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**THE PROBLEMS AND THE PRIORITIES OF  
THE YOUNG GENERATION  
IN MACEDONIA**

Abstract

This paper discusses the status of the youth in the Republic of Macedonia within the legal system and in the practice, as well as their values and priorities. It is based on a presentation of the data from several researches conducted in Macedonia in the past few years that deal with this issue. The paper focuses on the basic problems of the young generation, their priorities in life, as well as their perspectives and expectations.

**Keywords:** young generation, values, youth priorities

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present findings of recent researches conducted in Macedonia, dealing with the status, perspectives, values and priorities of the young generations. It is based on the results of several projects, including polls, focus groups, interviews and content analysis of documents related to this problem. The perspectives of young generations have always and everywhere been a key issue in contemplating the social, the political and the economic processes in a society. In this manner, their socialization in all forms is an essential official value incorporated in the legal framework in the Republic of Macedonia. However, the practice does not at all resemble those aspirations. As this paper will show, the status of the young people in this country makes them more a vulnerable group than a goal.

## THE CONTEXT

Macedonia is experiencing a serious social and economic crisis and recently deep political turbulences. It reflects on the young generations in a very specific way. The most visible consequence is the unemployment which is pointed out as the biggest problem of the country in all public opinion polls conducted in the recent years. It affects mostly the younger generations. The estimation is that over two thirds of the unemployed are on the age between 15 and 29 years.<sup>8</sup> The unemployment as expected, leads to emigration of young people and Macedonia is a good example for it. According to the World Bank's latest research on migration, for 2013, approximately 626.312 people have emigrated from Macedonia.<sup>9</sup> There are no official data on this in Macedonia, since the country has not had a census for 15 years, which is exactly the period when the problem became apparent.

The public discourse regarding youth is most frequently about their unemployment, emigration and politicization. The problem with the emigration of the young people from Macedonia in the recent years became so visible, that for example it became a prior topic incorporated in the political programs of all the big opposition parties in the past parliamentary elections.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Тогузовска Латковиќ М., Борота Поповска М., Цацановска Р., Јаќимовски Ј., Сасајковски С., Симоска Е., Забијакин Чатлеска В. „Студија за младите во Македонија“, Институт за социолошки и политичко-правни истражувања, Скопје 2017.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank: Migration and Remittances Data, 24 September 2015, available at: <http://www.world-bank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>, accessed on 1 April 2017.

<sup>10</sup> СДСМ: „План за живот во Македонија“ достапно на: <http://sdsm.org.mk/Gis/Upload/PDF/Plan%20za%20zivot%20vo%20Makedonija.pdf>, пристапено на 1 април 2017.

On the other hand, the civic and political participation of the young people was never a main concern, although in the last 26 years since the independence of the country, their position is deteriorating with every new political crisis. The inability to create a special strategy for them leads to the present situation – indifference to civic participation on one side and membership in political parties, as the only solution to achieve their rights, on the other.

The legal framework in Macedonia is generally not in favor to young people. Although Macedonian laws are overregulated, there is no special law which regards them. They are absent in the Constitution as a special social category. There is only one governmental institution which is concerned about the rights of the youth – the national Agency of Youth and Sports,<sup>1</sup> but their work is entirely dependent and based on the governmental policies. According to the latest research “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,”<sup>2</sup> young people clearly declared their discontent with the official institutions, pointing out that they have to become more responsive to their needs. Many of them see the solution in a parliamentary commission for youth, which has been discussed many times but never established.

In such a context it is not surprising that the following three features describe generally the situation of the young people: inertness for participation, politicization and desire to leave the country.

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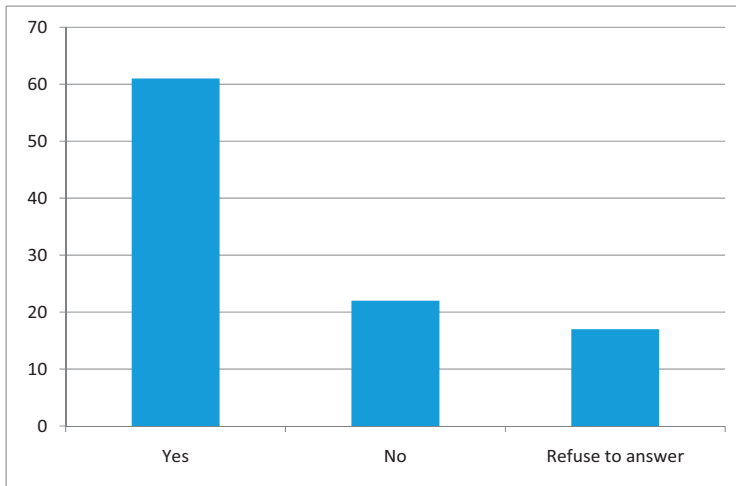
According to the same research, many of the young people (62%), growing up in the never-ending transition share the opinion that their parents had more chances for a better life. Despite this fact that they are more ambitious and willing to overcome their parents’ professional and educational success (72%), this “envy for the past” undoubtedly shows lack of progress and deterioration of their position.

The political context in Macedonia in the past two decades resulted in a deep politicization amongst young people. According to the data, a high percent (62%) of the youth have joined some political party. Only 22% responded that they are not members of some political party, while the others (16%) refused to answer.

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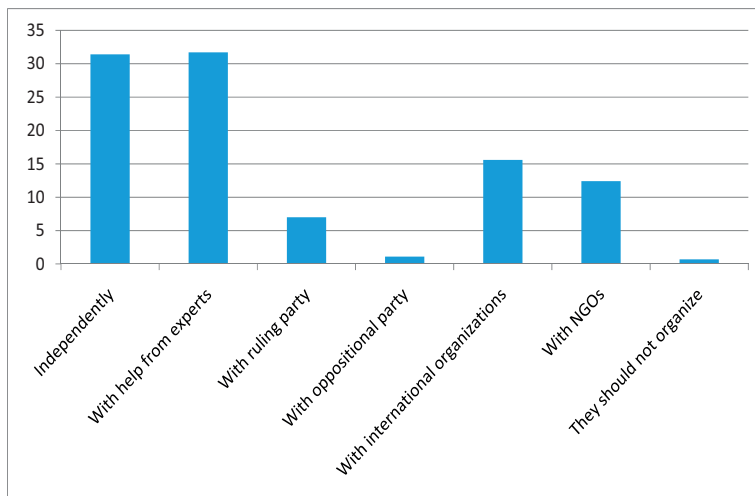
<sup>1</sup> Официјалната веб страница на Агенцијата за млади и спорт, достапна на: <http://ams.gov.mk/>, пристапено на 1 април 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Габер К., Симоска Е., Атанасов П., Наумовска Б., Лчевска К., (2016) Корелација помеѓу младинските приоритети и официјалните политики, Прогрес институт за социјална демократија и Институт за социолошки анализи.

**Graph 1:** *Are you a member of a political party?*

Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,” Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

Obviously, the political collectivities are perceived as the best solution for their problems and most effective instrument for acquiring and realization of their rights.

**Graph 2:** *How should youth organize in achieving their rights?*

Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,” Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

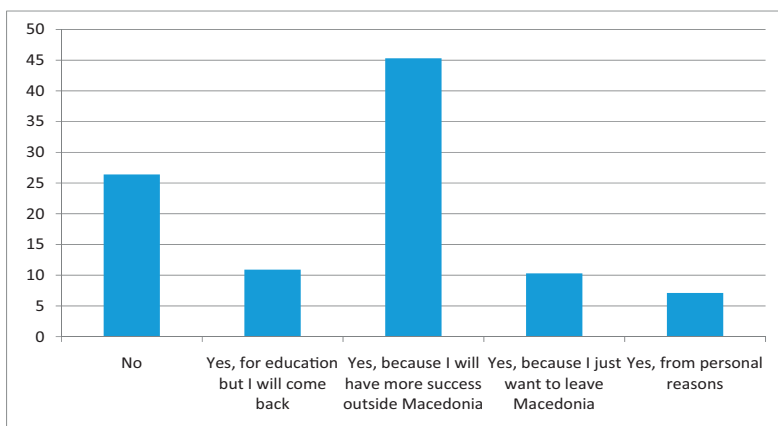
Compared to the engagement in the political parties, the non-governmental organizations are not enough attractive for young people. Only 15% of them answered that they are active in some NGO, while 32% have been volunteering in some organization.

There appears a certain confusion between the youth’s beliefs and reality in terms of achieving their rights and goals. Although many are members of political parties, most of the young people (31%) think that they should act individually or with the help from experts (32%) in accomplishing their goals. Only 7% think that they should get help from the ruling parties and 1% from the oppositional parties. There are young people who think that international organizations (16%) and non-governmental organizations (12%) can help them in achieving their rights. Although it is insignificant percent (1%), there are young people who think that they should not be organized at all.

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The most disappointing data regard the most current problem, the emigration among young people. According to their answers, only 26% of the young people would stay in Macedonia permanently, in terms of education and professional career. The others would like to leave the country somehow, eventually. A dominant number of **45%** think that they can prosper **only out of Macedonian borders**. There are young people who simply want to emigrate from Macedonia (10%), students who want to get better education abroad (10%) and others who have personal reasons for leaving the country (7%).

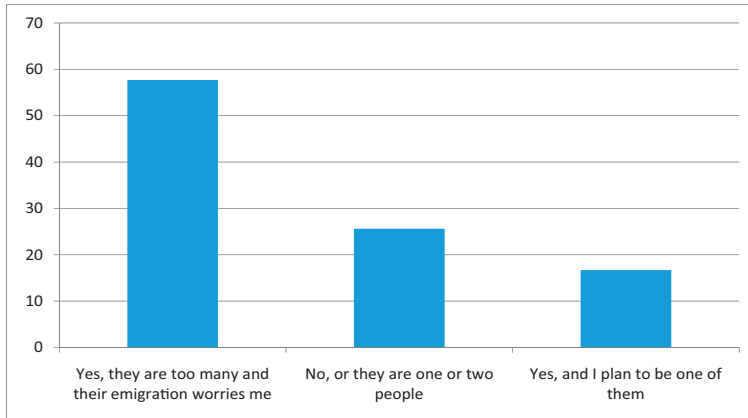
**Graph 3:** *Would you leave Macedonia?*



Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,”Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

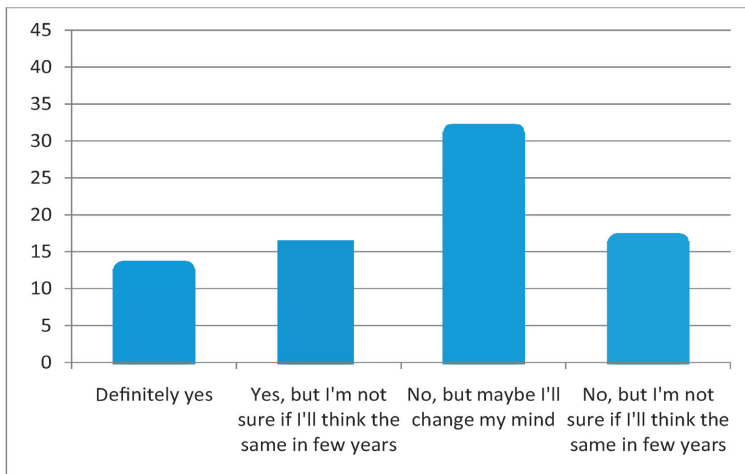
The fact that young people massively emigrate from Macedonia is reflecting in the answers of the respondents. The data also show that almost everyone among the respondents has some friend or acquaintance that has already left the country. More than a half of the youth (60%) are already worried about the number of people leaving Macedonia, while 27% do not have any friends who have left. The remaining (10%) are the ones who have already emigrated.

**Graph 4:** *Do you have many friends and acquaintances who emigrated from Macedonia?*



Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,”Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

**Graph 5:** *Do you see your future in Macedonia?*



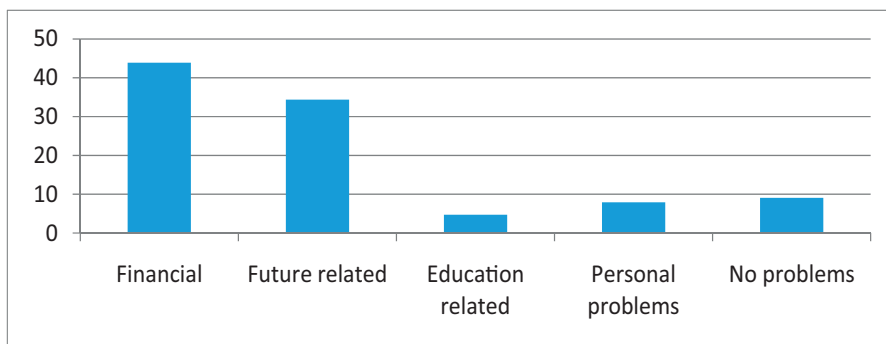
Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,”Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

According to the previous answers, the views of the youth about the prospects in Macedonia are not very optimistic. Yet, among the respondents dominates (specific for the youth) uncertainty about the future. More than a third of the polled young people (38%) believe that they have a future in Macedonia, but they are not sure that they will feel the same after few years. A smaller number (32%) of them, mainly do not think that their future is in Macedonia, but also they are not sure if they will feel the same after some years from now. Only 13% of the respondents are certain in their optimistic view, while 17% strongly believe that there is no future in the country.

### PROBLEMS AND PRIORITIES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

As it has previously been mentioned, in context of the same research, the Macedonian youth relates its biggest problems mainly to financial issues, as well as their own perspectives. The problems of financial nature present a “biggest problem” for 44% of the polled respondents. Further, for 34% the biggest problem is their future (they do not see any perspective for them in Macedonia), while only 9% stated that they do not have any problem. Education is a problem for 5% of the respondents and the remaining 8% pointed at the biggest problem as a one “of personal nature”. The lack of perspective as a problem is more frequent among respondents with a university degree (40%), inhabitants from Skopje (44%), Albanians (48%) and the ones whose parents have a university degree<sup>3</sup>.

**Graph 6:** *What is your biggest problem related to?*



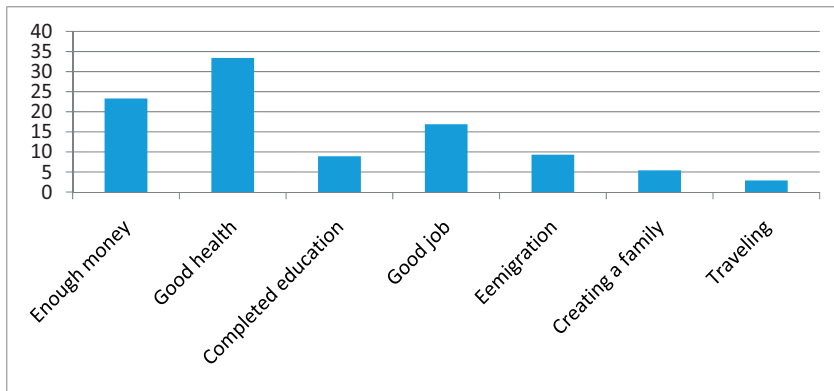
Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,” Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

<sup>3</sup> Габер К., Симоска Е., Атанасов П., Наумовска Б., Лчевска К., (2016) Корелација помеѓу младинските приоритети и официјалните политики, Прогрес институт за социјална демократија и Институт за социолошки анализи.

Complementary to the previous data are the answers to the question “What is your personal priority in life?” “With regards to this, even one third of the respondents answered that it is “to have a good health”, 23% chose to have enough money, 17% wish to find a good job, and 9% would like to move out of the country. (The remaining answers relate to: completing the education, create a family and travel, but they are with a rather small frequency.) It is an interesting fact and most unusual for young people, that the **good health** appears as a top personal priority among all categories of respondents, i.e. with respect to all independent variables.

As in many other researches<sup>4</sup>, the desire to move out of Macedonia as a priority is significantly different regarding the ethnic background of the respondents. Thus, the respondents of Macedonian ethnicity exhibited an almost twice as big interest to move out of Macedonia, as compared to their peers of Albanian ethnic origin. Moving out of the country as a personal priority is declared by 11% of the ethnic Macedonians and only 4% of the ethnic Albanians. According to the “Youth study of Macedonia 2013”,<sup>5</sup> the main reason for the emigration of the young people from Macedonia are of financial nature.<sup>6</sup>

**Graph 7.** Which is your top personal priority in life?



Source: “Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth,” Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

<sup>4</sup> Цветанова Г., Атанасов П., Јанев Г., Марковиќ М., Серафимовска Е., Цекиќ А., Наумовска Б. „Идентитетите на студентската популација во Република Македонија“, Институт за социолошки и политичко-правни истражувања, Скопје 2016

<sup>5</sup> Латковиќ Топузовска М., Борота Поповска М., Серафимовска Е., Цекиќ А. „Студија за младите во Република Македонија“, Фондација Фридрих Еберт, Канцеларија во Македонија, Скопје и Институт за социолошки и политичко-правни истражувања, Скопје 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

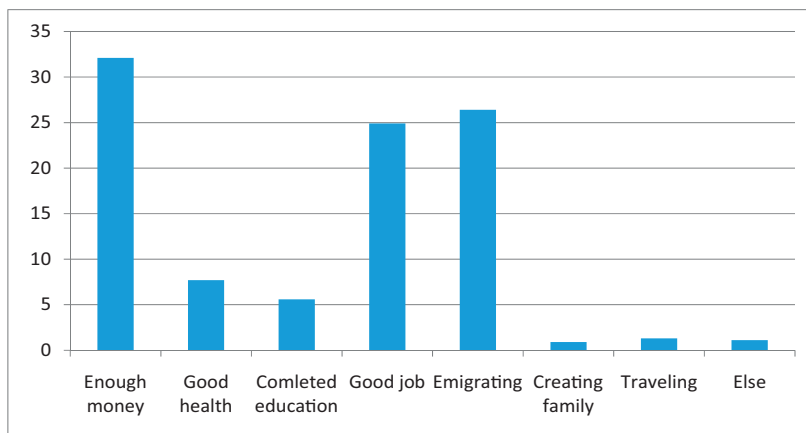


In order to get a more complete picture, the same question was asked in a context of the peers of the respondents. More specifically, it regarded the perceptions of the polled about the highest priorities of the young people in Macedonia generally. The general frequency of the answers shows that 32% of the respondents think that the top priority of their peers is to have enough money, 26% think that the priority is to emigrate from Macedonia, and for 25% it is to find a good job.

Although the health as a personal priority is on the top of the list when the respondents speak of themselves, it is mentioned by only 8% when they think about the others.

A completely different picture with regards to this question can be observed if the data are analyzed from the aspect of political affiliation of the respondents (whether they support a ruling party or an opposition one). Thus, 40% of the respondents who support a ruling party think that the highest priority of the young people in Macedonia is to have enough money, 13% said it is to find a good job, and the same number mentioned moving out of Macedonia. Among the respondents who support an opposition party the picture is completely different. There are even 40% who answered that the priority of the young people is to move out of Macedonia, while on the second position is the answer that the top priority is to have enough money (25%) or to find a good job (14%).<sup>7</sup> Such a great difference with regards to the political affiliation did not appear with regard to the question about the personal priority in the life of the respondents.

**Graph 8.** Which is the top priority of the young people in Macedonia?



Source: "Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth," Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

<sup>7</sup> Габер К., Симоска Е., Атанасов П., Наумовска Б., Лчевска К., (2016) Корелација помеѓу младинските приоритети и официјалните политики, Прогрес институт за социјална демократија и Институт за социолошки анализи, стр.18.

In order to get a more complete picture about this topic, besides the questions related to the problems which the young people are facing, their personal priorities and their peer's priorities, this presentation should be complemented with the data related to the official priorities of the Government related to the young generations. More specifically, it regards their perceptions of those priorities.

The question "Do the youth policies of the Government include the priorities of the young people?" was answered affirmatively by only 24% of the respondents, while 37% gave a negative answer. There is a significant number (40%) of the included population who could not answer this question, because they were not familiar with the policies of the Government. The biggest differences appear from the aspect of the employment status of the respondents, which is shown on the following table:

**Table 1:** *Are the youth policies of the government include the priorities of youth(Employment status)*

students	Employment status				Total
	employed in the public sector	employed in the private sector	unemployed		
Yes	23,8%	54,1%	22,3%	14,2%	23,9%
No	45,3%	21,6%	30,7%	38,2%	37,3%
Not familiar with youth policies	30,9%	24,3%	47,0%	47,5%	38,9%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: "Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth," Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

There are also differences regarding the ethnicity. While 27% of the ethnic Macedonians think that the policies of the Government are in accordance with the priorities of the young people, the respective answer was given only by 12% of the ethnic Albanians. As can be expected, a positive answer to this question was given by nearly half of the respondents who support a ruling party, and only 11% those who support the opposition.

Another question was focused on the perceptions of the respondents about the correspondence of the priorities of the Government and their personal priorities in several segments of the social life. The question about the official priorities included a possibility for two answers (used by only half of the polled population). **For that reason the following table will show the general distribution in absolute numbers.**

**Table 2:** *What are the two main priorities of the Government's youth policy?*

	<b>First choice</b>	<b>Second choice</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Education</b>	290	50	340
<b>Employment</b>	134	136	270
<b>Sport</b>	47	80	127
<b>Healthcare</b>	12	46	58
<b>Youth participation in decision-making</b>	22	32	54
<b>Culture of living</b>	9	34	43
<b>The Government does not have policies or priorities</b>	186	4	190
<b>Total</b>	700	382	1082

Source: "Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth," Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

The table shows that the majority of the respondents see the priorities of the Government in the sphere of education and employment, but the number of those who think that there are no policies or priorities of the Government related to the young people, is significant as well.

In order to point at the future policies and directions of the state institutions, the respondents were asked "what should be the two basic priorities of the Government related to the status of the young people". The general distribution of the answers (given in absolute numbers) is shown in table 3.

**Table 3:** *Which should be the priorities of government policies according to the position of youth? (Total number)*

	<b>First choice</b>	<b>Second choice</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Education</b>	280	54	334
<b>Employment</b>	319	196	515
<b>Sport</b>	18	44	62
<b>Healthcare</b>	16	74	90
<b>Youth participation in decision-making</b>	51	119	170
<b>Culture of living</b>	16	55	71
<b>Total</b>	700	542	1242

Source: "Youth Policies in the Republic of Macedonia: Correspondence of the Official Policies to Actual Priorities of the Youth," Progress Institute for Social Democracy and Institute for Social Analysis

It is obvious that a bigger number responded with a second choice as well. Furthermore, the employment appears to be of great significance for the young people. The young generations think that such an issue must be a priority for the Government. This complements the statements of the respondents about their personal problems (shown in Graph8). It is apparent that problems of financial nature and fear for the future dominate, which includes a fear for an (im)possibility for employment and financial possibilities for a normal life. Those categories are on the top of the list, which obliges any Government for finding a solution. The education was ranked as second on the list of priorities. It is interesting that the third priority for the young people is their need to be part of in the processes of decision making for issues related to them, to be asked, informed and fully included.

Regarding the inclusion in the realization of their rights, the biggest number of the young people (34%) see this process through lobbying and cooperation with state and local institutions; 26% would do it through NGOs, while 14% would participate in protests or boycotts. However, more than a quarter of the respondents (26%) declared that they would not be personally involved in any activities regarding the acquiring and realization of their rights. The lobbying as an instrument is more preferable choice for respondents with a university degree (41%) and public servants (60%), as well as ethnic Macedonians (38%). The protests or boycotts as a means for realization of their rights is a more frequent answer among the respondents with only primary education (35%) and the ethnic Albanians (27%). Lobbying is twice as acceptable for the young supporters of a ruling party (60%) than the ones who support an opposition party (32%).<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Young people should present the progressive and the avant-garde power in every society. However, it requires a certain level of content with their status and belief in themselves and their impact. The values and priorities in life of the Macedonian young people resemble the ones of their peers in many other countries, but the lack of belief and expectations are specific.

The situation at present in Macedonia is such, that we are witnessing a large emigration of the youth from the country, hoping for a better life, especially regarding the ones with a completed university degree. Those who stayed are unfortunately predominantly indifferent and unwilling to participate in social processes in order

<sup>8</sup> Габер К., Симоска Е., Атанасов П., Наумовска Б., Лечевска К., (2016) Корелација помеѓу младинските приоритети и официјалните политики, Прогрес институт за социјална демократија и Институт за социолошки анализи, стр.22.

to improve their rights and influence their position. The result is defeating – too many young people are joining the political parties as the only way to improve their life. The youth's pessimism and apathy can be very well illustrated by the words of one participant in the focus groups, according to whom: "We, the young people, cannot change anything. We are helpless and powerless to change anything. I think that even we do not want to change. And how can we change anything? It is the same for so many years, just going to the worse."

The unemployment, emigration and politicization of youth should be the base for a special youth strategy and incorporated in every segment of the legal system. That policy should make them proud and prove to them that they are not an abused social category but the progressive force that will bring the brighter future of the country. Or, as one famous Irish proverb says "Praise the youth and it will prosper."

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