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, problematic transition and economic underdevelopment – and some beyond national aspects.

Therefore, the WP6 objective is to analyse individual root-causes of violent extremism considering the seven drivers identified in the project (religion, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, digital socialization, socio-political issues (claims and grievances), and education, culture, and

[4] Georgieva, Trajanovski, Wolfe, (2022).

[5] See, as well, Power Sharing and the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement; FES, 2008. Link: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/skopje/06357.pdf.

leisure opportunities). WP6 aims to detect which are the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism at the individual level, not only from the point of view of personal values and beliefs but also considering processes of primary and secondary socialization that have an influence on individuals. Such processes can present very diverse patterns due to the combination of factors, in some cases common to different communities but in others caused by specific situations of a specific social environment. The individual factor is a fundamental aspect to understand how certain processes of violent extremism are driven and it can be very useful to verify, discard, or refine patterns, contexts and drivers identified at the macro and meso levels.

This analysis tries to answer several crucial questions about the perceptions of young people in RNM regarding radicalization and violent extremism. The report on the micro-level drivers of extremism in RNM wraps up previous MASA research on national approaches to extremism, the national framework for countering violent extremism (CVE) at the macro-level, as well as the three case studies on the drivers of extremism violent extremism (VE) and related socialization contexts.

The research findings help us fill certain gaps in knowledge about the need for an all-inclusive approach to coping, primarily at the local/individual level. The focus on young people is justified from the aspect of a social group that is constantly exposed to VE factors, but the qualitative findings are not always supported by quantitative analyses. Second, because 27% of the researched sample is the rarely accessible age group of young people between 15-18 years, the findings provide a better understanding of how these drivers are experienced in the late childhood years.

The findings in this report will be comparable to those in three MENA countries (Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt) and four Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Kosovo). The main goal of these studies is to understand the characteristics of the social environment and the role and connection of the drivers of radicalisation of this particular age group.

Methodology

The findings are based on a survey conducted in March and April 2023 with a non-representative national sample of 400 youth between the ages of 15-30 from the country's six regions. 49% of them are women. However, it should be emphasized that this is a non-representative sample for the research and should be emphasized as a limiting factor of the report. Therefore, the results should be treated as indicative and not in a generalized form for young people in Macedonia. Nevertheless, the data are useful in providing guidance for possible PVE interventions and in offering an understanding of how drivers of VE are experienced by some youth across age groups, gender and locations in Macedonia. Another important limitation is that the data collected, by design, do not allow establishing strong correlations between different drivers. Five cross-tabulations are used to explain the results, but correlations are discussed based on qualitative results from previous reports published by CONNEKT.

The methodology used for the implementation of this quantitative research, i.e. opinion survey of young people about their attitudes, were direct face-to-face questionnaire in the respondents' homes via CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) data collection technique. The face-to-face interview is the most commonly used method for collecting data from related target groups of respondents, especially in public opinion polls. The main advantage of this method, especially when it includes working on a representative sample, is that the results are objective and can easily be used to define general conclusions and findings. Face-to-face questionnaires are used when the research topic requires a deeper and more detailed analysis and when the representativeness of the sample is equally important.

Figure 1 Total research sample and gender

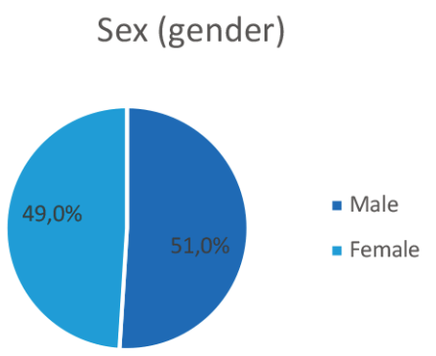


Table 1 Regions and research sample

Region	Vardar	31
	East	32
	Southeast	31
	Southwest	40
	Pelagonia	48
	Polog	56
	Northeast	30
	Skopje	132
Total		400

Source: Compiled by the authors

We conducted a survey across all eight statistical regions (NUTS 3) in RNM (Figure 2). The results obtained from the 2022 census[6] reveal that the population now stands at 1,836,713, which is 185,834 fewer people than the count recorded in the previous 2002 census. Of this population, 50.4% are females, while 49.6% are males (State Statistical Office, 2022). In terms of ethnic composition, the resident population consists of 58.44% ethnic Macedonians, 24.3% ethnic Albanians, 3.86% ethnic Turks, 2.53% Roma, 1.3% Serbs, 0.87% Bosniaks, and 0.47% Vlachs.

Regarding religious affiliation, 46.14% identified as Orthodox Christians, 32.17% as Muslims, 0.37% as Catholics, and there is a noteworthy presence of other religious communities not previously recorded in censuses. These new groups include Evangelical Protestant Christians, agnostics, Buddhists, and others. It is necessary, to perceive the conditions and changes that occurred in the period between the two censuses, that is, from 2002 to 2021. It is known that the number of populations between the two censuses decreased by 185,834 inhabitants. At the same time, it is known that the population has decreased in seven of the eight regions that exist in the country, and it is known that in 66 municipalities the population has decreased, and only in 14 it has increased. These data indicate that the number of the population by ethnicity should be expected to decrease, both at the state level and by regions and municipalities. [7] When it comes to young people, the comparison of the census data in 2022 and 2002 warns that from 480 828 the number of young people for several reasons, but most often due to emigration, decreased to 326 733, i.e., by 32 percent.[8]

Figure 2 Ethnic composition

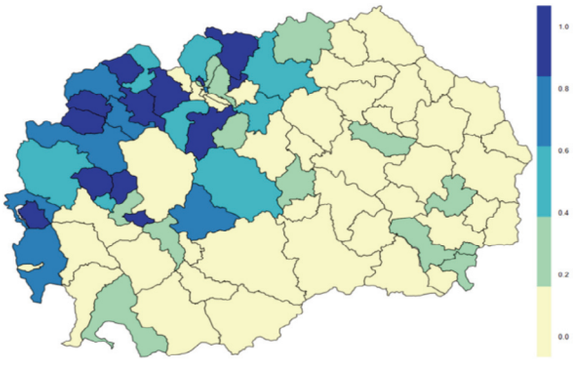


Figure 3 Statistical regions

Source: State Statistical Office, Regions in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2022

The **Vardar region** comprises the central part of the RNM and spreads along the Vardar River and Ovchepole Basin. This region had the smallest number of citizens, 7.6% of the total population, in the 2021 census. It covers 16.2% of the area of the RNM and at the same time is the most sparsely populated region with only 34.3 citizens per km2. Total population in the region is 138,722 inhabitants, and the

[6] State Statistical Office, 2022. Link: https://popis2021.stat.gov.mk/???????/????????-??????????-?????????-??-?????????-???????-??????????-????????-1-836-713-??????/.

[7] Source: Gerasimovski Doncho; Census - what is the declaration by ethnicity, New Macedonia, 23.05.2022. Link: https://novamakedonija.com.mk/mislenja/kolumni/popis-kakvo-e-izjasnuvanjeto-po-etnichka-pripadnost/

[8] https://www.radiomof.mk/infografik-kade-ischeznaa-mladite-na-popisot/.

unemployment rate in 2021 was 12.8% (State Statistical Office, 2021). The East Region is mainly mountainous and comprises the extreme east of the Republic of North Macedonia. It spreads along the Bregalnica River, over the basins of Shtip, Maleshevo and Pijanec and the field of Kochani. The region comprises 14.2% of the total area of the Republic of North Macedonia, with 8.3% of the total population, and 42.5 citizens per km2. Total population is 150,234 inhabitants, with an unemployment rate of 6.4%.[9]

The **Southwest region** comprises the extreme southwest part of the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the 2020 population estimates, 9.7% of the total population in the country lived in this region. It accounts for 13.4% of the total area of the country and has a population density of 53.1 citizens per km2. Tourism has great importance for the development of this region, mostly owing to the natural characteristics of Ohrid Lake and the cultural and historical significance of the Ohrid area, protected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). No less important for the development of tourism is the Galichica National Park, as well as the mineral and hot water springs near Debar. The total population of the region is 177,398 and the unemployment rate is 21.2% (State Statistical Office, 2020).

The **Southeast region** is located in the extreme southeast part of the country and comprises the Strumica-Radovish and Gevgelija-Valandovo basins, the Strumica River valley and the lower course of the Vardar River. According to the 2021 census, 8.1% of the total population in the RNM lived in this region. The region covers 10.9% of the total land area of the country and has a population density of 54.2 people per km2. Another specific feature of the region is that in 2021, compared to the other regions, it had the highest employment rate at 62.3%. Total population rate in 2021 in the region was 148,387 inhabitants. Unemployment was 3.8% and 100 citizens from that region emigrated abroad (State Statistical Office, 2020).

The **Pelagonia regio**n is located in the south of the RNM and comprises the Pelagonia Basin and the Prespa Lake Basin. This region is the largest, covering 18.9% of the total land area of the country, but also one of the most sparsely populated, having a population density of 44.6 people per km2. 11.5% of the total population of the RNM lived in this region. Total number of inhabitants in this region is 210,431 and unemployment is at 12.2% (State Statistical Office, 2020).

The **Polog region** comprises the northwest part of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Polog Basin and the valley of the Radika River. It covers 9.7% of the country's total land area. With 104.1 people per km2, Polog is one of the most densely populated regions, and 13.7% of the total population lived in this region according to the 2021 census. This region is characterised by a low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, which in 2020 was 152,216 denars (2,491 euro). The region participated with 7.5% of total GDP. Total number of inhabitants in this region is 251,552 and unemployment rate is at 22.8% (State Statistical Office, 2020).

[9] Regions of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023. Link: https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2023/Regionite%20vo%20RM%202023.pdf

The **Northeast region** comprises the extreme northeast part of the RNM and spreads along the Pchinja and Kriva Reka Rivers. It is one of the smallest regions, covering only 9.3% of the country's total land area and with population density of 66.2 people per km2. 8.3% of the total population (State Statistical Office, 2021 Census) of the RNM lived in this region. In 2020 the region had a share of only 4.8 % of total GDP, the smallest compared to the other regions. The employment rate in 2021 was 33.7%, the lowest compared to the other regions. Total number of inhabitants in this region is 152,982 and unemployment is at 36.3% (State Statistical Office, 2020).

The **Pelagonia region** is located in the southern part of the RNM and comprises the Pelagonia Basin and the Prespa Lake Basin. This region is the largest, covering 18.9% of the country's total land area, but it is also one of the most sparsely populated, with a population density of 44.6 people per square kilometre. Approximately 11.5% of the total population of RNM lived in this region. The total number of inhabitants in this region is 210,431, and the unemployment rate is 12.2% (State Statistical Office, 2020).

The **Skopje region** comprises the northernmost part of the RNM and extends across the Skopje Basin. This region is the smallest and covers only 7.3% of the total land area of the country. With 334.8 people per km2 and 33.0% of the country's total population (State Statistical Office, 2021 census), Skopje is the most populous region in Macedonia. This region is the main hub of the country and has the most developed transport infrastructure. Most of the country's industrial, trade and service capacities are concentrated in this region. Skopje, the capital of the Republic of North Macedonia, is located here, and it is the economic, administrative, cultural and academic centre of the country. As a result, in terms of internal migration, this region represents the largest immigration area. In 2020, the Skopje region had the highest GDP per capita (448,734 denars/7,344 Euros) compared to the other regions, and it provided 43.4 % of total GDP of RNM. In relation to the number of households in the region, the share of households that had access to Internet in 2021 was highest in the Polog region (96%). The largest share of persons aged 15-74 who used Internet in 2021 was registered in the Skopje region (92%). The total number of inhabitants in this region is 607,007. Unemployment is 13.9 % and emigration is 425 persons (State Statistical Office, 2022).

The analysis shows that citizens of RNM, according to the migration profile, emigrate abroad and have internal migrations, which largely coincide and are primarily the result of the level of socioeconomic development, at the level of the country and regionally. Emigration abroad is also greatly influenced by tradition, the established ones migration networks and migration policies of receiving countries. On the other hand, reasons for immigration from abroad are employment, schooling/specialization and family. In the area of illegal migration, because of its geographical position RNM is part of the Western Balkan corridor, that is, it is a country of transit, which is characterized by mixed migration movements, including refugees.[10]

The number of citizens who left to live abroad (flow data) was around 24,000 and 26,700 in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Foreign sources report that the total number of citizens staying abroad (stock data) rose from about 527,000 in 2010 to almost 700,000 (or almost a third of the country's resident population) in 2020. In

[10] International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2022. Migration in North Macedonia: A Country Profile 2021. IOM, Geneva. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/MP-North-Macedonia.pdf

World Migration Report 2020, RNM ranked among the top 20 countries in the world with the highest emigration rates.[11]

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Before commencing the research, the MASA team presented the ethical aspects envisaged by the research to the MASA Ethics Board for approval of the activities. Previously, the Ministry of Education granted consent for the implementation of all the activities outlined in the project. In determining the research sample, we did not follow the principle of "affected" and "unaffected communities" with the risk of VE. Instead, we employed the standard regional approach, which we considered most appropriate for providing regional data relevant to the analysis, including young people from all regions.

The following activities were undertaken as part of the research:

1. The questionnaire was reviewed, and, in some parts, adapted and translated into national languages (Macedonian and Albanian).
2. A representative design of a national sample was established in accordance with the eight regions of the country, as presented in Figure 1 and Table 1.
3. The questionnaire was programmed in CAPI software, and data collection and fieldwork supervision were implemented to ensure a high response rate.

The primary target group of the survey was young people aged 15 to 30 years. The survey was conducted on a sample of 400 respondents (refer to Figure 2 for details).

Figure 4 Age group

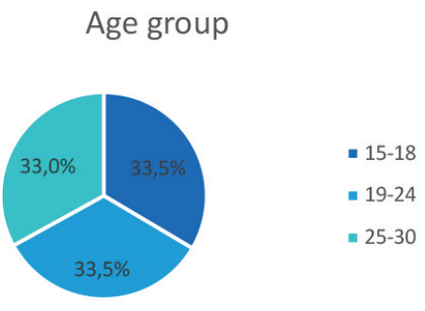
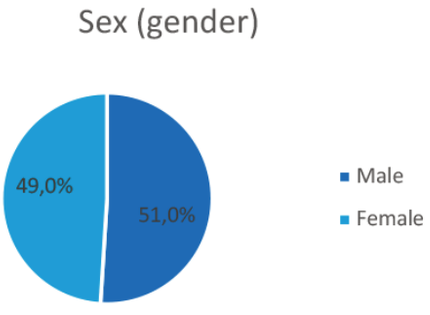


Figure 5 Gender



Source: Compiled by the authors

The study involved 400 young people, with 49% of them being women and 51% being men. One third (33%) of the survey population falls within the age group 25-30, while 34% of the survey population falls into one of two age groups: 15-18 or 19-24.

The data for the study was collected in both the Macedonian and Albanian languages during the period from 30 March to 12 April 2023, in eight different regions (State Statistical Office, 2022).[12]

[11] Ibid p.19

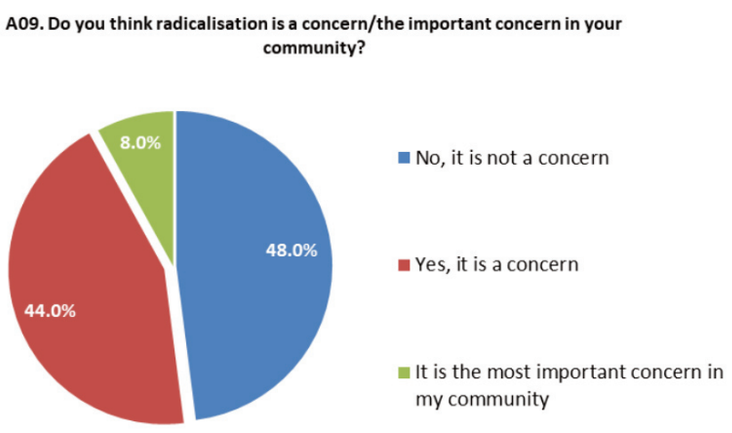
[12] The planning regions of the Republic of North Macedonia were adopted by the Assembly of Macedonia on 29 September 2009. Officially, Macedonia is divided into eight planning regions, which serve statistical, economic and administrative purposes. In addition to the regions, the first-level administrative division of Macedonia is the municipalities (State Statistical Office, 2022).

Research results

ANALYSING THE DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AT THE MICRO LEVEL

The results from the survey show that for 48% of young people, radicalisation is not a concern in the community, while 44% stated that it is a concern. Only 8% of them think that radicalisation is the most important concern in the community (see Figure 6). Observed by demographic data, the youngest ones (15-18) are less likely to consider radicalisation to be the most important concern in their community (4%), compared to other age groups (10%).

Figure 6 Radicalisation as a concern in RNM



Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 2 Youth perception of PVE Factors (Rank)

PVE Factors	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Rank	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Politics	36%	32%	27%	19%	9%	18%	7%	6%	3%	4%	5%	6%	12%	14%
Economics	26%	27%	22%	26%	24%	15%	12%	13%	7%	10%	7%	5%	2%	4%
Religion	21%	18%	17%	15%	19%	21%	14%	14%	10%	11%	8%	10%	11%	12%
Territorial inequalities	3%	6%	8%	11%	20%	11%	18%	23%	21%	21%	21%	16%	9%	12%
Transnational dynamics	3%	6%	7%	8%	12%	13%	17%	15%	25%	22%	18%	20%	19%	16%

Transnational dynamics													
3%	6%	7%	8%	12%	13%	17%	15%	25%	22%	18%	20%	19%	16%
Culture and leisure													
7%	8%	16%	12%	9%	10%	19%	16%	14%	14%	17%	22%	18%	18%
Digital space													
8%	7%	14%	15%	13%	16%	13%	15%	16%	15%	18%	15%	18%	18%

Source: Compiled by the authors

RELIGION

In a period of profound changes on the international scene but also on the local community level, caused by structural and organised political violence, the question of the role of religion cannot be marginalised or ignored (Pastur and Georgieva, 2023). Even the characteristics of democratic or secular societies do not erase questions about their relationship to religion. However, religion is neither the only nor the biggest cause of conflicts; nor can complete peace solutions be expected from religious actors. Especially regarding youth, current identity politics related to religion and secularity undermine trust in public institutions as well as in the media, as these are perceived as biased and offensive, as comes to the fore particularly about alleged 'religious' clothing (Pastur and Georgieva, 2023). The issue is not so much a lack of understanding – even though there is a need for religious or "convictional literacy" (Pastur and Georgieva, 2023) as a dissociation from politics based on traditional stances that have lost their original meaning (such as the religious–secular divide). The situation further complicates when the youth enter the equation, as most politics and policies related to religion and secularity are not tailored for this age group. Drawing upon these findings, in this study, we tend to perceive the driver related to religion as wide as possible, encompassing its full social, political and cultural complexity.

In Macedonia, 33 different religious teachings are registered. Five churches and religious communities are listed in the Constitution (art.17), as religions that have a great traditional and historical connection with Macedonia. In addition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, those are the Islamic religious community, the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Jewish community and the Evangelical-Methodist Church. The remaining 28 religious teachings, recorded in the register, are primarily Christian-Protestant churches. There are also those that are traditional religions from the East. The Mormons, the fastest growing religion in the world, have been operating in RNM for five years as well, calling itself "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints".

The state institutionalized the inter-religious relations and dialogue with the establishment of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups. The Commission is the main institutional authority whose major task is to help resolve issues that will arise between religious communities and religious groups and state authorities.

Data from the last population census (2022) show that according to their religious affiliation, 46.14% declared themselves as Orthodox, 32.17% as Muslims (Islam), 0.37% as Catholics, as well as several

other religious communities that were not present in the previous censuses, such as: Evangelical Protestant Christians, Agnostics, Buddhists, and others. When compared to ethnic affiliation 58.44% percent of the population declared themselves as Macedonians, 24.30% percent as Albanians, 3.86% as Turks, 2.53% as Roma, 0.47% as Vlachs, 1.30% as Serbs, 0.87% as Bosniaks, and others. The majority of Orthodox Christians live in the central and southeastern regions. Most Muslims live in the northern and western parts of the country.

There is a correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation in Macedonia: the majority of Orthodox Christians are ethnic Macedonian, and most Muslims are ethnic Albanian. Most Roma and almost all ethnic Turks and ethnic Bosniaks are Muslim, and most ethnic Serbs and Vlachs are Orthodox Christian.[13] There is also a correlation between religious and political affiliation, as political parties are largely divided along ethnic lines.

The data from 2019 public survey show that eight out of ten citizens in the survey are religious (81.6%), among them mostly Albanians (98.4%), followed by other ethnic groups (78.6%), and Macedonians (76.5%). For some citizens, religious tolerance remains the same as in the past years (42.1%), while some say it is greater (31.9%). Women believe that religious tolerance has improved (35.2%), and men (28.5%). The majority of those surveyed have confidence in their religious community (66.3%), respondents from the Orthodox faith have confidence (62.8%), from the Islamic faith (79.1%) and from the Catholic faith (100%).[14]

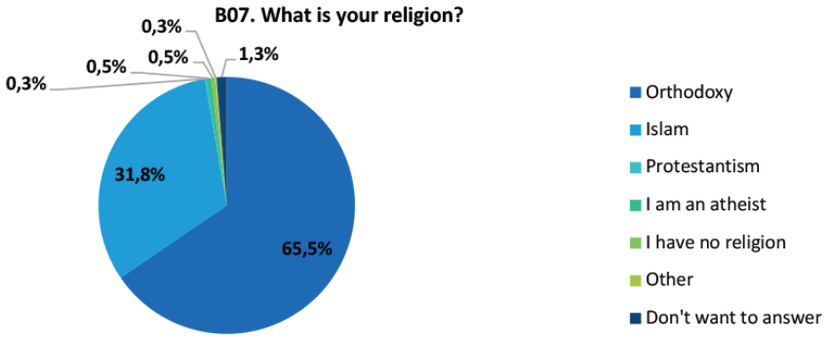
The question of how religion affects young people in RNM is very relevant but emerged recently as a research topic. It primarily resulted from interfaith relations in the country and the respect for religious freedoms. The position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church-Ohrid Archdiocese (MOC-OA) as non-recognised but with highly developed religious practices and influence was also relevant for Orthodox believers. The issue is considered a crucial component of the Macedonian ethnic identity that is on the top of the national but also local agenda. Although there was a presumption that youth in general are not interested in religion and religious practices, public opinion surveys show the opposite. Data from a public survey conducted in 2019 reveals that eight out of 10 citizens in RNM identify as religious (81.6%), with a higher percentage among Albanians (98.4%) compared to Macedonians (76.5%) (Institute for Political Research, 2019).

In our survey data shows that the majority of surveyed young people (66%) identify themselves as Orthodox Christians while approximately (32%), or one-third identify as Muslims (Figure 7). These figures coincide with the percentage of representation of the two largest communities in Macedonia.

[13] https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/north-macedonia/

[14] The survey on the topic "Respect for religious freedoms and rights" was conducted by the Institute for Political Research from Skopje (IPIS) in the period from May 18 to 21, on 1,108 adult respondents nationwide, using a random sample, stratified to the representativeness of the population was observed. Public interview; Focus; 16.06.2019. Link: https://fokus.mk/kolku-graganite-vo-makedonija-se-religiozni/.

Figure 7 Statements about religiosity

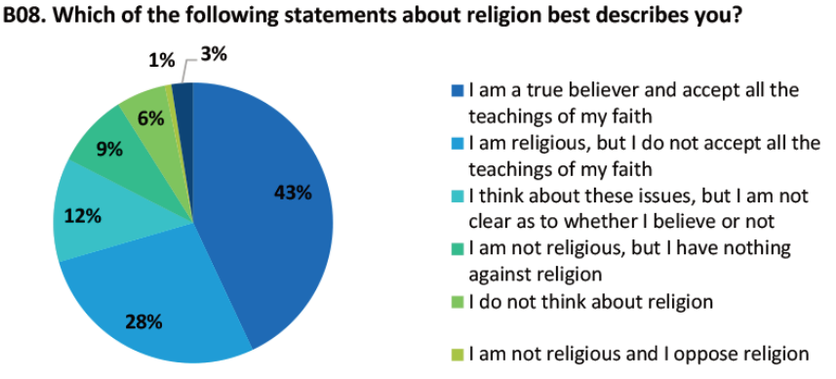


Source: Compiled by the authors

An important point to note is the strong correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation in Macedonia: the majority of Orthodox Christians are of ethnic Macedonian descent, while most Muslims belong to the ethnic Albanian community. Additionally, the majority of Roma and virtually all ethnic Turks and Bosniaks identify as Muslims, whereas most ethnic Serbs and Vlachs are followers of the Orthodox Christian faith. Furthermore, there is a connection between religious and political affiliations, with political parties often aligning with ethnic divisions (Mirchevska et al., 2022).

Considering these intricate identity and cultural relations, as well as the distinctions between communities, it becomes essential to consider the context in which these communities exist and the local factors that may contribute to the incitement of VE. This relates to issues of social exclusion and points of divergence based on ethnic, religious and cultural factors, which can serve as catalysts for violence and extremism. Notably, various forms of ethnopolitical and religious mobilisation are particularly prominent at the local level during local and parliamentary election periods, highlighting the influence of political and ethnic dynamics.[15]

Figure 8 Statements how religion describes youth

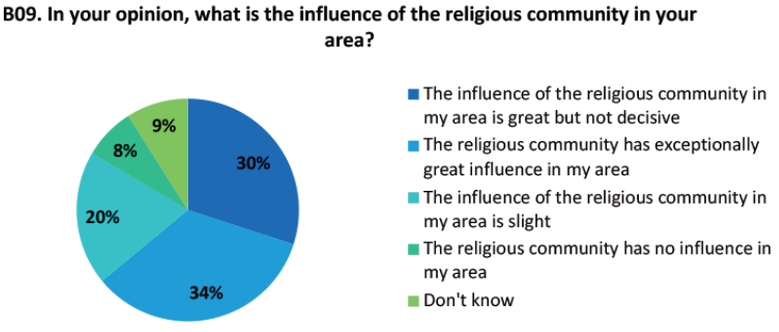


Source: Compiled by the authors

[15] Every sixth person suspected of crimes related to the elections was convicted at a first-instance court, and every third (or 18th of the suspects) served a prison sentence, BIRN research shows. The figures refer to the period from 2008 to 2015; that is, including the last elections held in 2014. During that period, according to the data from the Public Prosecutor's Office, criminal charges were filed against a total of 818 persons. The Public Prosecutor's Office filed charges against 165 participants in electoral crimes, and 131 of them were convicted in the period 2008-2015 (Prizma, 2016).

"I am a true believer and accepting all the teachings of my faith" is the best description for 44% of young people about their religion, on the other hand, 28% say that they are religious, but do not accept all the teachings of their faith (See Figure 8). Observed by demographic data, the youngest group of people (15-28 years old) tend not to think about religion (11%), more than the other age groups (3%). While young people in the age group 25 to 30 years old, stated that are true believers and accept all the teachings of their faith (51%), compared to the youngest age group (34%). Young people from urban areas are notably "less religious", but have nothing against religion (11%), compared to the young people living in the rural areas (5%).

Figure 9 Statements of the influence of religious community



Source: Compiled by the authors

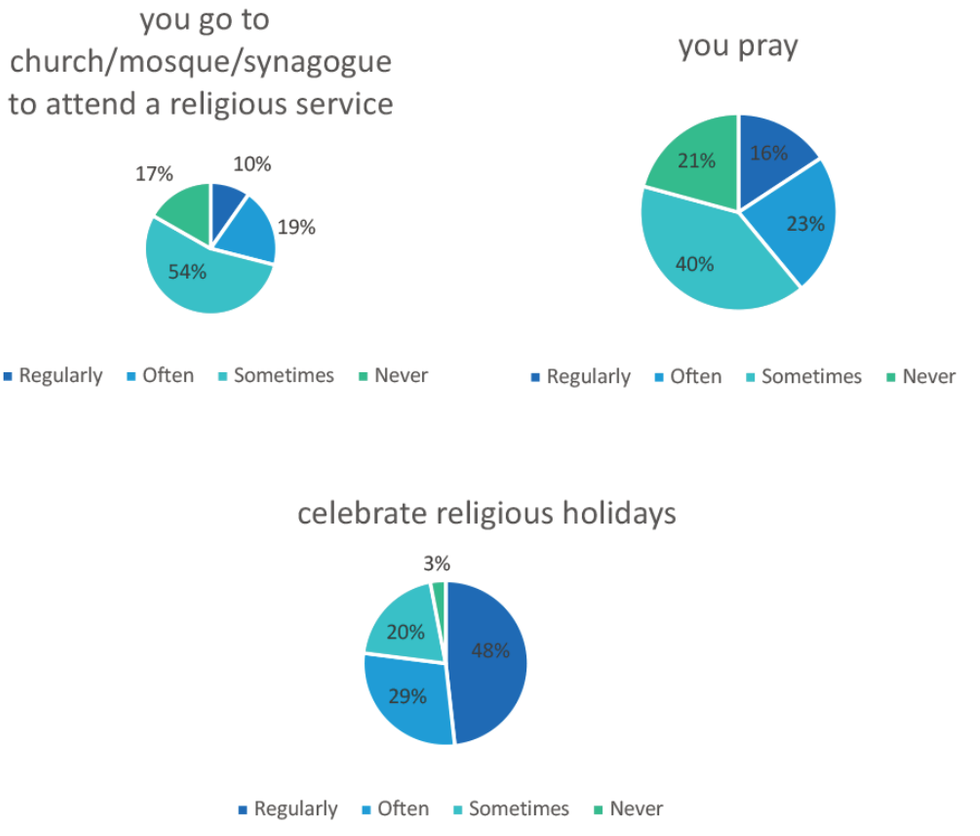
Regarding what is the influence of the religious community in the area of the surveyed young people, 34% of them stated that the religious community has exceptionally great influence, 30% that the influence of the religious community in their area is great but not decisive. Young people who believe that the religious community has no influence are considerably less (8%) (See Figure 9).

Almost half of the respondents (48%) regularly celebrate religious holidays, 16% pray and 10% of them regularly go to church/mosque/synagogue to attend a religious service (See Chart 16). Demographic data shows that more boys regularly attend a religious service, compared to the girls. Young people living in rural areas also more regularly attend a religious service (13%), compared to their peers living in urban areas (7%).

In RNM, citizens are highly religious, and this trend is also followed by young people (Figures 10, 11 and 12). This is confirmed by the fact that only 1.3% of young people did not define themselves in religious terms. Religion, ethnicity and future political affiliations in RNM tend to align, often leading to the formation of ethnic or religious political parties. At a more granular level, one third of respondents believe that religion wields significant influence. This can be attributed to the practice of religious holidays within local communities, with 48% participating regularly. Notably, men exhibit slightly greater participation in these religious activities than women. It should be noted here that in Macedonia, Ramadan Bajram is one of the ten national holidays, in addition to 6 Orthodox, 3 Catholic, 1 Muslim and Albanian and other public holidays of smaller communities. The analysis of the results about if radicalization is of concern splits between 44% and 48%, but 8% considers it is the most important concern. The observance of religious holidays by various

communities in RNM has played a role in increasing awareness of the importance of religion, as has fostering an understanding of the diverse cultures and customs present in the country.

Figure 10, 11 and 12 Statements of the influence of religious community



Source: Compiled by the authors

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

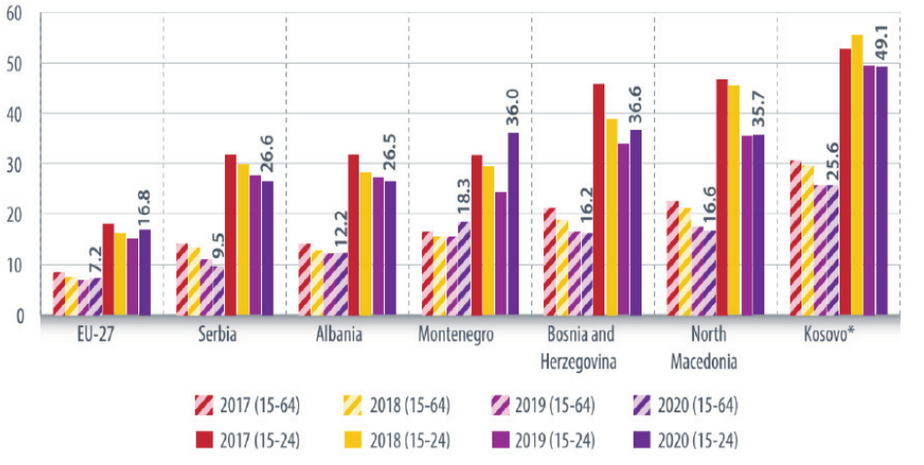
The relationship between the educational and employment status of youth elucidates how economic deprivation fuels relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is not examined as a driver of VE within CONNEKT project. We considered it as general, umbrella concept, while the relation between educational and employment status of the youth clarifies how economic deprivation feeds relative deprivation. Economic deprivation in RNM could contribute to radicalization through perceptions of injustices perceived by individuals or communities and the limits of social mobility.

It is crucial to underscore that while education is often seen as a pathway to social mobility, the education system at almost all levels in RNM does not facilitate social interaction and mobility between ethnic groups. Students are segregated based on their ethnicity, primarily determined by the language of education, whether it be Macedonian, Albanian or another language of non-majority communities. Although they share the same school building, students are placed in separate classes and attend classes during different shifts. This division in education ultimately affects future employment processes.

In accordance with established quotas for fair representation, public administration institutions in RNM are expected to employ an appropriate number, around 25%, of individuals from non-majority communities, following the principle of adequate and fair community representation. This process is administered through a tool known as the "balancer", an online calculator used to determine state employment based on ethnicity (Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 2023). [16]

Unemployment is a long-standing issue in RNM, particularly affecting the youth population (Agency for Employment, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Since the country's independence in 1991, unemployment has become a major point of contention between ethnic communities, leading to political polarisation and straining inter-ethnic relations. Specific grievances revolve around the limited access of non-majority communities, particularly Albanians, to public administration, healthcare, education, and other sectors. While the overall unemployment rate decreased to 35.5% in 2022, youth unemployment remains a significant concern. The highest levels of youth unemployment were recorded in 1996 (69%) and 2003 (65.8%) (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). Kosovo, RNM and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the countries with the highest unemployment rate among WB6 as Figure 12 below shows comparative data.

Figure 13 Comparative data on unemployment



Source: Regional Cooperation Council, 2021

In the interview with Radio Free Europe (RFE), Mitevski, the Executive Director of the Association for Research and Analysis ZMAI, discussed trends in youth unemployment. He stated that "when we compare the number of employed youth in 2022, which stands at 111,000, to the figure from 2009, which was 129,000, we observe a significant decline. Similarly, when we analyse the data on the unemployed or inactive population between the ages of 15 and 29, we can see a reduction of approximately 50,000 young people. In 2017, this number was 82,900, whereas in 2022 it decreased to 37,500. This suggests that the primary reason for the decrease in youth unemployment is emigration" (RFE, 2023).

[16] The "Balanser" is a tool that should provide appropriate representation of the ethnic communities in the public sector. According to the last cenzus of 2021 and balanser methodology 1/3 of the employe in public sector should be of ethnic albanian community (Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 2023).

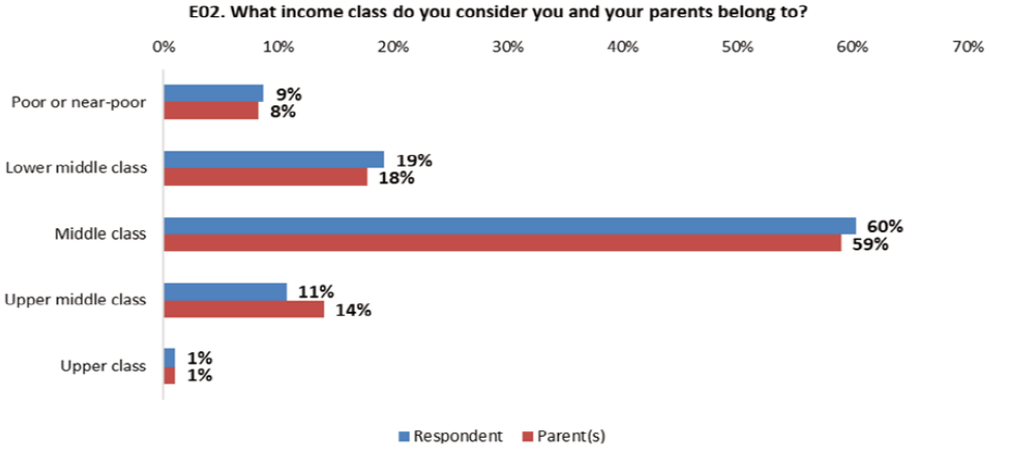
This data underlines the fact that economic hardship is a pressing issue, linked to various factors compelling young people to migrate. These factors include low wages, dissatisfaction with youth policies and support, levels of corruption, and more. In North Macedonia, there are a total of 209,192 young people aged 15-24, of whom 60,172 are capable of working. Out of these, 40,584 are employed, while 19,587 are unemployed. According to a report from the SSO, in the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 was 34.8%, in the second quarter it dropped to 30.8%, and in the third quarter it was 32.6%, which is 3.8% lower than in the same period of the previous year 2021 (State Statistical Office, 2023). According to data of the SSO, the activity rate of young people aged 15-29 is 46.1% and the unemployment rate is 24.5%.

It is crucial to note the correlation between poverty and employment. The most recent data from the SSO on the Laeken poverty indicator for 2020 reveals that the overall poverty rate stands at 21.8%. When analysed by household type, the poverty rate for households consisting of two adults with two dependent children in 2020 was 20.7%. Those familiar with the challenges young people face suggest that despite various social services and programmes aimed at reducing unemployment, providing support for independent housing, and improving student standards, these initiatives lack harmonisation. As a result, it is unclear which service truly benefits young people and to what extent it contributes to reducing poverty (Faktor, 2023).

Dušica Perišić, the President of ZELS (Association of Local Self-Government Units), has stated that insufficient fiscal decentralisation poses a threat to the development of municipalities. ZELS has two key demands: firstly, to allocate 10% of VAT to municipalities, which currently receive only 4.5%; secondly, they advocate at least 50% of personal tax to go to municipalities, whereas presently, municipalities receive just 3%. As an example, it is worth noting that municipalities in the region receive between 50% and 80% of personal tax (Perisic, 2019).

To examine how economic deprivation and unemployment impact young people's perceptions, respondents were asked about their opinion and their parents' opinion on belonging in society (class) according to their income and about job satisfaction. According to the results of the survey, more than half (60%) of the respondents consider themselves to be middle class, and (59%) consider their parents to be middle-income class (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 Responses about income class



Source: Compiled by the authors

To this should be added the reasoning that family income greatly affects the status and satisfaction of young people because a large percentage of them live in a family community, as employees or as unemployed. The crosstabulation of this data reveals the social immobility of young people, with 208 (52%) respondents coming from the same income class as their parents (Table 3).

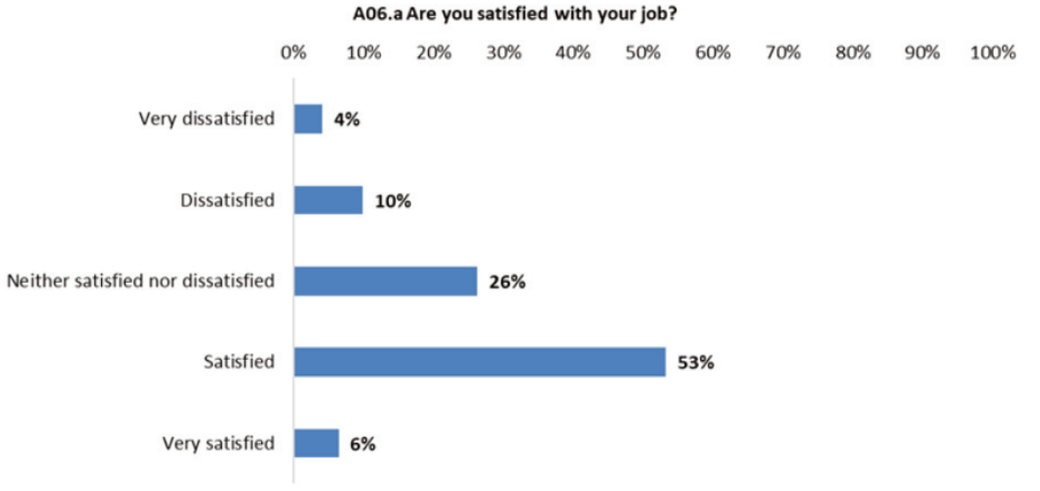
Table 3 Family income affecting the status of young people

Respondent	**Parent(s)**					
	Poor or near-poor	Lower middle class	Middle class	Upper middle class	Upper class	Total
Poor or near-poor	24(6.0%)	3 (0.8%)	7 (1.8%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	35 (8.8%)
Lower middle class	7(1.8%)	52 (13.0%)	17 (4.3%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	77 (19.3%)
Middle class	2(0.5%)	16 (4.0%)	208 (52.0%)	15 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	241 (60.3%)
Upper middle class	0(0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.8%)	38 (9.5%)	2 (0.5%)	43 (10.8%)
Upper class	0(0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)
Total	33(8.3%)	71 (17.8%)	236 (59.0%)	56 (14.0%)	4 (1.0%)	400 (100.0%)

Source: Compiled by the authors

Data on economic deprivation is best captured in job satisfaction levels among young people. The data shows that the majority (60%) of respondents who are employed (171 answered employed and 39 unemployed) are satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work, against 14% who are not satisfied (dissatisfied + very dissatisfied) (see figure 15).

Figure 15 Job satisfaction levels among young people



Source: Compiled by the authors

Young people in the age group 19-24 are more satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work (72%), compared to young people in the age group 25-30 (54%). In the case of most respondents (47%), 57% of their fathers and 53% of their mothers have four-year secondary education (Table 4).

Table 4 Education and job position

Employment Status	Education Status					
	Uncompleted and completed primary school	Three-year secondary school	Four-year secondary school	Baccalaure-ate/ Graduate study (College)	MA or PhD	Total
Employed full-time	4 (1.0%)	8 (2.0%)	83(20.8%)	50 (12.5%)	9 (2.3%)	154 (38.5%)
Employed part-time	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.8%)	4 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (1.8%)
Work independently/ freelance	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	5 (1.3%)	4 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (2.5%)
Unemployed	5 (1.3%)	2 (0.5%)	16 (4.0%)	16 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	39 (9.8%)
Pupil	80 (20.0%)	12 (3.0%)	33 (8.3%)	3 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	128 (32.0%)
Student	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	49 (12.3%)	8 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	59 (4.8%)
Agricultural worker	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)
Company owner	0 (0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0 0.0%	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)
Other	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 0.0%	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1(0.3%)
Total	91 (22.8%)	24 (6.0%)	190 47.5%	86 (21.5%)	9 (2.3%)	400 (100.0%)

Source: Compiled by the authors

The majority (71%) of the surveyed young people are satisfied (very satisfied + satisfied) with their friends (see Figure 16). Still, if we put data in the context of young people leaving the country, which is considered to be a key reason for the drop of youth unemployment to 35% in 2022, job satisfaction is an important variable. Of the total number of respondents that are full-time employed (38.5%), 20.8% completed secondary school and 12.5% university.

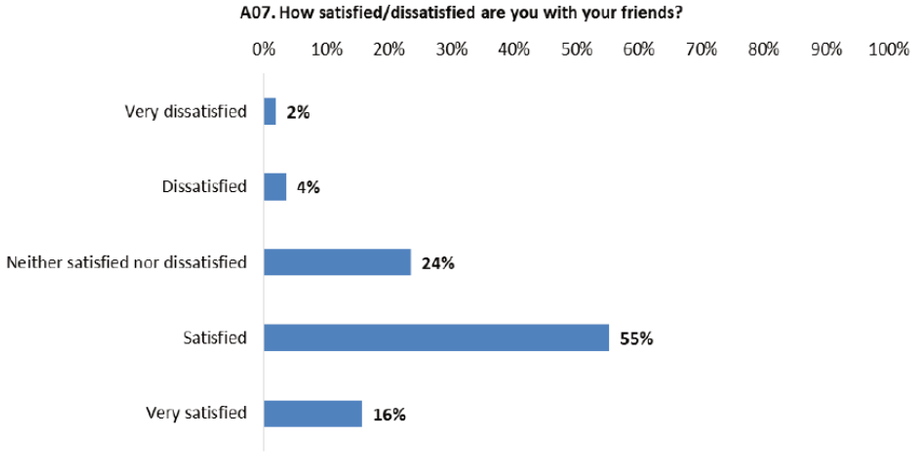
Table 5 Educational level

Education level	Respondent(%)	Father(%)	Mother(%)
Uncompleted and completed primary school	22.8	11.3	14.5
Three-year secondary school	6.0	11.5	10.5
Four-year secondary school	47.5	57.0	53.5

Baccalaureate/Graduate study (College)	21.5	17.5	18.5
MA or PhD	2.3	2.8	3.0
Total	100	100	100

Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 16 Satisfaction with friends



Source: Compiled by the authors

Economic deprivation and unemployment affect the perceptions of young people and are the most common reason for emigration, both from the smaller community to city (rural/urban migration) and abroad (IOM, 2021). Most of the respondents and their parents belong to the same social category – they are perceived as middle class. Here it must be taken into account that average monthly net salary paid per employee, in August 2023, is 36,390 denars (595 Euros) (State Statistical Office, 2023).

That economic deprivation has a significant impact is also captured by the levels of job satisfaction among young people. The data shows that the majority (60%) of respondents who are employed (171 answered employed and 39 unemployed) are satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work, against 14% who are not satisfied (dissatisfied + very dissatisfied). Young people in the age group 19-24 are more satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work (72%), compared to young people in the age group 25-30 (54%). This can be related to the profile and level of education, but also to the length of work experience, which can affect the status of employees. Unemployment and poverty are the key causes for high percentage of youth migration and vulnerability. In addition, perceived lack of perspective and dissatisfaction are making them exposed and vulnerable to different political, nationalistic or radical issues.

TERRITORIAL INEQUALITIES AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

The territorial reorganisation policy in Macedonia, first in 1995[17] and next in 2003,[18] exceeded its goals and objectives as economic sustainability and institutional reforms were overshadowed by ethnic factors in defining local government boundaries (Kreci and Ymeri, 2010). A key argument according to Kreci and Yusufi is that, through the territorial reorganisation, the large ethnic political parties, both Macedonian and Albanian, were given the opportunity for greater power and influence over local authorities. This also enabled a higher level of segregation between ethnic communities. Balancing the political, economic and institutional qualifications for the two interventions of the territorial policy represents challenges in RNM due to the perceptions of the citizens and the demographic profile. With the territorial consolidation process, the second territorial reform policy intervention in 2004, such difference became larger. This is a result of the political bargaining that created these divisions. Political parties representing ethnic Albanian constituencies tended to favour consolidations meant to increase the number of local governments with ethnic Albanian majorities. Similarly, political parties representing ethnic Macedonian constituencies favoured consolidations that increased the number of local governments with Macedonian majorities. The same also applies for proportions of both ethnic groups previously living as local majorities and minorities, as they consolidated into mono-ethnic groups when represented at the national level. The proportion of ethnic Macedonians living as majorities at the local government level to all ethnic Macedonians in RNM is higher than the proportion of ethnic Albanians living as majority groups at the local level to all ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.[19] The major consequence, among others (political, economic and social,) was migration of ethnic Macedonian but also Albanian youth towards western countries. Although political tensions prevented several governments from completing the census since 2002, the last one organised in 2021 confirmed that 20 years ago youth accounted for 24% of the population while in 2021 the percentage dropped to 18%.

SSO data on internal migrations in the period of 2009-2019 shows that the number of immigrated/displaced persons within the country, although with certain oscillations, remains relatively small. Data on resettled persons by individual regions shows that the Skopje region stands out with the largest number and participation (43.2%; n= 15,305 people) during the entire period. In internal migrations, the representation of rural-urban migrations and the share of inter-city migrations remain relatively high. The negative migration balance of rural people areas is 10 times higher than the positive migration balance in urban areas. This confirms that part of those who left did not move from rural areas to cities, but left outside the country (IOM, 2021).

Young people, as well as citizens in general, are exposed daily to some risk of violence. Our interest is focused on violence at the local level, and if a broader definition is accepted, it would include cultural violence, family violence, peer and youth violence, criminal violence, hooliganism, etc. As a post-conflict society since 2001, numerous projects have been implemented in RNM at the local level to restore trust

[17] Law on Territorial Organisation of Local Self-Government, the number of municipalities was set at 84.

[18] With the law of 2003, the number of municipalities decreased from 84 to 80. From the total number of municipalities, according to the new territorial division, 10 municipalities are united and form the City of Skopje, which has a special status.

[19] The total resident population of the Republic of North Macedonia on 5 September 2021 was 1,836,713 Citizens (State Statistical Office, 2021).

between ethnic communities, to build local institutions for prevention, dealing with domestic violence and strengthening the position of women, for efficient decentralisation, etc. Most projects are supported by international institutions, but also with significant participation of the civil sector.

Most young people (74%) feel safe in their neighbourhood, while 58% feel safe in their area/town/city. However, a significant percentage of young people (35%) feel neither safe nor unsafe in their area/town/city, while 23% feel neither safe nor unsafe in their neighbourhood (see Chart 21). Observed by demographic data, boys feel safer in their neighbourhoods (78%), compared to girls (69%). In general, Macedonians feels safer (76%) than Albanians (64%) in their nationhood. However, percentage of Albanians that feel neither safe nor unsafe is higher (32%) than one of Macedonians (Figure 18).

The majority (77%) stated that they can practise their religion freely, and most young people that have experienced a violent reaction from someone because of their religion disagree (disagree+ strongly disagree). Observed by demographic data, younger people in the age group 19-24 years have experienced a less violent reaction from someone because of their religion (81%), compared to young people in the age group 25-30 years (69%). Moreover, young people in rural areas have experienced more violent reaction because of their religion (14%), compared to their peers living in the urban area (7%). In this regard, we can conclude that there is support for the view that religion is not a decisive factor for violence among young people at the local level. Considering that both Christian and Muslim religious holidays are part of the list of public holidays, we have reason to believe that this increases interfaith communication and respect for others.

Figure 17 Feeling of safety/gender

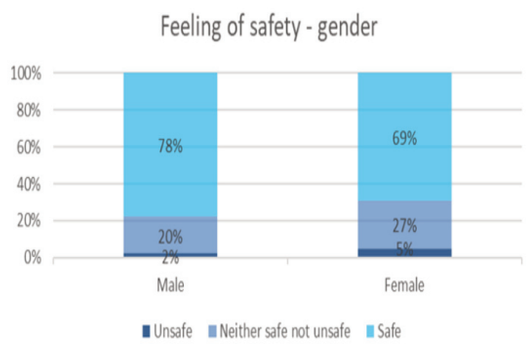
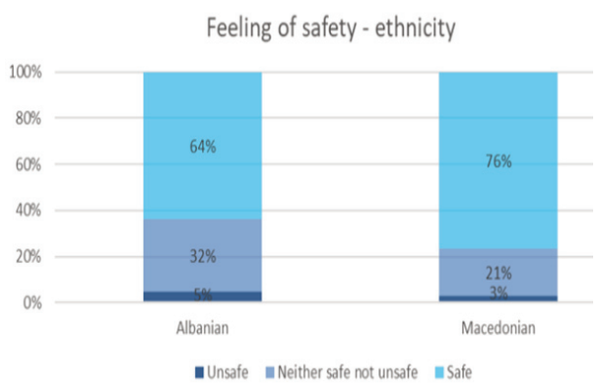


Figure 18 Feeling of safety/ethnicity



Source: Compiled by the authors

The regional comparison shows that respondents feel safer in the Eastern (91%) and Southeastern (87%) regions. Those regions mostly border Greece and has the highest employment rate compared to other regions (62.3%). The perception of safety in the Southwest (78%) and Pelagonian region (75%) is lower but still high. In fact, respondents in the Skopje, North-East and Polog regions expressed more uncertainty than those in the other regions. Apart from the fact that we are talking about regions in which multi-ethnicity is a significant factor, the fact that unemployment (in general) is higher in these regions should be a warning (22.8% in Polog, 36.3% in the Northeast and 13.9% in Skopje).

Out of the examined violent situations, most frequently young people have engaged in violent conflict with other young people in a club or café (10%), in their neighbourhoods (10%), in schools (9%) and during the sports event (8%). Less frequently young people have participated in physically violent conflict with young people of other political or religious convictions (5%), with the police (4%) or with their partner (3%).

Table 6 Location or target of violence

Location or target of violence	No	Yes	Percentage of all yes answers
Neighbourhood	120	13	9.8%
Club or café	120	11	8.4%
Sports hall/football pitch	122	11	8.3%
School/university	117	13	10.0%
With religious/political other	128	4	3.0%
With the police/protests	128	3	2.3%
With a partner	127	2	1.6%

Source: Compiled by the authors

Observed by demographic data, for the most frequent violent situations where young people participated i.e., in a club/café, neighbourhood and school, and football matches, boys are more frequently engaged in violent conflict than girls. Young people in urban areas more frequently participated in violent conflict in the neighbourhood they reside in (13%) compared to their peers living in rural areas (5%). Young people in the 25-30 age group more frequently participated in violent conflict in a club/bar (15%) compared to younger ones, i.e., those aged 19-25 (7%).

DIGITAL SOCIALISATION

According to recent analysis (2021) of the SSO, almost 99% of young people in RNM between the ages of 15 and 24 use Internet every day or almost every day. Only 0.7% of young people of that age use Internet at least once a week, but not every day, and there are no young people who use Internet less than once a week. Those over the age of 25 are in the group that uses Internet daily by 10% less. In fact, 83.7% of households in RNM had access to Internet from home, which is the highest percentage since 2012 (State Statistical Office, 2022).

These numbers show that there are many opportunities to access information through social media, but also that the exposure of young people to misinformation, hate speech, etc., is also serious. During the second half of 2022, a number of primary and secondary schools received bomb threats. According to the police's knowledge so far, the e-mails with the threats arrived from two foreign states, but the sender has not yet been discovered. Senders often use VPN connections when sending bomb threats to hide the IP address of the device accessing the Internet, making it impossible to locate. The false threats lasted almost five months, and in one day the peak was 120 threats to school addresses. The consequences were serious, considering that schools were evacuated and classes were suspended for a long period. The police officials

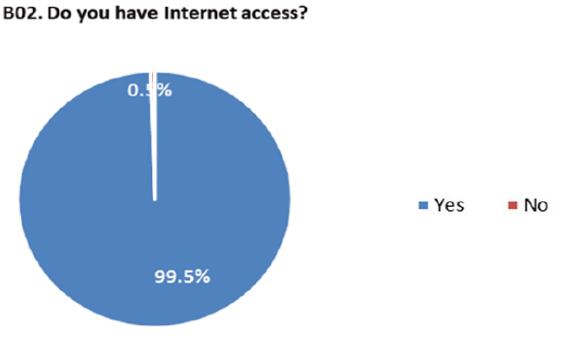
stated that over 950 reports in 720 facilities, mostly schools, were sent in the last six months (Chancharevic, 2023).

According to the numbers, it appears that there was a total of 905 false reports about planted bombs, and it is evident that the main target was schools and instilling fear and panic in children and their parents (Jordanovska and Popovska, 2023). With the change of the protocol in the event of a received threat and transition to online teaching, the public's fear decreased, but it obviously became aware of the seriousness of the danger.

The power of Internet and social media in shaping narratives and the wide reach of Internet content have increased the importance and impact of digital socialisation as a driver of VE.

Most respondents from RNM (99.5%) have access to Internet. About 31% of respondents use Internet more than four hours a day, and 26% use it between 3 and 4 hours a day.

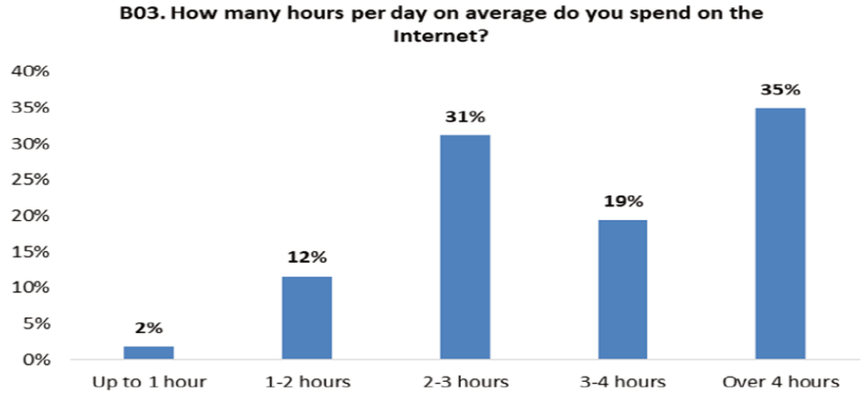
Figure 19 Access to internet



Source: Compiled by the authors

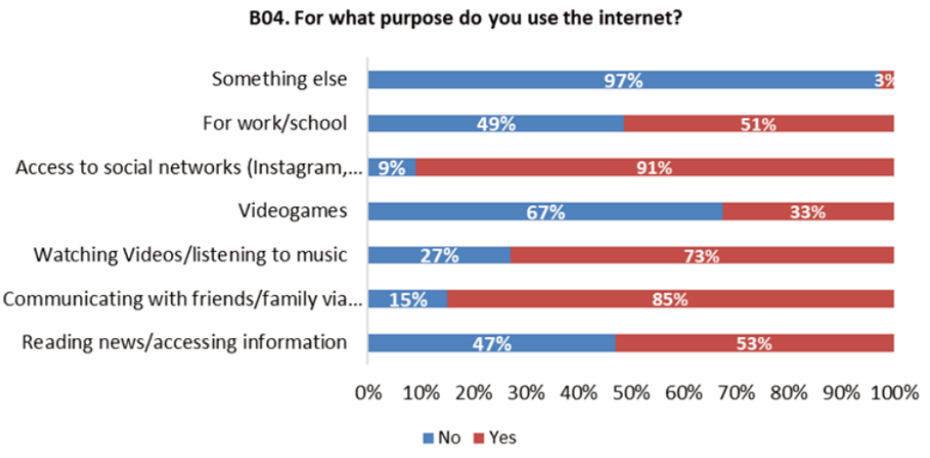
More than a third (35%) of respondents spend more than 4 hours a day on the Internet (see Figure 20). Young people mostly use the Internet for the following purposes: access to social networks (91%), communicating with friends/family via platforms (85%), watching videos/listening to music (73%), reading news/accessing information (53%), for work/school (51%), videogames (33%), and something else (3%) (see Figure 21).

Figure 20 Time spent on internet



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 21 Purpose of use of Internet



Source: Compiled by the authors

Most young people (61%) do not know what a VPN is (see Figure 22). It can be observed that boys are more familiar with what VPN is (46%), compared to girls (32%). Many of the respondents (85%) have never used a VPN, while 15% have used VPN. Demographic data shows that boys have used more VPN (19%), compared to girls (11%).

Of those young people who used a VPN, 55% have used a VPN because they want more independence and privacy, followed by 47% who have used a VPN to protect their location on social media, and 47% do not want anyone to see sites that they visit (see Figure 24). Recent events of anonymous threats in schools that lasted for five months show the risk of misuse of social media as a source to spread fear and disturb daily life and education process.

Figure 22 Knowledge of VPN

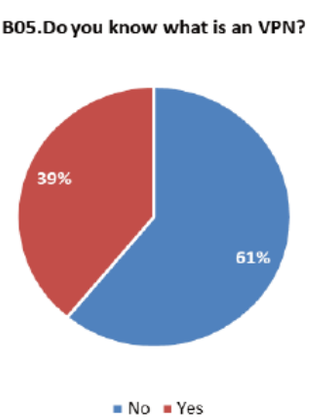
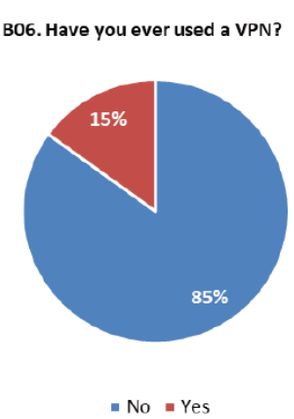
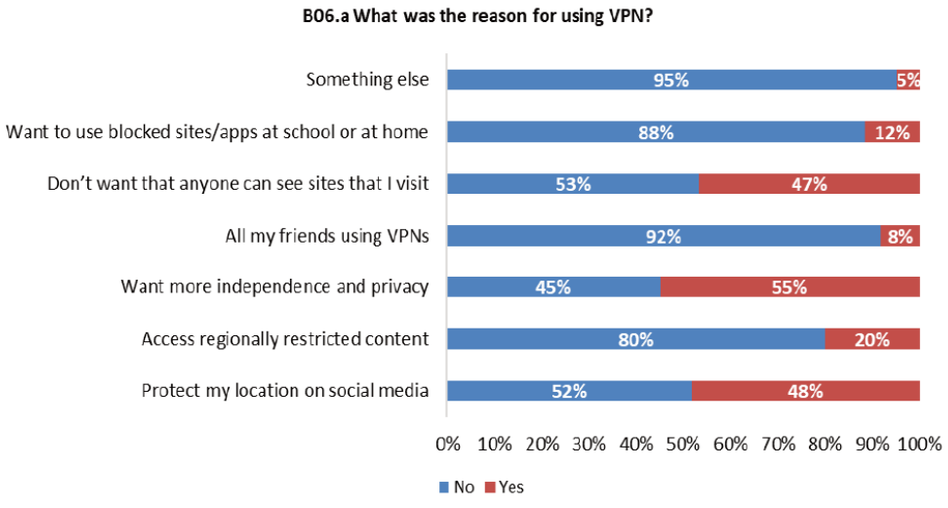


Figure 23 Use of VPN



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 24 Purpose of use of VPN



Source: Compiled by the authors

POLITICAL ISSUES

In terms of political issues, political freedoms, nationalism, exclusivist ideologies and institutional trust are included as variables related to the risk of radicalisation or VE. That is why this survey includes respondents' views on political issues through three groups of indicators: voting in elections, public services, and perceptions of foreign influence and foreign relations. The National Youth Strategy for the period 2023-2027 will aim to define strategic priorities in the areas of youth participation, youth information, youth work, education, culture, health, entrepreneurship, and security. It will determine the basic principles and guidelines for improving the socioeconomic position of young people and an environment that will enable them to realise their rights, needs and interests (Friederich Ebert Stiftung, 2022). Young people are dissatisfied with education, security and employment. In these three sectors, they have much higher expectations for the conditions and benefits that the state should provide them. This was the conclusion of the discussions conducted with high school students, students and people from youth organisations, for the preparation of a National Strategy for Youth 2023-2027.

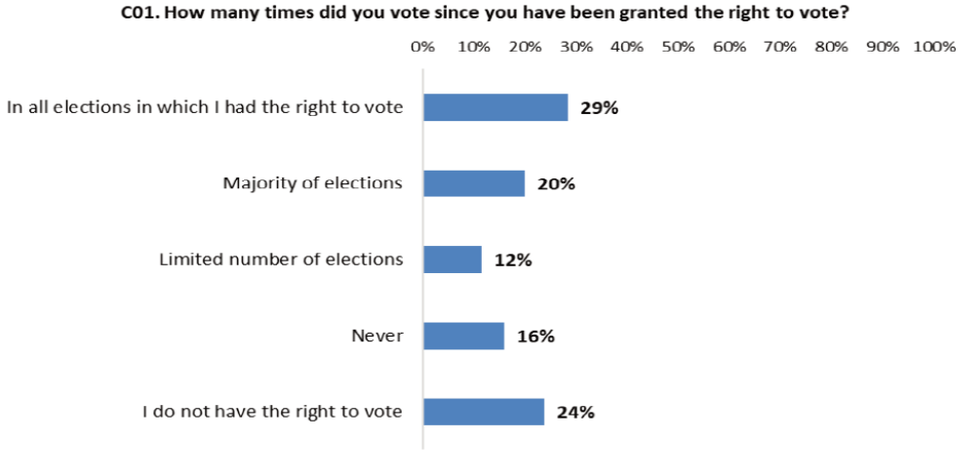
According to recent research about youth trends in Macedonia, 35% of young people show a particular interest in the decision-making process in the country. The participation is still low because of different forms of dissatisfaction among youth regarding education policy, low student standard, lack of political interest in youth needs and priorities (Republic of North Macedonia, 2019). The pandemic was also a factor that contributes to a decrease in the participation of young people in public life and in decision-making. They consider there is lack of interest of public institutions and political parties to address immediate youth needs.[20] However, young people are dissatisfied with their place in society – only one third believe that in five years the country will be a better place to live and therefore 58% of young people would move out of North Macedonia, if given the opportunity. Of these, only 6.9% would like to return to the country. Almost

[20] These are some of the results of the study on Youth Socio-Political Participation: Uncertainty, Inequality and Different Expectations by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Youth Education Forum (2023).

8 out of 10 young people (77.3%) believe that the authorities partially or do not take care of them and their needs (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2023). Although young people daily express dissatisfaction with living conditions and opportunities for advancement, it is obvious that they show interest in being involved in changes that will open opportunities for advancement.

Our analysis shows that 6.1% of participants voted in every election since they had the right, while 16.9% never voted in an election. Overall, voter turnout in the 2020 election was 30% lower than in 2016 (36%), reflecting growing scepticism among young people about the effectiveness of elections. Our research results show that 29% of the surveyed young people have voted in all elections in which they had the right to vote, followed by 20% who have voted in the majority of elections, and 24% still do not have the right to vote (see Figure 28). Observed by demographic data, it can be seen that 69% of the respondents in the youngest age group (15-18) do not have the right to vote.

Figure 25 Voting in elections



Source: Compiled by the authors

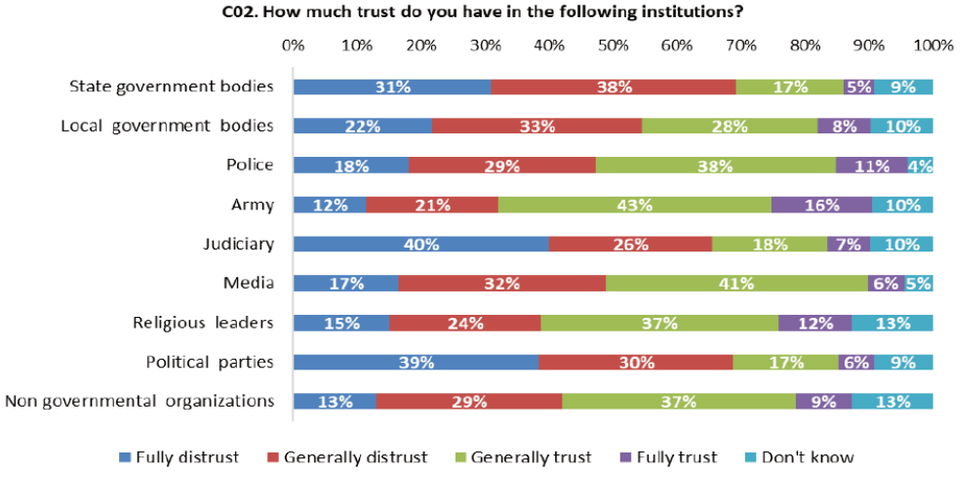
It is interesting to note that we also have a political influence in relation to young people voting and the biggest ethnic political parties encourage political youths to get involved in the electoral processes. However, as we concluded in the section on territorial inequality, almost all regions suffer from the exodus of young people, mostly the Skopje region, and highly educated cohorts. Disappointment with the status of young people in the country and the lack of opportunities that are often associated with the status quo in the beginning of negotiations with the EU as a roadmap for structural reforms reduce interest in voting in elections.

Data shows that more than half (59%) of young people trust (fully trust + generally trust) the army, followed by police and religious leaders (49%), media (47%), and NGOs (45%). In general, trust in the army is consistently high in the period after independence. In the period after 2001, after the armed conflict, with the reforms in the army, members of several ethnic communities are represented, and one of the positive aspects is the participation of units in NATO and EU peacekeeping missions. The police are gradually building trust among citizens, which was reduced in the post-2001 period, especially in regions with multi-ethnic characteristics. And in this part, reforms and cooperation with international security institutions

(OSCE, CoE, Interpol act) affect the level of trust. Respondents also express a high level of trust in religious leaders, which may be the result of increased communication with and between religious communities.

On the other hand, the greatest distrust (fully distrust + generally distrust) is expressed in relation to state government bodies and political parties (69%), followed by the judiciary (66%), and local government bodies (55%) (see Figure 29). The mistrust of young people in these institutions generally coincides with public opinion. The lack or ineffectiveness of youth policies that do not connect with the interests of young people accounts for this mistrust. High youth unemployment, low standards and dissatisfaction with education policies, together with the perception of high corruption in these institutions, also underpins mistrust.

Figure 26 Trust in institutions



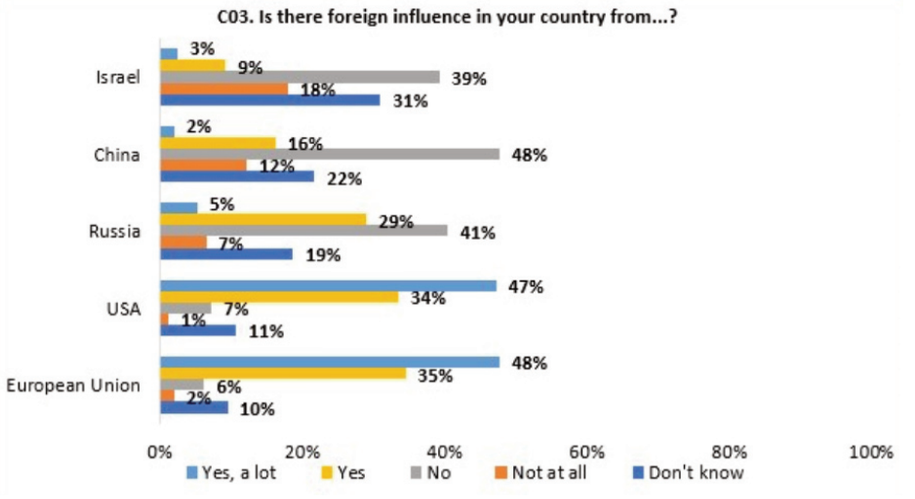
Source: Compiled by the authors

The large majority (82%) of young people stated that there is foreign influence (yes, a lot + yes) from the EU, followed by the USA (81%). On the other hand, they stated that there is no foreign influence in RNM from China (60%), followed by Israel (57%), and Russia (47%) (see Figure 30). A high percentage of young people are confident in the influence of the EU and the USA on Macedonian society. This perception is supported by the attitude of the EU in the process of negotiations for Macedonia's membership. On the one hand, this process is seen as reform and a way to improve the efficiency of institutions, while on the other, when RNM is asked to solve other issues related to history and identity, the impact is also perceived as negative. Both the EU and the USA are perceived as strategic partners, with a strong influence on political processes and institutional reforms. The influence of China, Israel and Russia are not considered as significant, but we should mention that RNM joined EU sanctions against Russia. Moreover, there was an incident with Russian diplomats and political messages from Russian officials in a form of dissatisfaction and listing the country as unfriendly. The Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained Russian diplomats were expelled for violating the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Meta, 2023).

It is also evident from the answers that a certain number of respondents do not know if these three countries exercise influence: for example, 22% for China, 31% for Israel and 19% for Russia. Data shows that 44% of

young people disagree (strongly disagree + disagree) with the foreign policy of the government regarding Ukraine, followed by Syria (43%), Afghanistan (41%), and Palestine (40%). On the other hand, 18% agree (strongly agree + agree) with the foreign policy of the government regarding Ukraine (see Figure 31). Observed by demographic data, young people in the 25-30 age group disagree more (strongly disagree + disagree) with the foreign policy of the government regarding Ukraine (54%), compared to the youngest age group (35%). The data shows that 44% of young people disagree (strongly disagree + disagree) with the government's foreign policy regarding Ukraine, followed by Syria (43%), Afghanistan (41%) and Palestine (40%).

Figure 27 Foreign influence

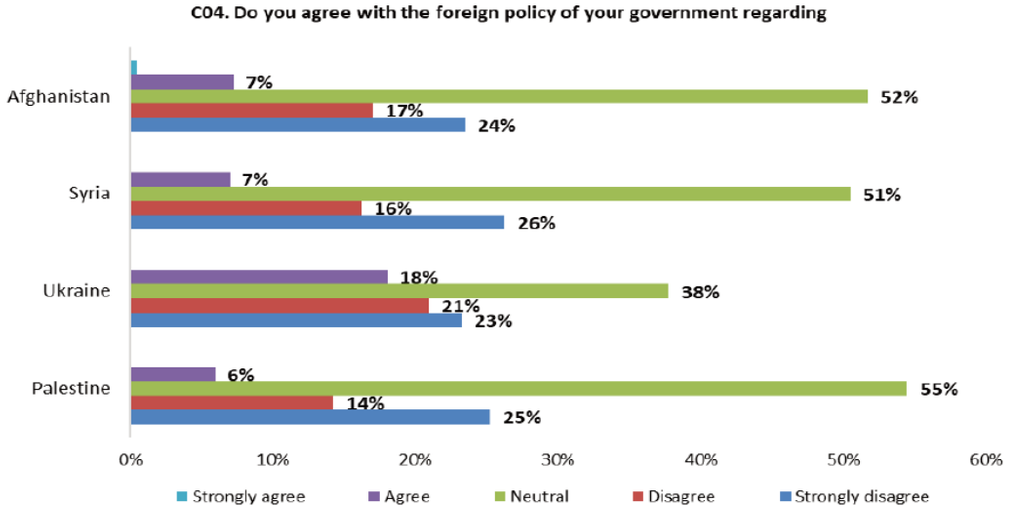


Source: Compiled by the authors

On the other hand, 18% agree (strongly agree + agree) with the government's foreign policy regarding Ukraine (see Chart 21). Looking at demographic data, it can be noted that young people in the 25-30 age group no longer agree (strongly disagree + disagree) with the government's foreign policy in relation to Ukraine (54%), compared to the youngest age group (35%). The answers also indicate that young people are largely neutral in terms of foreign policy towards these countries, with over 50%, except for Ukraine where 38% express a neutral attitude. It can be said that although there is support for the foreign policy towards some of the countries in which armed conflicts take place, on average of over 40%, while over 50% still express a neutral attitude, except for Ukraine.

Here it should be taken into account that the respondents who are 23-30 years old were born after 2001 and their memories of the armed conflict in RNM are primarily from the narratives of the older generations. Those aged 15-23 were born after the conflict and also have limited knowledge about it from family narratives or statements from political leaders. It can be hypothesised that narratives (and media) shape certain perceptions regarding support for violence or peace, or support for certain parties in a conflict.

Figure 28 Government foreign policy



Source: Compiled by the authors

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

After numerous politicisation and securitisation efforts, the matter of providing education in the mother tongue of ethnic communities at the graduate level was further addressed in the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001. In addition to the two largest ethnic communities (Macedonian and Albanian), the country is home to several smaller historic ethnic groups, the most prominent being the Turks, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks and Vlachs.

Regarding the languages of minority groups, legislation mandates the teaching of these languages at the primary and secondary levels. Additionally, according to the Constitution (Article 48), Macedonian is taught in schools where instruction is conducted in the language of one of the nationalities. The right to education in a minority language is specifically outlined in the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education.[21] Moreover, the Law on Higher Education permits education in minority languages only for those minorities constituting more than 20% of the population, effectively applying to the Albanian minority alone.

Debates surrounding religious education continue to be contentious due to differing viewpoints from various stakeholders, including parents. The only subject taught is Ethics in religion, offered as an optional subject in the 6th grade. It encompasses various vital elements, such as education through the ethics of religious systems and familiarisation with the religious cultures and traditions characteristic of Macedonian society.

[21] Article 10 stipulated that (1) educational work in primary school is carried out in the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic script; (2) for the students of the members of the communities who follow teaching in a language other than the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic script, educational work is carried out in the language and script of the respective community; (3) students from paragraph (2) of this article must also study the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic script. Primary and secondary education in Macedonia is compulsory.

Controversies primarily arose from the belief that religious leaders exert influence on young people in terms of religious intolerance and even violent behaviour. Conversely, there are proponents who argue that a better understanding of diversity and other faiths can reduce such influences and promote interreligious tolerance and respect (Pajaziti and Selami, 2017; Georgieva et al., 2020).

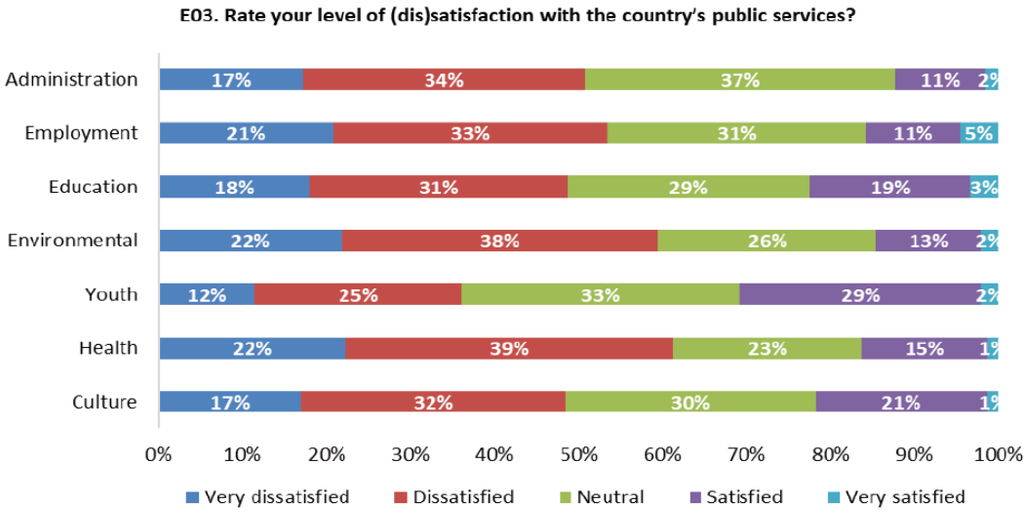
Contrary to widespread public opinion, our survey reveals that 46% of young people agree (agree + strongly agree) that religious education can effectively mitigate the risk of VE, while 27% of them disagree (disagree + strongly disagree) with this statement (refer to Chart 3). Demographic data indicates that a smaller percentage of young people in the 25-30 age group disagree (disagree + strongly disagree) with the notion that religious education can effectively contain and limit the risk of VE, compared to the youngest age group of 19-24-year-olds (32%).

When assessing whether state policies and measures, which aim to provide equal rights and resources to all citizens, can effectively mitigate the risk of VE, more than one third (39%) agree (agree + strongly agree) with this statement, as opposed to 29% who disagree (disagree + strongly disagree). Analysing this data by age category, the youngest group (15-18 years old) expresses a lower level of disagreement (disagree + strongly disagree) with the statement (23%) compared to young people in the 25-30 age group (34%). Regarding these perceptions, we can conclude that the younger generation expresses more interest in the role of religion, especially considering that young people expressed a high level of religiosity and adherence to religious practices in the public discourse on whether religious education is necessary (Bozinovski and Nikolovski, 2021). Our research also confirmed that young people are firm believers, as already explained in the section on religion.

The data reveals that almost one third (31%) of young people are highly satisfied (very satisfied + satisfied) with public youth services. This level of satisfaction is followed by education (23%) and culture (22%). Conversely, the highest level of dissatisfaction (very dissatisfied + dissatisfied) is observed with public health services (61%), followed by environmental concerns (60%), employment opportunities (54%), and administrative services (51%) see Figure 29. As we mentioned earlier, there is a notable lack of trust in public institutions, especially at the local and national levels, compared to the confidence placed in religious leaders (Galevski, M. 2019). These trends are intertwined with the fact that young, well-educated individuals often face unemployment and choose to emigrate. It is crucial to conduct a deeper analysis to determine if dissatisfaction with healthcare is a result of pandemic-related restrictions or a reflection of the overall quality of healthcare services, given that public and private healthcare providers may not offer services at the same standard.

Furthermore, the respondents' dissatisfaction with cultural aspects needs a more in-depth examination. Despite North Macedonia's emphasis on being a multicultural society, young people believe that intercultural policies and projects are falling short of their expectations. This is also related to the government's "one society for all" policy, which was designed to address longstanding issues like hate speech, discrimination, and ethnic intolerance, particularly since 2020.

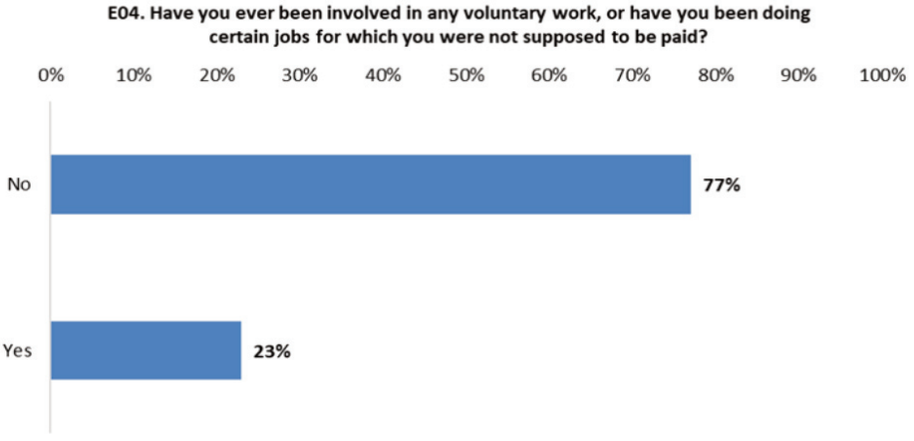
Figure 29 Satisfaction with public services



Source: Compiled by the authors

The majority of young people (77%) have never been involved in any voluntary work or had a certain job for which they were not paid, while 23% of them were involved in voluntary or unpaid work (see Figure 25). Observed by demographic data, it can be seen that the oldest age group of 25-30 have been more involved in voluntary work (30%), compared to the youngest age group (18%). Of those young people who were involved in voluntary work, more than a third of them (39%) did activities for NGOs, followed by activities to support a colleague in learning and participation in public activities in the local community (32%) (see Figure 26).

Figure 30 Activity in voluntary work

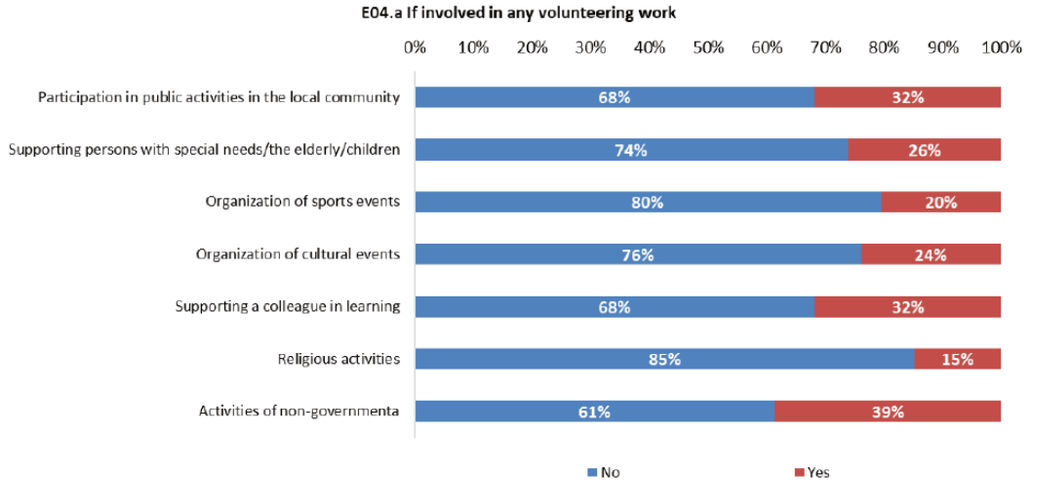


Source: Compiled by the authors

As the results show, the culture for volunteering is not sufficiently developed. Legal solutions (Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia, 2021) regulate this issue and provide that a volunteer can be an adult (18 years and older) or a minor with parental consent. In this way, young people have a limit when they can engage in voluntary work. This is also confirmed by the answers that older youths have more experience

volunteering in the non-governmental sector, which is more open to youth engagement. In the non-governmental sector, a greater space for communication between young people and intercultural communication is opening up.

Figure 31 Activity in voluntary work



Source: Compiled by the authors

TRANSNATIONAL DYNAMICS

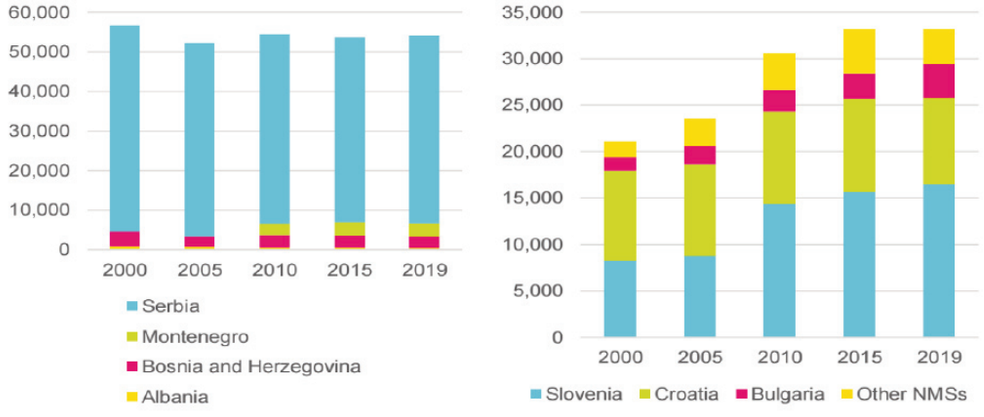
The current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6% of the global population (IOM, 2022). RNM does not have its own statistics on migration flows in the last few decades. United Nations (UN) figures show that at the end of 2019 the number of migrants was approximately 650,000, or almost one third of the population (Samardjiev, 2022). The 2021 census showed a decrease of 200,000 inhabitants and, despite the reduced birth rate, migration is the reason. During the census, the diaspora had the opportunity to register online. Additionally, according to Eurostat data, on 1 January 2019, there were 102,000 Macedonians in Germany, 66,600 in Switzerland, 63,600 in Italy, 23,400 in Austria, and 12,300 in Slovenia. According to this data, there were 156,900 Macedonian citizens in the EU alone in 2010 and 220,400 in 2019. However, these numbers are likely to be even higher. Namely, at least 81,000 Macedonians acquired Bulgarian passports, enabling them to work in the EU (Samardjiev, 2022).

Approximately 5% of the migrant stock of RNM lives in the new EU member states. The new member states started attracting Macedonians in 2009 because of the visa liberalisation. Before 2009, the data consisted mainly of Macedonians in Croatia and Slovenia, both the former Yugoslav republics. Since 2009, Slovenia has been attracting Macedonians at a slightly faster pace, mainly driven by proximity and the migration regime that guarantees a favourable environment for certain occupations (most notably doctors and dentists). Also, Bulgaria received an accelerated influx of Macedonians, who primarily left for studies and then stayed. Other new member states have not experienced high levels or inflows of Macedonians, although Malta and the Czech Republic have recently attracted a growing Macedonian workforce

(Samardjiev, 2022). According to a Radio Free Europe report, a 2016 survey showed that remittances range from 400 million to 1.5 billion Euros – more than what the state allocates for social welfare (Samardjiev, 2022).

The low level of Macedonian emigration to the new member states can also be considered a part of a chain reaction. As the new member states faced the emigration of their own citizens to Western Europe and overseas countries, they began to consider immigrants from the Western Balkans as replacements.

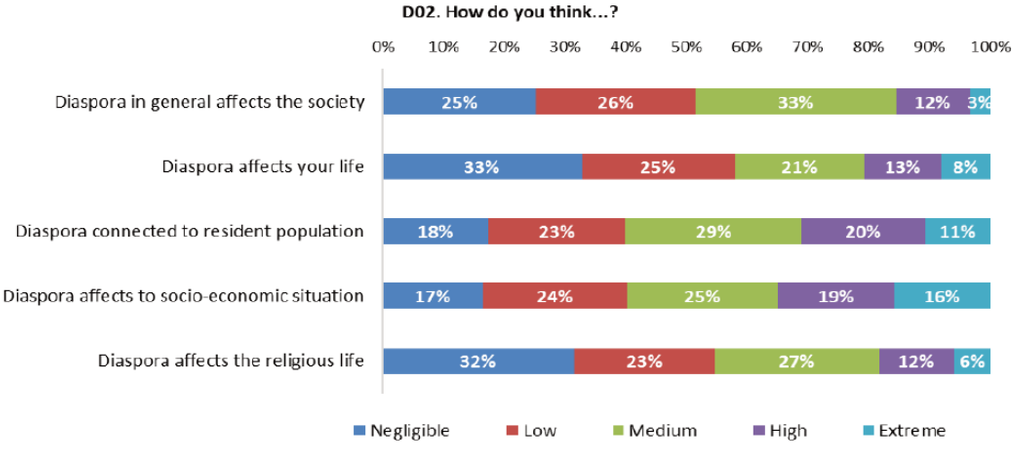
Figure 32 Migration in the EU and Western Balkans from RNM



Source: Compiled by the authors

More than one third (35%) of young people consider that diaspora highly (high + extreme) affects socioeconomic situation, followed by 31% of young people who believe that diaspora is highly connected to the resident population. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents share the attitude that diaspora has negligible or low effects including whether diaspora affects your life (58%), diaspora affects the religious life (55%), and diaspora in general affects the society (52%).

Figure 33 Diaspora impact



Source: Compiled by the authors

We can assert that Macedonian citizens working abroad temporarily or emigrating from the country can have an impact on certain relationships with the respondents. However, it is essential to emphasise that this influence is expected to be more significant when family connections are in question. As a result, the percentage of respondents who believe that the diaspora has a negligible impact on society and religion is lower than those connected to the local population and its social and economic life.

It is worth noting that emigration is a common characteristic of all ethnic communities, primarily driven by economic factors, unemployment, distrust in institutions, and high levels of corruption, among other reasons. Further analysis is necessary, not only from a socioeconomic perspective but also regarding the demographics of emigration. This should include a focus on the perspectives of the young population studying abroad and their relationships with the local population. There is also a growing interest in the diaspora for political reasons, as a significant number of Macedonian citizens opt for citizenship in other countries (such as Bulgarian citizenship) primarily for economic purposes. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), about 700,000 Macedonians, or about a quarter of the population, live outside the country today. Migration from RNM in the last decade has increased by five times in the EU and about a quarter of the working population leaves the country, which affects the productivity of the country itself. The potential of the Macedonian diaspora is quite large and about 3% of remittances go to the country but it is below the average in the Western Balkans, where it is around 10% (Fakulteti, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This report analysed the drivers of VE in RNM at the micro level. It was made on the basis of a survey with a sample of 400 young people aged between 15-30. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in March and April 2023 in seven regions of the country, of which 50.4% were with men and 49.6% with women. Although the research sample includes 49.6% women, the analysis does not reveal any significant gender variations. The analysis further confirms CONNEKT's previous findings in Macedonia: that the attitudes and perceptions that are characteristic of drivers at the individual level have close relations with the community-level results.

- The results from the survey in RNM show that, for 48% of young people, radicalisation is not a concern in the community, while 44% stated that it is a concern. Only 8% of them think that radicalisation is the most important concern in the community (see Figure 6). Observed by demographic data, the youngest ones (15-18) are less likely to consider radicalisation to be the most important concern in their community (4%), compared to other age groups (10%). High unemployment is the most common reason for emigration, both from one local community to another and abroad. Most of the respondents and their parents belong to the same social category – they perceive themselves as middle class. Family income greatly affects the status and satisfaction of young people because a large percentage of them live in a family community, as employees or as unemployed. Crosstabulation of this data reveals the social immobility of the youth, with 208 (52%) respondents coming from the same income class as their parents. That economic deprivation has a significant impact is also captured by the levels of job satisfaction among young people. The data shows that the majority (60%) of respondents who are employed are satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work, against 14% who are not satisfied. Young people in the age group 19-24 are more satisfied (satisfied + very satisfied) with their work (72%), compared to young people in the age group 25-30 (54%). This data can be related to the profile and level of education, but also to the length of work experience, which can affect the status of employees. However, if we put the data in the context of youth emigrating from the country, which is seen as a key reason for youth unemployment to fall to 35% in 2022, job satisfaction is an important variable. That is why effective employment policies, improvement of the standard, and efficiency and de-politicisation of institutions can be considered as a necessary part of the P/CVE policy. The suggestion is based on the previous argument that so-called "balancer", a method for employment applied by Ministry of Information Society and Administration as a tool for fair representation of non majority ethnic communities in the public sector. The survey conducted by an NGO concluded that "three quarters of the country's inhabitants, or more precisely 76%, circled the answer 'bad' when they were asked how they evaluate the current practice of employment according to the principle of adequate and fair representation in the public administration. And since that principle in state employment is protected by the so-called "balancer" (a tool/calculator

that determines the nationality of future candidates during an employment process), this means that a large majority in the country thinks that the tool is not good and contributes to politicisation and low trust in institutions (360Stepeni, 2023).[22]

- Territorial inequalities from a demographic aspect are strongly driven by economic deprivation, but also the inefficiency of local institutions to deal with local problems. Hence, in order to enhance the resilience of local communities and to build a local policy for PVE, the economic and social capacities at the local level must be strengthened. Vertical cooperation will not be sufficient for efficient PVE if horizontal local cooperation is not implemented more effectively.

- Macedonia, the citizens are highly religious, so young people also follow that trend, which is also confirmed by the indicator that only 1.3% did not define themselves as religious. Religion and ethnicity are also the basis for the respondents' political affiliations, which ends in ethnic/religious political parties. Although there are examples of when this principle is not followed, the question remains open, and additional analysis is needed on whether religion and ethnicity are the most important factors for joint political action. At the micro level, one third of the respondents believe that religion has a great influence that can be linked to the practice of religious holidays in local communities (regularly 48%) with a slightly higher participation of men than women. Hence, in order to draw a recommendation for effective PVE, it is necessary to establish principles on which political parties and leaders will base their platforms on accepting the fact that religion is not the only factor in radicalisation and that the politicisation of religion is not part of PVE.

- The feeling of safety and security is subjective and represents a barrier against the fear that individuals can feel or experience due to violent incidents. The majority of respondents (74%) feel safe in their neighbourhood, while 58% feel safe in their area/city/place of residence, which indicates that in the nearest neighbourhood the perceptions of safety are the greatest. But a significant percentage of young people (35%) also feel neither safe nor unsafe in their area/city/place of residence, while 23% feel neither safe nor unsafe in their neighbourhood. Looking at the demographic data, it can be noted that boys feel safer in their places (78%), compared to girls (69%). In general, Macedonians feel safer (76%) than Albanians (64%), but the percentage of Albanians who feel neither safe nor unsafe is higher (32%). The regional comparison shows that respondents feel safer in the eastern (91%) and southeastern (87%) region in the country. Aforementioned regions mostly borders Greece and has the highest employment rate compared to other regions (62.3%). The perception of safety in the southwest (78%) and Pelagonian region (75%) is lower, but still high. In fact, respondents in the Skopje, Northeast and Polog regions expressed more uncertainty than those in the other regions. Apart from the fact that we are talking about regions in which multi-ethnicity is a significant factor, a warning should be the fact that unemployment (in general) is higher in these regions (22.8% in Polog, 36.3% in the northeast and 13.9% in Skopje). In this respect, it is important to analyse further whether the diversity that characterises the regions where insecurity is higher is a more important factor, or whether it is again the obvious economic deprivation.

[22] According to 360 Stepeni (2023), hardly one out of 10 inhabitants of the country said that employment in the state according to 'balancer' is good.

- The data shows that 9 out of 10 young people have not participated in any physically violent conflict. Of the investigated possible violent situations, violent conflict between young people most often happens in public places. Less often, young people participated in a physically violent conflict with young people of other political or religious beliefs (5%), with the police (4%) or with their partner (3%). Looking at the demographic data, it can be noted that for the most frequent violent situations in which young people participated, that is, in a club/café, neighbourhood and school and football matches, boys engage in violent conflict more often than girls. Young people in urban areas are more likely to be involved in violent conflicts in their neighbourhood (13%) compared to their peers living in rural areas (5%). Young people from the 25-30 age group participated more often in a violent conflict in a club/bar (15%) compared to younger people, those aged 19 to 25 (7%). In this regard, it should be analysed how young people perceive radicalisation and whether they associate it exclusively with religious extremism or with ideological extremism and nationalism. Although trust in the military and police is high (as stated in our research), as well as among religious leaders, the question is whether PVE is exclusively the work of these institutions. PVE should include these institutions but with a much more sensitive, community friendly, preventive approach. Still, low trust in institutions is expressed in public surveys, such as judicial institutions (totally distrust + tend not to trust) at 82%, local authorities (totally distrust + tend not to trust) at 68%, the military and security forces (tend to trust) at 36% (Balkan Public Barometer, 2023) and trust in civil society at 30%. Therefore, the level of trust in institutions on a local level is important and should be improved to support the concept of a resistant society. The majority of the respondents (99.5%) have access to Internet, which has become a means of quick communication, but also exposure to misinformation, hate speech, xenophobia, and so on. About 31% of the respondents use Internet for more than four hours a day, and 26% use it between 3 and 4 hours a day. Young people mostly use internet to access social networks (91%), to communicate with friends/family through platforms (85%), to watch videos/listen to music (73%), to read news/access information (53%), for work, school (51%), and to play videogames (33%). The majority of young people (61%) stated that they do not know what a VPN is. However, it can be noted that boys are more familiar with VPN (46%), compared to girls (32%). The vast majority of respondents (85%) have never used a VPN, and boys used more VPNs (19%), compared to girls (11%). The recent events of anonymous threats in schools that lasted for five months show the risk of abuse of social media as a source for spreading threats and fear among young people but also in local communities that had no alternative other than the introduction of online teaching. Although respondents report that they feel safer in their local environments from physical violence, a comprehensive institutional approach to PVE requires additional measures to strengthen the resilience of educational institutions at all levels.

- As we concluded in the section on territorial inequality, almost all regions suffer from an exodus of young people, especially the Skopje region, and of highly educated staff. Disappointment with the status of young people in the country and the lack of opportunities that are often associated with the status quo at the beginning of negotiations with the EU as a roadmap for structural reforms reduces the interest in voting in elections. Only 6.1% of participants voted in all elections because they had the right to vote, while 16.9% never voted in an election. It is interesting to note that there is a political influence in relation to youth voting, and most of the time the biggest ethnic political parties encourage youths to get involved in the electoral processes. In addition to expressing mistrust in

institutions at the local and national level, respondents also express uncertainty and disagreement with foreign policy. For PVE, youth activism and volunteering are a tool for effective youth communication, but the motivation for electoral participation and trust in institutions is again correlated with economic deprivation.

- The mistrust of respondents in these institutions generally coincides with public opinion. The ineffectiveness of youth policies that are not connected to the interests and priorities of young people are the reason for this mistrust. High youth unemployment, low standards and dissatisfaction with education policies, together with the perception of high corruption, also underpin mistrust. Regaining the trust and increasing effectiveness of institutions at local and national level in the fields of healthcare, environment and education should be included in PVE strategies and policies to increase satisfaction and trust as relevant for community resilience. Almost half (49%) of young people agree that monitoring social media can effectively contain and limit the risk of VE, while the majority (77%) stated that they can practise their religion freely. PVE policy should rely on intercultural and multicultural communication actions and programmes along with media literacy education.

- As mentioned previously, there is high distrust in public institutions, as opposed to religious leaders, and young people are particularly dissatisfied with institutions at the local and national level. According to these results, dissatisfaction is with health and environment, education and employment. This data is correlated with the fact that young and highly educated people generally face unemployment and emigrate. It is necessary to further analyse whether the dissatisfaction with healthcare is a result of the restrictions during the pandemic period or is a consequence of healthcare services in general, taking into account that public and private healthcare do not provide services at the same level. Dissatisfaction with culture should also be further analysed because RNM emphasises the fact that it is a multicultural society, but young people believe that intercultural policies and projects do not meet expectations.

- As the results show, the volunteering culture is not sufficiently developed in Macedonia. Legal solutions regulate this issue and provide that a volunteer can be an adult (18 years and older) or a minor with parental consent. In this way, young people are limited when engaging in voluntary work. In the non-governmental sector, a greater space for communication between young people and intercultural communication is opening up, which is important for PVE policy in the form of platforms.

- Finally, Macedonian citizens who are on temporary work abroad or have emigrated from the country have an influence on certain relationships with the respondents, but here it should be emphasised that the influence is expected to be higher when there are family relationships than on a general level. In the context of PVE, compact or diverse diaspora (ethnically or based on religion) is a matter of importance. From a PVE perspective, diaspora is a connecting link for local and regional actions and actors.

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CONNEKT

What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 870772