



European Employment Observatory

EEO Review: Youth Employment Measures, 2010

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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October 2010

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1. Introduction

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has, since 1991, been going through a difficult period of transition from a planned to a market economy. This process has resulted in high unemployment rates and increasing levels of poverty. Despite significant progress in macroeconomic stabilisation, job creation has been limited while changes in the sectoral structure of employment and labour reallocation from less to more productive jobs have been modest.

Seen from an age perspective, unemployment in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia particularly affects young people. The current economic situation makes it very difficult for young people to find a job after graduation. Due to the high overall unemployment, young people are increasingly choosing to continue in formal schooling at universities, since at present studying is the most acceptable alternative for young people, bearing in mind the years that they will have to wait for their first job. The deterioration in the youth job market seems to have contributed to particularly large increases in the enrolment rates in higher education and a decrease in the percentage of early school leavers (from 19.6 % of the age group 18-24 in 2008, to 16.3 % in 2009).

The youth employment challenge has long-term and community-wide costs. The lack of decent work among today's youth perpetuates the vicious circle of poverty, inadequate education and training, poor jobs and thereby the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Young people who find a job are often employed in poor conditions, in the informal economy, and with short-term or temporary work arrangements. The opportunities for young people to obtain a decent job are influenced by factors such as aggregate demand, demographic trends, labour market regulations, education and training outcomes, work experience, entrepreneurship options, and the aspirations of young people themselves. Their impact on young people depends to some extent on their personal characteristics. Different analyses and reports point out that one can distinguish several groups of disadvantaged unemployed youth: rural and urban poor young people, young Roma, youth without skills/qualifications for employment, youth finishing general secondary education and graduate students.

As in other countries in the region, young people (aged 15-29) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are more likely to be unemployed in comparison to other age groups, the main reasons being: mismatch between labour market needs and the educational and training system; employers demanding workers with experience; and a massive increase in the grey economy.

Recent government measures have focused on youth unemployment and may have contributed to the slight drop in the unemployment rate (from 56.2 % in 2008 to 53.0 % in Q2-2010 for the age group 20-24, and from 40.3 % in 2008 to 37.9 % in Q1-2010 for the age group 25-29, with a steady increase in the age group 15-19). The results of these policies are clearly confirmed by the data related to the difference in youth unemployment rate between Q4-2009 and Q4-2007. Gender differences, which have been increasing in recent years, are significant in youth unemployment, especially for the age groups 20-24 and 25-29.

Unfortunately, issues remain open regarding the quality of this progress, since it has been driven above all by low-skilled workers, especially youth, engaging in low-productivity activities. Thus, unemployment decreased the most among the least educated youth (primary

school level or less), in parallel with rising employment rates for this group caused by an expansion in low-quality jobs in subsistence/unpaid agriculture.

2. Measures taken to promote youth employment

2.1 School education and training policies

Since the 1990s, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has adopted new educational policies for increasing educational attainment, with the latest comprehensive document being the National Programme for the Development of Education (NPDE) 2005-2015. It should help in developing an effective education system, by enabling equal access to, and equal possibilities for, education with specified quality standards. Nevertheless, the current economic situation makes it very difficult for young people to find a job immediately after graduation.

In order to prevent early school leaving and to guarantee access to basic skills, compulsory secondary education was introduced from 2008/2009, enabling equality of education across the regions. Moreover, starting from 2009/2010, the government enabled free textbooks to be allocated to all pupils in primary and secondary schools. In addition, the 'computer for every pupil (with internet access)' project was implemented in primary and secondary education.

The aim of the VET (Vocational Education Training) system in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is to prepare young people to effectively participate in the labour market and integrate fully into economic and social life. The VET centre was established in 2006, which is preparing the biggest reforms in secondary level VET in the past twenty years. The four-year secondary VET course is already being reformed. The concepts for two and three-year secondary and post-secondary VET courses are being drafted for the first time and will be adopted in the near future, with the expectation that the VET strategy and reforms will contribute to reducing youth unemployment. During the 2010-2012 period, the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) enables several projects to be implemented with the aim to: promote vocational education by establishing standards for professional qualifications in the two and three-year secondary VET courses and reforming the curriculum of the new two and three year secondary VET courses.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has no life-long learning (LLL) strategy, although the National Programme for Development of Education 2005- 2015 (NPDE) highlights the promotion of LLL as one of the key areas of intervention. The Programme for Adult Education in the context of lifelong learning was created in 2006 as an integral part of the NPDE. Moreover, the Centre for Adult Education was established, but it is not yet operating adequately and the implementation of the Law on Adult Education has been delayed. In addition, a Law on Workers' Universities is under preparation, which will regulate the competences of these universities to provide primary level education and first level vocational qualifications to adults, as well as informal education. As for informal education, activities were also undertaken by the LLL Cards project, where a working group was established in 2009 to create modular packages for acquiring literacy and certain qualifications. During the 2010-2012 period, IPA funds will be used to strengthen the capacities of the Adult Education Centre, develop programmes for adult education and develop programmes for literacy and the completion of primary education by socially vulnerable groups. It is also worth mentioning that the State Statistical Office, starting from

2005, in its LFS (Labour Force Survey), includes a separate set of questions referring to the LLL. The principal goal is to emphasise the importance of learning, both in the formal education system and through informal and non-formal learning. The LLL indicator (the share of the adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training, in the total population of the same age group) reached 3.3 % in 2009.

The main recommendation of the Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe was the fostering of entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning and providing young people with opportunities to acquire relevant entrepreneurial competencies at all educational levels. Having this in mind, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education work together to integrate employability, entrepreneurship and business education into classroom instruction by identifying key competencies and developing projects and lesson plans for existing subjects.

Apprenticeships, which combine school-based education with in-company training, are a proven system of learning for work. The involvement of the social partners in programme design and implementation ensures that apprenticeship programmes meet labour market requirements. Apprenticeships in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are not regulated by law and hence it is up to individual secondary schools and universities to decide whether to offer apprenticeships.

The Government Operational Plan for Active Employment Measures and Programmes, in place since 2008, includes three-month internship programmes in support of the first-time employment of young people up to 27 years of age. The purpose is to prepare young unemployed persons to enter the labour market. Moreover, starting in 2010, the curriculum for university students in both public and private universities should include a one month internship. In addition, 20 % of the classes should be delivered by experts from the private and public sector.

2.2 Labour market and employment-related policies and access to benefits

The Employment Service Agency (ESA) provides regular services to the young unemployed, such as: a labour exchange, provision of active labour market programmes and job-search assistance. The labour exchange works through announced job vacancies (posted on the website of the ESA and in Job Clubs in local offices) and when someone registers as unemployed the ESA selects the available jobs. Professional orientation (counselling) is offered to students entering higher educational institutions or the labour market, and to the unemployed and employed, consisting of: provision of vocational information, orientation (psychometric testing to see which career might suit) and professional selection (selection of candidates that would best meet the skills demanded by potential employers after training). Job clubs carry out activities with unemployed persons, such as drop-in sessions, workshops, lectures, interview practice and free foreign language and computer skills training.

The ESA should seek to increase the job search activity of the unemployed, improve the accuracy of the unemployment registry, pursue a more individualised approach with target groups and boost self-help services for others with better prospects of regaining employment. Given the high registered unemployment and staff and time limitations, the ESA should make basic vacancy information as widely available as possible, thereby reducing the frictional

unemployment, maximising the interactive job search and the self-help philosophy, an area where the ESA has made considerable progress recently.

ALMPs (Active Labour Market Policies) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia aim at increasing the employability of young people through skills development. Increasingly, they target especially disadvantaged young people by offering a package of services, including literacy and basic skills training vocational and job-readiness training, job search assistance, career guidance and counselling. The implementation of these programmes involves public employment services, local authorities and other partners, including private employment agencies and training providers, frequently working under contract to the public sector. Examples of such measures, implemented by the ESA, include: a self-employment programme for youth up to 27 years of age, training for certain professions and skills that the labour market currently requires, employment subsidies programmes (subsidising the employment of orphans, disabled persons and single parents), and an internship programme that supports the first-employment of youth up to 27 years old. However, one should have in mind that there was a significant reduction, by more than one third, of the allocated budget for active labour market measures in 2010, which significantly decreased available resources for the implementation of many planned ALMPs activities in the country, which is not in line with the very difficult existing unemployment situation.

Access to social security benefits does not specifically address young people; rather benefits are general in their nature and are regulated by the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment. However, in the Programme for the Realisation of Social Protection for 2010, certain vulnerable groups are specified, among which are: children without parental care until the age of 18, children without parents until the age of 18 (eligible until the age of 26), under-aged children with socially unacceptable behaviour, as well as children with disabilities. This shows that only a limited number of young people are included in the social protection system, which additionally worsens youth poverty and youth exclusion from social life.

The 2005 Labour law (and its later amendments), among others, created new and more flexible options for labour contracts and streamlined redundancy procedures. Moreover, in January 2009 the government reduced labour taxation through lower social contributions rates and higher personal income tax exemption, along with reduced administrative burdens on firms (reduced again in 2010 and further reductions planned for 2011). An early indication that the reform is working is the rise in the employment of young people aged 20-24 and 25-29 (see Annex) in 2009 and in the first two quarters of 2010, as compared to 2008. Will the results of the labour reform continue to be positive? The early signs are encouraging. The improvement in the post-crisis situation in the world will definitely bolster this positive trend.

The Government's Operational Plan for Active Employment Programmes and Measures is an annual action plan on the allocation of budget funds in the area of ALMPs and measures. Young people up to 27 years of age are defined as a separate target group eligible for obtaining support for employment from this programme. However, despite this fact, it was noticed, especially during the implementation of the 2008 Operational Plan self-employment measure, that young people were under-represented. As a result, activities to look into this situation were undertaken in 2009 and are planned in 2010, such as: (i) supporting an entrepreneurial culture; (ii) promoting enabling policies and regulations; and (iii) building

capacity for the provision of support services. In general, it can be argued that these efforts by the government are considered as a good foundation for solving the unemployment issue, especially of young people. Finding or putting the emphasis on the most suitable ways of informing young people is something that should receive more attention in the coming period (this has already been done in 2009 and is planned for 2010, which resulted in increased participation by young people).

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined the Bologna process in 2003. The National Agency for the European Educational Programmes and Mobility, as the implementing body for the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes of the EU, was established. The National Agency focuses its efforts on strengthening the competencies of its staff in all aspects of programme management, while the Ministry of Education and Science set up an efficient control system providing adequate assurances on the functioning of the National Agency. As a result, students are eligible to apply for the following educational programmes (as well as many other bilateral educational exchange programmes with separate EU Member States): (a) Erasmus Mundus - cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education; (b) Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EM ECW) programme - cooperation between higher education institutions, exchanges of students, researchers and academic staff, and supporting mobility, in particular from non-EU countries to EU member states (BASILEUS is one of the programmes for the Western Balkans); (c) JoinEU-SEE - mobility at all level of higher education, including both mobility for students (undergraduate, master, doctoral and post-doctoral) and for staff (academic and administrative).

2.3 Addressing problematic features of youth employment

The contraction and stagnation of employment and the growth of the informal economy in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia do not bode well for the young who are increasingly better educated. Once in the informal labour market (seasonal, temporary and occasional jobs), the transition to the formal labour market is quite difficult. The 'connections' that young people once had are already lost, the chances of finding a regular job decrease and hence young people remain in the informal economy for quite a long time. Two basic reasons why young people often take on informal work are: young people leave school as a result of lack of financial resources (to continue their studies) and the need to help their families.

As regards the quality of employment, young people appear to face much worse conditions relative to other age groups. Experience shows that young people are more likely to be first-time job seekers; they work disproportionately more in the informal sector and the primary sector comprising agriculture and mining and are mainly employed as unpaid family workers. Although accepting low-quality and low-wage jobs affects the chances of young workers finding a regular, better paid job, young workers seem to move rapidly into wage employment, especially after the age of 30.

Part-time employment in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is low compared to the EU average. Historically, the share of part-time work in total employment was fairly stable in the transition years prior to 2002, at around 7 %, and then decreased to 5.8 % in 2008 and to 5.6 % in 2009. The share of young people in part-time employment out of the total of people in part-time employment, in 2009, is as follows: 6.9 % for the age group 15-19, 6.6 % for the age group 20-24 and 8.7 % for the age group 25-29. The age and gender structure of part-time

and fixed-term employment implies that young people and women have less access to permanent and full-time jobs, on-the-job training and promotion prospects.

In order to find and propose relevant measures to minimise the identified problematic features of youth unemployment, the government adopted the National Youth Strategy in 2005. It is a document that includes the interests of young people and contains measures for their realisation. In the part on youth self-employment and support prior to employment, the Strategy defines the following target interventions: (1) Development of youth entrepreneurship, (2) Fast transition from education to employment, and (3) Increased competitiveness amongst young people in the labour market. However, the Strategy neither defines concrete measures for the realisation of the target interventions, nor concrete institutions and time framework for its implementation. Other strategic documents include the National Employment Strategy 2006-2010 and the National Action Plans on Employment. Both documents include, as one of their strategic goals, the development of employment and self-employment opportunities for young people. However, the defined goals in these documents are rather ambitious, if one takes into consideration the lack of institutional and human capacity for their realisation in the planned time framework, as well as the lack of coordination between the main stakeholders in the field.

2.4 Roles of the labour market actors

A functional and representative social dialogue (strategic and project coordination between the labour market actors) is still lacking in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Trade unions and employers' associations still have limited capacity to contribute to the development, implementation and evaluation of employment and social policies. The strength and activity of the Economic and Social Council varied substantially in the period 1998-2009, depending on, among others, the strength and leadership of the president, and the economic and social situation in the country. However, there have been positive developments lately. The social partners signed the Agreement for establishing the (new) Economic and Social Council (25th of August 2010, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 113/2010). It consists of 12 members: four members from the government, four members from the representative employers' associations (one employers' organisation) and four members from the representative trade unions (two trade unions). So far, the Economic and Social Council has had two meetings and laid a solid foundation for dynamic improvements in the sphere of social dialogue in the country. The European Commissions' 2010 Progress Report for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Chapter 4.19) highlighted that there 'has been little progress in the social dialogue. Determination of the representative status of trade unions and employers associations for participating in bipartite and tripartite social dialogue is completed. The membership of the Economic and Social Council has changed, reflecting the representative status of its members. It has become operational, but has yet to contribute to functional and representative social dialogue. Tripartite and bipartite social dialogue remains weak and there is not sufficient commitment and strategic approach from the government to ensure adequate and effective participation of the social partners in the policy development process. The capacity of social partners to contribute to development of employment and social policies themselves continues to be weak. Preparations in this area are progressing slowly.'

The Employment Service Agency (ESA) of FYROM, as a public institution, is a tripartite body consisting of nine members, five nominated by the government, and two by representatives of leading trade union and employers' organisations. The modernisation of the ESA, as one of the most important institutions of the labour market, has been quite dynamic since 2008. Part of the reform activities include: (1) creation of a new service model with a customer oriented approach; (2) 11 Local Action Plans for Employment were prepared; (3) starting from 2007, a skill needs assessment analysis is prepared; (4) staff at the ESA were trained in how to carry out a skills needs analysis; (5) the mid-term Training Plan for ESA was updated, particularly in line with the needs of the new ESA service model; (6) an extensive training programme for introducing the new service model in ESA was implemented; (7) ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) system was introduced; (8) a model for monitoring the implementation of ALMPs and measures was designed; (9) recommendations for preparation of ALMPs and measures were provided; and (10) an integrated software solution was launched in the first quarter of 2010, which will help job seekers access information on what jobs are available as well as what types of employees are currently in demand in the labour market.

3. Conclusions

The high youth unemployment rate in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia highlights the need to invest in young people as an investment for the future. Namely, the government must set out a process underpinning the preparation of national action plans for youth employment, which will integrate several steps: (1) In-depth diagnosis of youth labour market issues at the country and local level, identifying the most prominent opportunities and barriers; (2) Set national priorities in terms of the available scope of labour market interventions; and (3) The strategy for investing in youth employment should ideally build in the important step of evaluation of interventions to learn what works and what does not on the youth labour market.

Some of the possible recommendations in this regard include: (1) Youth employment dimension must be integrated into comprehensive employment strategy; (2) Strong institutional support for youth employment policies should be secured; (3) Entrepreneurship and enterprise development should be one of the most important activities of the government; (4) Access of youth to employment services and support should be expanded and improved; and (5) Partnerships for youth employment should be created.

The above recommendations should follow a few simple principles: (1) preference for work over unemployment, especially for new graduates; (2) preference for active measures over protective measures; and (3) preference for training over unemployment.

Finally, development of education and VET is of paramount importance for economic growth, more jobs and building a knowledge-based economy as a key means to creating the demand for and capacity to sustain social change. Therefore, education should become one of the key priorities of the government as the essential driving force for other sector reforms and for the transformation of society in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the years ahead.

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Annex

Table 1: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT / UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS																		
Country	FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA																	
	2008									2009								
Data	Age group 15-19			Age group 20-24			Age group 25-29			Age group 15-19			Age group 20-24			Age group 25-29		
	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w
Employment rate	7.0	7.9	6.1	24.0	30.1	17.6	46.0	55.3	36.2	6.1	8.0	4.8	25.0	32.6	17.0	48.3	56.6	40.0
Unemployment rate (total)	56.8	61.5	48.3	56.2	54.0	59.7	40.3	38.4	43.2	57.1	56.1	59.1	54.6	51.8	59.4	37.7	36.9	39.0
Unemployment for the low-skilled (ISCED<3)	43	n/a	n/a	24	n/a	n/a	30.8	n/a	n/a	39	n/a	n/a	20.2	n/a	n/a	23.5	n/a	n/a
Unemployment for the high skilled (ISCED>3)	57	n/a	n/a	76	n/a	n/a	69.2	n/a	n/a	61	n/a	n/a	79.8	n/a	n/a	76.5	n/a	n/a
Long-term unemployment as a % of total unemployment	1.9	n/a	n/a	12.6	n/a	n/a	13.8	n/a	n/a	1.5	n/a	n/a	12.2	n/a	n/a	12.9	n/a	n/a
Temporary work as a % of employment	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NEET rate (% of the age group)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Early school leavers (% of the age group)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Youth/adult unemployment ratio	7.6	8.6	5.8	26.2	25.1	28.0	25.8	24.0	28.7	6.7	7.2	6	26.2	25.4	27.4	25.2	23.6	27.6

Source: LFS

Table 2: DIFFERENCE IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BETWEEN Q4/2009 and Q4/2007 ¹⁾									
Country	FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA								
Data	Q4/2009			Q4/2007			Q4/2009- Q4/2007		
	15-19	20-24	24-29	15-19	20-24	24-29	15-19	20-24	24-29
Total	61.4	55.4	38.8	67.1	59.3	42.5	-5.7	-3.9	-3.7
men	56.7	54.2	37.9	66.9	57.7	41.2	-10.2	-3.5	-3.3
women	70.9	57.7	40.1	67.5	62.0	44.3	3.4	-4.3	-4.2

Source: LFS

Table 3: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT / UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS																		
Country	FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA																	
	Q/1 -2010									Q/2 -2010								
Data	Age group 15-19			Age group 20-24			Age group 25-29			Age group 15-19			Age group 20-24			Age group 25-29		
	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w	T	m	w
Employment rate	4.6	6.4	3.8	24.0	29.1	18.5	49.0	66.6	40.8	4.6	5.8	3.0	23.8	32.3	14.9	48.2	56.1	40.0
Unemployment rate (total)	64.4	68.1	56.7	55.5	66.2	54.2	39.4	38.9	40.0	65.7	69.9	52.6	53.0	49.8	59.1	37.9	35.6	41.0
Unemployment for the low-skilled (ISCED<3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unemployment for the high skilled (ISCED>3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Long-term unemployment as a % of total unemployment	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Temporary work as a % of employment	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NEET rate (% of the age group)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Early school leavers (% of the age group)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Youth/adult unemployment ratio	6.7	7.7	5.0	22.5	26.3	23.5	26.9	25.7	28.9	6.7	9.0	3.3	22.5	22.5	22.3	24.4	21.7	28.6

Source: LFS