Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion in the Western Balkans, Turkey and Israel

Country report: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

LSE Enterprise

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new economic environment, with fierce international competition, globalization and fast technological changes have caused large changes to the labour market. It is no longer assumed that a worker would keep his/her job position throughout his/her working life, but rather that he/she may need to change the position, company, working mode or even career. Moreover, the skill requirements of jobs are continuously changing, even more so in transition countries where transition has brought large changes to economic structures. These changes pose a great challenge for education systems to produce at the same time relevant skills and adaptable workers. The vocational education and training (VET) systems in transition countries, in general, as well as in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were very slow to adjust to the new economic reality, and new growing sectors. This has magnified the skills mismatches and worsened labour market prospects of the VET graduates.

In the last decade, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has implemented educational reforms at all levels of education. It introduced mandatory secondary education, along with supporting measures such as free textbooks and transportation. Physical infrastructure was improved through the renovation of school buildings and the purchase of IT equipment. Quality improvements were achieved through revisions to the curricula which promoted outcome-oriented and interactive teaching and learning, early learning of English language and information technology skills, training for teachers, etc. Within the VET system, 4-year study programs and curricula were reformed and streamlined to better reflect new economic reality. However, the 3-year programs are mostly the same as at the onset of transition. Those reforms have produced large improvements in the indicators on the educational attainment of the Macedonian population (i.e. level of education), and large reduction in the number of dropouts from schools. However, developments are not that positive in terms of the quality of education.

Empirical studies show that besides the education and labour market role, the VET system might also support social inclusion (at an individual level) and cohesion (at a society level). In other words, VET can have a broader social role in reducing inequalities, supporting institutional integrity and value formation. However, this role of the VET has been neglected in the past in the transition countries, and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There is generally a low awareness and knowledge of the concepts of social inclusion, cohesion and equity. The legislation and strategic documents related to education do make reference to social inclusion, antidiscrimination, and equal access, although the concept is understood very narrowly. Social inclusion was most often related to some form of disability, or pupils „with special needs", and in recent time, to the ethnicity of pupils.

Most of the efforts (either national or donor-driven) to combat social exclusion are targeted towards a limited number of risk factors for exclusion, while little attention is given to the others such as vulnerability related to pupils being from remote and rural areas, physically disabled pupils, pupils with learning difficulties, and those from poor families. This narrow concept of social inclusion is then transferred to schools, given that schools' activities are mainly shaped by national policies and international donor support. Moreover, a more comprehensive approach to social inclusion is required on a national level which would combine financial support with some form of mentoring, tutoring and counselling. The draft Strategy for Vocational Education and Training does acknowledge the need to improve the potentially inclusive role of the VET schools, and proposes some measures (action plan) to improve social inclusion.

The introduction of the mandatory secondary education has increased the participation in education of pupils from rural or remote (usually mountain) areas, as well as of pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic background. However, our field research has shown that the quality of the (primary) education in remote areas is low, with large interventions needed from schools at the entry of those pupils in

secondary VET schools. The low initial knowledge of some pupils gives rise to the selection at entry into school and tracking within the school, i.e. selection of pupils in classes based on their ability.

Pupils in vocational secondary schools are in general given insufficient support in making their decision to either continue further the education (and the choice of the track), or for entering the labour market. There are career centres in the three vocational schools covered in this study, however their activities are mainly shaped by national and international projects, rather than with the real needs of the pupils. There should be greater effort to improve life-skills of the pupils, equip them with the skills necessary for successful labour market experience, and knowledge for continuing education, especially for disadvantaged pupils. This raises a need for greater (and more formal) cooperation between schools and the business community, employment agency and local self-government. Central and/or local authorities should find some more systematic way to increase the interest of companies for accepting the vocational school pupils for internships. This might be related to some financial incentives, at least in the least developed municipalities/regions where the business sector is very weak and has insufficient capacity to absorb all pupils. Experiences form other countries might also be considered. Local authorities should increase their support to schools in general, and become partners of schools in their efforts to create more inclusive education.

School-level interventions related to the social inclusion are bound to the nationally set policies/projects with little incentive by schools to pilot or test some measures that would increase equality of access, the experience and performance of pupils at schools. This might be related to the low financial power of schools and lack of motivation of teachers and management, as some schools manage to implement own-designed actions. Though, some school managers showed "eagerness" to learn from this particular project or other experiences on how to improve the inclusive role of the schools. Overcoming the low *a priori* expectations of schools for the performance of their pupils can build the self-esteem and motivation of pupils, leading to greater achievements in the schools and throughout life. Experiences from other countries show that support from former students can be used for motivating pupils and increasing their expectations from themselves. Financial and other incentives for improving the performance of disadvantaged pupils, mainly those from Roma ethnicity, are effective to a certain extent, however, some streamlining of those incentives (offered by several government institutions) and greater involvement of parents might give better results.

There is a growing need for increasing the awareness and efforts for more inclusive education, apart from the focus of current policies on ethnicity issues (within the Strategy for Integrated Education). Some pupils might still be left aside, such as pupils from rural areas (where the quality of primary education is low), pupils from poor households, those with parents with lower educational attainment, as well as pupils with special needs, either physical or mental. There is a mode of "silence" in the society and lack of strategy for the latter group of pupils.

INTRODUCTION

The new economic environment, with fierce international competition, globalization and fast technological changes have posed large changes in the labour markets. It is no more assumed that a worker would keep his/hers job position throughout the working life, but instead to change the position, company, working mode or even career. Moreover, the skill requirements of jobs are continuously changing, even more so in the countries that underwent deep structural reforms during the transition, such as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. These changes pose a great challenge for the education systems to produce at the same time relevant skills and adaptable workers.

Structural changes during the transition have led to high rates of structural unemployment and mismatch between the skills supplied in the labour market and the ones demanded by the emerging sectors (Bartlett, 2007; EC, 2012). There are several factors leading to persistent skill mismatches in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and across the Western Balkan (WB) region. First, the efforts towards adapting the education systems to the national employment, social inclusion and competitiveness goals have been insufficient and generally ineffective (Spasovski et al., 2010; Bartlett, 2012). The old curricula have not been adjusted properly and quickly to reflect new occupations and skills requirements in the manufacturing and the fast growing services sector. Second, the legislative changes were at times lagging behind the reforms hindering the effectiveness of the latter (ETF, 2010). Third, the education system in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (as across all the ex-communist countries) was mainly focused on input-based measurement of the effectiveness of educational policy (for instance, through the number of schools and teachers) rather than on outputs, or student achievements. Such a system neglected the key competences and functional literacy leading to low achievements of Macedonian students, as assessed by international comparative studies. Fourth, a long period of under-investment in education has lead to a poor educational infrastructure. Fifth, the low willingness of employers to invest in on-the-job training and continuous skill upgrading of their workers has exacerbated the problem of skill mismatches (Sondergaard et al., 2011). For instance, the share of the employed workers aged 18-64 participating in education and training in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is low by international standards, being 5% in 2011 compared to an average of 12.5% among the EU-27 countries (Eurostat database).

Empirical studies show that VET might also support social inclusion (at an individual level) and cohesion (at a society level). For instance, Preston and Green (2008) find that besides the labour market function, VET plays a broader social role in reducing inequalities, supporting institutional integrity and value formation. They argue that there is a switch from the socialization role of VET towards a role of building competences. Moreover, Tsakarissianos (2008) argues that VET can contribute towards greater social mobility – the degree to which offspring can move up (or down) the social scale of their parents – in conjunction with broader social policy. However, VET schools in most transition countries fail to provide this social function leaving many young people excluded from education, with little chance of social mobility and inclusion (non-enrolled pupils, irregular attendees, dropouts and early leavers). Social exclusion in VET may take different forms at different stages: at entry into VET, completion of VET (i.e. drop out), educational experience during their education, transition from school to work and the subsequent career path.

With an unemployment rate at about 31% and youth unemployment rate at 55%, young workers face a very difficult school-to-work transition. There are no national data on unemployment differentiated by type of secondary education, though Lamo et al. (2011) and Masson and Fetsi (2008) argue that VET graduates in transition countries suffer comparatively higher unemployment. Besides the general lack of jobs, the inappropriate and less relevant knowledge and skills of graduates raises the probability that they will enter the labour market through unemployment.

To date, there have only been a few studies in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that assess the school experience of pupils from VET schools, their labour market prospects and experience, and/or the role of the VET schools in promoting the social inclusion and cohesion. One of these studies is the study of the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Centre for Vocational Education and Training which provided assessment of the effectiveness of the reformed 4-year vocational education (ETF, 2010). The study showed that, in general, employers are not satisfied with the skills possessed by students graduating from secondary vocational education. In their opinion, students lack practical and soft skills (team work, leadership, self-initiative, creativity, communication skills). Hence, employers complain that they face high costs for the initial on-the-job training of workers. However, the findings from the study also reveal that employers do not have an incentive to cooperate with the schools, though they indicated that they would be willing to help schools develop better study plans, provide co-mentors for students, provide in-work training for teachers, etc. The lack of incentive on the employers' side for cooperation might be related to low job creation or turnover of workers, such that employers do not experience high cost of hiring new workers. Although very useful, the study did not investigate the social role of the VET schools. A sole study that focuses on the issue of social and cultural aspects of the Macedonian schools is the study of Spasovski et al. (2010), prepared under the auspices of the ETF. It maps the policies and practices for the preparation of teachers for inclusive education. Findings from that study were used in the preparation of this report.

The lack of detailed research in the area of VET schools and their broader social role constrains effective policymaking. The aim of this study is therefore to provide a detailed analysis of the role of the VET system in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in promoting social inclusion and cohesion, as well as the policy and reform developments in this area. Special focus is given to the barriers to policy reform towards enhancing the role of VET in social inclusion and cohesion.

In particular, the research tasks are the following:

Research task 1: to map the different policies towards VET, social inclusion and social cohesion and assess the relationship between them;

Research Task 2: to map the influence of selection and tracking on social inclusion;

Research Task 3: to map the extent of drop out from vocational education and assess the influence of drop-put on social inclusion;

Research task 4: To map the different patterns of school based vocational education and apprenticeship systems and assess their influence on social inclusion in the WBTI countries;

Research task 5: to map the transition from vocational education to work and assess the different ways in which this transition reflects differences in social inclusion;

Research task 6: to map the different patterns of continuing vocational education and training and assess the influence of continuing training institutions on social inclusion.

The findings of the study will assist education and social policymakers in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in designing reforms/measures aimed at improving the role of the VET schools in integration of pupils from different backgrounds, especially those from the most vulnerable groups, into the society and labour market. Findings will be shared with other stakeholders and relevant parties, such as the DG EMPL, DG ELARG, DG EAC. In addition, the national report for Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia forms part of a cross-country regional study, which will help countries in the region to share best practices.

The structure of the study is as follows. In Section 1 the report investigates the institutional framework and the policy process at the national level. Section 2 assesses the VET practices for social inclusion and social cohesion at the local level, through findings from interviews, as well as data collected through

questionnaires. The following section, Section 3, presents action proposals for schools. Section 4 provides policy recommendations for policy makers at the national and local levels, as well as for the international donor organizations. Section 5 concludes.

1. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND THE POLICY PROCESS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

1.1 Situation analysis (vocational education, skills mismatches, social exclusion and social cohesion at national level)

This section investigates the vocational education system in Former Yugoslav Republic of, the issue of skill mismatches, social exclusion and cohesion. It starts with a brief discussion about the issue of vulnerability, barriers to achieving inclusive education and social inclusion and cohesion in education

1.1.1   Vulnerability, social inclusion and public awareness

At the onset of this study we assess the extent of understanding of inclusion, vulnerability and barriers to inclusive education in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the region as a whole.

The ETF project on Social Inclusion through Education and Training that was carried out in the Western Balkans and Turkey between 2008 and 2011 found that the role of the VET system as a tool for supporting social inclusion and cohesion is largely neglected in the region. This can be explained by the fragmented manner in which educational policies are designed, weak linkages between educational institutions and the labour market, the very narrow system of teacher development, etc.

Moreover, across the region, there is generally a very narrow understanding of the concept of "disadvantage" and "inclusive education". Education professionals and the wider public understands "inclusive education" as education for students with special needs (Spasovski et al., 2010). Similarly, Booth and Ainskow (2002) acknowledge that elsewhere inclusion is usually related to "special education needs". However, these concepts have to be widened to take account of the full diversity of young persons who experience inequality of access, participation and/or learning in the VET schools. In this regard, the current study focuses on the following groups of pupils that are at a risk of exclusion in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Roma pupils, girls, especially ethnic Albanian and ethnic Turkish girls, students with disabilities and serious health problems, students from rural, isolated and inaccessible areas and ethnic and minorities, who are at a risk of exclusion.

Box 1 provides an explanation, rather than definition, of the main elements of inclusive education.

> Box 1: Inclusion in education
>
> - Equally valuing and treating all pupils and staff;
>
> - Supporting participation of pupils in the cultures, communities and curricula of the schools;
>
> - Ensuring that school' cultures, policies and practices embed the diversity of pupils;
>
> - Reducing the barriers for learning for all pupils;
>
> - Learning from own measures and best practices to reduce barriers of access and participation of specific groups of pupils, and widening those measures to all pupils;
>
> - Making schools supportive and stimulating for the teachers and pupils;
>
> - Emphasizing the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievements.
>
> Source: Booth and Ainscow (2002).

There is a range of possible barriers to inclusive education: financial, institutional, structural, socio-economic and political (Spasovski et al., 2010). Financial barriers include insufficient family funds to access a certain level of education or the desired school, for learning materials (textbooks, additional materials and notebooks, computer resources, etc.), transportation costs, etc. Institutional barriers concern tracking. Structural problems involve institutional networks that constrain the access of some pupils to the desired or quality education (usually related to the transportation and accommodation costs), as well as inappropriate supply of institutions for pupils with special needs. Socio-economic barriers are related to unequal access to education for individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and/or with different mother tongues. Political obstacles are mainly related to the lack of intervention to prevent the other types of barriers.

The extent and types of barriers that are present in a specific environment/country would determine the appropriate policy approach for overcoming the exclusion. This study assesses the presence of each of these barriers and actions that have been taken by policymakers to overcome them.

1.1.2 Situation analysis at national level

This section provides an analysis of the trends in enrolments in secondary vocational schools, recent reforms in the education system in general and, in particular, in vocational education as well as the perceived quality of the vocational schools.

According to the Law on Secondary Education (article 43, Official Gazette, No. 52/2002) there are four types of secondary schools in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: general schools (gymnasiums), vocational schools, secondary arts schools and secondary schools for pupils with special needs. A majority of young people in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (about 60%) in 2011 attended VET schools (Table 1), although the share of pupils attending VET schools has been on a declining trend over the last decade (from 70% in 2001). Slightly less than half of the pupils in vocational education are females (44 to 48%).

Table 1 - Enrolled pupils in secondary education, by type of program

Type	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Secondary education, total	94,545	93,843	95,343	94,155	93,064
Gymnasium	38,214	38,373	38,527	38,013	37,646
Arts	854	1,015	1,221	1,071	1,080
Vocational education	55,477	54,455	55,595	55,071	54,338
VET, as % of all	59%	58%	58%	58.5%	58.4%

Source: State Statistical Office, various years.

Across the VET schools, the most attractive ones are the economy-law and trade, the medical, the electro-technical and the machine engineering. However, given that the supply (quotas) for these occupational areas is generous, relatively large enrolments might reflect only the availability of places.

Pupils and their parents prefer 4-year VET programs over the 2- and 3-year programs, as the 4-year programs provide a possibility for subsequent enrolment into tertiary education. There is no system in place for tracking pupils' destinations after the completion of secondary schools, but interviews with schools directors have suggested that about 40% of graduates continue to universities, the majority of them pursuing technical studies.

The enrolment into VET education is in most cases a second best alternative for pupils (ETF, 2010). There is greater pressure for places in general secondary schools but because of their limited capacity (and quota), students that fail to enrol in those schools (due to the low prior performance) end up studying in VET schools. In addition, for some pupils a VET school or a specific type of VET school is the only available choice as they are financially constrained to travel and/or to go to the preferred schools in other town/city. This raises a need for rethinking the nature of the schools in small towns, or might suggest there is a case for organizing combined secondary schools (general/vocational). There are also practices of mistakenly tracking Roma pupils into schools for pupils with special needs due to their latter enrolment into schools and some holes in the mechanism for assessment of pupils' mental health (Johnston, 2010).

The education system in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia including VET has undergone significant changes during the last two decades. However, the VET sector is one of the public policy fields where reforms are difficult to implement because of the strong unions which usually resist policy change. The large structural changes that occurred during transition including the shifting structure of the economy were not accompanied by appropriate reforms in the VET education. Moreover, educational policy and reforms in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were significantly influenced by international organizations and donor support. The most influential international actors have been the European Commission, World Bank, UNDP, OECD, ETF, GTZ, etc. However, policy transfer and the effectiveness of the implemented policies is at times constrained by the weak administrative capacity, cultural traditions, domestic reform management and insufficient public resources.

Within the reforms, only the 4-year vocational secondary education was reformed comprehensively. The 3-year vocational education have not as yet undergone extensive reform and the curricula continue to date from the period of the former Yugoslavia. Only the mechanical/automotive and electro-technical/electronics tracks were reformed under a GTZ reform which was aimed at introducing a "dual system" with 50% of the curricula being covered by practical learning. However, so far, such reform is not possible on a broader scale (except in the pilot schools) due to a lack of qualified teachers, equipment, links with industry as well as the required resources. These are some of the most important reforms/measures which have been introduced to date in the VET system: improvement of the legislative environment; changes in the structure of the VET, through extension of the compulsory education, introduction of curricula with different programme durations and levels of qualifications acquired; incorporation of the adult education in the overall education system; decentralization of the management of VET from central to local levels; establishment and capacity building of the main VET institutions; some steps towards building a more inclusive education, etc.

Previous studies and assessments of the VET reforms in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkan region argue that the adjustments or adaptations of the VET systems to the new economic environment and developing industries have been very slow and insufficient (Masson and Fetsi, 2008; Bartlett, 2012). Moreover, most of the reforms have been donor driven, without a clear vision on the future of the VET system and goals to be achieved. A step forward is the new Strategy for Vocational Education which is currently open for public consultation (but has not yet been adopted).

Apart from the reforms specific to the vocational education, one of the major reforms in the Macedonian education system was the introduction of mandatory secondary education from the school year 2008/2009. The Law on Secondary Education imposes a penalty (of EUR 1,000) for parents whose children are not enrolled or do not regularly attend classes (Official Gazette, No. 49/2007). As a support to the policy for establishing a compulsory secondary education the Government in recent years, has implemented several programs/measures for increasing enrolment into primary and secondary education, some of which are general whereas some are targeted towards vulnerable groups. These programs include:

- Free books and transportation from the place of residence to the school for children enrolled in secondary education;
- Establishing a system of mentoring and tutoring, as well as scholarships for the students from poor families, especially for Roma students;
- Introduction of Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) for children from poor families who regularly attend secondary schools. The transfer is given when a child from a family that receives social financial assistance is enrolled and regularly attends a school with the joint aims of strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of the social safety net, as well as of enhancing the human capital of children from socially disadvantaged families. The total amount that children receive is MKD 12,000 (about EUR 200) per school year.

As reported by school directors, the introduction of mandatory secondary education and the supporting measures has led to a significant reduction in the number of dropouts.

Despite the educational reforms and the increased supply of secondary (and tertiary) education, important gaps remain in secondary school enrolment, attendance and completion rates in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia compared with the EU countries including the new Member States (NMS). Moreover, the achievements of Macedonian pupils on the international assessments are relatively poor. The most recent international assessment, the 2011 TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) showed that Macedonian 4th and 8th grade pupils have very low achievements as compared to the other 62 participating countries. Moreover, there is a declining trend over time, from 1999 to 2003 and then 2011 which does not match the increased spending on education and reforms that have been implemented in the last decade.

1.2 The institutional framework for vocational education

This section first explores the legislative environment and then the institutional setting of vocational education in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Besides the legislation, strategic and other documents, valuable insights are also derived from the interviews with national authorities (see Appendix A).

1.2.1 Legislative environment for VET

The main laws governing the vocational education and training system are the following: the Law on Secondary Education (Official Gazette, No. 52/2002) with several subsequent amendments, the Law on Vocational Education and Training (Official Gazette, No. 71/2006, and recent amendments 17/2011), the Law on the Bureau for Development of Education (Official Gazette, No. 37/2006, with most recent amendments in Official Gazette No. 148/2009), the Law on Adult Education (Official Gazette, No. 7/2008), the Law on the State Examination Centre (Official Gazette, No. 142/2008) and the Law on Education Inspectorate (Official Gazette, No. 52/2005). These laws are accompanied by numerous bylaws (rulebooks, norms, regulations, guidelines, etc.) which regulate the curricula, personnel, technological, organizational and financial areas. ETF (2010) argues that despite the continuous legislative improvements and changes, the new legislation still has some of the old weaknesses which limit the effectiveness of the education policy. Most of the weaknesses are systemic ones, with unclear division of responsibilities and competencies between the several newly established institutions (for instance, the Bureau for Development of Education and Centre for Vocational Education and Training) and lack of synchronization between laws. In spite of a number of successful interventions, certain issues in the remained unregulated or insufficiently regulated. The ETF study also found that the Law on Secondary Education is not coordinated with the other laws, such as the Law on Vocational Education and Training and the Law on Local Self-government.

Anti-discrimination and equality of access to education is covered in several laws and strategic documents. For instance, the Law on Secondary Education prohibits the display of religious and political

party symbols in schools, prohibits discrimination and guarantees minority-language instruction. Discrimination includes social, political, religious discrimination and/or discrimination based on social status (articles 3 and 7). Similarly, the National Strategy for the Development of Education 2005-2015 more directly covers the issue of inclusion, through: non-discrimination; improved physical access to schools; increasing participation in education through awareness-raising in ethnic communities; expanding coverage of pre-school education; etc. The Strategy identifies the need for greater ethnic and cultural cooperation and cohesion, starting from early childhood. It stresses the need to find common denominators that would bridge different ethnicities and cultures. Similarly, the Concept for Nine Year Primary School education, developed by the BDE in 2007 introduced building competences for inter-personal, inter-cultural, social and civic competences, as part of the basic principles for the functioning of primary education. Further inclusiveness measures and actions are set within the Strategy for Integrated Education and the Indicators for quality of work of the schools (see section 1.3 for more details). On a more operational level, some specific measures for increasing the inclusiveness of education include the introduction of new elective courses at the secondary school level on the themes of civic culture (in general secondary schools/gymnasiums) and the culture of protection, peace, and tolerance (in both general and vocational schools).

Besides the main legislation, education is also covered in several strategic documents and action plans from other areas of social life, such as the 2007 National Action Plan for Gender Equality, Child Protection Program, the 2009 Social Protection Program, National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010-2020, National Action Plan for Education for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, etc. However, most of these programs do not make specific reference to vocational education as a potentially powerful tool for increasing social inclusion and cohesion (for instance, the Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion). On the other hand, the National Action Plan for Education for the Decade of Roma Inclusion emphasizes access of Roma population to scholarships and tutoring, and also calls for the legal obligation of supplementary instruction to be delivered.

Despite the evident progress made in the past years in broadening the understanding of social exclusion (apart from pupils with special needs) and on tackling exclusion, there is still evidence of continuing discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable groups from secondary education. Spasovski et al. (2010) argue that the legislative and policy support for the diversity of students and the promotion of social inclusion is not effective in practice. For instance, there are separate public schools or separate classes in public schools for pupils with disabilities or pupils from ethnic (and linguistic) minorities. Similarly, the Strategy for Integrated Education argues that physical barriers between ethnic and cultural communities were created by the introduction of the right to education in the mother tongue. The discrimination takes the form of the selection of students by social group and social class and/or the choice of the occupational area/profile of students in relation to gender and ethnicity (interview with the director of the Directorate for Development and improvement of education of minorities language, 22.11.2012).

There are limited educational opportunities for pupils with special needs. This is mainly related to the lack of the necessary physical capacity within schools, but also due to the widely accepted notion that pupils with special needs should not be mixed with "normal" pupils. UNICEF assesses that only about 15% of school-aged pupils with special needs are enrolled into education (UNICEF, 2013). Deluca (2007) argues that either the society is unable to correctly detect the mental disability of pupils or that there is an open exclusion of such children from the society. As was noted during an interview, "*the best available option for parents who have a child with mental disability is to leave the country and move to more developed Western countries. However, this option is available only for reach households*" (interview with university professor and practitioner from institution that works on social issues, 23.11.2012).

1.2.2 Institutional setting of the VET system

The VET Centre, established in 2006, occupies a central place in the institutional setting of the VET system. The Centre's primary role is to integrate the public interests and interests of the social partners in VET. Despite the improvements in the operation of the VET Centre, the EC (2012) finds that the overall capacity of the VET Centre (as well as the Centre of Adult Education) remains insufficient.

Besides the VET Centre, several other institutions are involved in vocational education. These include: the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), the Adult Education Centre (AEC), the State Education Inspectorate (SEI) and the State Examination Centre (SEC). The BDE is in charge of monitoring, research, improvement and development of the educational processes in the pre-primary education, primary, secondary general education, secondary vocational education, education of children with special needs, adult education, etc. The BDE sets the educational curricula for all levels of education (except the tertiary education), organizes training for the professional development of teachers, makes proposals to the minister for enhancing the quality of the educational processes, prepares educational standards, standards for the assessment of pupils' achievements, prepares concepts for textbooks and approves textbooks. The work and institutional setting of the BDE is laid down in the Law for Bureau for Development of Education, Official Gazette No. 37/2006 with most recent changes in Official Gazette No. 148/2009. The personnel of the BDE is specialized in a certain area, such as biology, geography, etc.

The institutional setting and responsibilities of the SEI are set in the Law on Educational Inspection (Official Gazette No. 52/2005, and most recent changes in the Official Gazette No. 51/2011). SEI monitors the implementation of educational standards and assures quality in pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, special educational institutions and adult education institutions. The main tool of the SEI for quality assurance is the integral evaluation of the educational process. The integral evaluation includes: evaluation of the organization and fulfilment of the educational program, the environment and culture in the educational institutions, management, professional development of the teachers and managers, communication and the public relations, cooperation with the parents and the other stakeholders (see section 1.3). This integral evaluation is considered as a key tool for early recognition of potential discrimination, and in overcoming discrimination through recommendations from the inspection.

It appears that the role and responsibilities of the BDE and SEI are distinct in that the BDE has more of a developmental and advisory role in the education system, whereas the SEI ensures compliance with the legislation and standards and can apply penalties. However, field research has shown that in practice their roles are not that distinct. For instance, the SEI inspector would check if the teacher has a daily work plan for the particular class, whereas the BDE would oversee the thematic and methodological preparation of the teacher for the class, but both can overlap to a certain extent. However, the discussion with the National Advisory Board has shown that it is sometimes the schools that are not that familiar with the nature of the monitoring from the two institutions. A similar overlap in functions can be found between the VET Centre and BDE. For instance, the BDE has competences for the teachers teaching general subjects in 4-year VET, whereas the VET Centre has competences for teachers teaching vocational subjects – hence the different interests of the teachers and institutions involved in the delivery of VET. Similarly, the VET Centre is responsible for the preparation of external tests for vocational subjects in secondary vocational schools, whereas the SEC is responsible for the general subjects. Such inefficiencies in the organization of the VET system suggest the need for a clearer division of responsibilities between the different actors (mainly the VET Centre and the BDE), maybe streamlining of the legislation, as well as greater accountability of the institutions.

As part of the overall effort to decentralize the delivery of public services, the competencies and responsibilities for the delivery of the VET were to some extent transferred to local self-governments. However, there is no clear division of the responsibilities between the central and local levels of

government. The Law on VET states that the local self-government should analyze the local labour market and inform the VET Centre about the latest developments on the labour market, make suggestions for the development of new curricula and programs, for enrolment quotas in the VET, etc. However, local self-government units have insufficient information about the local labour markets, and that VET education is not a priority for them. Hence the decentralization did not bring the expected benefits in terms of greater links between the curricula, the needs of the local labour market and the demand for workers. The draft Strategy for VET envisages a review of the current model of division of responsibilities and financing over VET education between the central and local government level.

1.3 The policy process and the policy debate

This section explores the current debate in the area of vocational education at the national level, which is mainly incorporated into or investigated through the Strategy for Vocational Education and Training. It then examines several recent actions/measures for increasing the equality of access and improving the educational experience of all young persons.

1.3.1 Policy debate: the Strategy for Vocational Education and Training

In April 2013, the Government adopted a National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training. It has been prepared by National Council, including representatives from the MES, the VET Centre, the Association of Local Self-Governments, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Service Agency, the BDE, the Centre for Adult Education and the Chamber of Commerce, and financed by the ETF. The Strategy aims at addressing the main dilemmas in the future development of the VET system, such as the policy design (aim, mission and vision), the systematic organization of the VET (occupational areas, profiles, network of schools, curricula), the challenge of meeting the needs of the multiple clients (pupils, parents, business sector, the society), and in the delivery of the programs.

The Strategy has the following goals:

- To increase the attractiveness, relevance and quality of VET, and to promote its role in business performance, competitiveness and innovations;
- To offer a flexible and different opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills, promoting an entrepreneurial spirit, continuous education, and active citizenship; and
- To promote high quality and social inclusion, to ensure greater employability, mobility and security of the workplace.

The Strategy establishes nine key areas for intervention, which are then elaborated in detail and measures for improvement proposed. These areas include: quality and attractiveness of the VET; curricula and study programs in VET and their relevance to the labour market and further education; teaching process and grading criteria; cooperation with the business sector; decentralization of management and financing of the VET; monitoring and evaluation; legislative environment; internationalization of VET. The Strategy would provide a clear vision of the future of the VET system and its organization, and would make room for the re-thinking and re-design of the supply of occupational areas and profiles in the country, the network of schools, of the curricula, the delivery of the programs, improved coordination between institutions, etc. However, the Strategy does not give an answer to all open questions, but rather sets the goals to be achieved and potential instruments to be used. For instance, the Strategy neither prescribes the "optimal" way to link better demanded skills with the supplied skills of the graduates, nor the optimal level of decentralization of the curricula to local self-government. Moreover, the Ministry needs to work further on establishing linkages between the VET strategy and other sector strategies, on developing policies on school to work transitions, on the inter-relationship and linkages between government and business, and to review and if necessary revise the financial policy of the education system and the distribution of the public resources to VET.

1.3.2 Strategy for Integrated Education

In 2010, the Government adopted a Strategy for Integrated Education which aims at reducing the distance between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds on the grounds that limited interaction between pupils from diverse ethnic minorities, limited knowledge about each other's culture and language barriers might lead to the disintegration of society. The Strategy was prepared jointly by the Ministry of Education and Science and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE HCNM).

The Strategy is therefore a further step in addition to the national legislation, documents and policies towards establishing an integrated approach to education in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The right to education in a mother-tongue is laid down in the Law on Primary Education (article 9), and the Law on Secondary Education (article 4). The integrated approach to education is also implemented through the Indicators for the quality of the work in the schools, developed by the State Education Inspectorate in 2009. The latter is much broader in its approach towards integration and inclusion, as the Strategy for Integrated Education only covers the ethnicity-related integration. It leaves aside other vulnerable categories of young people, such as those from rural areas, socially-disadvantaged households, without parental control and pupils with disabilities.

Box 2 Example of Conceptualization of Theme 1, Objective 1: Promote integration through joint curricular activities	
Output 1	Programs for joint curricular activities for groups of students belonging to different ethnic communities in the subjects that are integrated into the curricula for primary and secondary education
Activities	- MES, BDE and the VET Centre will jointly develop curricula and local and international experts would be consulted; - Groups of students from different ethnic communities would be taught in the subjects: foreign languages, IT, art and physical education, using a inter-active and inter-disciplinary approach based on contemporary teaching methods
Indicators	- No. of workshops for preparation of programs for joint activities conducted - No. of programs created - Level of implementation of the programs
Timeline	- 2011 – development phase (6 workshops) - 2012 – pilot implementation (evaluation, monitoring, final workshop) - School year 2013-2014 – implementation

Source: Strategy for Integrated Education, p. 10.

Policy actions in the Strategy are divided into 5 Themes: i) integration through joint curricular and extra-curricular activities; ii) integration by increasing the mutual knowledge of each other's languages among students and adults; iii) adjustments in the curricula and existing textbooks with particular emphasis on history, geography and language teaching; iv) building teachers' qualifications related to competence of facilitating integration in education; and v) school management in the context of decentralization, and de-politicization of the education system.

In February 2013, the MES published the first results from the activities implemented towards enhancing the integrative role of primary and secondary schools. In the period February 2012-February 2013, the following activities were implemented:

a) Activities for pupils

The Strategy has resulted in several measures/activities. As an example, Box 2 presents one of the intended outputs of the Strategy, under the Theme 1, Objective 1: Promote integration through joint curricular activities.

- Summer multi-culturalism camp, which involved 98 pupils and 16 teachers from all ethnic groups, from 8 municipalities. Pupils were grouped in four thematic areas: multimedia, music, drama and literature and painting workshop, for one week;

- Multi-cultural bus which was used for organizing 4 excursions, involving 400 pupils. The excursions helped pupils learn about each other's culture, language and traditions, historical and religious monuments;

- Painting caravan which included 6,000 pupils who were drew paintings on the theme of "You and I are the same";

- Extra-curricular classes called "We learn together", which were introduced as a pilot project in 9 secondary schools. Under the project, 18 curricula for free classes were prepared.

b) Activities for teachers and school directors

- Teacher training in the language and culture of the other community, which involved 448 teachers and 72 administrative staff from 22 primary and 11 secondary schools;

- Training of directors, management and parents' councils for management in multi-cultural environment, supporting understanding, prevention and conflict resolution.

These activities were undertaken with a financial support from the Kingdom of Norway, USAID, UNESCO, UNICEF, EU, US Embassy in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and other EU countries embassies and consulates.

In summary, the Strategy provides solid ground for greater interaction and integration among all ethnicities in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. However, it has a limited role in terms of facilitating overall inclusion and cohesion as it focuses on only one risk factor for social exclusion, that of ethnicity. Moreover, as has been acknowledged, the implementation of the linguistic rights of communities has produced the unintended side-effect of disintegration among young people instead of integration.

1.3.3 Integral evaluation

The 2005 Law on Educational Inspection stipulates that the SEI conducts integral inspection. After a three-year period of piloting the integral inspection among schools (2005-2007), the official implementation started in 2008. Inspections are conducted every three years for the same school. In 2009 the SEI in cooperation with the international and local experts and supported by the USAID, identified key areas for assessing the work of the schools, aimed at ensuring standardized objective criteria for measuring the quality of the educational process and pupils' attainments. Indicators are grouped into 7 sets of thematic indicators as follows: study plans and programs; performance and pupils; learning and teaching; pupils' support; school climate and relations; resources; management and policy-making.

These areas are then broken down into several quality indicators and topics within each set of indicators, and evaluated on a scale from 1 to 4. Appendix B shows one example of Area 4-Pupils' support. The evaluation is conducted through interviews with the school' stakeholders, data analysis, resources, documents and observations.

1.3.4 Specific inclusive measures for Roma population

The Directorate for Development and improvement of education in minority languages which is an independent body under the auspices of the MES has a special role in the implementation of the concept of integrated education. The Directorate implements several measures/activities directed towards promoting the inclusion of all ethnic communities in the education. It cooperates with several international donors, such as the Roma Education Fund-Budapest and UNICEF. One of the most significant activities of the Directorate is the project providing scholarships, mentoring and tutoring for Roma pupils in their 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th years of secondary education. The project has been in operation since 2009 (and is due to run until 2014) and is supported by the Roma Education Fund. The project aims at increasing the progress and attainment of Roma pupils from all state and private secondary schools in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. So far, 600 pupils have been involved with the project, from 28 municipalities. The project is implemented in 3 phases:

- Scholarships – financial support of 2,200 MKD for 9 months, for 400 secondary school pupils with an average grade of above 3.5, and 1,500 MKD for 200 pupils with average grade of 3.0-3.49. So far, 591 pupils have used the scholarships, 395 of whom fall into the first category of scholarship. This support comes on top of the CCT payment.

- Mentoring – in the school year 2011/2012, a total of 133 teachers were involved in mentoring Roma pupils (not beneficiaries of the scholarships) from secondary schools. Each mentor can organize a minimum of 10 additional classes (on top of the regular ones) with a group of at least 10 pupils. The mentor monitors pupils' progress, school attendance, oversees their involvement of pupils in extra-curricular activities within schools and has regular contacts with the parents.

- Tutoring – Tutors are assigned to the pupils that have scholarships to support their preparation for the Matura. To date this phase of the project has not been implemented.

The project has had satisfactory results so far. The progress, attendance and attainments of the pupils were all increased, cooperation between the school, parents and children has also been improved, pupils were socialized, and the availability of textbooks and transportation to schools have also been improved. As reported in one of the schools, the progress of pupils, in general, is slower when parents are with lower education, poorer families and rural areas (interview with school pedagogue, Prilep).

Apart from this project, starting in 2009/2010 the MES has reduced the criteria (points) for enrolment of Roma pupils in secondary school by 10% from the prescribed minimum points. The intention of this measure is to increase the access of Roma population to preferred schools and to mitigate their self-selection into certain, lower-quality or low-attainment schools.

Moreover, in July, 2012 a Twinning project "Support of integration of ethnic communities in the educational system" started within the Directorate, worth about 1 million EUR. The project aims at ensuring equal access to quality education for pupils from all ethnic communities. Specifically, the project objectives are to: ensure equal access to education; support equal opportunities through education; and support equal respect among different ethnic and cultural communities.

1.4 Summary

There is increasing but still insufficient awareness of the concept of "inclusive education", as it is mainly understood in a very narrow sense of inclusion of pupils with special needs and/or those from ethnic minorities. The educational system was largely reformed in the last decade, and some supporting measures were introduced or reinforced for pupils from socially-disadvantaged families and Roma pupils. Expenditures for education were also increased. This has lead to large increases in the quantity of education (i.e. average educational attainment) among population, however quality indicators of education (comparative international assessments) show worsening results for Macedonian pupils.

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The legislative environment has been improved and new institutions established in the area of vocational education and lifelong learning, and quality standards reinforced. However, there is a need for streamlining the legislation and better coordination of the role of each educational institution. The authorities recently adopted a draft Strategy for Vocational Education and Training which sets the vision and reform directions for the VET system. There are increased efforts to improve the equality of access to education and experience at schools, however those are mainly focused on ethnicity and reducing ethnic divide among pupils. The inclusion of pupils with special needs, of whom many are left out of school or are tracked in special schools, is not considered as priority.

2. VET PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL COHESION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

2.1 Methodology

The research was conducted on the basis of a Participatory action research (PAR) and adopted a holistic school approach towards inclusion in education. In this way the PAR process of investigation involved both the researchers and the subject of research in a joint endeavour designed to make the research findings relevant and applicable.

The research was carried out at a national level and local levels in three (3) case study schools selected according to comprehensive selection methodology and criteria which included:

- presence of inclusive and/or segregational practices (new and/or longstanding)
- consideration of diversity (accounting for economic, socio, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, urban/rural)
- instrumental learning (academic attainment and practical learning)
- dialogic and/or cooperative learning
- family/community/employers collaborative involvement in the school
- commitment of the school staff to inclusive approaches for all learners
- level of motivation (of students, school staff and families)
- academic expectations (of students, teachers, and family members)
- inclusion of democratic values in the educational programme
- school's capacity to contribute to the research (carrying out research activities/reporting/participating in externally designed research projects)
- commitment from the Government to support financially either through donor-funded projects or state funds.

The initial ranking of the schools resulted in a list of ten (10) VET schools, agreed between the partners in the project, the MES, ETF and the LSE enterprise. The ten (10) ranked schools were then mapped across regions in order to select schools from different regions of the country. Following this procedure case study schools were selected from the Pelagonia region, the Polog region and the Skopje Region as the top three populated regions amounting to 56% of the total population, ethnically diverse as well as regions with the highest share of number of enrolled students in secondary education. The selected case study schools were as follows:

- VET school – "SOU - Riste Risteski-Ricko", Pelagonia region, municipality Prilep;

- VET school - "SOU - Nikola Stejn", Polog region, municipality Tetovo;

- VET school- "ASUC -Boro Petrusevski", Skopje region, municipality Gazi Baba.

For the purposes of the research study temporary advisory bodies were established on a national level as well as three at the local level, one in each case study location. The National Advisory Board led by the Deputy-minister of education and science, consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Education

and Science and the VET Centre. Local Advisory Boards (LABs) were also established at the three case study schools with the School governance bodies acting as a LAB for the purposes of the study.

A combined qualitative and quantitative research strategy was adopted to address the questions on VET policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion. The qualitative research involved indicative data analysis of the participants' perspective and views expressed in their own words. The qualitative data was gathered through:

- Collection of legislative, strategic documents and statistical indicators

- In-depth individual interviewees on national and local level

Quantitative research was carried out through the preparation and implementation of a questionnaire for students and teachers. The questionnaire was implemented in the three case study schools for students from 1st year and 4th year of study and also for the teachers. The student survey was conducted at different levels of study in order to identify possible differences between the two groups and to check the level of student's expectations over time, in particular as they approached to the upper grades.

2.1.1   The Methodology of participatory action research

The participatory action research process was organised and implemented in the following sequence:

Step 1: <u>Establishment of National and Local Advisory Boards</u> -- At the national level the National Advisory Board was established and initial discussions on the research aims and methodology were undertaken. At the local level initial discussions were held with the directors of the local case study schools and the Local Advisory Boards were set up.

Step 2: <u>Desk Research Phase</u> - Desk research provided a background for the subsequent field research process and involved a comprehensive review of the literature on VET policies and practices on social inclusion and cohesion, national legislative and strategic documents, action plans as well as a set of statistical indicators on education, labour, poverty etc.

As part of the desk research the policies towards VET, social inclusion and social cohesion were examined through the review of:

- VET policies, integrated education and decentralization processes,

- Level of social inclusion/exclusion though the examination of entry into school, drop-out rates from school, apprenticeship/internships, transition from school to work.

The statistical indicators were gathered at the national level for a 5-year period (2007-2011) on:

- Social inclusion in vocational education (education expenditure, participation in vocational education, enrolment rates, dropout rates, teacher pupil ratios, structure of the teacher workforce);

- Social inclusion in the labour market (unemployment rate, youth unemployment rate and employment rate by educational level and gender);

- Social cohesion (poverty and death rate by education level, literacy rate and trends in violent crime);

- General education system indicators (pupils and students in all level of education (ISCED 0-6, pupils in each level of education ISCED 1-2, ISCED 3-4, ISCED 5-6, share of population aged 25-64 with lower, upper and tertiary education attainment, lifelong learning and early school leaving rate).

Additional statistical indicators were gathered at the local level in each case study locations on:

- enrolment trends;

- drop outs;

- students performance;

- management and finances in the schools.

Step 3: <u>In depth individual interviews at the national and local levels</u> - The interviewing phase lay at the heart of the qualitative research approach and provided the researchers with the opportunity to discuss current VET policies and practices in general and their correlation with social inclusion and social cohesion overall. The interviewees were purposefully selected to provide insights into national level visions and strategies related to the VET system, social inclusion and cohesion, Roma integration, integrated education, multi-ethnicity and the improvement of the education of the minorities, monitoring policies as well as to garner academic and NGO views on the research project's key thematic questions. The comprehensive set of interviews at the local level were conducted to find out about practices from a management perspective, from teachers, youth organizations, the counsel of parents and the local business community.

Step 4: <u>Quantitative Research Phase</u> - The quantitative research or field research was complemented by questionnaires for students selected from the first and final years of study and a teachers' questionnaire, conducted at each case study location. The students' questionnaire was designed to provide insights into student views on the reasons for their choice of the vocational school, the reasons for their choice of vocational school in preference to other type of school, their experience at the school, motivation, school environment, participation in extra-curricular activities, plans for the future, transition from school to work and job search expectations. The teachers' questionnaire aimed to ascertain teachers' views on teaching practice, theoretical vs. practical learning, the use of computers, the quality of the education, the school environment (school ratings, behaviour problems, infrastructure, etc.), social inclusion in the school, attracting students to the school, promotion of social inclusion, equal opportunities and transition from school to work.

Step 5: <u>Presentation of research findings to NAB and LABs</u> for discussion and consideration of their significance for improving VET policy and practice in relation to social inclusion and social cohesion.

Step 6: <u>Finalization of the report</u> incorporating comments and reflections of advisory boards.

2.2   Situation analysis (in the case study areas)

2.2.1   Case study school SOU "Riste Risteski - Ricko ", municipality Prilep, region Pelagonia

VET School in the wider context - region and municipality characteristics

VET School Riste Risteski Ricko is located in the region of Pelagonia, in the municipality of Prilep. The Pelagonia Region is in the south of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and is the largest region covering 18.9% of the total land area of the country. In 2011, 11.3% of the total population i.e. 233,628 citizens lived in this region. This region has pronounced emigration of the population and as a result has a negative natural population increase. The Pelagonia basin, which is the largest plain in the country, the Prespa lake, the specific climate, the extensive hydrographical network as well as largest coal deposits makes this region the largest producer of tobacco, apples and milk as well as the largest producer of the electricity. Pelagonia region covers 9 municipalities - Dolneni, Krusevo, Demir Hisar, Krivogastani, Prilep, Mogila, Resen, Bitola and Novaci with 343 settlements.

The literacy rate in the region is 96%, the economic activity rate is 64%, the employment rate is 44% and the unemployment rate is 31.4% (SSO, 2012). There are 8,308 active entities in this region. There are 17

secondary education schools out of which 12 are VET schools. The total number of students enrolled in secondary education in 2011/2012 school year in Pelagonia region was 10.423 students.

The municipality of Prilep has a mainly Macedonian population who account for 93% of the population of 76,768, while 6% are Roma and 0.8% are from other ethnic minorities. Business activities in this municipality are mainly distributed in the tobacco industry, agriculture, food industry, mining, textile industry, construction, metal industry, trade and tourism. The municipality is characterized by a high unemployment rate and, as elsewhere in the country, the majority of the unemployed have either no education or only primary education and are over 50 years old. In this municipality there are four (4) VET schools.

VET school SOU "Riste Risteski – Ricko"

VET School "Riste Risteski-Ricko" is 4 year VET school offering 5 educational programs in the following areas: mechanical, electro technical, traffic, graphic and sport gymnasium (see Table 2). Each of the educational programs has different education profiles (areas of specialization). The Electro technical education program has 3 education profiles: computer and automatics, electronics and telecommunications, and energetic. The Mechanical education program has 2 education profiles: mechanical technician and mechatronics. The Traffic education program has 1 education profile: transport and forwarding. The Graphic education program has 1 education profile: graphic technician.

Table 2 - The total number of students enrolled in the school year 2012/2013 is 907 students.

Total number of students 2012/2013								
	I year		II year		III year		IV year	
	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students
Total	9	244	10	258	8	208	8	197
by program								
Mechanical	2	55	3	70	2	50	2	42
Electro technical	3	65	3	72	3	74	3	70
Traffic	2	66	2	65	1	33	1	31
Graphic	1	24	1	22	1	28	1	23
Sport gymnasium	1	34	1	29	1	23	1	31

Source: School administrative data.

About 60% of the total number of students are enrolled in the first year. The dropout ratio of the school is 3.4% out of which only 0.3% of the students drop out for unknown reasons. Most of the dropouts occur among pupils in the 1st year of study and in this regard the main reason is a change of school.

The average student performance per study program is lowest in the mechanical track (2.5) and highest in the sport gymnasium-3.6 (Figure 1).

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Figure 1 – Student performance per study program (average grade, 1-5)
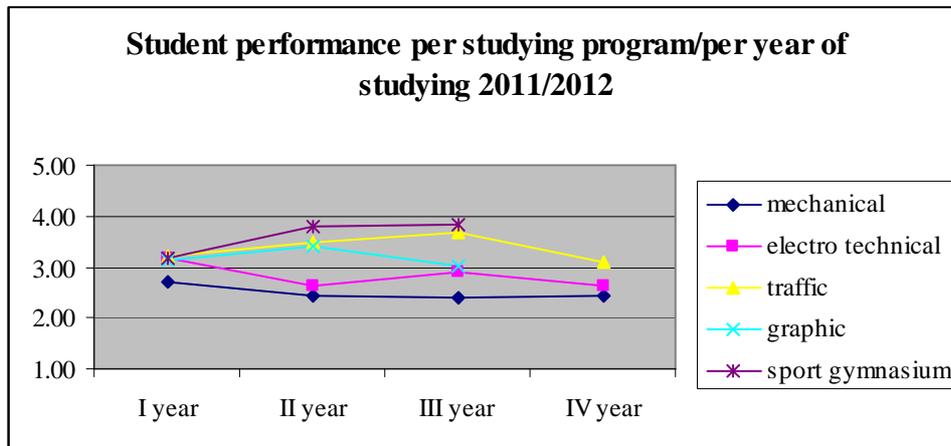
Source: School administrative data.

The school has 84 employees, 3 of which are in management, 60 are teaching staff and 21 administrative staff. The school budget for 2011 was app. 600.000 EUR 97% of which were made up of transfers from the central budget and an additional 3% was income from the school's own activities/businesses. About 80% of the school funds allocated by the central budget are for salaries for the employees.

2.2.2 Case study school VET school - "SOU -Nikola Stejn", municipality Tetovo, region Polog

VET School in the wider context - region and municipality characteristics

VET school "Nikola Stejn" is located in Polog region, in the municipality of Tetovo. The region belongs to the northwest part of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Polog basin and the valley of the river Radika. It covers 9.7% of the country's total land area. In 2011, 15.3% of the total population i.e. 315,964 people lived in this region. It is one of the most densely populated regions. The region also has the highest natural rate of population increase. The municipality has extensive hydroelectric potential, which is utilized to some extent by the hydroelectric plants on Mavrovo Lake. The specific vegetation of the Polog basin and the surrounding mountains create favourable conditions for the development of agriculture, and for cattle breeding in particular, for which this region is renowned. Owing to the high mountain ranges, the specific landscape and the climate, the most popular winter resorts are located in this region.

The region is characterized by a low GDP per capita, which in 2010 was 47% of the average national GDP per capita, the lowest across all 8 regions. The region contributed 7.2% to the total national GDP. The Polog region consists of 9 municipalities – Tetovo, Tearce, Jegunovce, Bogovinje, Brvenica, Vrapciste, Gostivar and Mavrovo/Rostuse with 184 settlements. The literacy rate is 96%, the economic activity rate is 44%, the employment rate is 30% and the unemployment rate is 31.8% (SSO, 2012).

There are 13 secondary education schools in the Polog region out of which 7 are VET schools. The total number of enrolled students in secondary education in 2011/2012 school year was 15,650 students. About 7,000 active entities operate in this region.

The municipality of Tetovo is a multi-ethnic environment with a strong predominance of ethnic Albanians who make up 70% of the total population of the municipality (estimated population 200,000 citizens), 23% are ethnic Macedonians and 7% Turks, Roma and other ethnic minorities. The business activities in this municipality are mainly located in the wood industry, construction, agriculture, textile industry. There are four (4) VET schools in this municipality.

VET School "Nikola Stejn"

VET School "Nikola Stejn" is a 4-year VET school offering 5 medical educational programs - medical nurses, dentist technician, pharmaceutical technician, physiotherapist and 2 educational programs for personal services - cosmetics and optics.

In 2010/2011 the total number of students enrolled in the school was 2,631 students in 74 classes, out of which 51 classes were conducted with instruction in the Albanian language, 19 in Macedonian and 4 in Turkish language. The education program for personal services is provided only in the Albanian language. In the school year 2012/2013 the total number of students in the school decreased to 2,334 students. Table 3 shows the distribution of pupils per year of study, ethnicity (language of instruction) and program. The medical nurses program dominates with slightly less than 50% of all pupils.

Table 3 – Pupils per year of study, program and language of instruction, 2012/2013

	I year			II year			III year			IV year		
	Students			**Students**			**Students**			**Students**		
	Mac.	Alb.	Turks	Mac.	Alb.	Turks	Mac.	Alb.	Turks	Mac.	Alb.	Turks
Medical nurses	22	224	31	57	152	31	58	218	31	55	213	33
Dentist technicians	22	80	0	20	40	0	22	73	0	26	79	0
Pharmacy technicians	22	40	0	23	40	0	22	74	0	24	87	
Physiotherapists	20	80	0	25	80	0	0	39	0	31	41	0
Cosmeticians	0	40	0	0	40	0	0	39	0	0	0	0
Optics	0	0	0	0	40	0	0	40	0	0	0	0
Total	86	464	31	125	392	31	102	483	31	136	420	33

Approximately 90% of the students with Albanian or Turkish as their language of instruction are enrolled in the first enrolment cycle. This share is lower for Macedonian students where approximately 30% were enrolled in the first enrolment cycle. This might suggest that for ethnic Macedonian pupils this school is not a first choice. Or it might be related to the fact that some of the ethnic Albanian pupils who are not accepted for enrolment in the first cycle (and the quota is filled in the Albanian language classes), decide afterwards to enrol in Macedonian-language classes. The drop out ratio of the school is 0.6% and all these drops outs are the result of a change of school.

Figure 2 shows that pupils from the dentist technician program have the highest level of attainment (average grade of 3.4), whereas cosmeticians have worse performance (2.5)

Figure 2 – Student performance per study program (average grade, 1-5), 2011/2012

Student performance 2011/2012
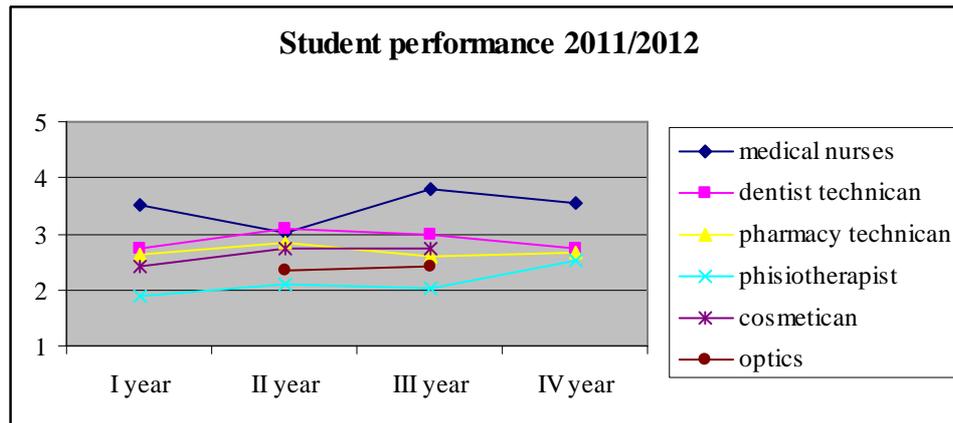
Source: School administrative data.

The school has 209 employees, out of which 5 are in management, 183 are teaching staff and 21 administrative staff. The school budget for 2011 was approximately 1.9 million EUR 97% of which was made up of transfers from central budget and another 3 % was derived from school income from its own activities/businesses. Approximately 80% of the school funds allocated by the central budget are for salaries for the employees.

2.2.3   Case study VET school "ASUC Boro Petrusevski", municipality Skopje, Skopje region

VET School in the wider context - region and municipality characteristics

VET school "ASUC Boro Petrusevski" is located in the Skopje region in the northernmost part of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia extending across the Skopje basin. This region is the smallest and covers only 7.3% of the total land area of the country. With 29.4% of the country's total population (2011) i.e. 605,899 citizens, Skopje is the most populous region in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Six of its constituent municipalities have a population density of over 1,000 people per km2. This region is the main hub of the country and has the most developed traffic infrastructure. Most of the country's industrial, trade and service capacities are concentrated in this region. In 2010, the Skopje Region had the highest GDP per capita (314,809 MKD), 50% higher than the national average. Skopje region consists of 17 municipalities with 142 settlements. The literacy rate is 97%, the economic activity rate is 56%, the employment rate is 39% and the unemployment rate is 31% (SSO, 2012).

There are 32 secondary education schools out of which 15 are VET schools. The total number of students enrolled in secondary education in the 2011/2012 school year was 27,661 students. There are 28,095 active entities operating in the region.

Skopje, the capital of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, is located in this region, and it is the economic, administrative, cultural and academic centre of the country. As a result, this region represents the largest immigration area. The majority of the population are ethnic Macedonians (60.8%), followed by ethnic Albanians (20.5%), Roma 3% and other minorities.

VET School "ASUC Boro Petrusevski"

VET School "ASUC Boro Perusevski" is a 3 and 4-year VET school offering 3 education programs: traffic, mechanical and auto-technical. The education profiles that are offered under each education program are: i) Traffic education program – 2 profiles, technician for road traffic and technician for transport; ii) Mechanical education program – 2 profiles, mechatronic (4 year VET) and auto mechanical (3-year VET – not reformed); iii) Auto-technical education program - 2 profiles, auto-electrician and body-repair mechanic (both programs are 3-year – GTZ reformed)

In the school year 2012/2013 the total number of enrolled students was 1,023 students in 40 classes, 22 of which with Macedonian as the language of instruction and 18 in Albanian. Table 4 shows the distribution of pupils per year of study, program and ethnicity (i.e. language of instruction).

Table 4 - Pupils per year of study, program and language of instruction, 2012/2013

	I year		II year		III year		IV year	
Occupation	**Students**		**Students**		**Students**		**Students**	
	Mac.	Alb.	Mac.	Alb.	Mac.	Alb.	Mac.	Alb.
Technician for road traffic	21	25	28	23	28	23	32	25
Technician for transport and forwarding services	26	23	26	25	26	25	34	24
Mechatronic	38	50	51	50	51	50	59	48
Auto- mechanical (3 year VET)	20		18		18		20	
Auto-electrician (3 year VET)	19			17		17	13	
Body repair mechanic (3 year VET)	20		18		18			14
Total	144	98	141	115	141	115	158	111

Source: School administrative data.

Approximately 72% of the students are enrolled in the first enrolment cycle. The dropout ratio of the school is 4.3% (the largest among the three schools under study), 0.6% of which leave the school for unknown reasons. Most of the dropouts occur due to a change of the schools. The larger dropout rate in the school might be related to the fact that a larger share of pupils live outside the municipality of Skopje (as reported in the school interviews), and/or due to the greater choice of schools in the capital city than in other municipalities.

The average student performance per study program is highest for the transport technician program and the services (3.4), and lowest for pupils from the body repair mechanic program-2.4 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Student performance per study program (average grade, 1-5), 2011/2012
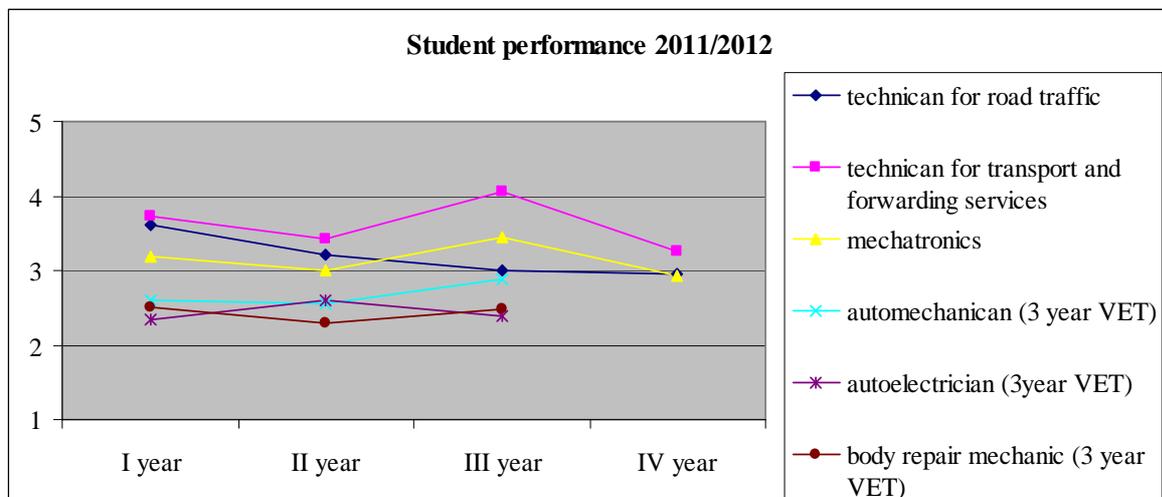
Source: School administrative data.

The school has 143 employees, out of which 1 in a management, 94 are teaching staff and 48 administrative staff. The total number of administrative staff also includes the staff hired from the school

for running the school's own businesses. The school budget for 2012 was approximately 1.9 million EUR, out of which 44% were transfers from the central budget and 56% was school income from own activities/businesses. About 80% of the school funds allocated by the central budget are for salaries for the employees. One of the specificities of this school is the relatively large share of the budget which is amassed through the school's own activities, rather than sole reliance on central budget transfers. This allows the school to invest in school infrastructure, to better motivate the teachers through bonuses for performance, to undertake extra-curricular activities, to offer mentoring for pupils with lower performance levels and to take care of pupils who come places of residence outside Skopje..

2.3   PAR research process and research findings

Social exclusion in VET can take different forms: at the point of entry into VET, completion and drop outs from VET, educational experience during students' schooling, transition from school to work and the subsequent career path. In this regard, this section analyses school practices on:

-   Selection and tracking of the students where the selection of the students is based on the school practices to select students by ability/ethnicity/special needs. Tracking might also involve separation of students into separate educational streams, selection into gymnasium vs. VET. Tracking may also take place within schools if students are segregated into separate classes;

-   Completion of VET school - mapping the extent of drop-outs from vocational education and its influence on social inclusion as well as investigating the extent and causes of drop-outs in the case study schools;

-   Experience in the school, vocational education and internship[1] system; and

-   Transition from school to work though an investigation of the processes of exit from the school system into the world of work, unemployment and inactivity.

2.3.1   Selection/tracking of students

The selection of the students in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is based on nationally set secondary school enrolment criteria (minimum acceptable points), publicly announced prior to the student enrolment process. The students are ranked based on the average grades in primary education, average grades in mother tongue and second language subjects and from 2 specific subjects relevant for the education stream in which they want to enrol, diplomas (1st, 2n, 3rd place) from international and national competitions in the specific subjects and average score in terms of student school behaviour. The minimum enrolment criteria are set for each specific education stream/program, where the minimum criteria is highest for medical schools (min 70 points), gymnasiums (min 60 points) and vocational schools (min 60, 35 points for 3-year programs). The selection points are decreased by 5 points in the second and third enrolment cycle. For Roma students, the minimum enrolment points are reduced by 10% in each education stream. This system selects the students with higher academic attainments to enrol in general gymnasiums (which are more attractive) or other academic pathways and students with lower attainments to enrol in vocational pathways. *"The national ranking system is based on previous academic performance. The points set for specific study programs differentiate between more attractive and less attractive education profiles"- (national education authority, 22.11.2012).*

Given that performance differences are likely to be associated with different socio-economic backgrounds, pupils from poorer families are more likely to self-select and enrol at vocation schools. Data

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[1] Internship system means practical training of students as a part of the student classes (curricula) aimed to develop student skills and student's integration in the actual working process.

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from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy on enrolment trends of the children of social assistance beneficiaries show that 80% of the students from poor families tend to enrol in vocational streams which is above the general share of pupils enrolled in vocational schools (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Enrolments in VET schools vs. gymnasiums for children from poor families
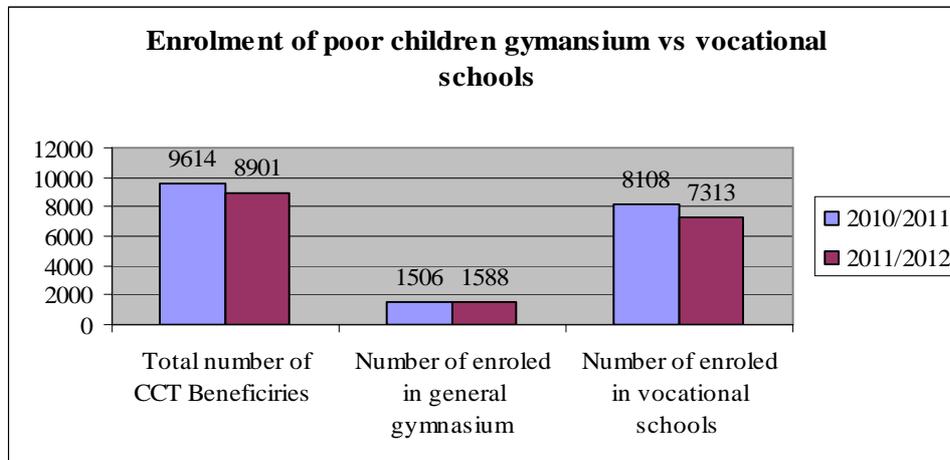
Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, CCT database.

There are significant differences in the attractiveness of the schools and hence their promotional campaigns.

"We do not have school promotional activities, why should we when there is a huge interest among students in enrolment in our school. 100% of the student's quota is fulfilled in the first enrolment cycle"- (school management, medical school Tetovo).

'We have a strong promotional campaign for attracting students to our school throughout the year. With such a campaign we managed to keep up the level of interest in our school even in years when the interest in enrolment in vocational education was decreasing significantly. But when talking about the promotional campaign this does not mean only presenting the profiles, given our less favourable position we must also offer and provide children with a better and more supportive learning environment than other schools that offer the same or similar profiles" (school management, traffic school Skopje).

The presence of social exclusion at the entry level to the school or tracking within the school is ultimately rejected by all interviewees. Still when speaking about possible social exclusion and/or inclusive education, the process is not broadly understood as a mainstream general policy and practice in education, but it is rather referred as a specific intervention addressing particular disadvantaged group, persons with special needs and ethnic groups.

"We do not even know whether the child is with special needs during the enrolment process, we learn that once the child is enrolled. All children have equal access to our school, and the parents are not obliged to tell us whether the child is with special needs in prior" (school staff).

Parents, in general, do not report if their child has some form of mental disability in order to avoid tracking of the child in schools for pupils with special needs. Once at a school, those children are not tracked within the school from one occupational program to another, without their own will nor are they separated into specific classes. Teachers tend to be supportive of integrating these children into mainstream education processes. However, it is not certain if teachers possess the necessary competencies for working with such children. Moreover, the class sizes (of above 25 pupils) might also hinder the effective teaching of pupils with special needs. Still, the figures on children with special needs enrolled in the case study secondary schools are very low, several cases were noted per school which is insufficient to gain a more comprehensive knowledge on practices in regard to pupils with special needs. However, it

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might also suggest that children with mental disabilities are excluded from the regular education system (see section 1.2.1). Moreover, the accessibility of schools for pupils with physical disabilities is limited. UNICEF already implements some activities to increase the inclusiveness of Macedonian education for children with special needs.

The selection of students based on the ethnicity is done purely because of the possibility to receive instruction in their first language (see section 1.3). The legislation however does not restrict students from ethnic minorities from enrolling or studying in classes to learn in the Macedonian language.

"There are cases when ethnic Albanian and Turkish pupils get enrolled in classes in the Macedonian language of instruction. But if they find it difficult to study which then influences their attainments then the students are transferred to continue studying in their mother tongue"- (school management, Tetovo).

"Students might be segregated in separate schools and classes but it is done on the basis of the student's own decision. Roma students usually tend to get enrolled in specific secondary schools but at their own will. Education authorities have provided Roma students a preferential access to secondary education by decreasing the ranking system by 10%. Even in the case when the quotas are filled in certain schools, if there is an interest by Roma student to get enrolled in that school, schools accept the student"(education authority.)

The division of the students according to the language of instruction in most cases corresponds to the ethnic division. One of the main challenges in the specific national ethno-political context is mitigating the physical and cultural barriers between pupils from different ethnic communities that were caused by the introduction of the right for education in a mother tongue. Even though there are school practices which are intended to foster multiculturalism, they are mainly related to projects (usually donor-funded) and extra-curricular activities (see section 1.3).

"We have several activities in the school to get children together to learn about different cultures, activities for multi-culturalism, visits of different religion sacraments, the Matura event is celebrated together for pupils from different ethnicity and mother-tongue, we have a number of school activities to familiarize the students with the culture and life style of other communities .…" (school' staff from multi-lingual secondary school).

"We try to include all pupils regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic position in the activities of the youth organization. We usually have mixed teams that participate in national and international competitions. We are also involved in a project on mediation and anti-violence. We have organized a bi-lingual play which was welcomed by both ethnic communities" (Youth organization).

However, some of the statements in favour of joint activities prove to be mainly declarative. For instance, in one of the schools a joint activity of pupils from different ethnicities was reported to the research team, to establish a joint student newsletter. However, the newsletter was published only in one language.

The Strategy for Integrated Education provides solid ground for greater interaction and integration of all ethnicities in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through mitigating language and cultural barriers. It has lead to several activities for increasing the knowledge among students from different ethnic backgrounds and bringing together pupils from different ethnicities which are examined in section 1.3. At the same time, as already noted, it focuses only on one risk factor for exclusion, the ethnicity.

"The implementation of the Strategy for Integrated Education would raise the level of communication between persons belonging to different communities. It would make students live together rather than each on their own" (national education authority, 23.12.2012)

However, a more profound and wider approach needs to be implemented in order to reduce the linguistic and cultural barriers, as they might have large consequences for the future labour market experience of young people. Pupils' internships are also shaped by their language of instruction and ethnicity, as pupils

undertake internships in companies where the common language for communication is their mother tongue.

2.3.2   Completion of VET – dropout

There is clearly a growing awareness at national and local levels about the issue of early school leaving. The authorities are fighting this phenomenon through different measures/instruments: legislation and penalties, motivational and preventive measures. The former consist of the introduction of a mandatory secondary education (and supporting measures such as free books and transport) with penalties for parents not sending their children in schools. Preventive measures include in-school counselling with pupils who are at risk of dropping-out and their parents as well as mentoring of the students with lower levels of attainment. Motivational measures include CCTs and financial payments to children from families who are social assistance beneficiaries for regular attendance at schools, scholarships for talented Roma pupils conditional on their performance as well as mentoring and tutoring of Roma pupils (see section 1.3).

Since 2010 the role of the SEI has been strengthened in order to enforce measures for students that are not enrolled in secondary education and for those that drop out from education. There is a mandatory procedure that obliges schools to report all drop outs to the SEI stating the reasons for doing so. The reporting of school leaving should be accompanied by an explanation of the reason why: an enrolment certificate provided from the school to which the student is transferred, proof that the pupil is leaving the country, or dropping out entirely from the education system, or sometimes if the reason is unknown to the school. Even though this procedure relies primarily on enforcement matters, there is significant evidence that it has prevented students from dropping-out of the system.

"The introduction of the mandatory secondary education and subsequent penalties for dropping out of school has provided broader social effects, for instance less early age marriages for Roma girls. Now parents are concerned that they would have to pay a penalty of 1,000 EUR." (school psychologist)

According to the interviews held, mandatory secondary education has increased the participation in education of pupils from rural or remote (usually mountain) areas. However, it has also drawn attention to the low standards in primary schools located in the remote areas. Hence, those children coming from remote areas have greater difficulty in performing well in secondary school.

"Some children coming from remote areas and small villages are even illiterate. They cannot read or have difficulty in reading. For them, we assign mentors whose role is to prepare them for being able to follow the study material with less difficulty." (school staff).

The measures for reducing the school leaving have certainly delivered large pay-offs. There has been a clear decreasing trend in early school leaving in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia during the five-year period from 2007 to 2011 (see Figure 5). In 2011, the share of the population aged 18-24 years with at most lower secondary education who are no longer in education or training declined to 13.5%, which is the same as the level of EU-27 countries. Even though there is strong evidence of improvements in the early school leaving rates in the recent years still there is much room for further improvements having in mind the EUROPE 2020 target set at under 10%.

Figure 5 – Share of early school leavers

Source: Eurostat, www. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu.
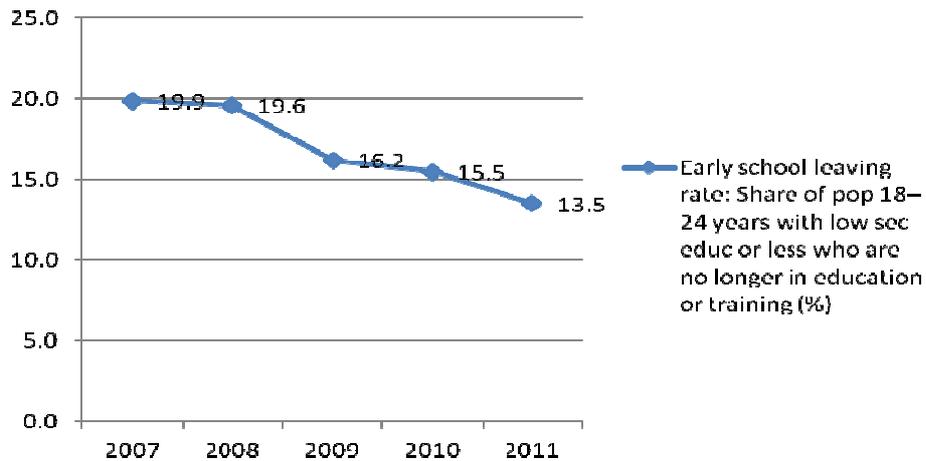
The analyses of administrative data on dropout rates in two subsequent school years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 at the case study locations shows very limited manifestation of early school leaving practice. Only one of the schools, Riste Risteski Ricko – Prilep reported that 3 students had left the school and have not provided any further information. All other reported drop outs occurred due to the change of school for which the students provided the certificate for enrolment in another school.

The trend of drop-outs due to the change of school shows that in most cases it occurs in the first year of study in which year the students usually have questions about where to continue the education. The school staff reported that this is a common practice at the beginning of the school year in which students are likely to change the school up to December of the current year. There is also a moderate difference in this indicator among the two streamlined vocational schools (Boro Petrusevski – traffic school and Riste Risteski Ricko – electro-technical school) vs. medical one Nikola Stejn. The students that enrol in the medical program, which is the most attractive study program in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as the Nikola Stejn school, tend not to change their program/school afterwards. Or, as previously pointed out, it might be that the school network in Skopje is more developed which gives students more choices for enrolment and change of school.

Figure 6 – Share of students that enrol in the first cycle
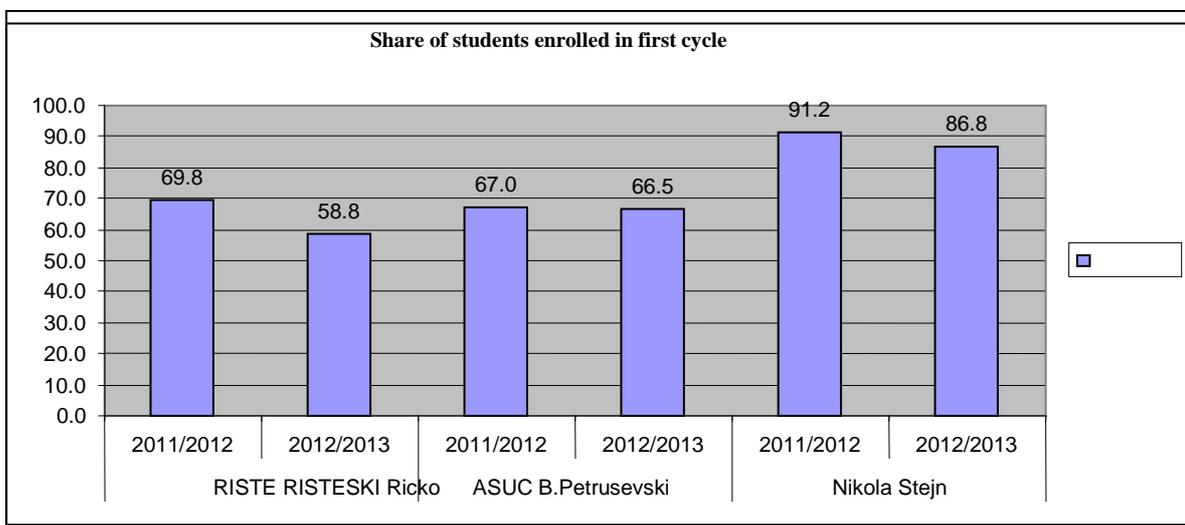
Source: School administrative data

The attractiveness of the schools can also be assessed by the share of all pupils in the first year of study that enrol in the first cycle of enrolment (when the criteria are stricter). Figure 6 shows that the medical school is much more attractive than the other two technical schools.

At a school level, in order to prevent early school leaving the schools have introduced several mechanisms to track student absenteeism – monitoring of student attendance and student attainment. All students are tracked by their classmates: where students that tend to have low attainment or more than three fail marks (at any time during the school year) and/or more than 10 absences, they are invited to student and parent counselling with the school physiologist/pedagogies/sociologist. In respect to the pupil's attainment, the school physiologist/pedagogies/sociologist undertakes consultative discussions with the teachers to examine the reasons for the low attainment. The student is then assigned to a group to receive additional classes in subjects with low marks (fail) and is constantly monitored. The tripartite student/parent/school counselling process continues until the improvements are recognized. Additional classes are mandatory for the students that have low marks. In addition to the national policy on the mentoring and tutoring of Roma pupils, the school ASUC Boro Petrusevski - Skopje has their own program that provides mentoring and tutoring to all low performers in the school. The school has 16 mentors that work with these children and monitor their progress. At the time of the interviews, a total of 32 children had been included in the program. In addition, this school also adopted a Strategy for preventing the early school leave. The strategy covers 3 areas of intervention, student professional development, education and upbringing. The social pedagogues is directly responsible for implementation of all measures that support the Strategy as, activities for student professional development from the first year of study aimed to increase the student motivation as well as information on the studying program and plans; change of the studying programs and plans to correspond on the labour market demands and the student interests; student inclusion in extra curricula activities according to their interests aimed to improve the students positive attitude towards the school, society, communication with the teachers and friends; organizing visits to international and local fairs relevant for the studying programs; volunteer work; individual work with the students through preparation of projects and their presentation; ensuring timely information and communication on student performance between the head of the class, teachers, parent etc. There is also a separate protocol established for early recognition on students with specific behaviour problems as well as action plan for work with students with special needs.

Figure 7 – Average pupils' performance per school and year of study
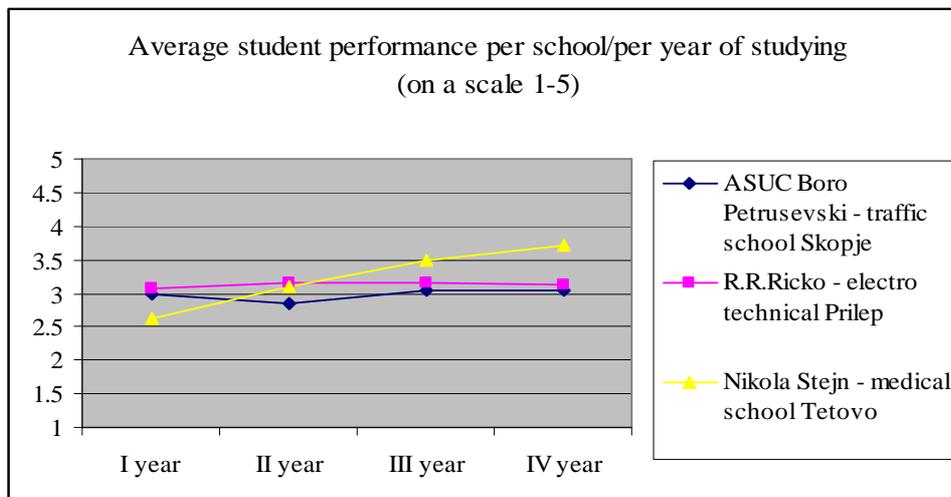
Source: Schools administrative data

The average performance (average grade) in the three schools is similar, at around 3, although there are large differences within schools, depending on the study program (see Figure 7). It is also noteworthy that

even though the medical school has higher selection/criteria for enrolment (min 70 points in the first cycle) and hence attracts higher performers, the performance of pupils afterwards is relatively low (2.6). This might suggest that the pupils have not been properly prepared during the lower secondary education in the subjects relevant for the medical school or it might be because the first year is usually the year in which the students adapt to the new study environment and commence new subjects.

At all three schools teachers report that the student intake is of a relatively low level, mainly due to the inflation of grades and low standards in primary schools.

"What can I do when I get students in the first class who do not know the basics. Last year at the beginning of the school year we disseminated a very basic test for students to test their knowledge of – their mother tongue and out of 30 students only 3 managed to complete it successfully, all the others failed. This makes our life difficult as we have 25 students per class and we need to teach them the basics plus follow the mandatory school study program." (school teacher).

The parents usually argue that students are not motivated to do better; the school and parents must work jointly to increase the motivation among the students.

"By increasing the motivation of our children towards higher levels of attainment we would increase their personal involvement. Why are they not motivated? It might be because they are spoiled; for instance, pupils coming from rural areas or small town and staying in dormitories are more motivated than the urban children. However, the socio-economic background of the students is not always related to their performance; some of the poor children are highly motivated to achieve more. We must all work on increasing the student motivation" – (parent, school counsel of parents)

One of the possible reasons for dropping out from the secondary VET schools is also an inappropriate choice of occupation.

"It is difficult to help my child to choose a secondary school and subsequent occupation. We can hardly estimate their abilities and aspirations when they are so young. In addition, little information is available for making a good choice"(parent).

In this regard, some support to parents and pupils for making choices about the secondary school can be ensured through the initiative undertaken by the MES, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Employment Service Agency at the end of the school year 2011/2012, for assessing pupils' abilities and professional aptitudes. This pilot testing has been implemented in 8 schools, for pupils in the final year of primary school, and the results were shared with the pupils and parents with some advice on the best-suited school/track. These institutions monitor if the parents and pupils have really chosen the particular track. From this year onwards this is due to become a regular practice and to be expanded to all students in their final year of primary school (grade 9). The authorities might want to consider further strengthening this activity and supporting it by establishing careers guidance which is particularly important at transition points from one level of education to another.

On the local level, the activities in this regard, can be found in school ASUC Boro Petrusevski which has established an Action plan for the activities that each year must be performed by the school psychologist divided for the students in each year of studying. The plan lists the activities, timeframe, responsible persons and performance indicators. Some of the activities that are included in this action plan are: at the first year of studying the school psychologist implement a survey "Why I have enrolled in this school". The aim of the survey is to learn on student motivation and expectations at enrolment stage as well as to provide the school staff with an insight on students' interests on further professional development. At the first year the students also attend seminar for learning techniques and styles. At the second year the students are involved in individual and group work activities for getting information on the occupations and working processes as well as for the possibility to transit from one to other occupational profile; at third and forth year the school do a survey "Student destination after the secondary school" and based of

the results the school perform two sets of activities, first for the students aimed to transit to work which receive a support for drafting a CV, motivation letter, looking for a job, responsibilities on the working place, carrier guidance and the students that aim to transit in universities undergo testing on the abilities, counselling, support in selecting the tertiary education etc.

2.3.3   School Based Vocational Education And Internship System

Encouraging young people to take up internships as well as establishing a structured system for the organization of internships is a challenge. The practical training of students in 4-year VET is present in about 10% -21% of total classes, depending on the occupation and study program.

Practical training of the students might be provided in the form of practical classes/learning, professional practice and summer practice. Practical classes/learning might be organized within the school, in school laboratories and workshops, in school real business and/or local businesses. The professional practice is mandatory only for occupation profiles from agriculture, veterinary, forestry and food industry. The summer practice lasts for 10-20 days over the year and is mandatory for the majority of the occupations and study programs in the 4-year VET. The practical classes for the 3-year VET are organized in a different manner, and are represented in 50% of the total classes but only for the reformed 3-year programs. In general, the students from the 1st year of study conduct their practical training through practical classes within the school premises and the students from 2-4 year might experience practical classes in real businesses.

The findings at the case study locations confirm the overall national perception that students lack proper practical work that would increase their working skills and abilities. Whether the students would experience good practical training depends on how good connections have the school with the companies. There is a lack of proper national strategy or organized system of cooperation between the employers and schools on carrying out of internships.

"The students from Medical school in Tetovo are more than welcome to do their practical lessons in our hospital. They are well prepared in the school so they, under the professional supervision, work directly with the patients. We have historically strong relationship with the school."

In other schools student's practicing usually rely on good relationships of the school management with the local businesses. The school are recognizing the need that the supplied skills must match with the demanded one therefore the school Boro Petrusevski move a step forward and started a communications with some foreign investors in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

"We have started a communication with "Jonson Matthey" to present our occupations, school based curricula and to learn from them on their skills needed. We are strongly committed to do so with every foreign investor that is intended to come in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. What we lack is the pre-knowledge on possible investors so that we can earlier accommodate the learning on the possible needed skills" – (school management Boro Petrusevki).

Having in mind that the schools are key actors in the local "skill development system," along with the employers, local government, trade unions and NGOs the national authorities might consider the opening of the curricula to be adapted on a local level needs.

The in-school practical training mainly depends on how well are schools and school laboratories equipped with the necessary aids. School have no financial power to provide equipment on their own. They rely on the support from the central or local government (which does not come always on time) and/or on donor support. The schools also differ among each other in respect to the school equipment for practical lessons. The school Boro Petrusevski has privileged position among all three as the school is running a number of own businesses so that the students can experience work in real businesses even in the case where there is

lack of interested companies to anticipate the students for practical lessons. This is considered as an advantage by the school as in addition to the education role that they can provide for the students, with income generating role they have stronger financial independence, so that can invest more in the infrastructure, teacher training, student activities, developing new project and programs … thereby creating more suitable, open minded and motivated school environment. The practice of income generating is really rear among the secondary schools in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Under the umbrella of USAID project "from virtual to real business" there has been an attempt to strengthen the schools businesses, providing them with proper training for business running as well as with the necessary equipment but when the virtual was supposed to become real the schools faced legislative difficulties and most of these schools never managed to start the business.

"UASID financed a dentist laboratory in our school but than we faced a problem on business formalization. Some laws provides the legal basis, others do not, so we never managed to put it in practice." (school management Tetovo).

It is also the intention of the Government to strengthen this function of the schools but the proper implementation requests revision of the laws which is suggested to be done in a faster pace.

2.3.4　Transition from school to work

The transition from vocational education to employment can be difficult for young people. While some periods of transition is to be expected as young people make their way from formal education to the world of work, slow or difficult transition to the labour market can have lasting impact on the career development and income of the individuals over their lifetime. One in every two young persons Macedonian is searching for a job, but cannot find one. Although there are no data on unemployment rates in the country differentiated by the type of secondary school (VET vs. gymnasium), other studies find that in transition countries in general graduates from VET schools face even higher unemployment rates.

The analysis of the student questionnaire on plans for future shows that 50% of students would seek paid employment after completion of school. Pupils expect to get support for finding a job at most from their friends and some from the career centres, public employment agency and teachers. Out of those that responded that they would not seek a paid employment after the completion of the school, about 87% of the pupils would continue their education.

The career centres operate on each case study locations. Even though there are some activities organized through these centres, still the insufficient staff capacity has been recognized which might influence on their proper functioning and quality in providing the intended services on in-school guidance and counselling. These centres are led by dedicated school staff or staff without a full load of classes. Career centres do not have formal links with the local agencies for employment neither in the past has had some joint activities, but are much supported by international donors (USAID) and local NGOs. The functioning of these centres mainly remains on the school staff creativity and it is obvious that it lack to provide the intended role on supporting the young people to move on their post school careers.

"We do not have systematic information where the students transit from education. Majority continues the education and some transit to labour market" – (school staff, Tetovo)

"We have implemented internal survey to see the student's aspirations after the completion of the secondary education and found out 60% of the students transit to labour market and 40% transit to university education. We also intend to establish social network platform to enable students to stay linked among each other and with the school, so that we can traced them and have insight into their further professional achievement." – (school management, Boro Petrusevski)"

"The students transit to university at most. The attractiveness of the VET schools have been increased after the introduction of the "state Matura" that opened the door for all students regardless whether studied in general schools or vocational school to transit on equal merit to any university (technical or economic, legal…) - (school staff, Prilep)

The lacks of proper tracing methods on students leave the school only to suggest where students continue after the secondary education. The laws provides schools with mandate to suggest new studying profiles to the VET Centre based on the local level needs and findings but this role can be effectively anticipated if the schools maintain strong links with local employment agencies and local business sector. These links would in addition provide the schools with proper and on time information on labour market needs that would also enable them to have stronger role in school guidance and counselling of the students. Otherwise, it is left on good management and creativity skills of the schools to struggle and try to improve the employability of the students.

2.4 Comparative analysis of vocational education, social inclusion practices and social cohesion

This section reflects the similarities and differences between the three case study schools/localities and their relationship to social inclusion/exclusion and social cohesion through the analysis of the students' and teachers' questionnaire.

2.4.1 Comparative analysis – student questionnaire

The student questionnaire consisted of 42 questions, divided into 5 parts: demographic data, family background, reasons for selecting the specific vocational education, experience in the school and plans for future. It has been disseminated in three VET schools for students in 1st year and final 4th year of studying.

The data analysis was done in SPSS, analysing the students' views and factors that influence selected variables:

- Reason for choice of the specific vocational school (options: distance from home, reputation of school liked courses, future employment opportunities and further study opportunities);

- Reason for choice of vocational school in preference to other type of school (options: to learn skills to support my career, to obtain prestigious profession, to earn more money in future, to increase chances to get a job, family expectations);

- Experience in the school (how much happy do you feel in school; how much do you learn from courses; hours per week in practical lessons; hours per week in outside company; whether what you learnt at school will help in future job; whether teachers made you welcome);

- School motivation (importance of doing well in school: for you personally, your family and future job prospects);

- School environment (improvements needed in: school buildings and classroom equipment);

- School ratings (students ratings on teaching methods; teacher subject knowledge; friendless of other students and friendless of teachers);

- Participation in extra-curricular activities (sports; voluntary work; youth clubs; paid work);

- Plans for future (whether plans to look for paid work; go to further education or university; look after family at home; work in family business; do voluntary work; emigrate); and

- Transition from school to work (how much help is expected in finding a job from: friends, teachers; career centre in school and public employment agency).

Students tend to select the vocational school because they liked the courses, expect that it would increase their future employment opportunities, as well as because of the further study opportunities that it allows. The distance from home and reputation of the school are less important reasons for choice. On a scale 1-5, the first 3 parameters are graded on average near to 4 (very important), whereas the latter two are graded on average 2 (not so important). There is no difference among the students from the three selected school.

Pupils have assigned equal importance to all the reasons stated in the questionnaire for the choice of the vocational education as a preferred option to other type (gymnasiums). For each of the options, the average score was 4 (very important). There is no difference among students in the three selected schools. On a scale 1-10 on how much happy students feel at school, the average score among all students is 7. More than 85% of the students felt welcome by teachers in the first week during their enrolment in the schools. The average rank of the level of learning from the courses is 3, i.e. moderate.

Although it is established by the legislation and curricula, the real experience with the share of practical classes in total curricula (or as hours per week) is different across the three schools. For instance, while pupils from the school Nikola Stejn reported to have on average 2.3 school classes per week of practical learning, pupils from the school Riste Risteski Ricko reported only 1 practical class per week (see Table 5). Similar differences emerge for the practical learning realized in real businesses.

Table 5 – Reported class hours in practical learning

	Class hours per week in practical lessons within the school	Class hours per week in real businesses
Nikola Stejn	2.3	2.2
ASUC Boro Petrusevski	1.5	1.9
R. R. Ricko	1.1	0.6

Source: Pupils' questionnaire.

The national level debates, as well as school interviews have shown that vocational schools face difficulty in finding companies where students can carry out their internships. The medical school Nikola Stejn has relatively less difficulty in finding appropriate internship given that it has strong relations with the State Medical Center in Tetovo where students do the practical lessons. Staff from ASUC Boro Petrusevski reported that they face difficulties in finding interested local businesses to be involved in the provision of practical work for the students. These lack of partners among businesses has been partially offset by school own managed businesses where pupils also perform practical learning. The school R.R. Ricko has neither some major partner in providing practical work as the school in Tetovo, nor has own business as ASUC Boro Petrusevski, thereby the students in this school tend to experience less hours of practical work in outside companies compared to other students. Pupils from 1st year reported less practical classes than their peers from the 4th year, which is in line with the curricula. Pupils feel very important to do well in school for them personally, for their family and for their future job prospects where on a scale 1-5, on average, they ranked 4 all the options provided.

The students anticipate some improvements that need to be made to school buildings at each case study school but pupils from the school Nikola Stejn and R.R Ricko indicated that it was very important that improvements be made to classroom equipment and the students in ASUC Boro Petrusevski found this less important as they might be satisfied with the current equipment on a disposal (Table 6). In the school

R.R. Ricko, for instance, there is a sport gymnasium while there is no sport hall. There is no difference in answers between the students in the 1st year and 4th year.

Table 6 – Pupils perceptions about needed improvements in school' buildings

	Improvements in school building scale 1-5, average score per school	Improvements in classroom equipment, scale 1-5, average score per school
Nikola Stejn	3.5	4.3
ASUC Boro Petrusevski	3.2	2.7
R. R. Ricko	3.7	4.1

Source: Pupils' questionnaire.

On average among all three schools, about 57% of pupils are involved in sport activities, 24% in voluntary work, 20% in youth clubs activities and 11% in paid work (see Figure 8). There is no gender difference in participation in extra curricula activities. The significantly greater participation in youth clubs, voluntary work and paid work is found at the pupils in forth grade of education.

Figure 8 – Share of pupils involved in extra-curricular activities by school
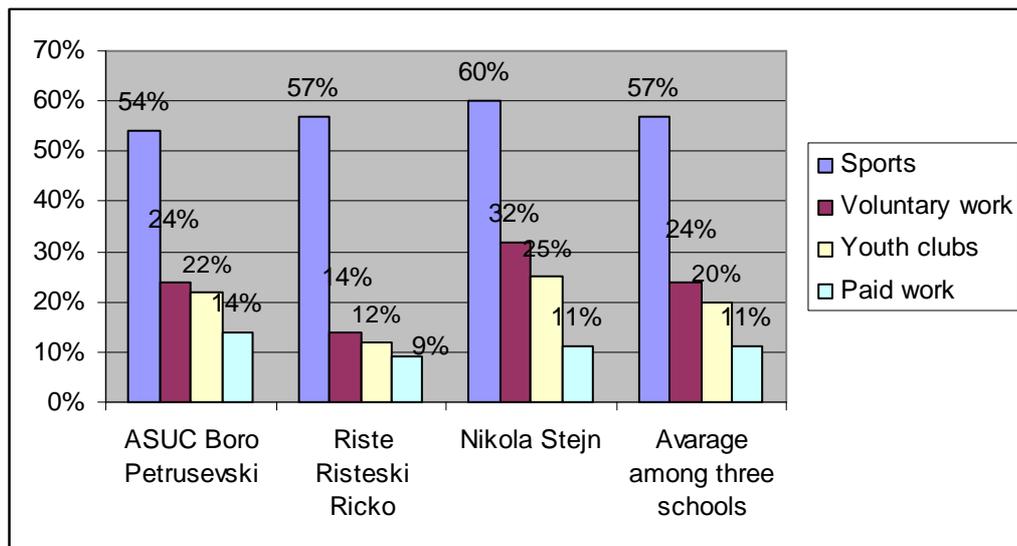
Source: Pupils' questionnaire.

There is no significant difference among the students from the 1st and 4th year as well as among schools.

In respect to the help expected from transiting from school to work, the students expect help mainly from the Employment Service Agency, then from the career centre and from teachers. On a scale 1-5, all options are graded slight above 2.

2.4.2 Comparative analysis – teachers' questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, divided into 5 parts: demographic data, experience in teaching practice, school environment, social inclusion in the school and transition from school to work. In has been disseminated to the teaching staff in the three selected VET schools.

The data analysis was done in SPSS, analysing the teachers' views and practices, as follows:

- Experience in teaching practice (separate tracks used, teacher weekly hours in preparation and teaching, use of computers, perception on quality of education);

- The school environment (behaviour problems and infrastructure);

- Social inclusion of the school (attracting students, students with difficulties and disabled students);

- Transition from school to work (communication with local employers, provision of career guidance, quality of guidance, difficulty of student's placement).

The findings show differences across the schools in respect to the tracking of students into separate tracks. About 58% of the teachers in ASUC Boro Petrusevski responded that the schools puts students in separate track based on their ability. This practice among the respondents is graded moderately useful, where on a scale 1-5 the average score is 3.3. There is a difference among the teachers that teach general subjects and those teaching vocational subjects, where the former found the usefulness of this practice at 3.7, near to very much useful, and the later graded the usefulness 2.8, near to moderately useful. Controlling for the teachers nationality, 60% of the Macedonian teachers found this practice much useful, whereas the majority of ethnic Albanian teachers (67%) found it as little useful.

Around 34% of the teachers in Riste Risteski Ricko put students in separate track based on their ability. This practice among the respondents is graded moderately useful, where on a scale 1-5 the average score is 3.3. Even though this practice is mostly reported by the teachers teaching the vocational subjects rather than the one teaching general subjects, still both groups of teachers found this practice moderately useful.

Only one teacher in Nikola Stejn reported that separate tracks for the students based on their ability are used and he/she found that practice moderately useful.

In general, 38% of all teachers covered with the questioner reported a use of separate tacks for the students based on their ability. The answers were the same across instructors teaching general subjects and those teaching vocational subjects. On a scale 1-5 the teachers teaching general subjects found this practice moderately useful, graded at average score of 3.6 and the teachers instructing vocational subjects graded the usefulness slightly below 3.

The teachers on average among the three schools tend to spend 1.4 hours per week for class preparation, and on average 1.8 hours in teaching practice. The usage of the IT equipment and computers as a teaching tool is highest among the teachers in Boro Petrusevski (about 89% of teachers report to use IT equipment), then in Riste Risteski Ricko (68%), and least in Nikola Stejn (33%). These findings also might be crossed match with the students view on the need improvements in the school equipment where the students in Tetovo and Prilep found these improvements very important.

The teachers think that the quality of education in their school is average. There are no significant differences among schools in this respect. Teachers find pupils' motivation, discipline, absenteeism and bullying as a little or average problem in the schools. On a scale 1-5, all these options are ranked from 2 (low) to 3 (average).

The school infrastructure (buildings, equipment, computers, etc.) is considered as very good in ASUC Boro Petrusevski, whereas in Nikola Stejn and Riste Risteski Ricko it is ranked as a good except the computers in Nikola Stejn and equipment in Riste Risteski Ricko which are ranked as weak.

Teachers in ASUC Boro Petrusevski think that their school moderately promotes the social inclusion through: school ethos and values; application of pastoral curriculum; development of a sensitivity of social justice among students; through open days for the community; significantly through ensuring extra-curricular activities; and support to disadvantaged groups, as well as disabled students. Teachers in Riste Risteski Ricko assess that they promote the social inclusion moderately applying all the above techniques and the teachers in Nikola Stejn consider that the application of these techniques are not so good, or in some of the areas their efforts to promoting social inclusion are only moderate.

All of the schools have communication with the local employers. Almost all teachers (97%) of the teachers in Boro Petrusevski believe that their school provides the career guidance for the students. This is reported by 78% of teacher in R. R. Ricko and almost 55% of teachers from the school Nikola Stejn. The quality career guidance is considered as very good in ASUC and Riste Risteski Ricko, whereas in Nikola Stejn it is assessed as low.

3. ACTION PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOLS

This section briefly sets out recommendations that arise from the research for each case study school.

The common recommendations for all 3 case study schools are as follows:

- The study found that all 3 schools face challenges with respect to the student performance. Therefore it is recommended that the schools introduce school teams that would work on recognizing the factors that drive student performance. The teams would also define set of measures targeted to specific groups of pupils (those at risk of low performance) aimed to improve their performance. Student de-motivation which was also recognized as a challenge by the council of parents in one of the case study schools might be improved through bringing some established community members who completed their education in the school to give motivational speeches to pupils.

- The analyses found that students at most participate in sport as an extra-curricula activity. It is recommended that activities/efforts for the promotion of social inclusion be strengthened. This might be achieved through open days for the community; through joint, extra-curricular activities, drama, art, and voluntary work to help adults in the community.

- The VET schools should devote more attention to pupils from disadvantaged families, especially pupils from remote and rural areas. School Riste Risteski Ricko and Nikola Stejn should consider the possibility of establishing a mentoring and tutoring system for these target groups in addition to one that is already established for Roma students. This practice has proved to have a significant impact on student performance in ASUC Boro Petrusevski.

- Schools should introduce a regular in-service training programs aimed at increasing teacher competencies on inclusive education, as well as training for the school staff on methods and techniques for recognizing student absenteeism, early warning signs and undertaking preventive measures.

- The study found that Career Centers have only limited activities in Riste Risreski Ricko and Nikola Stejn, and more but overwhelmingly donor-funded activities in ASUC Boro

Petrusevski. Therefore it is recommended that the role of Career Centers be strengthened. Given the under-funding of the Career Centers it is recommended the activities of the Centers be mainly directed or prioritized in providing career guidance including career information, career education, guidance and counselling and that pedagogical/psychological guidance/counselling be made available for students at risk and/or socially excluded students. Another possible activity for Career Centers would be the organization of job fairs where students and potential employers would establish closer contacts. There is also scope for increased regional networking among Career Centres from VET schools.

School Riste Risteski Ricko:

- The analysis of the teacher questionnaire showed that 34% of the school teachers reported that the students are put in separate tracks based on their ability. This practice has been assessed as moderately useful by schools staff. We recommend that the school re-evaluates the use of this practice as the school should ensure that teaching practices support educational potential of pupils and that teaching methods are adapted to the diverse abilities of its students.

- Considering the financial constraints of the school, we recommend that the school consider the establishment of school-run businesses (real companies) which could bring in additional funds. The experience might be drawn from ASUC Boro Petrusevski which has similar programs and has established businesses related to the education profiles that are studied in the school. The establishment of school-run businesses might have multiple effects. With an income generating role the school would have stronger financial independence, and could invest more in the infrastructure, teacher training and student activities, as well as developing new programs thereby creating a more motivating school environment. Students could experience work in a real business even if local companies are not interested in providing the students with practical lessons.

Medical School Nikola Stejn - Tetovo:

- The teacher survey identified the limited use of IT equipment as a teaching tool by teachers and a weak IT infrastructure. Therefore, the school is encouraged to invest in improving the IT equipment and to motivate (and train) the teachers to use more IT-related teaching techniques.

- Considering the financial limitations of the school which at most relies on funds from the central budget it is recommended the school to consider the re-establishment of school-run business (real company) which can bring some additional funds for the school. Such function might have multiple effects: with an income generating role the school would be able to invest more in the infrastructure, teacher training, student activities, developing new project and programs, etc. Moreover, students can experience work in real businesses even in the case where there is lack of interested companies to anticipate the students for practical lessons.

- The School should extend cooperation with the business community and private sector for internships and potential employment of its graduates rather than relying solely on cooperation with the state Medical Centre-Tetovo.

School ASUC Boro Petrusevki:

- The analysis of the teacher questionnaire showed that 58% of the school teachers reported that the students are put in separate tracks based on their ability. This practice has been assessed as moderately useful for the student overall performance. It is recommended the school re-evaluate the usage of such practice.

- The school faces challenge of integrating all pupils' body which is quite diverse in the case of this school: different ethnicities, children from poor families, children from other parts of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia rather than Skopje, and from rural areas. Nationally set policies and those implemented by the donors and/or NGOs bring improvement into the overall environment within the school, however ad-hoc tensions between pupils are registered within the school. This leaves a room for implementing new and innovative approaches to increase social inclusion. Close cooperation with the parents' council and the local self-government might bring new ideas about such programs. Language-divide should be overcome with more joint activities. Social cohesion should be further promoted by the local self-government based on experiences from other countries.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out recommendations for policy makers and involved actors concerning improvements that could be made to educational policy, institutional framework, educational practice, and other relevant areas of policy that could have the potential to improve social inclusion and social cohesion related to the vocational education system. The policy recommendations are directed separately at the different policy audiences.

4.1 Policy recommendations for policy makers at national level

In general, the national authorities should consider the possibility for greater incorporation of the inclusive education concept in secondary vocational schools. This study found that vocational schools enrol many disadvantaged students, hence the inclusive measures should be primarily directed to vocational education rather than gymnasiums.

The specific recommendations per task of the research study are as follows:

Selection and tracking: The national ranking of students for enrolment in secondary education is based on previous academic performance. This encourages selection of low-performing pupils into vocational education.

Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Introduce quality guidance and information at the primary school which should unveil and form professional abilities of pupils. This might reduce the selection of pupils into vocational education based exclusively on their previous academic performance.

- Consider the introduction of some form of "teaching" pupils about possible future occupations either as a separate program or throughout the curricula. The experience might be drawn from Finland: the 'Occupational Start' program that offers young people who are unsure about their study and career direction an alternative programme during which they can find out about different occupations. The programme is linked to the initial vocational education and training (VET) system in the country. This training is intended to improve the participants' study skills and give them information about different occupations. The training takes place in groups and follows a curriculum, but in a flexible and individualised manner. A good case in this point is also the German' program called 'Qualifications and connections'. The program consists of three

activities which objective is to ensure smooth transition of pupils to the next level of education. The program involves about 2,000 trained mentors. The activities include:

- Analyse the potential, interests and aspirations of students in grades 7 or 8;

- Provide occupational guidance in grades 7 or 8; and

- Oversee and mentor students in their penultimate school year until the completion of their first year in vocational training.

Dropout. The measures in place for preventing dropout are found to be effective given the very low dropout ratios at the school case studies as well as considering the declining trend of early school leavers over the 5 years, set at 13.5% in 2011. The recommendations below might further strengthen these trends:

- Consider the possibility for providing financial incentives to targeted schools to reduce the number of dropouts but also give greater discretion to state education inspectors to penalize schools that do not actively work towards early school leave. Such policy can be found in Netherlands.

The study found that schools face challenges to improve the performance of its students. Therefore it is recommended that national authorities;

- Run a comprehensive analysis among the secondary schools to identify the reasons for weak student performance and, based on the results, provide support to schools in designing tools and measures to tackle it. The measures should be school specific and targeted to specific groups of students. The analysis might also be extended to include an evaluation of primary education outcomes, that might help to ascertain whether the low student performance in secondary education is correlated with pupils' levels of prior knowledge from primary education.

- Design and pilot an "alternative learning environment" program for pupils with low performance or those with anti-social behaviour in selected VET school. The "alternative learning environment" programs use different and innovative teaching techniques and methods, teaching takes place in different settings (including non-classroom), and the staff have special competencies to work with those pupils. The main goal of the alternative learning environment is to increase the motivation of the pupils. Such programs might be implemented on a national level (as in France, Germany, Luxembourg and Finland), or at a local level.

Internship. The study found that the quality of the in-school practical training mainly depends on how well schools and school laboratories are equipped with the necessary tools/aids. School do not have the financial resources to provide equipment on their own. They rely on support from the central or local government, (80% are used for salaries) and/or on donor support. Some stakeholders within schools also argued that more practical learning vs. the theoretical one is needed. In addition, practical training outside school depends at most on the connections schools have with the companies. There is a lack of proper national strategy or organized system of cooperation between the employers and schools on carrying out of internships.

Therefore it is recommended to:

- Strengthen the business role of the VET schools in addition to the educational one. This would give schools the possibility to raise additional income, provide them with some financial independence as well as help to provide continuous vocational training for the teachers. Moreover, pupils would have the possibility to do internships within the school, but in real

businesses. Legislative barriers to the opening up of school businesses should be removed. The authorities might set some financial framework for usage of these funds.

- Establish organized frameworks of cooperation between schools and companies. Central and/or local authorities should find more systematic ways to increase the interest of companies in accepting the vocational school pupils for internships. This might include some financial incentives for companies, at least in the least developed municipalities/regions where the business sector is very weak and has insufficient capacity to absorb the pupils.

- Provide school and municipalities with a greater role in curricula design (for instance, prescribing a certain percentage of the curricula or subjects to be open for local interventions) which has a potential to improve the links between the labour market and education and reduce mismatches. This might also increase the employers' participation in the education process, raise their confidence in the education (knowledge and skills) the students are receiving at the VET schools that might be subsequently applied in the work place as well as develop a greater sense of employers' ownership in the education system.

Transition from School to work: The transition from vocational education to employment can be difficult for young people. The provision of information and in-school guidance/counselling plays an important role in supporting young people to move on to their post-school careers.

Therefore it is recommended to

- Direct and prioritize the activities of the Career Centers (given their current weak capacity and underfunding) to providing career guidance including career information, career education, guidance and counselling as well as targeted pedagogical/psychological guidance/counselling for students at risk and/or socially excluded students.

- Consider the possibility for the establishment of so-called "Youth employment centers" as in the case of Lithuania or some alternative such as youth employment departments within local employment agencies. The centres might provide information and counselling for young jobseekers; introduce young people to the world of professions; organize informative events and practical training; assist in preparation for job interviews; and also promote entrepreneurship. The centres might also provide free internet access for job search, occupational profiles and informative films about professions, offer professional orientation tests, information about conditions for studies in HE institutions, and consultation on writing a CV and a motivational letter. The services would be free of charge and registration would be optional.

4.2 Policy recommendations for policy makers at local level

The role of the local self-governments in education was found to be very limited, with few exceptions. Some municipalities have a delegated education inspector that oversees the work of the schools, but other have not done so. Moreover, the financial power of municipalities is rather small to support schools in their developmental efforts.

The recommendations in this regard relate to the role of the municipalities in bringing together the schools and students with the local community.

Therefore it is recommended the local self-governments:

- Support the schools in identifying students that are not enrolled in education;

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- Establish closer relations between the education, social and labour market institutions at a local level such as through the organization of joint events and monthly meetings where the staff can discuss topics related to the local conditions;

- Organize different events such as careers days aimed at bringing together young people with representatives of companies, higher education providers, entrepreneurs or former students to share their labour market or further educational experience. These events give pupils a 'real-life' perspective of the labour market opportunities and help them make „optimal" choices about their future.

- Initiate and organize extra curricular activities such as sport, drama, art, clubs, technical skills, culture, environment aimed at bringing together the local community, which might also increase the social cohesion.

4.3 Policy recommendations for international donor organizations

The international community has provided significant support for the educational reforms during the transition. Many reforms and actions were both financially and/or technically supported and even pushed for by the donors. However, in light of a lack of vision for the vocational education system, some actions were not that relevant or suited for the country.

Given the limited public resources and still insufficient capacity of some institutions, there is a large role to be played in the forthcoming period by the donors in terms of the financing, design, and implementation of actions/measures for better quality of the VET system, as well as for improvement of the inclusive measures and policies. The following areas of support can be identified within this study:

- Financial and technical support for the design and implementation of wider measures for social inclusion, for pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic background, pupils with mental or physical disability;

- Financial and technical support to the professional development of teachers, especially in techniques and methods for working and teaching pupils with some form of disability, inclusive education etc.

- Financial and technical support for the implementation of the Strategy for Integrated Education;

- Developmental and financial support for the school-based career centres;

- Sharing best practices of linkages between vocational schools and the business community;

4.4 Policy recommendations for NGOs/CSOs

NGOs have so far supported activities and measures for social inclusion and cohesion, though on a limited scale given their relatively weak financial position. They are in general focused on Roma pupils. However, NGOs/CSOs can have much larger role in promoting social inclusion and cohesion through piloting and implementing innovative approaches in this area. If effective, those programs might eventually receive national or local-level support and funding. Following areas of support can be detected for NGOs/CSOs:

- Piloting measures/activities for social inclusion and cohesion at both national and local levels. Given that evidence shows that the VET schools have problems with low student achievement, in addition to the national and school based policies and practices, the NGOs are encouraged to introduce pilot projects aimed at providing disadvantaged children with extra support than better off children would normally receive at home. The after-school activities that might be provided to disadvantaged children include, but are not limited to: homework, mentoring, organizing arts, sports etc. Reference to such activity might be found in "Tanoda programme" – Hungary. This

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program is supported by network of centers which are led mainly by NGOs that provide after school support for disadvantaged students and the coverage is 2000-4000 children per year.

- Organize awareness-raising activities about social inclusion and cohesion practices on local and national levels.
- Establish regional networks of NGOs/CSOs for social inclusion and cohesion

CONCLUSIONS

The final section of this report is based on the case study PAR research in the schools and the local community, and concisely summarizes the findings of the research and the conclusions which arise concerning the linkage between the vocational education system with the social exclusion/inclusion and social cohesion at local and national levels.

In section 1.1 we differentiated the barriers to equity in education on financial, institutional, structural, socio-economic and political. The documentary analysis and field research showed that in general there are efforts to mitigate some of these obstacles to equality in education, however the intensity of interventions is insufficient to effectively fight the social exclusion. The government has implemented several legislative and other measures to reduce the financial barriers to equal access to quality education. This has included free transportation, free textbooks as well as specific measures targeted at the most vulnerable pupils (pupils from poor households-beneficiaries of social financial assistance and Roma population). These measures (along with the introduction of the mandatory secondary education) have brought considerable improvement of the early school leaving and level of dropouts. Actions were also implemented to reduce the physical divide across pupils from different ethnic and cultural communities, barriers which were created with the introduction of the 'right to education' in a mother-tongue. These actions are mainly implemented under the umbrella of the Strategy for Integrated Education, with support from donors and NGOs. They mainly consist of extra-curricular activities. However, bringing together pupils from different ethnicities and different languages might take much more effort and resources. Pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic background are over-represented in vocational schools, which might suggest some form of selection, although there are no evident selection criteria/policies, except the enrolment criteria. One of the measures to reduce this selection is the lowering of the enrolment criteria for pupils from Roma population. There are no explicit structural barriers that limit vertical and horizontal mobility of pupils. However, fighting social exclusion inevitably involves greater support towards pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic background, those with learning difficulties and those with some form of physical disability. In other words, a much wider approach towards fighting social exclusion has to be implemented beyond ethnicity-related risk of exclusion.

In the opinion of interviewers, there is no social exclusion at the point of entry into school or tracking within the school was ultimately rejected by all interviewees. However, there is some form of self-selection into schools/programs/classes based on the mother language (or language of instruction), or ethnicity (especially among Roma pupils). Whereas the former cannot be addressed, the latter should be mitigated by the introduction of scholarships, mentoring and tutoring for Roma pupils. Lower quality standards in some primary schools where pupils complete primary education without being even literate acts as a selection factor at entry into VET is created by. Those pupils have difficulty in accessing school (due to low achievement in primary school), but also face difficulty in learning afterwards. Measures to address this have been introduced at the school level, but nation-level actions are also required to avoid such situations.

The issue of drop-outs has lost its importance with the introduction of the compulsory secondary education, as well with the system in place for reporting in case a pupil leaves the school. Penalties that apply to parents whose children do not attend secondary education have provided sufficient "motivation"

(stick) for parents to enrol their children at school. Given that pupils from poor families, remote areas, pupils with other social disadvantage etc. are most likely not to attend secondary school, this measure has strengthened the social inclusion. In addition, it has limited early age marriages among Roma girls.

Pupils in vocational secondary schools are in general given insufficient support in making their decision to either continue further the education (and the choice of the track), or for entering the labour market. There are career centres in the three vocational schools covered in this study, however their activities are mainly shaped by national and international projects, rather than with the real needs of the pupils. There should be greater effort to improve life-skills of the pupils, equip them with the skills necessary for successful labour market experience, and knowledge for continuing education. Our finding showed very little involvement of pupils in extra-curricular activities (only 1% of the pupils) which might be related to the motivation of pupils. Experiences from other countries show that support from former students can be used for motivating pupils and increasing their expectations from themselves.

In general, the study shows a need to intensify and broaden the fight against social inclusion in vocational education and training, as well as to open up possibilities for greater social cohesion. There are national-level signals to schools that they have to provide activities and measures for greater support to pupils from disadvantaged background, but the effectiveness of the social inclusion efforts greatly depends on: 1) additional efforts put forward by the schools themselves, based on their specific context; 2) increased funds and decision-making power of schools; 3) greater efforts by all stakeholders, including the role of the parents, local self-governments and businesses themselves.

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Mapping of VET educational policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion
Country Study: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

Interviews on national level (10 interviews)

- Advisor for primary and secondary education, Ministry of education
- Head of department for primary and secondary education, Ministry of education
- Head of unit for EU, Ministry of education
- Director of the Directorate for development of education of the minorities, Ministry of education
- State Education Inspectorate
- Head of department for social inclusion, Ministry of labor and social policy
- Coordinator of Roma decade, Ministry of labor and social policy
- Conditional Cash Transfer Project Implementation Unit, Ministry of labor and social policy
- Professor for social protection and social inclusion, Institute for social protection
- Coordinator of social inclusion project, Ludwig Boltzmann

Interviews on local level at each case study location

School ASUC Boro Petrusevski; Site: Skopje (12 interviewees)

- Director of the school
- Head masters of classes from different studying profile (3 headmasters)
- School psychologist (1)
- Chef of practical studying (1)
- Local businesses (2)
- Youth organization (2)
- Council of parents (2)

School Riste Risteski Ricko; Site: Prilep (10 interviewees)

- Director of the school
- Head masters of classes from different studying profile (3 headmasters)
- School psychologist (1)
- Chef of practical studying (1)
- Representatives from local businesses (2)
- Youth organization (1)
- President of the council of parents (1)

School Nikola Stejn; Site: Tetovo (14 interviewees)

- Director and Deputy Director of the school (2)
- Head masters of classes from each studying profile (6 headmasters)
- School psychologist (1)
- Chef of practical studying (1)
- Director of Medical Center – Tetovo (1)
- Youth organization (1)
- President of the council of parents (1)
- Local Agency for employment (1)

APPENDIX B: INDICATORS OF QUALITY

Table - Breakdown of Area 4-Pupils' support

Quality indicator	Theme
4.1 Pupils' care	- Protection from physical injuries and force majeure - Violence prevention - Prevention from smoking, alcohol and narcotics - Quality of the available food - Support for pupils with physical disabilities - Care of children from socially disadvantaged families
4.2 Health	- Hygiene and protection from diseases - Care of pupils with health issues
4.3 Counselling for further education	- Support in making decisions about future occupation/institution for further education or employment - Care of pupils with emotional distress
4.4 Monitoring of progress	- Monitoring of individual pupils' progress - Monitoring of the progress of the whole class

Source: Indicators for quality of work of schools.

APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON STUDENT AND TEACHER QUESTIONER

Teacher questioner

	ASUC Boro Petrusevski - Skopje	Riste Risteski Ricko - Prilep	Nikola Stejn - Tetovo	Total
Total respondents	38	41	18	97
per gender				
Male	35%	40%	18%	32%
Female	65%	60%	82%	68%
per nationality (absolute numbers)				
Macedonian	26	41	4	73%
Albanian	10	/	13	24%
Turks	1	/	1	2%
Other	1	/	/	1%

per teaching subjects				
General subjects	56%	40%	56%	
Vocational subjects	44%	47%	44%	
Practical lessons	/	13%	/	

Student questioner

	ASUC Boro Petrusevski - Skopje	Riste Risteski Ricko - Prilep	Nikola Stejn - Tetovo	Total
Total respondents (in absolute numbers)	112	88	121	321
per year of studying				
First year	47	41	86	174
Final year (4th)	65	47	35	147
per gender %				
Male	56%	83%	71%	43%
Female	44%	17%	29%	57%
per nationality %				
Macedonian	45	97	46	60%
Albanian	51		50	37%
Roma	1		4	1.5%
Vlach	2			0.6%
Turks		2		0.6%
Serbian		1		0.3%