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ЗАЈАКНУВАЊЕ НА МЛАДИТЕ ГРАДЕЊЕ ВЕШТИНИ, КРЕИРАЊЕ ИДНИНА

# Strategic proposal for strengthening youth participation in the co-creation of employability policies and initiatives

**Project: "Empowering Youth: Building Skills, Creating the Future"**

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## Introduction

In conventional approaches to public policy-making, young people are often treated as the ultimate recipients of pre-defined measures – with a limited role, mostly reduced to passive participation or consultation in the late stages of the process. This model is particularly reflected negatively in the **vocational education and crafts sector**, where policies are still too often developed without the real involvement of precisely those who are supposed to bring them to life – **young students, future craftsmen, young artisans and entrepreneurs**.

For policies on employability, professional development and an inclusive economy to be truly effective, relevant and long-term, young people need to be treated not only as “beneficiaries” but also as **collaborators and co-creators**. Young people, especially those in education or already working in the crafts and practical professions, are the most affected by inadequate educational provision, inflexible regulation and limited economic opportunities – and are therefore the most competent to point out the gaps, propose innovative solutions and contribute to their implementation.

This strategic framework proposes **institutionalizing youth co-creation** by integrating youth from vocational schools, young craftsmen and youth organizations in all phases of policy design, development and monitoring. Such an approach will ensure:

- **A deeper understanding of the specific needs of young people in the craft sector** – what skills they lack, what forms of support they need, what are the real barriers to their inclusion in the world of work;
- **Establishing youth councils at vocational schools**, as permanent bodies that will cooperate with teaching staff, local chambers and the business community in adapting programs and practical training;
- **Involving young craftsmen and interns** in advisory bodies at the Ministry of Education and Science and the Center for Vocational Education and Training, with the aim of designing programs that respond to the reality of the workplace;
- **Support for young representatives in working groups**, who will work on regulations, mentoring programs, grant schemes for self-employment in craft sectors and incubator initiatives.

Through these mechanisms, young people will gain **a real voice in shaping their own future**, and institutions will gain partners who understand the realities “on the ground.” Instead of policies being applied top-down, **a circular policy-making process will be created** in which young people – especially those in practical and technical fields – will be an equal part of the process.



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## 1. Mechanisms for meaningful youth participation in the policy-making process

To ensure a truly inclusive and effective approach to the development of youth policies – especially in the areas of employability, vocational education and skills – it is necessary for young people to be actively involved as equal partners in all relevant institutional and programmatic processes. This implies going beyond formal consultation and moving towards **structured, continuous and influential participation**, through the establishment of specific mechanisms and platforms that regulate and support their role in the public process.

In this context, it is particularly important that young people from **vocational schools, technical areas and craft chambers/organizations** have the opportunity for institutionalized contribution, as they most directly face the challenges of the transition from education to the labor market, insufficient practical preparation and the absence of adequate support for self-employment.

### 1.1 Establishment and institutionalization of youth advisory bodies in the field of employability, vocational education and crafts

A key prerequisite for the development of effective youth-oriented policies, especially in the areas of vocational training, dual education and crafts, is **the structured involvement of young people themselves in decision-making processes**. To this end, it is proposed **to establish national and local youth advisory boards**, integrated into the institutional frameworks of key ministries and local government units.

These bodies would be formed when:

- **Ministry of Education and Science** – with a focus on curriculum adaptation, development of practical teaching, certification and dual models;
- **Ministry of Economy and Labor** – for policies related to youth employment, support for young entrepreneurs and incentives for employers;
- **Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth** – with an emphasis on inclusiveness, NEET categories and support for vulnerable youth;
- **Local government units** – with a role in developing local employment strategies, supporting small craft businesses, and connecting schools to the local economy.

The advisory boards will be composed of **young people aged 16 to 30**, including:

- students from secondary vocational schools;
- young interns and employees in craft workshops;
- young entrepreneurs from technical/craft sectors;
- representatives of youth and student organizations.

The selection will be carried out through a **transparent and inclusive procedure**, in cooperation with local schools, chambers, youth centers and civil society organizations, in order to ensure diversity by gender, regional representation, education and social status.

### Competences and function of the advisory bodies:



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- Preparing opinions and comments on proposed policies, programs and regulations that affect youth;
- Providing suggestions for improving dual education, mentoring, internship and self-employment financing programs;
- Monitoring the implementation of youth measures and initiating public debates;
- Initiating consultative processes with other young people and relevant stakeholders;
- Participation in annual reports on the impact of policies on the young population.

A good practice in this regard is to organize **regular quarterly meetings** of the youth advisory boards with line ministers, agency directors and representatives of chambers of commerce (including the Skopje Chamber of Crafts and the Business Confederation of Macedonia). These meetings will be conducted according to a pre-determined agenda, and the institutions will be obliged to submit **written responses and plans for the implementation** of the recommendations within a certain timeframe.

In this way, young people – especially those related to crafts and vocational education – will not only be informed, but also **direct participants in shaping public policies that determine their professional and economic future** .

### 1.2. Organizing co-creative workshops and hackathons:

In addition to institutional participation through advisory bodies, it is necessary to create **dynamic and interactive formats** that will encourage **direct cooperation between young people and policymakers** , especially in the domain of vocational education, practical training and entrepreneurship development in the craft sector.

Therefore, it is proposed to establish **regular co-creative workshops and so-called "policy hackathons"** , where young people, students from vocational schools, young craftsmen, mentors, representatives from institutions, teachers and companies will work in joint teams to design new solutions to key challenges related to:

- aligning curricula with the needs of the local economy;
- improving access to practical training;
- supporting self-employment and incubation of young businesses in the craft sector;
- new models for mentoring, internships and certification.

These formats have a multiple purpose:

- to **empower young people as equal co-designers** of solutions;
- to encourage **innovative, intersectoral thinking** ;
- to build **relationships of trust between young people and institutions** ;
- to offer **concrete policies and measures** that can be piloted, tested and scaled in practice.

### Recommended formats and topics:

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- **Intersectoral workshops** with mixed teams (students, young entrepreneurs, mentors, teachers and civil servants) working on a common challenge;
- **Public policy hackathons** – intensive 48-hour events in which participants generate innovative solutions, and the best ones receive support for pilot implementation;
- **Co-creative forums with chambers of commerce and craft organizations** – especially aimed at young people planning a career in technical or craft professions.

Organizing **thematic workshops** would be a good practice, especially workshops under titles such as:

- "Skills for the Future: How to Modernize Vocational Schools?"
  - "Youth Entrepreneurship in the Craft Sector: Barriers and Opportunities"
  - "Career Guidance in the Digital Age: How to Help Young People Choose a Profession?"
- These workshops will be organized **in partnership with public institutions, business chambers, local governments and non-governmental organizations**, and will result in concrete proposals that will be submitted to the relevant ministries for further processing.

The co-creative approach will not only increase youth involvement, but will also create **new models of cooperation between generations, institutions and economic sectors**, making policies more flexible, innovative and more specifically targeted at the real needs of young people in the vocational and craft sectors.

### 1.3. Development of interactive online platforms for feedback and consultations

In modern democratic and digitalized societies, access to information and the possibility of direct communication with decision-makers are essential prerequisites for active civic participation. For young people – especially those involved in vocational education, vocational training and technical professions – **online platforms represent an indispensable channel for information, participation and advocacy of their interests**.

Therefore, it is proposed to develop and institutionalize **interactive digital platforms** that will enable young people to:

- access to updated information on current public policies, programs and support measures related to employment, vocational education, mentoring, entrepreneurship and practical training;
- the opportunity to provide **structured feedback** on policies and initiatives, through online forms, surveys, consultative questionnaires and discussions;
- participation in **public debates, thematic consultations and e-workshops**, especially related to the revision of curricula, conditions for practice, subsidies and incubators for young craftsmen;
- access to **local opportunities**, such as internship calls, practical training, career orientation events and grants.

**Key functionalities that such a platform could contain:**

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- Section "Developing Policies" – for public consultations on proposed programs;
- Digital space for suggestions from young people (e-idea forum), with the possibility of voting;
- Calendar with calls, opportunities and forums related to VET and employment;
- Interactive map of employers offering internships and mentoring;
- Access to digital resources and videos for orientation in craft and technical careers.

### Focus on inclusivity and accessibility:

Particular attention should be paid to **young people from rural areas, small towns and marginalized communities**, who are often excluded from physical consultation processes. The platforms should be:

- optimized for use on mobile phones,
- available in multiple languages, including easy-to-understand wording,
- involved in the educational process through schools.

### Example of good practice:

Integration of new platforms with existing tools such as **the national youth portal, the Employment Agency and CSEO platforms**, in order to ensure **a connected user experience**, greater visibility and interoperability between systems. This will allow young people to **access information, communicate with institutions and participate in consultations from one central place**.

## 2. Areas for co-creation

To be truly inclusive and effective, youth participation in policy-making needs to be **systematic and horizontal across all areas that determine their current and future employability**. This implies their active role not only in discussion and consultation, but also in the design, testing, monitoring and review of policies, programmes and public services.

It is particularly important that these processes be open to **young people involved in vocational education, vocational training, dual education and young entrepreneurs** who face specific challenges, but also have a practical perspective that can advance existing solutions.

### 2.1 Involving young people in the revision and development of curricula in vocational and higher education

The modernization of educational programs is an essential prerequisite for improving the employability of young people and for their better preparation for the dynamic and technologically changing labor market. Therefore, the process of revising and developing curricula – especially in **secondary vocational education, technical schools and higher vocational education** – must be open to **the structured participation of young people**, both in the role of pupils/students, and as young craftsmen, interns and beginners in industry.



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Through their active involvement in the bodies for the preparation, evaluation and accreditation of curricula, young people can:

- **to identify outdated content and lack of practical applicability** ;
- **to propose new subjects and modules** in areas such as digital literacy, energy efficiency, craft entrepreneurship, 3D modeling and technological innovation;
- **to initiate adaptation of teaching methods** (learning through work, interdisciplinary projects, simulations, digital tools);
- **to point out skills that are in demand but absent in the programs** , such as communication with clients, financial literacy, microbusiness management, or eco-design.

In addition, their contribution is important for building **flexibility into the education system** , through elective modules, practical lessons and short-term trainings that will enable the adaptation of education to the individual interests and professional plans of young people.

Formalizing the **participation of young students in the committees for the development and accreditation of curricula** , by including representatives from secondary school and student organizations in the bodies of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the Center for Vocational Education and Training (CVET), as well as in the governing boards of schools and faculties. This approach has proven effective in European countries that have developed successful models of dual and vocational education, as it allows education to develop according to **the real needs and perspectives of young people**.



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The ultimate goal is to create educational programs that will not only be technically relevant and innovative, but also **truly appropriate to the reality, ambitions and needs of young people**, thereby increasing their motivation, readiness and opportunities for quality employment and self-employment.

### 2.2. Designing programs for skills development and entrepreneurship:

Creating effective programs for skills development and support for youth entrepreneurship requires the systematic involvement of young people in all stages of their design – from setting goals, through the selection of methodologies, to testing and evaluating the effects. This is especially important within **vocational education and crafts**, where young people are carriers of specific practical experiences, but also face real challenges in terms of access to resources, networks and market opportunities.

In this context, young people should be:

- **involved in defining the content** of programs for the development of digital skills (web design, e-commerce, social media), technical skills (machining, electrical installations, craft modeling), as well as soft skills (communication with customers, time management, teamwork);
- **consulted on the choice of methodologies** – whether it is intensive short-term training, in-company training, online courses or mentoring formats;
- **involved in the design of youth entrepreneurship programs**, with a particular focus on craft startups, creative industries, local manufacturing initiatives and community services.

Programs should be created in collaboration with:

- **The Center for Vocational Education and Training**, which can incorporate new skills into existing educational pathways;
- **The Fund for Innovation and Technological Development**, which has opportunities for co-financing and developing youth incubators;
- **local governments**, which through local economic councils can provide logistical and spatial support;
- **Chambers of Commerce and Crafts**, which can provide relevant insight into current market demands and include mentors from the industry.

Organizing **focus groups with young entrepreneurs, students from vocational schools and young craftsmen**, as a good practice through which direct knowledge will be gained about:

- the most common administrative and financial obstacles to starting your own business,
- the needs for mentoring support and business networks,
- the type of skills that are in demand in the real economy but are not included in current programs,

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- proposals for innovative instruments, such as vouchers for skills development, online financial literacy modules or mobile applications for craft business management.

Engaging young people in this way will result in **more precisely targeted, more useful, and more sustainable programs** that will not only improve their employability, but also encourage them to become economically self-reliant in their local communities.

### 2.3 Improving career guidance and mediation services

The quality, relevance and accessibility of career guidance and mediation services are key factors for the successful transition of young people from the education system to the labour market. To this end, it is necessary that these services – traditionally offered through **the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia , Career Centres in secondary schools and university support services** – be redesigned with **active consultation and involvement of young people** as users, but also as co-designers.

The inclusion of young students, interns and young unemployed people will enable:

- **identification of barriers to access to information** , outreach activities and support;
- **updating the content** of career development counseling and guides;
- **improving communication channels** , with a focus on digital formats, peer-to-peer approaches and local events;
- **incorporating the perspective of young people from vocational education and crafts** , who often remain underrepresented in these services.

Additionally, these services need to be:

- **more accessible in rural and less developed municipalities** ;
- **interoperable with educational institutions' platforms** ;
- **supported by real opportunities to connect with the business sector** , through digital databases of internships, internships and open job positions.

An example of good practice is the implementation of **a pilot program for “youth career guidance ambassadors”** within vocational secondary schools and universities. These ambassadors – young people who have already gone through an internship, employment or entrepreneurial experience – will serve as **informants, motivators and mediators between institutions and their peers** . Through real-life narratives, interactive sessions and a mentoring approach, they will increase the effectiveness and trust in these services.

These reforms will result in **a more personalized, functional, and youth-oriented career development infrastructure** that will support every young person – regardless of whether they want to continue into employment, further education, or their own business.

### 2.4. Review of labor regulations and employment policies

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The formulation and amendment of labor legislation and employment policies have a direct and long-term impact on the position of young people in the labor market. However, traditionally these processes take place without adequate consultation with young people, especially those coming from **secondary vocational education, craft professions, or entry-level positions in the market**.

To ensure that policies are **fair, realistic, inclusive and adapted to the challenges of young people**, it is necessary to systematically include youth voices in the regulatory cycle – from proposals for amending laws, through impact assessments of measures, to the creation of new instruments for active employment policies.

In this context, young people should have a formalized approach to:

- to propose amendments to **the Law on Labor Relations**, **the Law on Vocational Education and Training**, as well as **the Law on Crafts**, especially in the sections relating to interns, trainees, temporary employees and seasonal young workers, in order to ensure better protection, fair conditions and greater involvement of young people in practical work and craft professions.
- to consult on policies related to **flexible working arrangements** (working week, part-time work, remote work), which are increasingly sought after by young people;
- to provide an opinion on the design of **active employment measures**, including subsidized employment, training and retraining programs, or access to start-up support;
- to participate in monitoring the effects of the measures, especially on **vulnerable categories of youth** (NEET, youth with disabilities, rural youth, members of ethnic communities).

A good practice in this regard would be to organize **public hearings and online consultations on all draft laws and policies related to labor relations and youth employability**, in coordination with the Ministry of Economy and Labor, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, and the Agency for Youth and Sports. Representatives from youth organizations, student parliaments, student assemblies, and informal youth networks should also participate in these consultations.

### 3. Ensuring substantive participation and integration of youth input

True youth participation in policymaking requires the establishment of mechanisms that will ensure that their voice is not merely symbolic, but has a real impact on decision-making processes. Their suggestions, views and recommendations need to be systematically evaluated, documented and integrated into the final policies and programs. Specific proposals for enabling such an approach follow.

#### 3.1. Transparency and establishment of effective feedback mechanisms

To ensure the credibility and sustainability of youth participation processes, it is essential that institutions guarantee **a high level of transparency and accountability**. Any process in which young people are consulted, involved or engaged as co-creators of policy should be accompanied by **a structured feedback mechanism**, through which they will get a clear picture of:



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- how their views are documented and considered;
- what is the decision regarding the proposed solutions;
- which proposals are integrated and why;
- and for those that are not accepted – **a specific and reasoned explanation** .

This approach will help **build mutual trust** , increase the sense of belonging, and strengthen the motivation of young people to continue their active participation in public life.

It would be good practice to establish **a standardized practice for publishing summaries of public consultations, workshops and meetings** with youth groups, clearly stating:

- the ideas proposed by young people,
- the institutional response,
- decisions on implementation or non-implementation,
- as well as future steps related to the process.

These reports can be published on the websites of the relevant institutions (e.g. Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, Agency for Youth and Sports), and made available through digital youth platforms, in order to ensure **continuous information and involvement of the wider youth public** .

### 3.2 Policy advocacy and training capacity

For youth participation in co-creation processes to be truly effective, it is necessary for young people to be adequately prepared and educated about the mechanisms of public policy creation. Therefore, it is necessary to establish **structured training and capacity development programs** that will cover the following skills and knowledge:

- Fundamentals of public policies and processes of their creation and adoption;
- Advocacy and argumentation before institutions;
- Data analysis and trend recognition;
- Communication skills for participating in public debates and presenting proposals;
- Group work, consensus and leadership.

Particular emphasis should be placed on **young people coming from secondary vocational schools, vocational schools and young craftsmen** , who often have limited opportunities for direct involvement in public discourse, but possess practical knowledge and insight into the real challenges of the economy. These young people should be actively encouraged and supported to become **messengers of their professional communities** and partners in redesigning vocational education and employment systems.

A good practice would be to develop and publish a **“Handbook for Youth Participation in Policy Making”** , tailored for different target groups (including young people from vocational education and craft profiles), which would contain practical tools, step-by-step guides, terminology explanations and examples from practice. The handbook should be **available digitally** , regularly updated and promoted through educational institutions, youth organizations and chambers of commerce.



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Furthermore, the trainings should be implemented in cooperation with **the Center for Vocational Education and Training (CVET), the Chambers of Crafts, as well as youth organizations active in supporting professional development**, with the aim of creating a continuous generation of young people who not only know their rights and opportunities, but also know how **to turn them into concrete policies and solutions**.

#### 4. Addressing the diverse needs of different groups of youth

Effective youth policy requires an approach that recognizes and responds to **the heterogeneity of the youth population**. Young people are not a homogeneous group – they face different social, economic, educational and geographical challenges. Therefore, strategic initiatives must be **inclusively designed**, fully recognizing and integrating the needs of different subgroups, such as: rural youth, youth with disabilities, members of ethnic communities, NEET youth, young women, as well as youth engaged in crafts and vocational education.

Only through **targeted interventions**, adapted to the specific realities of these groups, can equal access to educational opportunities, practical training, entrepreneurship and employment be ensured.

##### 4.1 Targeted identification and active inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented youth groups

In order to ensure equal access and fair opportunities for all young people, it is necessary to develop **specific strategies for identifying, motivating and including** those groups that are traditionally underrepresented in policy-making processes and employability initiatives. This applies to:

- young people from rural and peripheral areas,
- young people with disabilities,
- young people from ethnic communities,
- young people without parental care,
- young people who left the education system prematurely,
- as well as **youth involved in craft professions and informal economic activities**, which are often not covered by formal programs.

These strategies would include:

- **adapted and accessible communication channels**,
- **technical and logistical support for participation in events and consultations**,
- as well as **cooperation with local and national organizations** that work with these groups and know their specific needs and barriers.

A good practice would be to hire **"inclusion coordinators"** or local facilitators, who would act as a liaison between institutions and these youth groups, with the task of:

- inform about existing opportunities for participation,
- provide logistics and communication support,

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- and help articulate their views and proposals in formal processes.

## 4.2. Application of flexible and inclusive participation formats

To ensure true inclusiveness in co-creation processes and enable the participation of a wider range of young people, it is necessary to offer **flexible formats of inclusion** that will suit the different life circumstances, capacities, interests and availability of young people.

This includes a combination of:

- **online and offline formats** (surveys, forums, debates, video conferences);
- **short and one-off activities** (surveys, focus groups);
- **longer and more comprehensive processes** (series of workshops, consultations with preparation of draft documents);
- **the possibility of anonymous or written contributions** , especially for young people who do not feel comfortable participating publicly.

Special attention should be paid to the inclusion of **young people from vocational schools, young people involved in craft practices and young people employed in small enterprises** , for whom classical forms of participation are not always applicable due to work commitments or geographical distance.

Institutions and organizers of youth participation processes should ensure:

- **participation fees** (as symbolic support for the time and effort invested);
- **covering travel expenses and meals** for young people from rural or remote municipalities;
- **adjusting the schedule** of activities according to the schedules of vocational school students or working youth.

In this way, **participation will not be a privilege of mobile and resource-secure youth** , but will be transformed into a systemic approach that recognizes the real conditions of all target groups.

## 5. Sustainability of youth participation: a continuous process

Youth participation in policy and programme design must be conceived as **a continuous, structured and institutionalised process** , and not as a one-off or symbolic engagement. To ensure the long-term effectiveness and relevance of youth employment policies – especially in the sectors of vocational education, crafts and youth entrepreneurship – youth participation needs to be **a standard part of the policy planning, implementation and evaluation cycle** .

Only through such **a sustainable model** will young people be able to build their role as active citizens, influencing their economic and professional future.

### 5.1. Institutionalization of youth participation

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To ensure consistency, predictability and legal certainty in the inclusion of young people in policy-making processes – especially those related to employment, vocational education, entrepreneurship and crafts – it is necessary to regulate youth participation **through clear legal and regulatory mechanisms** .

This means:

- Including **provisions in relevant laws** (such as the Youth Law, the Labor Relations Law, the Vocational Education and Training Law, the Crafts Law) that will provide for **mandatory participation of young people or representatives of youth organizations** in working groups, advisory bodies and public consultation processes.
- Developing **standardized procedures** for involving youth representatives in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of strategic documents and programs.
- Establishing **an obligation for public institutions** at national and local level to provide technical and logistical conditions for youth participation, including transparent selection and training processes.

It would be good practice to systematically **include clauses for youth participation** in all relevant national and local **strategies, action plans and programs** , clearly stating:

- inclusion mechanisms,
- role and responsibilities of youth representatives,
- indicators for monitoring implementation.

This approach will ensure that youth participation is not a matter of goodwill, but **a standard element of democratic and inclusive governance** .

### 5.2. Capacity development in public administration

One of the key prerequisites for the substantive inclusion of young people in the processes of policy and program creation is **the readiness and competence of institutions and their administrative staff** . Therefore, systematic capacity building among public administration employees is necessary, especially those who are directly involved in the processes of creating and implementing youth policies, employment, vocational education and training.

This will include:

- Implementation of **specialized training and modular programs for civil servants** , with a focus on:
  - methodologies for youth participation,
  - principles of co-creation and participatory management,
  - techniques for facilitating consultative processes with young people from different socio-economic and educational groups.
- **Institutionalization of these trainings** through administrative academies, public administration training centers or partnerships with universities and civil society organizations.



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- Developing **internal procedures and guidelines** on how to initiate, design and monitor youth participation within specific policies or programs.

A good practice would be to organize **regional exchange programs** and study visits to countries that have **successfully implemented youth participation models**, such as Finland, Slovenia or the Netherlands. These programs allow for direct learning from practice, knowledge transfer and adaptation of good examples to the local context.

### 5.3. Financial support for youth organizations:

To enable effective, organized and sustainable participation of youth in policymaking, it is necessary to provide **systemic financial support for youth organizations**, especially those active in the areas of employment, vocational education, crafts and social entrepreneurship.

These organizations play a key role in:

- Mobilizing young people at local and national levels.
- Conveying their challenges, ideas and priorities to policymakers.
- Providing training, counseling and capacity building for participation.
- Encouraging youth to engage in initiatives related to skills development, local craft practices and entrepreneurship.

The support should be:

- **Predictable and continuous**, based on clear criteria and quality indicators.
- **Transparent**, through open calls for support for programs that promote youth participation in policy co-creation processes.
- **Dedicated**, with a special component for organizations working with marginalized youth, youth from rural areas, and youth involved in vocational education and training.

A good practice would be to establish **a national fund to support youth initiatives for participation in policy-making**, managed by an independent body in partnership with the public and private sectors. This fund could support projects for:

- advocacy and policy initiatives,
- participation in public consultations and debates,
- local youth forums for crafts and employment,
- mentoring programs and dialogues between youth and decision-makers.

## Conclusion

This strategic proposition highlights the need to transform the way young people are involved in the creation and implementation of employment policies, especially in the areas of vocational education, crafts and youth entrepreneurship. Instead of being passive recipients of decisions, young people should be **equal partners** in shaping them. It is through such an approach that it



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will be ensured that the system is both **realistic and sustainable, and based on the real needs** of future generations.

Defined **mechanisms for youth participation**, such as advisory bodies, policy hackathons, digital consultation platforms, focus groups with young artisans, are the basis for building a democratic process that is constantly learning and adapting. At the same time, institutionalizing co-creation, through legal and strategic mechanisms, will prevent symbolic (so-called tokenistic) involvement and create an environment where **the youth voice has a real impact on decision-making**.

The focus of this strategy is on **vocational education and crafts** – areas that are of crucial importance for local economic development and inclusive growth. The lack of practical training, weak connections between schools and employers, and insufficient motivation of craft workshops to engage in the educational process are identified as systemic weaknesses that can be addressed precisely through increased youth participation. Young craftsmen, vocational school students, interns and future entrepreneurs should be **direct interlocutors** in the redesign of curricula, the creation of mentoring programs, dual education and incubator platforms.

Through specific recommendations such as:

- creation of **regional craft hubs** ;
- introducing **national mentoring, internship and career counseling programs** ;
- financing youth initiatives and providing **flexible formats for participation** ;
- redesigning **the laws on vocational education, crafts and labor relations** in cooperation with young people;

A platform is being created for **true cooperation between the public sector, private companies, educational institutions and young people**.

By implementing the proposed mechanisms, principles and activities, the Republic of North Macedonia will not only demonstrate its commitment to youth, but will also establish a system that is **more responsive, inclusive and efficient**. This is **an investment in human capital**, which in the long term will contribute to increased employability, retention of youth in the country, growth of the craft and entrepreneurial sector, and building a society that values the expertise, labor and vision of youth.