

**CITIZENSHIP AND
LIFELONG LEARNING
MONITOR 2020**

**NORTH
MACEDONIA**

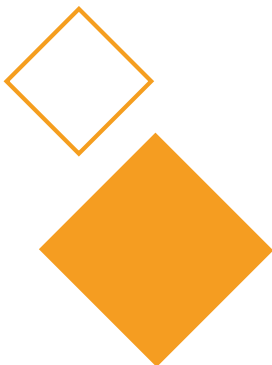




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ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of nine national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The North Macedonian report is focused on the general three main themes: global citizenship education, digital citizenship, and community partnerships for interculturality. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. In a year in which learning has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more apparent how essential global citizenship education is for the development of competences that prepare learners for global challenges and that prepare them to act responsible towards their fellows beyond any national border. Unfortunately, though the government of North Macedonia is working on the Agenda 2030, it does not focus on global citizenship education, which is relegated as a sub-topic of citizenship education which is also a neglected topic in formal education. This is a tremendous wasted opportunity, given that based on the latest

PISA results, the North Macedonian learners are scoring very highly on global competences. The lack of support for learners on this front is compensated by the work of civil society organisations (CSOs) via non-formal and informal learning. However, due to the pandemic, the funding for CSOs has been slashed significantly, while investment in closing digital infrastructure gaps was inconsistent prior to the pandemic. As a result, CSOs find it more complicated to empower the learners who have some of the worst scores on basic competences in Europe and find themselves into a context where approximately 20% of the North Macedonian society does not have access to broadband connection in their household. Mismanagement of investment and cases of corruption have eroded the education system, coming full-circle during the COVID-19 pandemic to reveal the significant barriers that learners have in adapting to the 21st century society. The public authorities must better cooperate with CSOs, must increase funding for such organisations, and promote an educational model based on lifelong and lifewide learning considering that this the only way learners can adapt to the new society.

INTRODUCTION

As of 2005, North Macedonia is a candidate country to join the EU, with accession negotiations being opened in March 2020¹. Based on this historical landmark, it is essential to consider how North Macedonia can adapt to the digital and green transitions which the EU itself is undergoing. The promotion of global citizenship education (GCE) in North Macedonia is sporadic, with the topic being still national in focus and relegated to very few mentions in formal education. This situation does not contribute to taking advantage of the global competences of North Macedonian learners, which are above the OECD average based on the latest PISA results². If, based on the above, there is significant lagging behind to develop transversal competences for the green transition,

North Macedonia is dealing slightly better with the digital transition, significantly reducing the digital infrastructure gaps in the past years and taking steps towards building up digital competences. However, these steps are coming slightly late, and more must be done, a situation highlighted by the force majeure nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its effort to meet accession standards, North Macedonia has improved the cooperation among the civil society and national authorities, ensuring more democratic processes in the country. However, efforts to educate North Macedonians towards intercultural dialogue and democratic values need to be intensified, which extends to the important role that non-formal and informal education providers have during this process.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

TERMINOLOGY

GCE is sporadically approached in North Macedonia, which makes it difficult to establish the specific definition used by national authorities. This is the case also because the citizenship education curriculum was only recently updated in 2018, as part of a larger set of education reforms³, prompting some concerns about the development of civic competences for active participation for the North Macedonian population. The new curriculum was launched with a delay of 8 years, revealing the complicated process to develop baseline competences for any engaged citizen. Currently, citizenship education is a separate

subject for the 8th-graders, but it is also taught cross-curricularly. GCE is supposedly part of this separate subject, while also being implemented across all the other subjects. The new citizenship education curriculum contains certain basic topics such as ‘civic identity – building the notion of individuals as citizens, cooperation and the relationship with the civic sector, the citizen and the society, religion art and media in the civic society, the citizen and the state’ while also including the topic the ‘citizen and the world’⁴. This latter one would represent GCE, but it is worrying that it limited to a sub-topic within a terminal year subject and it is even more worrying that our members report that the world-wide resonance of local/national

1 European Commission (2020). European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations – North Macedonia. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/north-macedonia_en. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

2 OECD (2020). PISA 2018 Results Volume VI - Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?. Available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/OECD/edu/pisa-2018-results-volume-vi-are-students-ready-to-thrive-in-an-interconnected-world>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

3 Eurydice (2020). North Macedonia – National Reforms in School Education. National Education Systems. Available at : https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-42_en. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

4 Eurydice (2020). North Macedonia – National Reforms in School Education.



issues or actions are not considered, failing to fully prepare the learners for how to be citizens of the world. Our members clarified that they operate with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development but explained that other CSOs have different approaches across North Macedonia, lacking a unitary response to the topic.

AN EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT FOSTER THE TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES THAT PUPILS HAVE

The positive developments related to pupils' global competences, based on the latest PISA results⁵, reveal a fertile ground for the implementation of a curriculum adapted to the global world. North Macedonian pupils have the second highest cognitive adaptability from the countries studied, illustrating a capacity to adapt to a GCE curriculum and develop the needed transversal skills. The pupils are very interested in learning about cultures, being significantly above the OECD average regarding this, while also above the OECD average in terms of the amount of foreign languages they learn. These actions are fostered by the fact that many school heads in

North Macedonia report that actions to teach about various cultures are undertaken in their schools, putting North Macedonia significantly above the OECD average⁶. This type of learning has made North Macedonian pupils aware of discrimination in their educational institutions⁷, being a generation prepared to reckon with the current multicultural societies and with inclusivity for the purpose of meaningful inter-person interactions but also for meaningful participation in society. The GCE curriculum should be updated, building upon pupils' competences, and supporting the development of transversal skills.

SDGS WITHOUT SDG 4.7 CANNOT BE MET

Though our members report the fact that GCE is not used by North Macedonian public authorities, they admit that the Government is working on the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), relying on its [National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2008-2020](#). It is worrying, however, to see that GCE, and [SDG 4.7](#) are not treated as priorities within the North Macedonian approach towards SDGs. An encouraging element is the collaboration

5 OECD (2020). PISA 2018 Results Volume VI - Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?.

6 Ibid. Pp. 22, 28, 49, 64.

7 Ibid. P.69.

between CSOs and the public authorities has been improving⁸, leaving room for the potential to upscale GCE by means of a grassroots effort. As part of a formal group of Experts for Improvement of the Citizenship Education in Primary and Secondary Education - created by the Ministry for Education and Science in January 2018 - civic education experts and CSOs representatives contributed to the development of the latest civic education curriculum⁹, practicing a multi-stakeholder approach that provides a more comprehensive method to the topic. Based on this, but also on the work that CSOs are doing on the ground regarding GCE, there seems to be avenues for cooperation to ensure the mainstreaming of GCE in the country. However, this has to happen soon given the current climate emergency, and given

the fact that the people have to be supported to undergo the green transition that becomes a hallmark of the EU, and implicitly of any accession ambition for North Macedonia.

CSOs have been setting up initiatives to promote GCE, building up inclusive societies that are attuned to the 21st century multicultural, digitalised and fast-paced societies. Relying on their knowledge and expertise on the ground, the public authorities should collaborate with them in developing a comprehensive GCE strategy that would ensure that the entire educational system is reformed based on this paradigmatic shift. More information about the GCE provided by non-formal and informal providers in North Macedonia can be found in the case study below.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Community Development Initiative \(CDI\)](#), has implemented the project [From-MetoEU](#) (From Migrants Engagement to Europe Upgrade), funded from the EU's Europe for Citizens programme. The project was launched in 2018 and was finalized in 2020 partnering up with [CDI](#) organisations from Albania, Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain, Croatia and Greece. The project was aimed at identifying avenues through which migrants

and European natives can collaborate to build up and share a new idea of a multicultural Europe. The project served as a way to go beyond what formal citizenship means, and treat migrants as citizens, making their ideas, innovative approaches, participatory methods a reality in the community in which they lived. Therefore, the idea of citizenship was conceived in a borderless way, inviting all to develop competences for GCE.



8 CIVICUS Monitor (2018). Civil Society – Government Relations Continue to Improve. Available at : <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2018/06/21/Civil-Society-And-Government-Relations-Improve/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

9 Eurydice (2020). North Macedonia – National Reforms in School Education.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

COVID-19 AND ONLINE LEARNING

The pandemic has caused the closure of the education institutions in North Macedonia on 11 March 2020, with further evaluations reaching the conclusion of keeping the institutions closed for the remainder of the 2019/2020 academic year¹⁰. Distance learning became the rule, with the Ministry of Education and Science developing educational content to be broadcasted on a national channel dedicated for these lessons¹¹. The public authorities have also made available an online platform, titled [Eduino](#), which has short video lessons accompanied by explanations from teachers. All these tools have been developed in partnership with UNICEF.

The situation in North Macedonia replicates the case from many other European countries in which reforms to close digital skills and infrastructure gaps have been implemented before the health crisis but they have not been sufficiently ambitious, leading to many lacks that have excluded learners from education during the lockdown period. Such an example is the governmental project Computer for every child which was part of the 'Education and training for everyone' initiative (2005–15)¹², and paved the way for digital and online learning in primary and secondary schools, including initial VET. Unfortunately, the commitment to the project was short-lived as it was discontinued in 2013, without meeting its targets due to the Ministry of Education missing on payments to the



10 UNICEF (2020). The Social and Economic Effects of COVID-19 on Children in North Macedonia. P.82. Available at : <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/6816/file/Study:%20Social%20and%20Economic%20Effects%20of%20COVID-19.pdf>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

11 Di Pietro, Giorgio, et al. (2020). The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets. Joint Research Centre Technical Report. P.34. Available at : https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121071/jrc121071.pdf?mc_cid=ecbb7c6ba9&mc_eid=26e959399a. Last accessed: 5 January 2021. ; UNICEF (2020). The Social and Economic Effects of COVID-19 on Children in North Macedonia. Pp.82-83.

12 Ministry of Information Society and Administration of the Republic of Macedonia (2009). Press of the ministry for information society in the occasion of one year government. Available at: <http://arhiva.mioa.gov.mk/?q=node/2179>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

providers of digital equipment and breaching the terms of the procurement contract¹³. Such blatant disregard for the needs of the North Macedonian population has contributed to the challenges experienced during the pandemic, revealing instances of mismanagement of investment in education that has long-lasting consequences. The Law on Primary and Secondary Schools requires teachers to deliver at least 30% of the teaching and learning content digitally. The State Education Inspectorate is the authority responsible for ensuring that this rule is applied through regular evaluations¹⁴. It appears that VET teachers are not using digital and online learning on a regular basis as there is a gap between reporting and reality in the interpretation of what 30% of ICT use in teaching means¹⁵. In this context, it must be highlighted that though the teachers have not been transitioning learning digitally, this might have been the case because they lacked the resources to do so. The Computer for Every Child initiative included not only digital equipment for the education institutions, but also training for the teachers to implement it¹⁶. Therefore, the task put on the shoulders of teachers was too big in the absence of the support from public authorities.

Increases in the expansion of fixed broadband connection have been reported, with the percentage of households with internet access

increasing by 11pps between 2014 and 2018 (79.3%), while mobile broadband increased to above 60%¹⁷. Unfortunately, only 6.4% of learners reported engaging in online learning before the pandemic¹⁸. The government is working on a new strategy for the development of digital skills, while digital literacy is a priority in the most recent curriculum¹⁹. However, the lack of internet connectivity in many households is an issue, with reports that only 90% of learners have had access to online learning during the lockdown, a number which is disappointing considering that education is the basis for exercising any other right, and a universal right in itself. Furthermore, 60% of those learners that could engage in online learning have been using mobile phones, highlighting a shortage of proper devices for this process, which can have risks on the learners' health and well-being²⁰.

FIGHTING PERSISTENT INEQUITY IN EDUCATION

Any kind of inequity in education is exacerbated by the fact that the North Macedonian education system is confronting with political influence and corruption. Access to mainstream education for children and students with disabilities remains poor with limited access to school buildings, lack of appropriate supplies

13 Chaveski, Igor (2013). Macedonia: Project "Computer for Every Child" halted. Available at: https://metamorphosis.org.mk/en/arthiva_arhiva/macedonia-project-computer-for-every-child-halted/. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

14 Government of North Macedonia (2019). Law on Primary and Secondary Education. Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 161/2011 dated 5.8.2019.

15 Jovanov, Ivan, et al. (2020). Challenges of implementing distance learning in Covid's time-19 in secondary education. Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Leaders Association for Education Activism and Development. Available at : http://lead.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Istrazuvanje_Sproveduvanje-na-dalecinskoto-ucenje.pdf. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

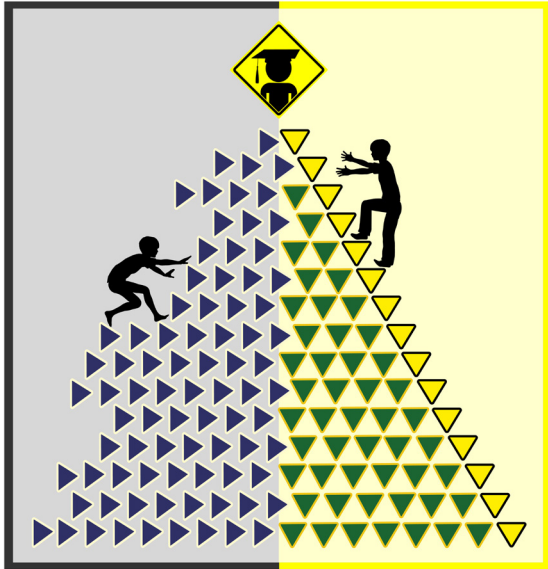
16 Ministry of Information Society and Administration of the Republic of Macedonia (2009). Press of the ministry for information society in the occasion of one year government.

17 European Commission (2020). North Macedonia 2020 report. 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. P.55. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.; Jovanov, Ivan, et al. (2020). Challenges of implementing distance learning in Covid's time-19 in secondary education.

18 Hunt, Paula Frederica (2020). Inclusive Education, Learning and Distance Learning in North Macedonia. United Nations Development Programme. P.22. Available at: <https://www.mk.undp.org/content/north-macedonia/en/home/library/poverty/Inclusive-Education-Learning-And-Distance-Learning.html>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

19 European Commission (2020). North Macedonia 2020 report. P.71.

20 Jovanov, Ivan, et al. (2020). Challenges of implementing distance learning in Covid's time-19 in secondary education.



and learning materials, and insufficient support for teachers. Children and students from Roma communities continue to face barriers to regular and quality education and training as separation along ethnic lines in education and training continues²¹. Therefore, barriers to integrated education and training remain significant and this has only been reinforced during the pandemic as those disadvantaged were the ones having difficulties in accessing online learning. Even more worrying is evaluating the quality of education provided online, given the fact that North Macedonian pupils have some

of the worst scores in Europe regarding the achievement of basic skills²². The adaptation to the online environment risks worsening this situation given how underprepared the educational system has been to transition to online learning.

The current gaps in terms of the provision of education but also in terms of building up digital skills needed for the digital transition, especially during the pandemic, are filled in by non-formal and informal education providers. Their support becomes essential when public authorities cannot cover the learners' needs. For this reason, there needs to be a structural approach to ensuring multi-stakeholder partnerships on the provision of education, ensuring that informal and non-formal providers can collaborate with the formal education sector. The lifelong learning aspect of building up competences for digital citizenship can only be achieved if acknowledging the contribution of each type of education provider, while properly financing the work of these organisations. The CSOs have been providing a significant amount of projects in the run-up to the pandemic on digital literacy, and they have been continuing their activities online, further promoting digital citizenship.

21 European Commission (2020). North Macedonia 2020 report. P.90-91.

22 European Commission (2020). Equity in school education in Europe. Eurydice report. P.38. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity_2020_0.pdf. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CDI](#), implemented the project [Breaking Barriers- Embracing Literacy through Digital Media](#) from 2014 until 2017. The project emerged as a need to support adult learners who lacked basic literacy skills, while also preparing adult educators to adapt to the digital environment when approaching literacy. Digital pedagogies were promoted, making use of newly emerging digital innovative tools to update teaching methods. The situation regarding basic digital skills in many European countries is a key conceptual problem related to the lack of a common global understanding of how to approach literacy. This suggests the significant need for cross-border collaboration and innovation in the development of literacy programmes for adults and teaching tools for educators. The project tackles the question of how digital tools can meet the need of low-skilled adult learners, aiming to explore how adult educators can engage and motivate adult learners by using digital tools and storytelling.

The project activities accounted for research on best practices related to ensuring basic digital literacy, for training of adult educators, for the creation of an innovative tool kit for adult educators focusing on the use digital media and interactive story-telling to teach basic skills and for the development of a customised manual complementing the digital tool kit. Project partners engaged in this process were adult education centres from Norway, Malta, the Netherlands, the UK, Italy, Cyprus and Poland, while [CDI](#) was involved through the [Association Alliance for Development of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning](#), a membership-based network which they coordinate. Such efforts are commendable for building up digital skills that have not been sufficiently approached in formal education, and for preparing learners for the digital transition and for adapting to new methods of societal participation and of engagement with the labour market.

In addition, CSOs have been essential actors at combatting fake news during the pandemic and promoting messages aligned with the governmental health directives, revealing again the role of such organisations. SOLIDAR

Foundation member, [CDI](#), has created 10 informative videos on how to react and behave in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic which have been promoted via social media and their [YouTube channel](#).

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

[The Monitor's previous edition](#) has explained the importance of collaboration among formal education providers and informal or non-formal providers in the context of intercultural dialogue. However, this is insufficient, as the learning process continues across all moments of one's life, which highlights how essential it is to secure a continuous learning process in their own communities. As a result, this year's edition looks more into partnerships organized by CSOs within local communities for the promotion of inclusion related projects.

BIDIRECTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AS PARTNERS FOR CSOS

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CDI](#), is well-positioned in the North Macedonian society with regards to partnerships with governmental bodies but also within communities. [CDI](#) is managing the North Macedonian [Life-long Learning Network](#), which unites national association of stakeholders, organizations and institutions, for the development of adult education and lifelong learning, and is the North Macedonian intermediary organization for the [Erasmus for Young entrepreneurs programme](#). [CDI](#) has also signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, engaging in multiple adult education programmes in partnership with local and national authorities, and developing a trust-based, iterative collaboration. [CDI](#) expanded

its partnership also within local communities, collaborating, for example, with [the VET high school Moshapijade to open the URBAN VET centre](#), where they offer hard skill courses for unemployed persons (carpentry, bakery, laser printing and metalworking) ensuring a significant number of people participate and gain skills needed for market employability.

This healthy approach towards various partnerships secures multiple avenues in which intercultural skills for the inhabitants of the local communities can be built up. The improvement of cooperation among CSOs and the public authorities²³ is encouraging for future potential projects implemented in partnership across communities. An example of such a project that contributed towards intercultural education is [CDI's](#) project titled Demystification of inter-ethnic conflicts. More information on the project can be found in the case study box below.



23 CIVICUS Monitor (2018). Civil Society – Government Relations Continue to Improve.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CDI](#), reported on a project implemented by their partners, [ACTAC](#), from January 2017 until September 2017, titled [Demystification of inter-ethnic conflicts](#), relying on financial support from the United States Embassy. The project aimed to reduce the interethnic and inter-confessional tensions and conflicts among high school youngsters in North Macedonia and their essential and sustained relaxation through demystification of the general political climate and political manipulation, as well as through a new

vision of maintaining peace. The project implemented numerous interactive actions to normalise inter-ethnic collaboration, and to foster more collaborations within community, normalising intercultural dialogue. Examples of such activities are the creation of a TV commercial, youth trainings with mixed nationalities, and a press conference to publicize the TV ads created by the youngsters, and to raise awareness on the existence of intercultural conflicts across North Macedonia.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR POLICYMAKERS AND LAWMAKERS IN THE PROCESS OF PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Promotion of multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue relies on an adequate representation of other cultures in the social and political life. Therefore, the existence of the [Committee for Inter-Community Relations \(CICR\)](#) as part of the national assembly is not only providing the possibility to put on the agenda issues relevant for interculturalism but also provides the chance from MPs coming from those communities to receive more coverage. The CICR is composed of 7 Macedonian MPs, 7 Albanian MPs and 1 MP representing the Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serbian and Bosnian ethnic communities. The Assembly is obliged to consider the opinions and proposals of the Committee and

make relevant decisions, based on legislation from 2002 and 2007. With its work so far, the CICR has established itself as a body with an important role and responsibility in the implementation of the general and special right of the members of the national communities. It has played a vital role and provided significant contribution in the development of the multicultural and multi-ethnic dimension of the Macedonian society, true harmony among all citizens, thus strengthening the overall parliamentary democracy in North Macedonia²⁴. The national-level CICR is complemented by municipal level CICRs which serve the same function but for local policy-making. These would be established in municipalities where 20% of the population belongs to a minority, and would be tasked with evaluating the implication of decisions taken at local level on the minorities²⁵. However, any inclusion related body

24 Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (2020). Inter-Community Relations Committee. Available at: <https://www.sobranie.mk/inter-community-relations-committee.nspx>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

25 Koceski, Sreten, et al. (2007). Committees for Inter Community Relations – CICR. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/e/30744.pdf>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

must work on itself and must adapt to the ever-changing composition of communities. For this reason, [CDI](#) has implemented a series of projects aimed at improving the way the CICRs operate. The overall objective of the action is to ensure inclusion of all non-majority ethnic

communities in local decision making through securing the continuity of the work of CICRs regardless of changes due to local elections. More information on how non-formal education providers are promoting intercultural education through supporting CICRs can be found below.



CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CDI](#), has implemented a series of projects, titled [Bona Mente](#), aimed at improving the functioning of the CICRs. Various iterations of the project were implemented in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014, which were funded by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission to North Macedonia, by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) or by the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Though the projects each slightly differed, the overall aim of this long-term approach to project funding was to support the development of the multiethnic society by strengthening the capacity of the CICRs at municipal level in terms of the implemented actions, implicitly ensuring the effective and equitable representation of the minority groups with regard to local policies. As the projects advanced, the capacity of CICRs to engage with the municipal councils on policymaking has increased, while the participants of small minorities within CICRs was improved.

Training workshops were provided for building the capacity of CICRs, but also to help newly elected and established CICRs to navigate the policymaking process and effectively perform their function. The project activities were complemented by study visits, including cross-borders ones to Serbia,

for understanding best practices on the engagement of minorities in local politics, while also a documentary was developed to account for the efforts of the CSOs in building up a fairly recent political body's capacity to support, in a formalized way, the minorities. CSOs have collaborated with the CICRs in setting up local funds which were accessible for community members, empowering individuals to act towards the betterment of their communities.

Furthermore, the projects had a research component as well, accounting for the composition of CICRs, measuring the involvement of under-represented communities in local politics and in CICRs, and providing recommendations for the equitable representation of non-majority ethnic communities at local level. The role of CSOs in building the capacities of public officials to facilitate a formalized process of representation for minority groups is a tremendous achievement for improving representation and the presence of intercultural education on the political agenda. The essential role of these organisations in bridging up communities with policymakers, and providing the on-the-ground knowledge accumulated, cannot be overstated, and highlights the importance of building up a vibrant civic space to facilitate the meaningful societal participation of individuals from local communities.

FUNDING

This section shall consider the public spending on education as a percentage of the GDP, while addressing the specific funding allocated for GCE and for CSOs to build up community partnerships. Public spending on education was at 3.7% of the GDP in 2019²⁶, a sum which cannot sufficiently support the educational system to close the existing gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged learners, to ensure the digital transition and to support the teaching profession to readapt the educational system for the green transition. The sum is well below the EU average²⁷, and it is further affected by the COVID-19 emergency. Our partners report that the main sources of funding for GCE are coming from the EU or from other external donors. This prompts concerns regarding the inconsistent, project-related funding that a topic which should underpin the entire educational system enjoys. As a very neglected part of formal education, GCE is of course affected as well by the limited public spending on education.

Though the situation regarding the civic space is improving, as suggested in the previous sections, funding for CSOs, in light of COVID-19, reveals a sliding back and the fact that the

North Macedonian government does not see the CSOs as reliable partners in fighting the pandemic²⁸. The government released three COVID-19 support packages totaling 500 million EUR²⁹, but no extra funding was allocated for struggling CSOs. The government has also reduced the 2020 state budget for CSOs by 525.000 EUR without consulting the Council for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Society Sector or the public³⁰. This situation is strenuous for CSOs who had to readapt for COVID-19 and it risks shrinking the civic space further, therefore, threatening the possibility of maintaining community-based projects. CSOs need to be better supported during this period, and their expertise in running community projects but also in providing non-formal and informal education should not be ignored. At a time when the population has to adapt to the green and digital transition, and CSOs provide a flexible approach to reaching them in their communities for lifelong and lifewide learning, the North Macedonian government cannot allow itself to further cut the support for these organisations.

26 European Commission (2020). North Macedonia 2020 report. P.55.

27 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019. Pp.104-108. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

28 CIVICUS Monitor (2020). Funding Cuts and No Economic Assistance for CSOs during COVID-19. Available at : <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/06/15/funding-cuts-and-no-economic-assistance-csos-during-covid-19/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2021.

29 European Commission (2020). North Macedonia 2020 report. P.49.

30 CIVICUS Monitor (2020). Funding Cuts and No Economic Assistance for CSOs during COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Increase public spending on education to reach at least EU average spending
- ◆ Better mainstream GCE across the formal education curriculum, developing a state-level strategy for the promotion of GCE
- ◆ Increase funding for extra-curricular GCE projects
- ◆ Foster the development of the whole-school approach in North Macedonia, ensuring that informal and non-formal education providers can better collaborate with formal education providers for the propose of promoting the development of global and digital competences
- ◆ Better monitor the process based on which teachers would have to deliver 30% of the educational content digitally
- ◆ Expand the fixed broadband connection to all households, ensuring it is treated as a public good given how essential it is in the digital transition
- ◆ Close the digital skills and infrastructure gaps across the country
- ◆ Provide better training on digital competences for the teaching professionals
- ◆ Provide additional funding for CSOs to offset the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while reverting back the decision to cut state funding for CSOs
- ◆ Promote community-level partnerships, ensuring the collaboration of local authorities with CSOs providing non-formal and informal intercultural education
- ◆ Strengthen the representation of different ethnic communities in CIRCs, and ensure the work of CICRs promotes initiatives fostering intercultural dialogue.

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