



PLATFORM OF
MULTICULTURALISM



Public Policy Document

YOUTH POLICY CREATION FOSTERED BY LOCAL YOUTH COUNCILS



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FOREWORD

The publication is the result of the cooperation between youth civil organizations and youth wings of political parties and is the product of two workshops on creation and composition of public policies held in 2016 for the requirements of the member organizations of the Platform of Multiculturalism within the project “Support of Democracy in Multiethnic Macedonia – Youth Activism for Multicultural Democracy” 2015-2017. The workshops and the documents were completed under the mentorship of d-r. Jasna Bačovska Nedic and d-r Aleksandar Spasov, a professor and docent at the Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law within the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.

The Platform of Multiculturalism was created in 2013 within the project “Support of Democracy in Multiethnic Macedonia – Dialogue and Cooperation” implemented by the Progress – Institute for Social Democracy and the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation from Finland. The Platform was established by the youth wings of political parties and civil society organizations, with the support of Progress – Institute for Social Democracy and the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation.

The publication and recommendation of the authors, representatives of youth organizations and youth wings of political parties aim to initiate a broad debate and discussion on key issues related to the life of young people in Macedonia and to introduce specific policies for improvement of the situation.

The Platform of Multiculturalism is going to continue its work with proposals of specific public policies and recommendations towards making progress with the issues young people face in the country, as well as towards increasing the number of organizations and civil activists on local and national level so as to become an active actor in the creation of public policies in Macedonia.

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SUMMARY

This public policy document examines the problem with the (non)functioning of most local youth councils in Macedonia, a reason for the distrust young people nurture towards such bodies and the lack of initiative for local youth policy creation. The objective is, above all, to promote the advantages of youth councils as a means for participation in youth policy creation and raise awareness among young people on the influence they could exercise by participating in youth councils.

In the past 8 years, youth councils have been established in over 50 municipalities in Macedonia to act as advisory bodies within the municipalities and encourage active youth participation in public life by proposing initiatives on issues concerning young population. Urgent action is required in order to solve the problem and restore the primary function of youth councils, which is to be a link between young people and institutions in the true sense of the word.

1. Problem description

A summary of the current youth council situation in four municipalities, Centar, Strumica, Tetovo and Bitola, reveals that young people expressed significant interest for active participation in youth councils, boosted by their mere presence in the country.

In this context, the Strumica Youth Council has been active for eight years, with young people actively participating in project implementation and activities proposed by council members as well as citizens. Youth participation in Centar (Skopje) and Bitola has been more recent.

In 2015, the first Youth Office in Skopje was opened in Centar to act as a link between the young people and the municipality, as well as the entire city since it was the first and only office of its kind.

The Youth Council in Bitola was formed the same year, while a Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Bitola with specific actions for increasing youth participation in local processes had been adopted the previous 2014.

Unlike the aforementioned municipalities, Tetovo remains without a youth council, although its establishment was announced for this year.

In the meantime, participation of young people is mostly ensured through civil society organizations.

» Current State with the Youth Council of Centar Municipality

On 23rd January, 2016, the Council of the Municipality of Centar unanimously verified the mandates of the members of its first local Youth Council. It is important to stress that the Executive Board consists of civil sector representatives, volunteering organizations, student and high school organizations, as well as youth wings of political parties. The Municipality of Centar is a good example of great collaboration between young people and the local self-government.

» Current State with the Youth Council of Strumica Municipality

The Youth Council in Strumica is among the first in Macedonia, founded in March 2008 by representatives from civil society and high school organizations. Since its very beginnings it has served as an exemplary model of partnership between young people and a local self-government unit. The Youth Council, as a civil society organization, was founded with the purpose to acclimate children and young people to leading an independent life in a society where they would be brought up according to the principles and ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. The Youth Council strives to promote a municipality tailored for young people by developing methods for working with children and young people. Its offices are always open for all citizens and young people who would like to propose projects and ideas.

» Current State with the Youth Council of Tetovo Municipality

The Initiative Board for the establishment of a local youth council in Tetovo comprised of young people from civil society organizations, high school organizations and young wings of political parties. For a year and a half, the young people advocated for their initiative at public events and debates, promoting the idea and necessity for a local youth council. The citizens, mostly young people, offered great support and the process of establishing a local youth council was launched. However, an obstacle appeared. Namely the local self-government unit refused to issue an operating permit and thus deprived young people of their voice. Instead, the Tetovo local self-government took it upon itself to design a model and open a local youth council. However this has yet to happen. This refusal for cooperation deprived young people of the opportunity to be able to address their problems to the right place, con

sequently discouraging them from participation in daily activities that could improve life in the municipality..

» **Current State with the Youth Council of Bitola Municipality**

The Youth Council in Bitola was voted in December 2014, with nine appointed members. The idea for establishing a youth council emerged with the creation of a youth core in Bitola consisting of eight members from local organizations

appointed by way of an open call. In the first couple of months, the youth core underwent several trainings at the end of which it was presented to young people from Bitola at a promotional event organized to this purpose. Subsequently the Initiative Board was formed, comprised of core members as well as newly appointed members. The process was finalized with the creation of the Bitola Youth Council as an advisory body to the Council of the Municipality of Bitola. Nine members were elected at an open call with a two-year mandate, appointed to enhance youth participation in Bitola.

2. Key Problems Young People Face

2.1. Efficiency Problems?

Few youth councils function in accordance with their declared objectives. We are facing a situation where youth council membership is unaware of its role and has failed to encourage and solve many of the pressing issues young people face. Instead, the councils continue to function simply as an institutional structure. The result is distrust and suspicion regarding the councils' work. It is believed that the sole purpose for their establishment is to satisfy the requirements imposed by political parties, with activities dictated by the party they supposedly represent. Quite frequently youth councils are distrusted even by the municipality councils that established them. Members often lack the capacity to advocate for youth policies in front of local self-government units, resulting with low budgets allocated for youth issues, particularly for the activities of local youth councils.

In 2016, the Youth Council of the Centar Municipality spent 369,000 MKD on office lease. In 2017 the total amount spent was 498,727 MKD, 20,060 MKD of which for training, 5,000 MKD for publications, leaflets and other organizational materials, 166,667 MKD for development of the selected projects and business ideas/plans and 307,000 MKD for office lease. In the Municipality of Strumica, the Mayor awarded 3 million MKD at a Council Session to the Youth Council organization. The amount was not forwarded to the Youth Council in advance but is awarded for per project. Annually, 50-60% of the total budget is spent. On 29th January, 2016, the Municipality of Bitola reached the Conclusion to adopt the 2016 Annual Activity Program of the Youth Council of the Municipality of Bitola, without a set budget.

Some program activities were organized with the logistical help of the Municipality, in addition to free transport to training sessions organized to strengthen the Council's capacity. An office was also opened to function as an information centre for young people as well as their personal space where they can organize future activities. Regarding the 2017 budget, finances were provided for the office maintenance, while the implementation of future activities will be subject of the 2018 Activity Program of the Youth Council planned to be developed.¹

The main problem is the lack of qualified personnel trained to work with young people, i.e. lack of departments specialized for working specifically with young people within the local self-government units. Furthermore, young people seem to be disinterested in the municipality development and consequently participation in policy creation, which on the other hand is the main objective of youth councils and their activities. Another weakness is the difficulty to contact and inform organizations as well as the lack of direct inclusion of all youth groups, regardless of their visibility and number.

2.2. Personnel Issues

The problem with the proper functioning of youth councils should be firstly tackled by appointing qualified members. The municipality mandate commission in charge of appointing council members often disregards members experienced in youth policy creation and those motivated to dedicate time and energy towards solving youth issues. In addition, the quota for members-representatives from civil society organizations is often limited.²

¹ Information gathered by way of Access to Public Information on municipalities.

² The Youth Council of the Municipality of Bitola consists of nine members, only two of whom are members of civil society organizations.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations for Immediate Actions

Several conclusions can be reached from this brief analysis on the four local youth councils. Firstly, the proper functioning of the youth councils is largely conditioned by the local self-government. This is clearly demonstrated in the refusal of the Tetovo authorities to issue permission for the establishment of a youth council, thus failing to hear the voices of the young people and depriving them of a proper space where they could address their issues.

Youth councils are in fact advisory bodies of the municipalities' council, and their goal is to actively include young people in public life by way of proposing initiatives on issues concerning young people who live in these municipalities.

Promoting the advantages of youth councils as a means for active participation in youth policy creation and raising awareness among young people on the influence they could exercise by participating in youth councils should be of primary concern to civil society organizations, as well as local self-government units, seeing that putting youth human resources to use is of mutual benefit.

On the other hand, there were cases when youth council membership was not clearly aware of their institutional position and consequently failing to undertake initiatives for discussing and solving issues concerning young people. These councils function solely as an institutional cover, which is also a cause for concern.

In order to change the situation, we present several recommendations and guidance for immediate action that might, first in the short-term, and afterwards in the long-term positively influence young people and society as well.

» Analysis of the council's activities

An analysis of youth councils' activities to determine the weaknesses will help build a proper approach towards solving the aforementioned problems. It will also provide a clearer picture of their work and the segments in need of improvement. Furthermore, developing local action plans for young people based on the pressing issues, as well as providing implementation funds is also required. All concerned parties, particularly young people and youth organizations, should be actively included in the development of these local action plans.

» Opening offices for young people in more municipalities

There should be more offices for young people to function as youth council headquarters. The offices will help increase the councils' visibility and availability and offer information to help young people improve their lives. Other youth organizations and informal groups could also obtain the facilities for their own activities.

» Allocating proper budgets for youth councils

The budget allocated for youth councils' activities should be increased and continuously monitored in future. The numerous international youth support funds should be utilized towards application for projects managed by the youth councils.

» Greater visibility and accessibility of youth councils

Websites of municipalities should offer space where young people could be updated about open calls, share their problems, discuss local action plans, offer suggestions etc. In addition, youth councils should actively participate in activities organized by other organizations. Youth councils should initiate and/or organize debates on topics related to the youth several times a year.

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