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NEWSLETTER 7

**NINTH SESSION OF WG2 - SOCIAL POLICY
AND EMPLOYMENT (CHAPTER 19)**

**“YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT: WHAT STANDS
IN THE WAY OF GETTING A DECENT JOB”**



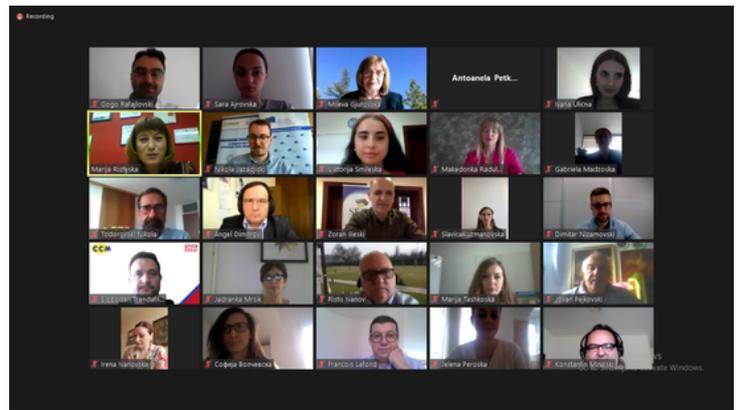
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25 years of foreign policy expertise

At the ninth session of Working Group 2 - Social Policy and Employment, which took place on June 15, 2021, online through Zoom webinar from 09:30 to 13:20, participated 50 participants who were representatives of: the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP), Employment Agency, Civil Society Organizations, students, academia members, experts in the field, trade unions, employers' organizations, and other stakeholders. The co-chairs of the session were **Gabriela Madzovska**, from the Sector for Equal Opportunities in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and **Marija Risteska**, director of the association "Center for Research and Policy Making" from Skopje.

Young people are one of the most vulnerable categories when it comes to labour rights. Youth unemployment in North Macedonia is among the highest in Europe. It has to be underlined that the labor market today requires higher skills and adaptability to new achievements, creativity, ability to think innovatively, and both formal and informal education should be developed in that direction.

The question of discrimination is a key topic in Chapter 19: "Social Policy and Employment". This session addressed many questions related to age discrimination, which is further related to other forms of discrimination, such as:



sex and gender discrimination, political discrimination, as well as discrimination stemming from physical and/or intellectual disability. One of the main conclusions drawn from the discussion in this session, was the need for increased participation of young people in creating policies that apply to them, which would probably contribute to a more effective implementation of the policies themselves.

Mileva Gjurovska, President of the European Movement in the Republic of Macedonia and National Coordinator for NCEU-MK, was the first to address the panel. Gjurovska began by stating that this is the ninth session of WG 2, Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment and she welcomed the participants and expressed her gratitude to the members of the Working Group, experts and representatives of youth organizations who accepted the challenge to participate in the session. Further she emphasized the exceptional cooperation with the partner team from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, and expressed gratitude for the valuable support the USAID team is providing in preparation for the new phase of NCEU-MK.



She stressed the importance of this session's topic, which is dedicated to young people and the challenges they face in finding decent employment. NCEU-MK always strives to find the most appropriate form of dialogue between the different stakeholders. Therefore, this session is an intergenerational dialogue between young people and their opinions and suggestions, and the seasoned analysis of experts.

"We understand intergenerational dialogue as a way of strengthening the collective intelligence that ensures continuity, and development of communities. Generational consensus is necessary when it comes to planning for the future where the voice of young people should be recognized in the decisions made by the authorities, and the voice of adults is recognized in the validity of the value system."

The current generation of young people, the so-called generation Y, carry the epithet "digital nomads". Worldwide, young people are seen as significantly curious, fact-seekers, self-confident, tolerant, but also with very high expectations.

They also have an exceptional desire for advancement, a thirst for professionalism, an entrepreneurial spirit and a high standard of living.

The data from the online survey conducted by NCEU-MK for the purposes of this session, indicate that young people in our country are close to this general character of young people in the world. But what happens when: young people are not recognized in public policies and in the decisions made by authorities; when their expectations are not met; when communication is one-way and comes only in the form of information from the centers of power; when the salary is very low; when the existing values do not have the power to integrate but rather divide people; when the issues of discrimination are resolved through the power of the party elites - then, the young leave in search of better conditions where they can realize their new "life software".

According to the World Bank, 500,000 people have left the country in the past 30 years, most of which are young people with high job performance. It is known from migration theory that leaving one's own country is the last alternative for people. "People move out when there is no hope that something will change at home," concluded Gjurovska.



Tomas Strazay, Director - Slovak Foreign Policy Association from Bratislava referred to experiences from the realization NCEU-MK where the main partner is the European Movement. According to him the Convention is a great success, and the Slovak Association is a smaller partner and facilitator. In his address, Tomas Strazay pointed out that both North Macedonia and Slovakia share similarities in this issue, especially in terms of youth employment. "In Slovakia we are also facing a brain drain and that is a really large number of young people moving to other European Union countries for study and most of them remain living in those countries. At the same time, the number of migrants from third countries is increasing, but those numbers are still not enough to compensate for the brain drain" said Strazay.

He reiterated that Slovakia is a great supporter of Macedonia's integration into the EU, which requires reforms, and one of the most important is to make labor market inclusive, especially for vulnerable groups. Due to the similarities, the exchange of experience between the two countries is useful.

Mileva Gjurovska followed up this to emphasize that NCEU-MK in the past 4 years cooperated with more than 40 Slovak experts and achieved a satisfactory way of cooperation and exchange of experiences based on the methodology of the Convention which has more than 1,000 active members.



Marija Risteska, Director of the Center for Development and Policy Making, in the role of Co-Chair of the Working Group 2, introduced the topic and emphasized the low utilization of youth creativity, lack of student initiative, youth inactivity. She pointed out that in North Macedonia social trends are not in favor of young people. Research shows low participation of young people in all social flows, which is expressed in the low level of utilization of youthful creativity, low interest of young people in extracurricular activities, absence of student initiatives. "It is not inappropriate to say that young people are invisible in Macedonian society. The last three years especially articulate the need for inclusion of young people in society and there is data that identify indicators of this situation.

. In addition, policies are created to improve the overall social environment of young people. Among the factors that negatively affect the prospects of young people is the high unemployment rate, which is as high as 45%" said Risteska. She also pointed out the problem of discrimination against young people in employment, and stressed that usually it is a question of gender discrimination.

"Out of the total population in the country, as much as 62.3% of the unemployed are women, while young people aged 25 to 29 have a rate of inactivity among women 76.5%. Furthermore, political discrimination is one of the most common forms in conditions when the state is still the largest employer. Young people face political discrimination, especially if they are supporters of a particular political party, have trouble finding or retaining employment. "This form requires new mechanisms for protection against discrimination" said Risteska.

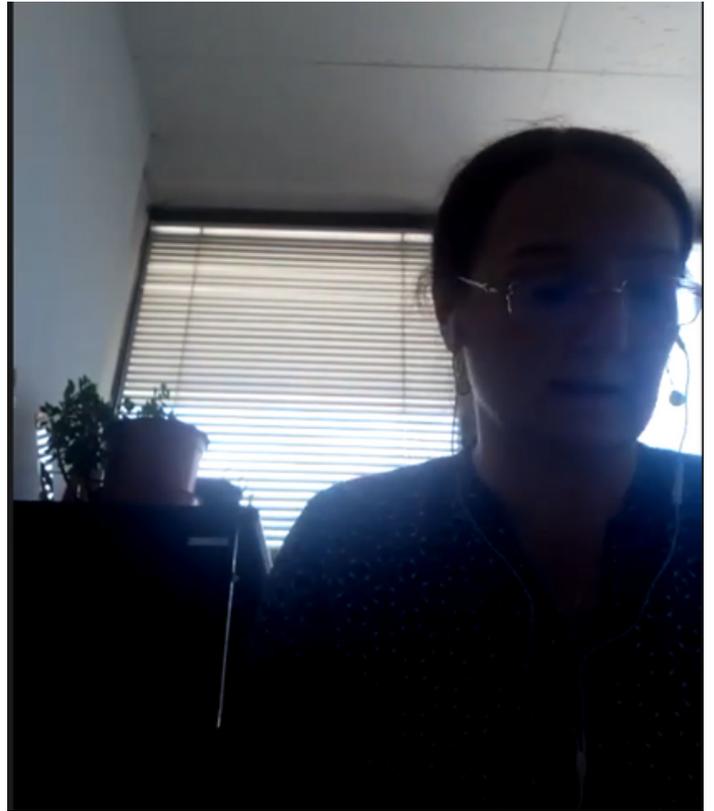
She also pointed towards discrimination based on physical or intellectual disability, emphasizing that young people with such disabilities are particularly stigmatized in the field of employment and it is necessary to discuss the positive measures that exist in order to deal with such stigmatization. "Rewarding, especially in the initial salary, is one of the reasons for the emigration of young people, which is not sustainable in the long run.

Other measures that are needed are measures that will incentivise the labor market to provide flexibility in work engagements.



At the moment, this is happening slowly with the existing Law on Labor Relations, which cannot provide an adequate result needed to respond to the dynamics demanded by young people in the labor market" underlined Risteska. In addition, she pointed out that informal work is a problem, which affects both young and old, and we have a lot of informally employed young people and that prevents them from being beneficiaries of employment rights and benefits. While the informal economy is considered quite stimulating in developed countries, Risteska says that in countries such as low-income North Macedonia, it is a limitation on the development prospects of the youth.

Gabriela Madzoska, Representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP), Co-Chair of WG 2, in her address emphasized that youth unemployment is a global problem and that in our country the MLSP is focused on young people for which it creates policies in the field of labor relations, employability, promotion of equality, child protection, youth and gender policies. She stressed that although N.Macedonia is not a member of the EU, it has already started the implementation of the project "Youth Guarantee", which, as she said, was introduced as a pilot in three municipalities in 2018, and in 2019 is implemented throughout the country with a special focus on three regions - Poloshki, the Northeastern and the Southwestern regions. These are the regions with the largest numbers of unemployed young people, who are also not involved in training or education. According to her: "This measure allows young people up to the age of 29 to receive a suitable job offer, to continue their education or to be included in an employment measure. The data show that in 2019, about 20,000 individuals were covered with this measure, of which 52% were women, and 6,004 people were employed. In 2020, the coverage is about 25,000, of which 7,424 people are employed. The Ministry is continuously taking measures in order to increase the employment rate of young people and their employability" added Madzoska.



It also merged the Law on Internships, which gives young unemployed people the opportunity to do practical work for a certain period of time and to be paid.

Ivana Ulicna, an expert from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, presented data on youth employment and listed the problems that contribute to high youth unemployment. These include: lack of skills, higher education, long transition from the educational process to work, lack of environment and opportunity to develop entrepreneurship, lack of a career guide as part of the educational process. She stressed that the level of urbanization plays an important role in the employment of young people. In this part, she points out that the access to education of marginalized groups, access to public services, development of the IT sector,

improvement of infrastructure, erasure of gender stereotypes (education and employment, mainly in marginalized communities) should be improved. The Slovak expert pointed out that the labor market today needs a workforce with higher skills. From the so-called "Difficult skills" in the labor market today requires digital skills, STEM skills, knowledge of foreign languages, financial literacy, project management. While, she points out, out of the so-called "Soft skills", it is necessary to have creativity, adaptability, communication skills, innovative thinking, presentation skills.

"In Slovakia, there are several measures to encourage the employment of young people, including employment subsidies, which is especially attractive for private companies to employ young people, and for a certain period they are covered almost all costs after the end of the subsidy. Also there are open so-called "Labor labs" to find the right skilled workforce, especially for IT skills a company needs. Ulicna estimates that the impact of measures to address youth unemployment depends in large part on the state of the economy, and in particular on the ability of the labor market to create jobs. But she also proposed measures for improvement: accessible education, quality job opportunities, development of the IT sector, infrastructure, reduction of regional differences, erasure of gender stereotypes.



Further she stressed the need to take into account environmental energy in the future, to develop digital skills, to support the creation of a workforce with more skills, the ability to adapt, the ability to think critically and self-motivate; and lifelong learning, self-employment, and education to be adaptable and meet the needs of businesses.

Zoran ILIEVSKI from the Youth Coalition SEGA stressed the need for new approaches to improve the opportunities of young people for a better life by applying a multisectoral approach, in terms of new policies and measures that provide more rights that will change the social position of young people. He stressed the need to address issues that are important for the quality of life of young people, and among them is especially important the issue of housing, employment rights and wages. According to him, in all phases of youth policy making (proposal, adoption, implementation and measurement) it is necessary to involve NGOs.



There is also a lack of communication channels that will convey information on policies and measures for greater economic activity of young people. It is especially important to strengthen the information process that will significantly motivate young people to be included in the youth guarantee. This will increase the trust of young people in institutions, which is now at a very low level. Finally, he stressed the need to create new measures aimed at developing digital skills.

Dimitar Nizamovski, director of the Youth Education Forum said that YEF is working to increase the capacity and skills for employment of young people, their better positioning in the labor market, but also how they can be able to find their first job, to keep and if possible change it.

Unfortunately, today, youth unemployment, in the country, the region, but also at the European level, is at a critical level, the situation was serious even before the pandemic, and we saw that especially last year when YEF and 12 organizations, we made an analysis of how much and how the situation has changed. The data showed that exactly young people as a category are definitely more affected or damaged in relation to the average monthly net income and they saw a decline of 2.6 percent of the average net income, where young people were first on strike" - said Nizamovski.

A significant proportion of young people are employed in the informal sector, especially in sectors that were severely affected during the crisis caused by the Corona pandemic. Young people do not trust the institutions mostly because of the existence of party discrimination due to which civic education is needed and concrete measures are taken to strengthen the merit system in employment and promotion. As a measure to deal with party discrimination, it proposes a training system to increase awareness of the various forms of discrimination, promote mechanisms for recognizing formal and informal discrimination, and link schools with companies. He also calls for the inclusion of young people through a willingness re-qualify and gain additional qualifications to improve their employability.

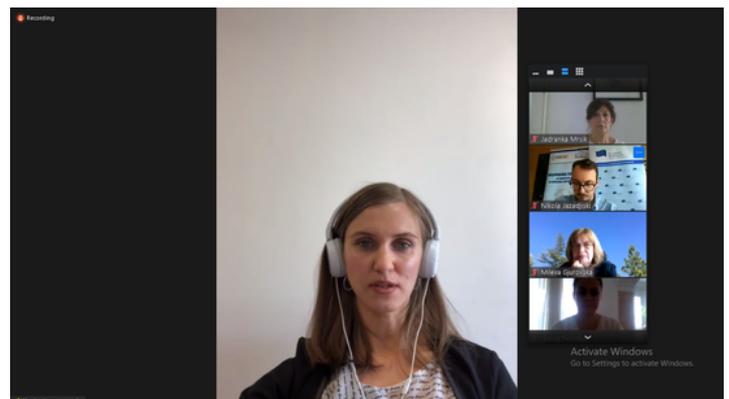


Nizamovski points out that on one hand a young workforce is required, but on the other hand in the job advertisements themselves are expected to have significant work experience, which is not appropriate at that given moment. Employers do not seem to be aware of the moment, what and how it works and they have unrealistic expectations regarding their experience and what is required of them.

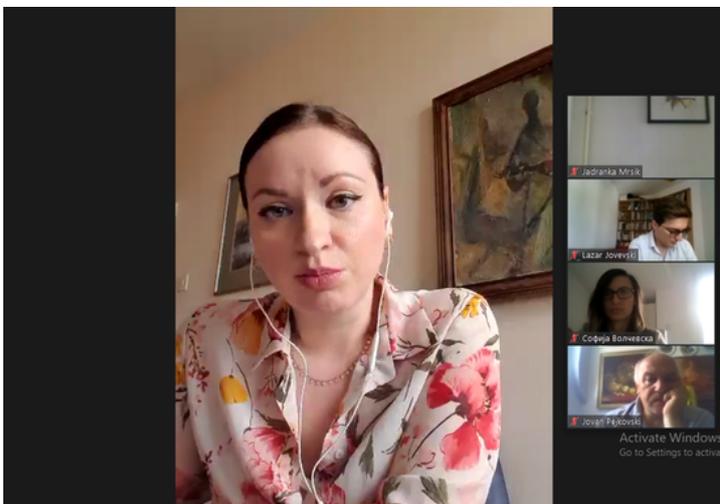
Gjorgji Rafajlovski, Operations Director of the Technology Park - SEEUTechPark at the South East European University presented the goals and activities of the Park for Innovation, Technology and Investment Development, which has existed since 2013, in creating new and developing existing small and medium enterprises. He also explained the ways in which help is offered to entrepreneurs. Collaborate with foreign EBRD programs; THE WORKS; GIZ, and with domestic institutions: FITR, Sparkasse, 500 start-ups. He also presented the results of their work in terms of self-sustainability and achieving the goals of supporting new and developing existing businesses.

Their strategic goal is innovation and new technologies, and startups, as Rafajlovski says, help by providing idea-model, business training, marketing and sales, mentoring, capital, legal advice, office, etc. Although the small market should not be a handicap for new companies, he stressed, despite the progress in North Macedonia, there are fewer start-up companies compared to other countries.

Slavica Kuzmanovska, JURIDICA, Association for Legal-Economic Research and Education presented the results of the survey among young people (18-29 years) conducted by NCEU-MK and emphasized the characteristic answers and conditions of the position of young people. Half of the respondents would leave the country, and the main reason is not the low salary, but young people have an important opportunity for career development, ensuring job security, socializing with colleagues at work. The problem of the influence of political parties for employment opportunities is emphasized, ie it is known that membership in one of the two major parties is needed to get a decent job.



Young people are aware of the need for a good education and are ready to continue their education, accept retraining and start their own business, but are unaware of the government's employment assistance and start-up support measures. According to them, the municipalities are not active supporters of youth employment, secondary vocational education is not a favorite with parents. The results show that greater transparency of government measures for youth employment and involvement of parents in familiarizing themselves with the terms of these measures should be ensured. She also highlighted the problem of gender discrimination, which discriminates against women both as young people and as women.



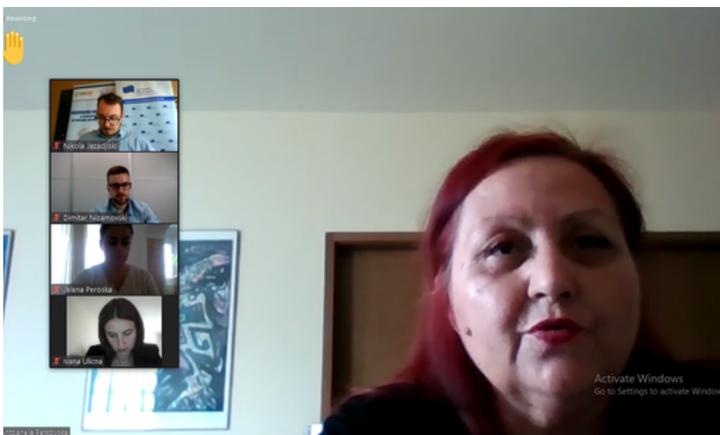
Irena Ivanovska, president of the youth section, stressed the problem of greater job insecurity among young people, which was shown during the Covid crisis, when most of the people who lost their jobs were fixed-term employees and young people. "Every fourth person who lost his job is a young person.

Most of the young people who lost their jobs had a fixed-term employment contract, which confirms the fact that young people are one of the most vulnerable categories of people when it comes to labor rights," she said. She pointed out that young people feel that they are marginalized and in order to change this situation it requires a unified approach from all stakeholders and concrete and stable measures. And to ensure real protection of workers' rights, especially for young people, greater social protection and inclusion to ensure that young people see the future of their country.

According to her, just as there can be no discrimination between men and women, so there can be no discrimination between younger and older workers working in the same positions. "Employment contract with a young people are usually concluded for a fixed period, three or six months, extending these contracts for a maximum period of five years. That is why we, as young people in SSM, asked the social partners in the new law on labor relations to reduce this restriction from five years to one year, which would be followed by the transformation of employment from fixed to indefinite. In that way, this will provide young people with the needed stability to develop their future plans for independence, family planning, as well as solving the housing issue, said Ivanovska.

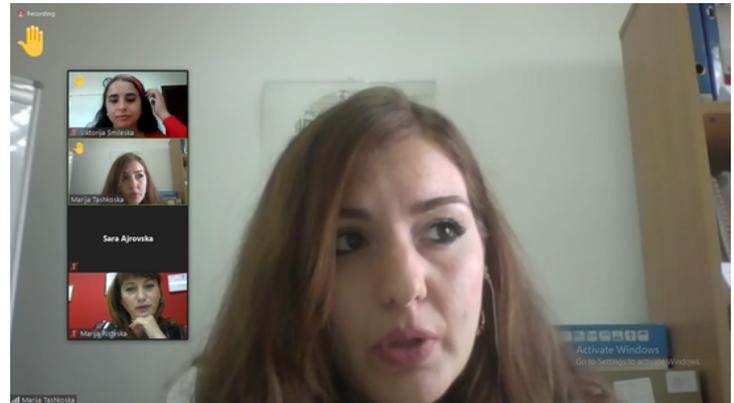
DISCUSSION

The discussion was started by **Antoanela Petkovska**, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Sociology, where she teaches a subject: Sociology of Youth. She stated that the key problem is not only the institutions, but also the distrust young people have towards the institutions. The amount of the salary is not a basic motive for them, but what is important is career prospects, quality and culture of living, creativity and self-realization. They want to participate in society, although not in politics, even though they are aware that belonging to a political party helps them to position themselves in society and in life.



Marija Tashkoska, economist, age 25 and an intern in the Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA, made proposals for increasing youth employment by synchronizing education with the needs of the business sector for dual system policy in secondary education, supporting formal and non-formal education to create skills development programs, promotion of employment channels, protection and control to

reduce party employment, introduction of rewards and penalties for public sector employees.



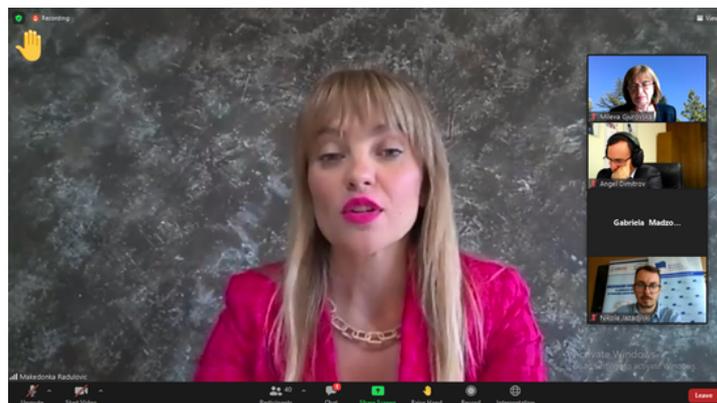
Viktorija Smilevska, 24 years old from the Coalition SEGA, pointed out the need to coordinate secondary and higher education programs with the demands of the labor market, institutions to work to improve the employment conditions of young people, employment agencies in municipalities to improve its staff for providing better service to young people for employment.



Angel Dimitrov, President of the Association of Employers stressed the lack of solutions and implementation for real development and structural changes in the economy to ensure a higher standard of citizens.

A solution to the problem of high partisanship should be provided in all sectors, especially visible in the field of employment. He cited the problem of youth invisibility, their apathy and lack of interest in social developments.

According to him, the employment measures are current and similar to the measures in other countries, but the question arises why young people are not informed about them, ie why they do not visit the websites of the MLSP and ESA where all measures of the Operational Plan are published. It is incomprehensible because they are online all day. More work needs to be done on the need for ways (forms) that will achieve economic activation of young people, especially in innovative businesses. Informal work is abused by employers, but greater benefits are needed for startups during the first three years. From the aspect of the needs of the employers, he pointed out the inadequate training and skills of the young people and that is why their career guidance is needed, as well as the nurturing and development of entrepreneurial skills.



Makedonka Radulovic, Professor, Institute for Family Studies, Faculty of Philosophy-Skopje. She presented data from an American study on the characteristics of today's young people, their behavior, interest and attitude towards education in comparison with previous generations. She concluded that they are similar to the characteristics of the Macedonian youth and that in our country young people choose their education and profession often influenced by their parents, and not on the basis of their own abilities and interests. Agreeing with the theses in the study, she pointed out that young people are lazy, lazy, with expressed impatience, self-satisfied and unprepared to take responsibility. Most of them would like to work in the public administration where the work load is more comfortable. According to her, the level of influence that parents exercise over their children's choice of education and the pressure to study is surprising. That is why she mentions parental education as very important.



Slobodan Trendafilov, Chief of Cabinet of the President of the Federation of Trade Unions. According to him, the labor rights of young people are more endangered, especially since they are predominantly employed in sectors (catering and tourism) where informal work and part-time work are more prevalent and they were the first to be fired as a result of the Covid crisis. He therefore proposed shortening the period in which he could be employed for a certain period of time by extending such contracts.

Jovan Pejkovski, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, emphasized the issue of wages, especially the amount of the minimum wage. Relatedly, he believes there should be a social from youth motivation and a new social contract to increase wages.



Lazar Joveski, professor at the Faculty of Law "Iustinianus Primus" listed several challenges for the poor position of young people in the labor market and appropriate measures to address them. The first is the challenge with unemployment and the structure of unemployment, as well as the large participation of young people in the field of the shadow economy. The second is discrimination in labor relations and the third is the demographic imbalance due to the naked emigration of young people. He proposes a complete revision of the concept of access to youth with the ultimate goal of keeping young people in the country and returning those who are already in other countries.



Konstantin Minovski, a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, also referred to the need for direct measures to influence emigration and linked it to education, which should create staff for the needs of a growing economy.

Antoaneta Petkovska tried to further explain the current challenges of modern times in terms of new characteristics of young people that should be taken into account when creating policies for education and employment. According to her, this is a time of individualism, of creativity, of intensified competition in the process of education and in the work environment.



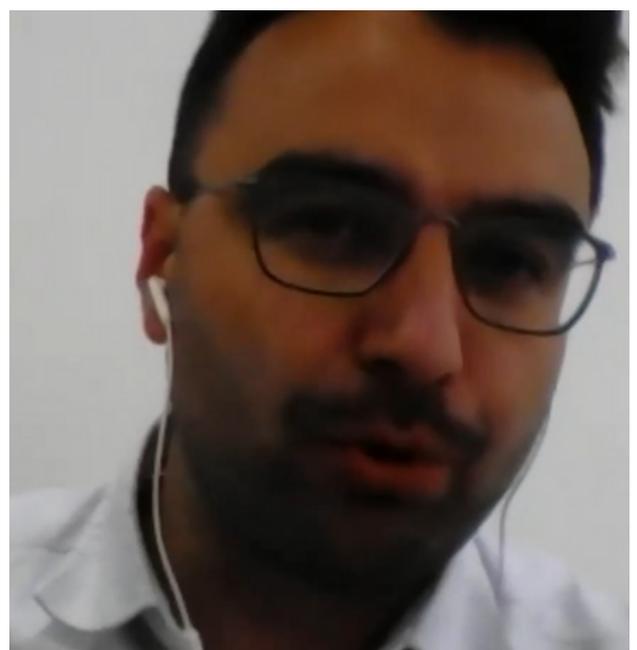
Slavica Kuzmanovska from Juridika stressed the need to create measures by regions due to their different degree of economic growth. In addition, emigration from other cities and villages in Skopje and demographic devastation of cities in other regions should be taken into account. Measures are also needed to protect women in the labor market during the period of exercising their reproductive function.

Mileva Gjurovska, National Coordinator of NCEU-MK, joined the discussion section with a question about Ivana Ulicna for her position on the discussions.

She stressed that young people have great creativity but need more motivation that would come from a society that should recognize that they are important and needed.

In response, **Ivana Ulicna** expressed her belief that the entrepreneurial spirit and internship should be developed and that a change in the way of thinking is needed, much more in secondary education than in higher education.

Gjorgji Rafajlovski added that only 17% of young people are members of organizations and associations and that the problem is the communication and integration of young people in smaller places. He suggested that in order to communicate with young people about measures related to their employment, direct channels should be used that are more acceptable to them than the traditional information media.



Based on the experience of supporting the innovation and entrepreneurship of young people and the results achieved within their technology park, he recommends to build conditions for inclusion of young people in the labor market and society according to the needs and changes that will occur in the next 100 years. He also pointed out the lack of education to create skills in young people and that they do not see it as something that adds value to their future.



Sofija Volcevska expressed disagreement with the statement that young people have unrealistic expectations when it comes to wages and obtaining higher positions. There are differences in the expectations of young people and employers in terms of education and business, and therefore professions are created that are not needed. Further, she pointed out the lack of opportunity for internships for students and that policies are being created that do not help young people very much.

She does not agree that young people are not interested in their future, but that they do not have the conditions for proper realization of their needs and demands

The project coordinator made a final comment on the discussions of this session that covered different but related aspects of youth employment, and stressed the importance of the intergenerational dialogue that was practiced during the session.

The Co-chair Gabriela Madzovska concluded the session.