



MACEDONIA YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (YES) NETWORK FINAL REPORT

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MACEDONIA YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (YES) NETWORK FINAL REPORT

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*Note: The above financial report includes estimates for expenses still being processed through out accounting system, and; therefore, does not reflect the final figures. The final costs will be reported to USAID on our Final SF425, which will be submitted after receiving confirmation of our final FY2016 NICRA rates from our cognizant agency, USAID. 62

Acknowledgements
The diagram on page 7 contains elements designed by Freepik.com.

ACRONYMS

ALMM	Active Labor Market Measures
AT	Assistive Technology
BEA	Business Environment Activity
BDE	Bureau for Development of Education
BIPO	Battery of Instruments for Professional Development
DPO	Disabled People's Organization
EC	Economic Council
EU	European Union
ESA	Employment Services Agency
GoM	Government of Macedonia
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization
LAPE	Local Action Plan for Employment
LED	Local Economic Development
LESC	Local Economic and Social Council
LLMA	Local Labor Market Analysis
MAMEI	Macedonian Association of Metal and Electrical Industry
MTToT	Masters' Training of Trainers
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PPD	Public-Private Dialogue
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
SwD	Students with Disabilities
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
USG	United States Government
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-based Learning
WRS	Work Readiness Skills
YES	Youth Employability Skills
YwD	Youth with Disabilities

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Employability Skills (YES) Network

“Young people – Macedonia’s future labor force – are a potential vast resource, but area presently disconnected from the economy by continued slow economic growth and a general perception that they are unprepared by skill and motivation for adult life. If Macedonia is to grow, and even to join the EU, this demographic resource will be required.”

— EQUIP3 Program Design, 2010

Background and Objectives

The Macedonia Mission of USAID commissioned a comprehensive assessment of workforce needs and solutions in 2009 and, after careful review, the Mission engaged the EQUIP3 program consortium led by Education Development Center to prepare a design for a new initiative growing directly from the findings and recommendations of the Assessment. The Mission opted to use the EQUIP3 Leader With Associates award to help design the supply-side intervention for improving the quality of workforce that was offered on the labor market, and to some extent the intermediary (i.e. the labor market exchange agents). The Mission decided to design two separate mechanisms based on the 2009 workforce assessment and another activity was to be designed to address demand-side issues and to help create more jobs. Nevertheless, Mission plans changed as funding sources in Washington changed. Ultimately, a counterpart demand-side project was never implemented in Macedonia with USAID funds. Instead, a Small Business Expansion Project was awarded to help SMEs grow, but this initiative was not necessarily intended to absorb new workforce entrants or to generate new jobs.

Six project objectives were established:

1. Facilitate Public Private Partnerships that will improve local level demand/supply labor exchange.
2. Develop venues for meeting immediate skill/training needs of the labor market and career development opportunities.
3. Strengthen the job services capacity of public and/or private labor market mediation organizations to ensure trained youth have access to up to date on job openings and career development opportunities.
4. Provide continuing professional development opportunities for teachers in Vocational Educational Training (VET) schools.
5. Create innovative mechanisms to make VET schools and the VET Center more responsive and relevant.
6. Integrate productive connections with current and planned USAID and other donor Workforce related activities.

Fidelity to Mission and Objectives

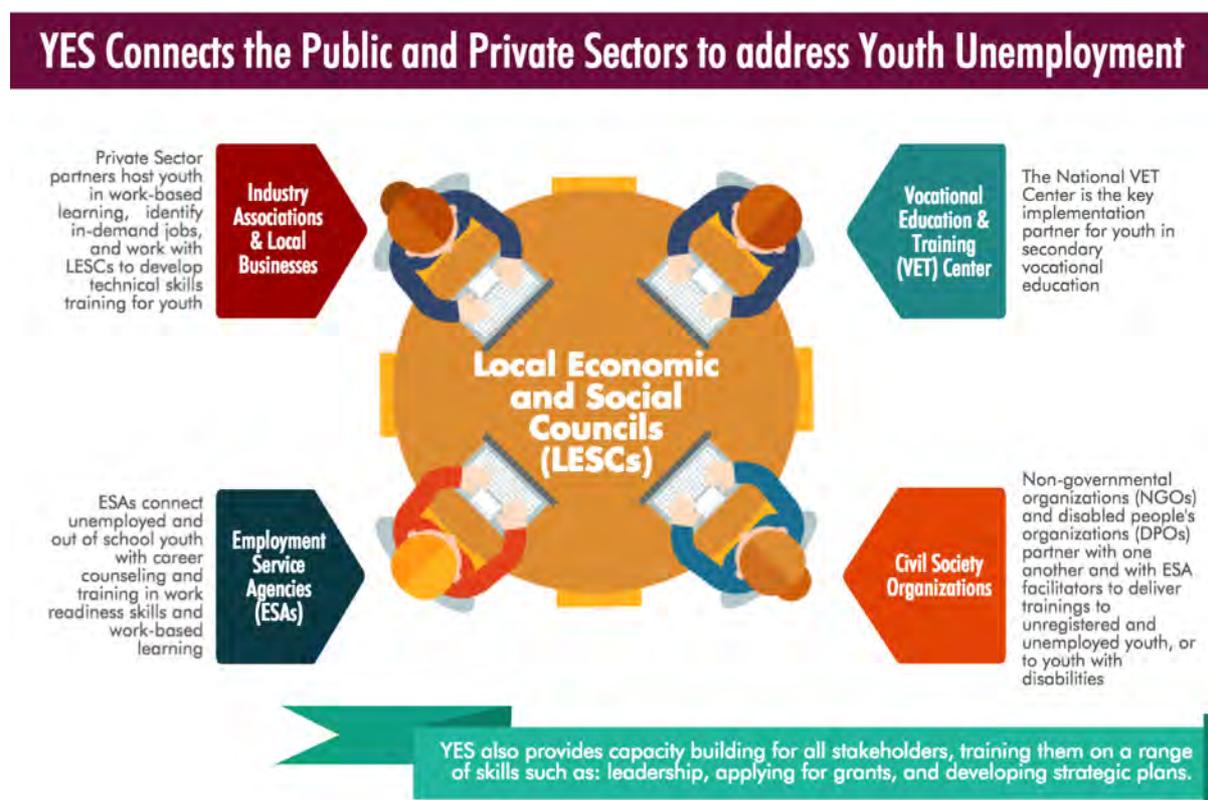
Following an “associate” award under the EQUIP3 mechanism in 2010, EDC as the EQUIP3 Leader, developed and began to implement a program following this design. From inception in 2010 to its conclusion in June, 2016 the project has adhered closely to the objectives and the intended design. Indeed, the project remained focused on its two primary objectives (1: to improve the quality of the supply of workforce; and 2): to improve the dialogue between the demand and the supply-side of workforce), though the design did somewhat change as continuous annual evaluations took place under the project’s robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) component. The project used results from the M&E component to actively provide design input prior to developing each year’s Annual Work Plan. In this manner, the project remained focused on its objectives, but project activities were adapted to respond to changing realities, stakeholder commitment, results, and evaluation findings. To reflect changing realities – including some fluctuations in budget – the YES Network project objectives were modified in several key ways throughout this award:

1. While the YES Network project always intended a local, multi-sector advisory board, and operated on the premise that organizing the “demand-side” of workforce development was necessary, the decision by USAID to separate the employability initiative (supply-side) from the economic growth counterpart activity complicated the enterprise. This led to an active decision by USAID the project should instead address workforce issues at the municipal level, and to engage all relevant stakeholders. This resulted in the establishment of local boards with private and public sector leadership rather than the single national advisory board originally proposed. The Local Economic and Social Council approach was selected as a basis for inclusion of demand-side perspectives, as it could build upon an earlier USAID Macedonia effort as the Mission had supported the establishment of one such council previously under its Business Environment Activity (BEA).
2. Feedback from a 2013 performance audit conducted by the Office of the Inspector General led to strengthening engagement of the private sector through LESC support, and a shift in the role of NGO’s to encourage referral of unemployed youth to the publicly-supported and managed labor exchange offices, the Employment Service Agency.
3. In response to an initiative of USAID¹ in 2013, the YES Network project added a component to address the needs of youth with disabilities (YwD). This project component was intended to build upon existing project components, leveraging the project structures (LESCs, work with the VET Center, with the Employment Service Agency (ESA), and with employers, in order to better transition YwD from school to

¹ These funds were added to the project as a result of EDC’s response to a USAID Macedonia RFA that was opened following a global call for increasing participation of persons with disabilities in USAID projects worldwide that was released by USAID’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) in Washington. EDC’s proposal was first selected as a viable one by a Technical Evaluation Committee in Macedonia, and then it was approved by DCHA for funding.

work. This component lead to the adaptation of each YES Network project element to include guidelines and tips for inclusion of YwD.

All three of these modifications, while challenging in the moment, resulted in significant improvements in the implementation of the YES Network, and all were successfully integrated into the final program design. The graphic below shows the integration of objectives with priority program activities.



As the YES Network project developed, objectives were streamlined for better communication, and four program components were implemented to support their achievement. A fifth and cross-cutting component, Monitoring and Evaluation, is addressed in Section IV.

Component 1: A Municipality-based Approach to Youth Employability through LESCs

Facilitate and establish mechanisms for ongoing Public-Private Dialogue that will improve demand-supply labor exchange at the local level, and strengthening the capacities of NGOs and DPOs for development of employability skills in youth.

Component 2: Career Preparation in Secondary Schools

Provide resources for work readiness training, career counseling, work-based learning, and continuing professional development opportunities for teachers in VET secondary schools. Create innovative mechanisms to make secondary schools and support the national VET

Center in making vocational and technical education more responsive and relevant to labor market requirements.

Component 3: Preparing Unemployed Youth for Work through Employment Service Agencies

Strengthen the capacity of the Employment Services Agency to provide better services to registered unemployed youth, including youth with disabilities, such as training in work-readiness skills, access to structured work-based learning opportunities, and up-to-date information on job openings and career development opportunities.

Component 4: Supporting inclusion of Youth with Disabilities in YES Network Programs, in partnership with Civil Society, particularly DPOs

Develop and demonstrate strategies for full inclusion of youth with disabilities in all aspects of the YES Network, including work readiness, work-based learning, and preparation for employment.

Summary of Accomplishments

System-building and Sustainability

- A new (and replicable) form of social dialogue on a local level initiated by establishment of 6 Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs) and strengthen one already established Economic Council, aimed at generating consensus and initiating activities targeting youth unemployment from the ground-up. This model has already been replicated by an EU/ILO project that established 6 additional LESCs based on the success of the YES Network project.
- Work Readiness Skills and Work-Based Learning programs developed and implemented in 47 of 73 VET schools nationwide. A Career Planning program was also developed and later approved for a pilot activity as an optional course in selected VET schools, and in four general secondary schools (*gymnasiums*).
- Work Readiness Skills – including the work-based Learning approach to connecting with employers were adapted for and included in National Operational Plan of the Government of Macedonia (GoM) for reducing of unemployment (The GoM indicated that 3,000 unemployed youth will be trained in 2015 and additional 3000 in 2016).
- Youth with Disabilities (YwD) inclusion in the YES Network workforce training is now part of National Operational Plan of the Government of Macedonia (GoM) for reducing unemployment. Prior to the YES Network project, the GoM offered some services for YwD that were frequently funded as separate initiatives. However, in 2016, and as a result of project assistance, the GOM issued a National Operational Plan included sub-targets/quota for YwD to be included in regular Work Readiness and Career Counseling Active Labor Market Measures (ALMMs) to provide for inclusion of YwD in regular/mainstream training groups rather than segregating them in “special” groups. This was a big step towards inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market without segregating them or providing “special” services for them.

- Increased disability awareness among teachers, ESA facilitators and businesses

Services to Youth, Teachers, and Counselors

- 11,630 youth trained in work readiness and work-based learning, and a sample of whom participated in an EDC-designed post-completion test:
 - 70% of students passed international work-ready now credential test (96 of 137 youth passed)²
 - 81% of unemployed youth passed the same test (143 of 176 youth passed)³
 - 79% reported increased skills and self-confidence (% of youth reporting an improvement of their employability skills)
- 429 were youth with disabilities
- 492 teachers and counselor were trained in facilitation of work readiness training and work-based learning
 - 162 included training in inclusion of YwD
- 141 mentors in companies participated with youth, of whom 66 were trained in inclusive mentoring



² The work readiness credential test was included as a pilot and not as part of the original program, therefore the percentages here may not be generalizable to the entire population of youth who participated in the YES Network project.

³ The work readiness credential test was included as a pilot and not as part of the original program, therefore the percentages here may not be generalizable to the entire population of youth who participated in the YES Network project.

II. PROJECT AND ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

YES Connects the Public and Private Sectors to address Youth Unemployment



Figure 1. Components of the Youth Employability Skills Network

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Component I: A Municipality-based Approach to Youth Employability, through Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs)

The YES Network project was launched using an innovative approach to youth unemployment: buy-in was to be driven from the ground up, and from outlying municipalities first. Working with Mayors and Education Officers first in the targeted communities of Tetovo, Bitola, and Strumica during phase 1, then with VET schools and ESA directors, relationships were developed to support training – first in Work Readiness Skills, and in Work-Based Learning – then through development of career centers in schools and capacity-building in ESA Job Clubs. This established program credibility that proved to be extremely valuable in supporting the planned expansion to the second set of municipalities. Following the “pairing” model designed to take a *regional* labor market approach, in phase 2, Gostivar and Prilep were soon added. A slightly different approach guided selection of Stip, where private sector and political leadership offered the promise of success, and the labor markets were less regional than local. Finally, in phase 3, having established credibility and proven effectiveness in these regional municipalities, the YES Network project was prepared

to take on the complexities of the nation's capital, Skopje⁴. The LESC and the programs that resulted confirmed the wisdom of this unfolding strategy, electing to enter Skopje only after the models had been proven in the other six outlying municipalities.

At USAID's proposal, the YES Network project decided to replicate, at the local level, a model that existed in the Macedonian labor law. This law mandated the formation of a National Economic and Social Council as a formal vehicle for social partnership and social dialogue, and empowered municipalities to create similarly structured tripartite bodies to address local economic and social issues. The tripartite social dialogue partners are the government (national or local), the business sector (i.e. employers), and workers (i.e. labor unions). Such a Local Socio-Economic Council (LESC), pre-dating the YES Network project, had been established in Kumanovo with support from a former USAID project called Business Environment Activity (USAID BEA). The innovation of the YES Network project was to expand and enrich the scope and membership of the councils by incorporating other local stakeholders relevant to youth employment such as administrators from local secondary vocational schools, representatives from the local Employment Service Agency (ESA), representatives from youth-serving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives from the youth council, and later on, representatives from Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs). Moreover, to further enhance the private sector representation, the project invited also other industry partners such as the Chambers of Crafts and Commerce, local business owners, and any other potential stakeholder who might benefit from addressing the problem of high youth unemployment. The YES Network project retained the same name for these bodies: Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs). As mentioned above, this model has since been expanded through other projects, such as the European Union (EU) funded project, *Promoting Social Dialogue*, implemented by the International Labor Organization (ILO) that has since worked to establish 6 additional LESC since the close of the YES Network project.

Further validation of the model comes from the municipalities themselves. Namely, seeing the value of social dialogue for local governments, two more municipalities (Kavadarci and Gazi Baba) have formed their own LESC. The project could include no more LESC under its scope due to budget and program constraints, but did provide information on what legal acts and documents they need to have in place to establish a LESC.

During the life of the YES Network project, Local Economic and Social Councils in the municipalities assisted by the project have developed from nascent institutions to drivers of municipal agendas – to a varying degree in each municipality in accordance to the local context - bringing together local stakeholders representing both the supply and demand side of municipal labor markets. With the goal of creating a forum for not only bi-partite public-private dialogue, but also tri-partite social dialogue on the local governance level, LESC now operate as advisory bodies to municipal governments, considering issues, providing opinions, and drafting proposals and recommendations to Municipal Councils for specific issues relevant to the socio-economic sphere, particularly on questions regarding youth

⁴ Secondary schools are managed by the City of Skopje in the capital whereas primary schools are managed by the municipalities that constitute Skopje. There is also one ESA center, therefore, it was logical that the project would work with the City of Skopje rather than any or all of the ten municipalities that constitute Skopje.

employment or Active Labor Market Measures (ALMMs) that are implemented by ESA and funded by the GoM Annual Operation Plans for Employment.

Over the life of the project, most of the LESC's have transformed from fledgling institutions, requiring considerable support and capacity building, to leaders and advocates for youth across a number of social issues pertaining to the effectiveness of municipal labor markets.

However, all LESC's have taken a different growth trajectory and have reached a different level of development through the life of the project. The success of each LESC depends on a variety of local issues, ranging from mayoral engagement to the ways in which LESC's have been able to leverage partners (institutions or private sector) to provide funding to meet LESC objectives.

At the time of this report, the annual operational plans of five of the seven LESC's have been officially approved by the Municipality Councils, therefore connecting these plans to municipal budget priorities. This is a significant milestone as it indicates that LESC's can rely on local funding during this upcoming year as they transition from YES Network support to sustainable local institutions.

Transformation to Municipal Agenda-Setters

Each LESC incorporates representatives from local government, employer organizations, trade unions (both municipal and national), industry associations, chambers of crafts or commerce, educational institutions, youth councils, NGOs and DPOs in their membership. Over the life of the project, YES Network worked with 6 municipalities to establish LESC's whereas in one additional municipality (Prilep) that had a pre-existing Economic Council (EC), the EC was brought under the project umbrella, with capacity-building targeted towards expanding its activities and providing wider representation for government and civil society. The EC of Prilep was established by the Mayor and comprised mostly of representatives of the private sector. The project worked closely with municipality of Prilep to add other local stakeholders (representatives of educational institutions, ESA, local NGOs, local DPOs etc.) that are relevant to social dialogue.

LESC's were established in three major cohorts or phases, allowing the project to focus on high-intensity capacity development at the early stages of the launch for each LESC. The first cohort (pre-2013) included the launch of LESC Strumica, Tetovo and the adaptation of EC Prilep to include socio-economic priorities. The second cohort (post-2013) added LESC Stip, Bitola, and Gostivar. The last municipality to be added and supported by the project was Skopje, in phase 3.

Since the very beginning, the project has established a very close collaboration with national institutions, especially with Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MOLSP), the national Vocational Education and Training (VET) center and ESA. The representatives from these partner institutions have been actively involved in the development and implementation of YES Network core programs: Work Readiness Skills (WRS), Work-based Learning (WBL) and Career Planning/Counseling. This close collaboration has resulted in the official adoption of these programs by the VET center as a part of VET curriculum (as optional subjects). Two of these curricula have also been

included in the GoM's National Operational Plan for reducing unemployment (WRS and Career Planning).

Building the Capacity of LESC

The YES Network project initially faced a great deal of reluctance on the part of municipal stakeholders. To many stakeholders, it was initially unclear what the development of LESC was intended to accomplish, and how those objectives were linked to the broader goal of addressing youth unemployment. In order to address these concerns, the project team worked closely with municipalities, first outlining a clear structure (i.e., bylaws, rulebook, elected leadership) and then mapping a training plan that gradually built the capacity both within each municipality and across all participating municipalities.

The initial action undertaken by each LESC was to create and pass a strategic plan for its own work and mission in the coming several years that would also include priorities for addressing youth unemployment. In support, the YES Network project conducted an initial LESC training, demonstrating how to develop strategic and action plans. This training was followed by two types of additional workshops: 1) Training applicable to all LESC, such as **Developing Effective Strategic and Action Plans**; and 2) Training tailored to the needs of each specific LESC, such as, **Communication and Leadership Skills**; **Conflict Resolution**; and **Effective Lobbying**. One practice that proved to be deeply effective was to invite participants from other LESC to any workshop tailored to meet the needs of a specific municipality. In this way, the YES Network project was able to encourage LESC to share experiences with one another and to establish communication channels between LESC that encouraged the exchange of best practices.

Local Economic and Social Councils quickly gained capacity in developing various strategic documents such as **Local Labor Market Assessments**, that then served as a basis for developing **Local Action Plans for Employment**, and in some municipalities, **Guidelines for Investors**, Brochure on How to Access Donor Funding Sources available to Municipalities in Macedonia, Brochure on Job –Seeking and Interviewing Skills (in Macedonian, Turkish, and Albanian language) for young job seekers, and **Local Economic Development Strategies**. Some LESC further organized forums, public panels on various topics including green jobs, employment of persons with disabilities, and other topics, vocational school fairs, or other events designed to draw attention to the need for interventions to reduce youth unemployment and to encourage the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Over the life of the YES Network project, LESC began to propose activities as diverse as competitions for the best student business idea, career fairs, and job specific training (also referred to as Rapid Response Technical Skills trainings). Many of these events had positive impact on youth employment. Data collected to date, reflecting two of the three rapid response technical skills training programs, reveal that 63% of the trained youth for job specific skills (19 out of 30) gained employment after attending the training.

The choice to build a Skopje strategy on the experience of the six “outlying” municipalities proved prescient, as the success in development of LESC – and perhaps more importantly the content and processes now maturing in the other six supporting employability development and employer involvement – proved persuasive to Skopje officials. As a result,

the Skopje LESC, as well as the VET schools and the ESA partnerships were quick to develop and to show very early success.

Differentiated Approaches to Youth Unemployment to Reflect Local Priorities and Needs

As LESC's gained capacity and transitioned to drivers of municipal agendas, the projects undertaken by these councils began to differentiate to reflect local priorities. Early on, four of the six municipalities outside the capital had conducted Local Labor Market Analyses, and based on those analyses that included employers' needs forecasts, they prepared Local Action Plans for Employment. Based on these documents, LESC Strumica requested approval from the MOES for the introduction of 6 new vocational profiles to be taught in their secondary VET Schools by their existing teaching cadre (i.e. with no need for new staff to be engaged by the school). The MoES approved the opening of 4 of the requested 6 profiles.

This example proves the LESC can indeed serve as a main vehicle at the local level that can assess employers' labor needs, amend education policies, and provide an adequate supply of workforce to the private sector. In addition to Strumica, the activities of LESC Tetovo, Gostivar, and Stip were guided by these analyses.

The list below illustrates some of these achievements:

Rapid Response Technical Skills Training

- The Skopje Local Economic and Social Council began to work with industry associations to identify specific skills demanded by local industry. The LESC initiated meetings with businesses, and through those meetings, identified information and communication technology (ICT) as one industry in significant need of new employees. Skopje LESC then requested support from the YES Network project to organize ICT training for young unemployed people. Rather than develop a curriculum, the YES Network identified and then worked with a training provider to conduct a mini-needs assessment of ICT skills gaps in the local market. Using this mini-needs assessment, the YES Network project worked with the training provider to tailor a curriculum to meet local industry needs. Eight ICT companies were involved in revising the training provider's curriculum to tailor it to their specific needs, resulting in a curriculum covering the exact technical skills demanded by these companies for new or entry-level positions. As part of this process, the companies committed to providing internships (one-month on-the-job training) to all youth trained through this technical skills curriculum; companies also indicated that the best interns would receive job offers. In the end, 14 out of 15 youth trained through this program were offered jobs. The 15th elected to continue on to school. This highly successful model was named "Rapid Response Technical Skills Training."

- Tetovo LESC put forward a local action plan for employment which was adopted by the municipal council of Tetovo. Following the Rapid Response Technical Skills Training model of Skopje LESC, the Tetovo LESC worked with local textile and furniture businesses and developed trainings for patternmaking and sewing technicians. Fifteen people attended this training, and by the time of submission of this report, 5 of them had secured jobs, 5 more were participating in final round interviews, and 5 had applied for start-up grants from ESA, and were planning to launch their own businesses.

Rapid Response Technical Skills Training as a Model

The YES Network project model for Rapid Response Technical Skills Training was driven by LESC Skopje's engagement with private sector partners on youth employment. Through the LESC, ICT businesses expressed an interest in hiring youth with specific ICT skills. The LESC approached the YES Network project to determine how to best meet the industry request. The model that was developed was for the project to facilitate a curriculum adaptation process between industry representatives and an existing technical skills training provider. The training provider's existing curriculum was adapted to reflect the exact training needs of the ICT companies looking to hire new employees. In return for this direct benefit, the ICT companies guaranteed one-month WBL placements for all youth who completed the training. Over 90% of youth who completed this technical skills training were offered jobs by companies who had participated in the curriculum adaptation.

The same model was then adapted by the YES Network project together with LESC Tetovo, in response to hiring demand from local textile and furniture manufacturing companies. In Tetovo, 66% of the technical skills trainees have already secured or are in the process of securing employment. The remaining 33% have applied for entrepreneurial grants, seeking self-employment as the strategy for transitioning into work.

Based on these two successful pilots, the industry association for metal and electronic manufacturing, Macedonian Association of Metal and Electrical Industry (MAMEI), is interested in developing its own Rapid Response Technical Skills training program. MAMEI will work directly with LESC to adopt the model tested by the YES Network project. The adoption of the model directly by an industry association is a hallmark of sustainability.



Image on Left: Students participate in technical skills training in Tetovo for furniture and textile manufacturing



Image on Right: Students receive awards for completing ICT technical skills training in Skopje

Social Entrepreneurship and Socially Responsible Businesses

- The Skopje LESC identified social entrepreneurship as a topic of particular interest to youth and to educators. In order to address this interest, the LESC worked with the City of Skopje to organize a training workshop for secondary schools to highlight social entrepreneurship as a potential outcome for youth interested in launching their own businesses. Representatives of LESC Skopje worked with the City of Skopje (City Council) and the Skopje Education Department to include all Skopje schools. An invitation to attend the training was extended to 3 – 4 students and 1- 2 teachers per school (the teachers invited were teachers of business or of entrepreneurship). The Skopje education department then worked with the Mayor of Skopje to support event, and after the event, to develop a guide for best practices for teaching of social entrepreneurship. This guide is available to students and teachers across Macedonia who may be interested in launching an entrepreneurial career. The Mayor's office provided cash prizes out of City budget for best business idea for social entrepreneurship. School teams from Boro Petrushevski and Vlado Tasevski shared the first place prize. In addition to medals, students and mentors participating on school teams each received a cash prize (each participant received 5,000MKD or \$100) provided by the City of Skopje. The second place winners were school teams from Pance Karagjozov and Rade Jovcevski Korcagin (these teams received silver medals and 4,000MKD or \$80), while the third place winners were school teams from Georgi Dimitrov and Nikola Karev (these teams received bronze medals and 3,000MKD or \$60). Announcement of the winners and presenting the plaques and medals, as well as the money prizes, was organized in the City of Skopje, during the awarding ceremony, which was attended by the Mayor Koce Trajanovski.
- In 2014, Tetovo LESC identified Socially Responsible Business Awards as a method for motivating business to become socially active. These awards took two years to come to fruition, with the Tetovo LESC playing an active role in ensuring the awards process did not become politicized. At the beginning, the LESC began to collaborate with businesspeople with reputations for being socially active, with a focus on those business owners not already on the municipal council. The vision of LESC Tetovo was to demonstrate neutrality in politics but encourage businesses to participate in events such as the promotion of VET, as well as active participation in events highlighting the mismatch of supply and demand, such as forums or panel discussions. The LESC crafted criteria for these awards, and included in this criteria that eligible businesses must be engaged with the YES Network Mentors in Companies curriculum, or host youth interns participating in the YES Network WBL program. Tetovo LESC issued its first round of Socially Responsible Business Awards in 2016.
- After conducting a Local Labor Market Analysis, LESC Tetovo organized a vocational school fair for the local VET Schools to present and promote their programs and attract primary school graduates in order to better satisfy the needs of local employers who seek mostly technically skilled workers for the industries they are developing. The project had reported based on statements from the municipal leadership that a significant increase of around 40% was reported in enrollment rates

in VET schools (versus general high-schools or gymnasiums) the following school year.

Youth with Disabilities

- Bitola LESC became very proactive in raising awareness of Youth with Disabilities (YwD), organizing several public panels, forums, and crafts fairs to showcase products made by YwD.
- LESC Strumica developed a strategy for social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs) as a Network

- One emerging success of the LESCs is that LESCs as a group are driving experience sharing across municipalities. For example, in January 2016, the National Public Private Dialogue (PPD) Conference was held. The conference attendees included approximately 70 different stakeholders, social partners, LESCs, members of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), youth and youth with disabilities, EU ILO and USAID Projects' representatives. This conference was a great opportunity for the individual LESCs to learn from each other, to highlight successes and best practices and to strengthen the link between them and the NESC. The main focus of the conference was emphasizing the importance of the LESCs as a driving force in developing effective economic and social policy, generating jobs, and improving local economies. It discussed and analyzed critical issues about LESCs sustainability, municipal support, and the relationship between LESC and NESC.
- The tripartite social dialogue as in improvement of bi-partite PPD was enhanced through establishing LESCs to better match the skills required in the labor market with those developed through education. As previously stated, this model was adopted and implemented by other donors, such as the EU/ILO **Promoting Social Dialogue** project.

Addressing the challenge of sustainability beyond project funding has been a high priority for the YES Network from the beginning. Since it involves both local politics and voluntary service, the LESCs are perhaps the most vulnerable of the possible survivors. YES Network project has learned some lessons:

- **Start with mayors.** The most successful LESCs were the ones in which mayors understood LESCs can be a vehicle for hearing the voices of all relevant stakeholders concerned with the municipal agenda items regarding youth employment, economic growth, or the engagement of civil society, as well as a forum for transparent and participatory debate on many issues that affect the citizenry. With mayors on board, LESCs were much more likely to have municipal funds available to implement action items, and to organize or host large events, fairs, or other public forums to enhance social dialogue.
- **Budget Counts.** In the final project year, five of the seven LESCs were able to link their Annual Operation Plan to municipal priorities by including it as an annex of official Local Economic Development Departments' plans. This step often occurred after LESCs were able to demonstrate their capacity as agenda setters, but is a

critical and necessary step for LESC's to continue in this capacity after the YES Network project close-out.

- **Experience sharing across LESC's strengthens engagement at all levels.** The YES Network project invited members from other municipality's LESC's to participate in each and every capacity-building training workshop for LESC's. This enabled LESC's to form peer relationships with one another, and strengthened the exchange of ideas and the sharing of best practices. This experience-sharing also allowed LESC's to take the lead in workshops where they had particular strengths.

Component 2: Career Preparation in Secondary Schools

The EDC Design Document posed the challenge to which Work Readiness Training, Work-Based Learning, and other measures were the project's answer:

A major part of this problem is the weak link between skills supplied through the education system and those demanded by employers in the modern workforce. In Macedonia, as elsewhere in the world, these skills are not technical or cognitive skills alone. They are the employability skills of job search, self-presentation, interviewing, CV preparation and application – the things one needs to understand and know how to do to find a job and be hired. Then there are the skills one needs to succeed at a job once hired – communications, punctuality, accepting supervision, working as part of a team, the so-called soft skills.

—EDC/EQUIP3 Design Proposal, 2010

As largely a “supply-side” project, the YES Network project's main conduit for impacting youth unemployment was through curricula. The YES Network developed three comprehensive curricula, each aimed at different stages of a youth's progress from unemployed/student to the world of work. Each of these curricula was also adapted for use with YwD (see page 27). In addition to these curricula, training program for mentors in companies as well as guidelines for teachers for teacher's externship program were developed. The YES Network also worked with schools to establish new or refresh pre-existing Career Centers (established via a former USAID Macedonia activity, the Secondary Education Activity (SEA)) within each school, making these centers a place attractive to youth, where youth could come in order to learn more about career pathways, job-seeking skills, and networking opportunities. In addition to working through secondary schools, the YES Network project began working with NGOs as training providers.

“Needs of companies for skills of new employees are changing – there is now a need for soft skills – what YES calls employability skills – because then employees have the attitudes and motivation to learn the formal job skills. Those job skills change so fast the schools can never keep up with equipment, curriculum, or teaching methods. But if they can teach them how to fit in, how to cooperate, how to learn, we can teach them the rest.”

—Trades and Crafts Union official

The YES Network facilitated an average of 40 training sessions per year, including specific activities, such as mentoring sessions, customized to meet the needs of individual schools. For example, some schools found challenging certain aspects of the curriculum (such as teamwork) or specific technical capacities (such as working with Google docs). The YES Network designed custom trainings hand-in-hand with schools to respond to these specific challenges, building the capacity of teachers to deliver trainings in a careful and tailored fashion.

The YES Network Project Curricula

Employability and Career: Work Readiness Skills for Youth

Work Readiness Skills is an adaptation of EDC's Work Ready Now! curriculum, a soft-skills training curriculum developed to prepare youth for work. With the input of relevant stakeholders, such as VET Center advisors, the Macedonian version (Work Readiness Skills, or WRS) was adapted to meet the needs of secondary school students. The WRS Program comprises of an introductory module for developing group cohesion, and a set of seven modules, each focused on different skill areas: 1) personal development, 2) communication skills, 3) teamwork and leadership, 4) appropriate workplace behavior, 5) job-seeking skills, 6) safety at the work place, and 7) personal financial management.

WRS training was initially provided to three cohorts of schools (38 schools in total). Only some of the teachers trained in WRS were able to implement the WRS structured program as a stand-alone optional course, some provided short and specific-skills workshops in schools, and some were able to integrate its contents in the regular/mandatory subjects they already taught (such as Mother Tongue and Communication, Business and Entrepreneurship, etc.). Due to a great degree of interest in this program, 9 additional training sessions were organized in most partner schools from the first three cohorts, totaling 203 teachers trained through the YES Network project.

In most of the secondary VET schools that partnered with YES Network, WRS was implemented through so-called "free-classes." Free classes are optional courses for VET students and are part of the VET school curriculum and schedule.

This curriculum is designed for students in their third year of a four-year secondary VET education, and takes place over 72 class sessions throughout the school year. In support of implementation of this program through free classes, the YES Network developed a Manual of Good Practices from the experiences of the first practitioners of the program.

Partnering with Businesses: Work-based Learning for Youth, Mentors in Companies for Business Partners, and Externships for Teachers.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Many schools struggled to implement work-based learning or on-the-job training programs, as they had been able to do under the old system, when most companies were large-size publicly-owned enterprises that had partner-schools they supported with technology, practical training for students, and from where they recruited future workers. In the transition period, these companies were broken down, restructured, or closed altogether, so schools found themselves facing with a need to establish new partnerships with a larger number of smaller or medium-sized companies. . Teachers and administrators frequently

stated that they do not have the resources or training to understand how to best support students and organize the process of provision of in-company practical training. Without a systematic approach to WBL, the success of each school's WBL program depended highly on the motivation, skill, and interest of particular teachers. The majority of schools have their own laboratories, workshops, or other practical training spaces that are intended to aid students' acquisition of workplace technical skills and in the absence of a structured WBL program, many schools were substituting this time in these in-school practical training spaces for time spent in engaging in a real workplace.

The YES Network project's WBL curriculum was developed to add quality control to the process. The curriculum does so by creating a resource that outlines the roles and responsibilities of teachers in supporting students during WBL. In addition, WBL introduces safeguards ensuring that industry partners do not misuse WBL students for free labor – internships must provide learning to the student.

The YES Network trained teachers in vocational subjects and/or practical teaching and learning in 34 secondary VET schools on the WBL curriculum. WBL was implemented only in VET schools, while WRS was introduced in both VET schools and gymnasiums.

The YES Network WBL was structured as a secondary VET school optional course i.e. another "free-classes" option targeted to fourth year students. The entire curriculum takes place over 66 classes throughout the school year, and includes preparation for WBL, reflection after WBL, and time for company visits, job shadowing or job placement.

Mentors in Companies

In order to complement the WBL training component, and in cooperation with the national VET Center, the YES Network developed the Mentors in Companies training program to help the private sector better work with youth placed in work-based learning or on-the-job training opportunities. The Mentors in Companies curriculum was designed as the private sector analogue to the WBL program: a structured program that provides guidance to businesses for how to best harness WBL to facilitate student learning outcomes. The Mentors in Companies curriculum connects mentors (in companies) to teachers, actively engaging teachers in an advisory role during a student's placement in a company. This allows for industry advisors to become actively engaged in the student's learning process, therefore bolstering the effectiveness of WBL as a true learning experience.

Based on the effectiveness and lessons learned from the initial cohort of Mentors in Companies, the YES Network project created a competency-based standard and manual for Mentors in Companies, defining the competencies mentors must have in order to effectively support youth during the youth's WBL placement. This standard, as well as the Mentors in Companies training program, was officially adopted by the VET Center in May 2016.

In total 171 mentors were trained through this program. The contact person for any information about this activity is the VET advisor Branko Aleksovski from the VET center. In June 2016, upon a proposal by the VET Center, the Minister of Education and Science has officially adopted the Curriculum for vocational and didactic training of mentors from companies.

Teacher Externships

In order to deepen the YES Network's support to the private sector and to close the gap between supply-side and demand-side trainings, the project designed an innovative approach in teacher professional development: Teacher Externships, or teacher training in companies. The goal of the teacher externships is to provide teachers with on-the-job experiences structured to allow teachers to upgrade their own skills, technical curricula and teaching methodology to match current and emerging industry needs.

During Teacher Externships, teachers spend 3 – 7 days over 3 years, placed in companies in their area of specialization. The curriculum then encourages teachers to reflect on this experience and apply that reflection to their current classroom content or lesson plans. The VET Center and MoES must approve the final implementation details for Teacher Externships beyond the life of the project.

The Teacher Externship program operated through YES Network partner schools, most of which were already actively participating in WBL programs. A manual to assist VET Center advisors in supporting VET teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate their externships, was also developed through YES Network. This pilot initiative has led to the creation of an official VET professional development certificate to teachers completing the externship program. In this pilot phase, 20 teachers have successfully completed training program in company and earned certificates.

The YES Network has closely collaborated with USAID Teachers Career and Professional Development Project and the VET center on including the externship as a valid form of Teacher Professional Development (TPD). The big challenge in implementation of this activity could be the fact that companies are not officially registered as a training providers. And according to official regulation of TPD, only trainings in accredited training providers could be counted as a professional development activity. Since companies are no interested to apply for training provider's accreditation, EDC would propose some changes in the official regulation of TPD to be made. It could be initiated by the VET center as responsible institution for implementation of teacher training in companies.

YES Network Project Training and Curricula



Figure 2. YES Network Project Trainings and Curricula

How the YES Network Instituted Trainings

Curricula were rolled out in sequence, with Work Readiness Skills (WRS) and Work-based Learning (WBL) developed first. Both of these programs target effective, practical learning: WRS for teachers, and WBL for businesses. The YES Network then added Career Counseling, Mentors in Companies, and a Teacher Externship training program, once the twin core of WRS and WBL was in place.

The YES Network held an annual meeting with school directors to initiate the process for curriculum planning for the upcoming academic year. During this initial meeting held before the start of the new school year, the YES Network and school directors would identify how to support teachers in each particular school, and work together to determine the content areas for upcoming training events.

As with Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs), school-based trainings were launched based on a rural-first, ground up model. The first cohort of training took place in Tetovo, Strumica, Bitola, the second cohort in Gostivar, Stip, Prilep, the third cohort brought the model to Skopje, and with it, the formal request from MOES to further expansion of Career Centers and the Career Counseling activities.

At the MOES request, a 4th cohort was added that included 11 more schools from 10 different municipalities in Macedonia and the 5th cohort added 14 further schools. Different cohorts were trained in different packages (see graphic).

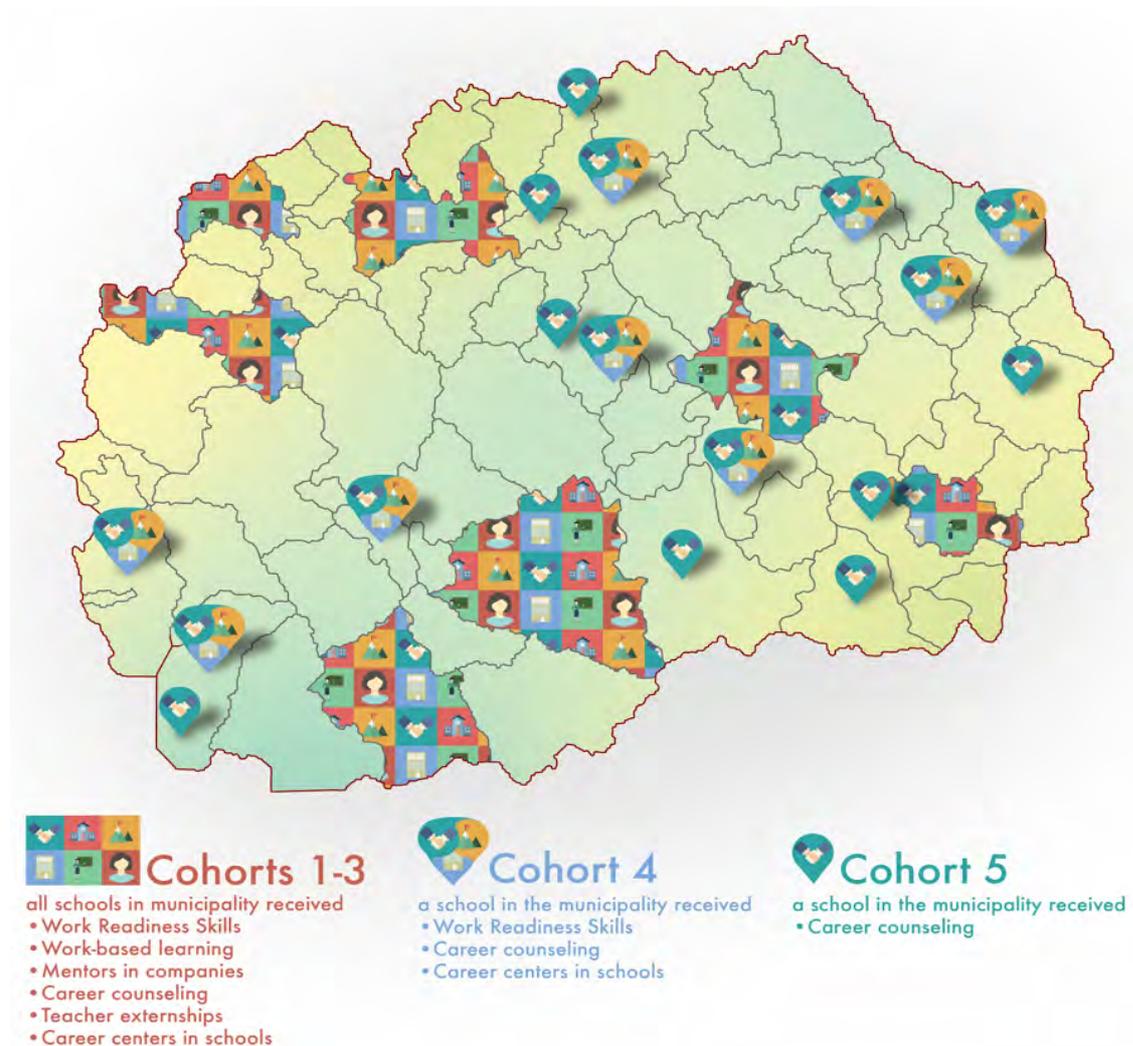


Figure 3. Implementation of the YES Network Curricula and Trainings in Macedonia

Teaching Youth Where They Are: Creating Career Centers

Career Centers were envisaged as spaces in schools where career education activities are available to students. During initial school visits, the YES Network found that – where they existed - these spaces were often underserved and unattractive to youth. In order to support the transformation of these spaces into true resource centers that are inviting, the YES Network supported the establishment or re-establishment of 52 Career Centers (48 in regular schools and 4 in special education schools), by providing furniture, IT equipment, and (in most) assistive technology i.e. adapted peripheral computer devices that allow students with certain type of disabilities to use the computers, career posters, and literature on job-seeking skills.

These venues offered the opportunity to have a recognizable location in schools where students were able to seek information about career pathways, receive career counseling,

and participate in workshops and trainings. Career Centers became the meeting point between the schools and the local ESA representatives, as well as a common venue for events where primary school students learned about and determined which track of VET education they would like to attend, or what kind of employers, universities and other organizations were available that provided student activities.

Throughout the project, school teachers trained in any of the programs developed through YES Network were supported to understand the role of the Career Centers, and work with the Career Center programs to integrate activities with the school's annual work plan.

Introducing Career Counseling to VET Schools

The YES Network Career Counseling/Planning curriculum was developed at the request of MOES. MOES requested USAID's support, through the YES Network project, in the development of a Career Counseling Certification Program, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in June 2012. The program objectives were: 1) To pilot different methods of empowering students to make informed decisions about career pathways; and 2) To test methods of delivery that would result in recommendations for the development of an effective career counseling program. The ultimate objective of the MOU was to develop a systematic and holistic approach to Career Counseling, to use an informed basis for the development of a national formal career counseling system.

In response to the MOES request, the YES Network project launched a series of pilot initiatives aimed at developing a curriculum and testing effective delivery methods. An initial analysis of existing systems for career counselling in European countries was conducted in partnership with the Macedonian Association of Career Counselors (ASK), and based on it, the core competencies of a career counselor were drafted. Then, based on the competencies, an initial training program was developed by the project, focusing on student self-evaluation of values and career goals.

"We love the work readiness curriculum and all the program components of YES, but we especially appreciate being actively a part of their development. They feel like they belong to Macedonia, to teachers and students in our school. Also, they are very practical, not just theory. For these reasons, I am sure we will continue to use them here."

—VET school director

In preliminary conversations with MOES and with teachers, the YES Network discovered that most teachers interested in career counseling were using informal tools. To create a systemic and comprehensive approach to career counseling, the YES Network invested in the development of a validated tool to measure: 1) professional interest; 2) professional values; 3) personality traits for young persons above the age of 16. This tool, the Battery of Instruments for Professional Development (BIPO), was used as the first activity to orient students towards career planning. This was the very first instrument of this kind that was developed for the Macedonian context and that was tested on a representative sample of students.

The tool has since been adapted to online use, and is posted on the MOES website. A version adapted for unemployed youth has been developed, and posted to the ESA website.

Once students completed the BIPO, they are encouraged to research job opportunities and educational opportunities aligning with their career goals, and then to articulate specific action steps outlining a process that could lead them into their desired career path.

Five cohorts of secondary schools (63 of 66 in total) received an initial 5-day training for career counseling⁵. Information from MOES regarding Career Counseling objectives did not indicate how MOES envisioned implementation, so the YES Network project piloted two delivery models: Individual and Group-based. Individual counseling relies on one-on-one guidance from a trained Career Counselor to an individual student; Group counseling is based on a model of facilitated discussions, led by a trained Career Counselor working with a group of students from a similar age cohort.

The YES Network project piloted group counseling with two different age cohorts:

- Second year VET students (72 hours per year - free classes); and
- Fourth year gymnasia students (30 hours per year - project work, including work-based learning experiences).

The rationale for implementing career counseling at these different ages is as follows: by their second year, VET students have already selected a vocation i.e. a career track, so the Career Counseling curriculum was tailored around refining career goals, developing concrete action plans, and conducting job searches. For gymnasium students – many of who are expecting to attend college – the Career Counseling curriculum was re-organized as a shorter optional course named “project-based activity” (similar to the “free classes” in VET schools), with more emphasis on future education and career pathways and progression, rather than on development action plans.

After the first year of implementation of career counseling in the first three cohorts of schools (27 in total), YES Network conducted an analysis of the implementation of this program. The results from this analysis were presented, together with the program, during an event on November 7, 2013, during which the Minister of Education and Science presented the first certificates of implementation to the teachers. After this initial implementation, the YES Network project continued supporting a team-based approach for career counseling, training additional school support service representatives, such as school psychologists, to complement the already trained teams of teachers.

“Choosing to work with both VET schools and ESA offices in these municipalities meant that without legal requirements to collaborate, we were able to build a system that prepares both students and unemployed young people for the work that is needed.”

—VET Center advisor, on curriculum

⁵ In total 66 schools were included in this component. However, in 3 schools for students with disabilities the YES Network project only equipped career but did not included teachers from these schools in the career counseling program. Therefore, teachers from 63 schools were included in the career counseling training program.

The continuing implementation of the Career Counseling Program in the schools was supported through the development of a Manual for Career Planning Program for school teachers, and a Parent Guide – a brief brochure helping parents to appropriately support their children in making career decisions.

Sustainability

In addition to its work through schools, businesses, and other local institutions, the YES Network project effectively partnered with national bodies to introduce its programs. This led to significant buy-in from national partners, such as MOES, MOLSP, the national VET Center, and to a limited extent with the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE).

These efforts resulted in:

- The National VET Center officially adopted WRS, WBL, and Career Counseling as a formal optional courses that are part of the VET secondary school curriculum. These training programs will help students and unemployed youth enhance their employability skills and build workplace experiences so that they are better equipped to successfully transition from school to work.
- The development of a customized Masters Training of Trainers (MToT), delivered to 16 teachers that show the best results in implementation of WRS program in their schools. These 16 Master Trainers can be engaged by the MOES or any other institution or project to deliver WRS curriculum training to new teachers from VET schools that did not have an opportunity to be partnering with YES Network.
- As a part of the YES Network Mentors in Companies initiative, the following was accomplished so far:
 - Supported by the YES Network, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Center developed and adopted General Standards for Equipment and Premises that each company must meet in order to qualify for receiving high-school students for practical training as mentees.
 - The VET Center developed and adopted the Standard for Mentors in companies.
 - The VET Center developed a Curriculum for vocational and didactic training of mentors from companies.
 - Upon a proposal by the VET Center, the Minister of Education and Science adopted the Curriculum for vocational and didactic training of mentors from companies.
- The VET Center plans to begin planning and administering teacher training in the companies (Teacher Externship program), in addition to issuing Teacher Externship certificates.

It must also be noted that relevant legislation requires that Chambers of Commerce play a role in provision of certification of companies that can take in interns, as well as in training of in-company mentors of interns. Therefore, the VET Center will need to partner with the Chambers of Commerce to continue to enhance the private sector's capacity to train future

mentors within the companies. YES Network did initiate in its last month of implementation two meetings with the Chambers and the VET Center, but this collaboration will need to be deepened and expanded.

Lessons Learned

- **Transport was a challenge.** Since the programs were implemented through optional courses which are not part of the mandatory classes held during regular school hours, i.e. were taking place as after-school activities, schools struggled with how to best transport students to/from the optional courses throughout the week as transportation arrangements made at the beginning of the year only took into account the schedule for the mandatory classes/courses. In some cases, such as with the special school for students with disabilities Iskra in Stip, the school was able to partner with the private sector to fund transportation costs. However, in most cases, schools were on their own in terms of identifying sources of transportation funding.
- **Full fidelity to the model isn't always possible.** Even with highly motivated school administrators and teachers, it was difficult to ensure that all teachers implemented curricula using the same methodology. For some schools, this was because teachers were not always trained on all the YES Network curricula, meaning that not all teachers received the same level of training from the project. However, within each school, and across the YES Network, certain teachers emerged as champions of the program – and some of these teachers, now recognized as Master Trainers for the Work Readiness Program, are the ones with whom we hope the sustainability of the program rests.
- **Scalability is not enough.** With a participatory learning paradigm like WRS/WBL, transmitting best practices in terms of pedagogy is just as important as training on the curriculum content. The YES Network project did train a cadre of Master Trainers able to disseminate pedagogical techniques, in addition to content knowledge. However, we hope that as the YES Network curricula gain national adoption, the onus will be on these Master Trainers to ensure that new trainings incorporate the participatory pedagogical model of these curricula.

Component 3: Reaching Unemployed Youth through the Employment Services Agency

A Focus on Job Clubs and Capacity Building for Employability

Reaching youth where they are means connecting with unemployed youth actively seeking work in the labor market in addition to reaching youth in schools. In Macedonia, those who are unemployed may register with Employment Service Agencies to receive career services. Prior to the YES Network project, Employment Service Agency centers were primarily responsible for registering the unemployed – career services offered through ESA were limited and of little value to youth, and often were not well connected to the needs of local businesses. The YES Network project aimed to transform these centers into providers of

services for unemployed youth. This involved training staff (often clerical) to facilitate workshops, and by building attractive physical spaces – Job Centers – within ESA branches to serve as a resource center for those seeking jobs.

After the start of the YES Network project, the Government of Macedonia launched several initiatives aimed at addressing youth unemployment, through their already established mechanism termed active labor market measures (i.e. employment measures). These measures included incentives for new entrepreneurs, and incentives for companies that hired young people (for example, reimbursement for fringe benefits paid to any young new hires). As a result of the GOM's interest, the YES Network project was able to leverage a spirit of inquiry on the part of ESA to determine how to best connect youth to the world of work. YES Network was able to tailor all the curricula developed for VET schools to meet the interests and needs of young job-seekers, who often were previously offered support with entrepreneurial activity and self-employment, rather than on selecting a career pathway. Through the ESA, the YES Network project:

- **Adapted WRS and WBL to create a 5-day combined training program.** WRS and WBL were adapted for ESAs through the combined efforts of YES Network team and ESA staff. In order to reduce the time demands of the two curricula, key modules from both were combined into a shorter, more targeted program. The YES Network trained ESA staff from all 30 ESA centers nationwide to deliver the modified curriculum. This training has been officially adopted and included in the MOLSP's operational plan for ESAs for reducing of unemployment.
- **Adapted the career counseling program to focus on action planning.** Youth registered through ESA articulated a greater focus than in-school peers on self-employment and on job-seeking skills. Therefore, the in-school career counseling program was adapted for ESAs to include information about ESA services, and to add modules that focused on practical, action-oriented job-seeking skills rather than aspirational career planning. The YES Network project also developed a manual for ESA career counselors that includes guidelines for how to work with registered unemployed youth in career informing and planning, individual and group counseling, defining of goals and objectives, preparation of employment plans etc.
- **Developed plans for sustaining the Career Counseling Program.** The YES Network Career Counseling working group, comprised of representatives from the MoES, VET Center and the BDE, has created an action plan for the sustainability of the Career Counseling Program, which has been officially approved by the MoES. Some activities have been already implemented.
- **Created Job Clubs.** Analogous to the YES Network Career Centers launched in VET schools, the Network project created Job Clubs in 7 local ESA centers (Bitola, Prilep, Tetovo, Gostivar, Stip, Strumica and Skopje). In many cases, these centers were existing though decrepit spaces that the project renovated and equipped with furniture, desktop computers, TV and multifunctional printer, assistive technology, career-related books, DVDs and posters. The new working environment allowed Job Club staff to deliver training workshops and offer other career-related services to a larger number of young registered unemployed persons.

- **Linked Job Clubs to Career Centers.** In order to secure the sustainability of Job Clubs, the YES Network worked to develop activities connecting Job Clubs and Career Centers in secondary schools. Job Clubs and Career Centers host learning experiences that showcase the availability of GOM active labor market measures to support youth unemployment. For example, one event hosted through this joint program invited new entrepreneurs to present their experience in launching a business in front of the students from secondary schools. These new and young company owners shared their personal experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in launching a business.
- **Launched Job Fairs.** One key innovation developed through the YES Network under this component was the creation of ESA Job Fairs. These fairs were launched as a way to convene stakeholders (jobseekers, businesses, LESC, and ESA) in one single event targeted to addressing youth unemployment. Job Fairs began in 2013, in Prilep. The Prilep municipal council, Prilep EC, and the YES Network project collaborated to host the fair as a two-day event. Local businesses and business associations, secondary schools, government institutions, unemployed youth, the Chamber of Commerce of Macedonia, NGOs and the Prilep ESA were invited to staff their own booths during the fair. After the success of the first fair, ESA promoted additional fairs as a formal activity, tied to the annual work plans and budgets for each ESA. As a result, Job Fairs have been enormously successful, with ESA hosting between 7 and 10 of these each year nationwide. Job Fairs have received significant support and buy-in from the ESA Director, as well as from local business partners.

Working with NGOs to Reach Disconnected Youth

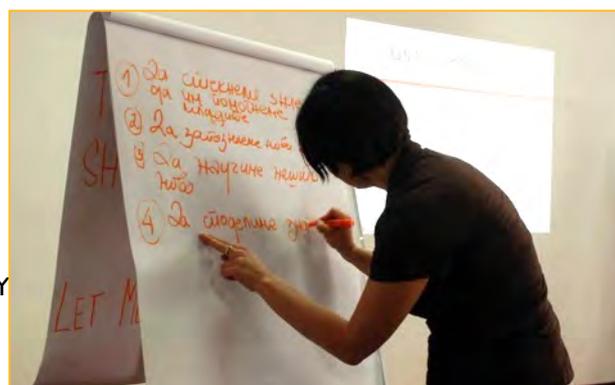
In many cases, youth do not register as unemployed. The burden to youth, in terms of transportation costs and time, often exceeds the perceived benefit derived from registration. Unregistered unemployed youth frequently fall off the radar of government services, and are the most difficult to reach through other programming. The YES Network project effectively reached these youths by working with local NGOs to provide career trainings to this group of beneficiaries.

In phases one and two, the YES Network supported selected NGOs in partner municipalities to offer the ESA-adapted WRS program to unregistered and unemployed youth who expressed an interest in building their work readiness skills in order to ease their entry into the workforce. The selected NGOs received grants to implement the WRS training for a group of up to 20 unemployed unregistered young people at a time.

As a result of this activity, YES network has enhanced the capacity of a total of 34 youth serving NGOs from partner municipalities of which 7 were granted to implement WRS workshops with unemployed unregistered youth. In total 308 youth have completed the WRS trainings.

Pairing NGOs Facilitators with ESA Staff for Training Delivery

NGO partners also played a key role in transforming ESA into a true service



provider for training: in many cases, ESA staff had no previous experience teaching, facilitating, or leading trainings. In order to effectively reach unemployed youth, ESA staff needed guidance and training on facilitation skills. YES Network addressed this need by developing customized facilitation skills training, aimed at teaching ESA staff how to become facilitators. However, in the first two years of project implementation, to ease the burden on ESA staff in delivering trainings, YES Network also paired trained NGO facilitators with ESA staff for workshop preparation and training delivery. In this manner, each new ESA facilitator was provided with a resource – in the form of a trained and experienced co-facilitator – as they learned how to lead trainings.

Sustainability

- YES Network’s activities with ESA were recognized as invaluable and at the request of the Minister of Labor, and with USAID approval, were scaled up nationwide. ESA staff from all 30 ESA centers in Macedonia was trained to deliver WRS, WBL and provide Career Counseling to unemployed youth.
- The WRS training and Career Counseling as a service were included in the National Operational Plan for reducing unemployment for 2015 and 2016 (approved by the Government of Macedonia and implemented by ESA). In a next phase, more focus should be placed on *quality* of training and services rather than on mere coverage i.e. numbers of ESA registrants benefiting from the WRS and Career Counseling.

“The beauty of the YES Network Project is that it shares the goals of the Employment Service Agency – to meet the demand for labor and skills – and it has helped us by building our own capacity to achieve them.

—Employment Service Agency local director

Lessons Learned

- **Set up Job Clubs as inviting spaces.** Because Job Clubs were located within high-traffic areas of ESA buildings, because the spaces were renovated to be inviting and attractive, and because YES Network encouraged an open-door policy at each Job Club, the Job Clubs played a significant role at the heart of each ESA center. ESA began to use Job Clubs as training venues, encouraging youth, government, and business partners to actively use the space to benefit the most from ESA activities and services. These spaces also served as a signifier of the commitment of the GOM and USAID to ESA as a significant partner of the YES Network.
- **Job Fairs bring together stakeholders and signify sustainability.** The success of Job Fairs demonstrates how a well-organized event that allows organizations to showcase their interests (businesses, in finding employees and customers; ESA in providing links to the private sector, LESC, in hosting public-private dialogue) can quickly become self-sustaining. It took only one Job Fair, organized in 2013, for ESA to view these events as critical to their broader mission of supporting youth employment. Once ESA viewed these events as part of their mission, the budget, capacity, and interest in continuing these events followed. In the future, ESA should start focusing on measuring the effectiveness of these fairs in terms of job interviews

arranged, or job offers extended in order to validate the usefulness and when necessary, change the contents of the event activities to maximize their effectiveness.

- **Pair NGO facilitators and ESA employees for successful training delivery.** The YES Network project envisioned ESA as a true service and training delivery organization, providing youths with the resources and skills needed to gain employment or launch their own businesses. However, most ESA staff had never been at the front of a classroom, much less facilitated a training event. By pairing experienced facilitators from local NGO partners, the YES Network project was able to build the capacity of ESA staff to successfully deliver trainings.

Component 4: Supporting inclusion of Youth with Disabilities in YES Network programs, in partnership with Civil Society, particularly DPOs

The Youth with Disabilities component was added to the project in 2013 through a modification of the Cooperative Agreement aimed at expanding participation of people with disabilities in USAID programming. As part of the RFA process, the YES Network project conducted a focus group with Youth with Disabilities. Findings from the focus group discussion demonstrated that Macedonian YwD did not have access to training for job-seeking skills (such as CV writing), and that many vocational training spaces, such as schools and ESA centers were physically inaccessible to these youth. In response to this need, and as part of its proposal, the YES Network outlined a series of objectives for including YwD in all YES Network Programs. The proposal, and subsequent grant, rested on the twin goals of:

- Building the capacity of DPOs, NGOs, secondary schools and ESA centers to provide employability skills training to students and youth with disabilities; and
- Ensuring the inclusion of students and youth with disabilities in workforce training and work-based learning opportunities alongside their peers rather than as separate groups of beneficiaries.

Instead of creating new content, the YES Network project sought to leverage its reach and training through adapting its already widely adopted curricula. Each of the YES Network curricula (Work Readiness Skills, Work-Based Learning, Mentors in Companies, and Career Planning/Counseling) were enhanced with guidelines for inclusion of youth with various types of disability – sensory, physical and intellectual. The curriculum revisions also included suggestions for alternative activities to be used in mixed/inclusive groups.

In addition, the project distributed assistive technology devices and software (big-button large-print keyboards, computer mouse alternatives for persons with physical disabilities, screen reading software for persons with visual impairment) to seven ESA Job Clubs. Assistive technology for YwD was also distributed to 36 mainstream and four special secondary schools in seven municipalities. The YES Network project also furnished and equipped Career Centers in all four special needs VET schools for YwD in the country.

“My Disability Makes Me Strive for Success”

Ivica Simjanovski, a young lawyer with partial visual impairment, came to the Work Readiness Skills training expecting another certificate he can put in his professional CV. He could not imagine that he soon would be provided with an opportunity to implement the skills gained during the training on a real and demanding job.

“The training made me think differently about things I know. I got a complete picture of the skills I now apply, which will help me endure work pressure and survive on the job,” says Simjanovski, who was recently hired by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Macedonia. Simjanovski is one of the four youth with disabilities who secured employment after attending Work Readiness Skills training as part of the USAID Youth Employability Skills (YES) Network Project. Youth acquired a set of communication, leadership, teamwork, job-seeking and financial skills - a much needed asset which proved to help them get a job in the open labor market.

Simjanovski says, “Thanks to the challenges I am facing in life, I became persistent, determined and hardworking. These qualities helped me find a job, and the skills I got from the training are already helping me to distinguish myself as a successful professional.”

Persons with disabilities were also part of the organizing team. This was the first time that YES awarded a grant to one disabled peoples’ organization (DPO) to deliver skills training to unemployed youth in mixed groups. By pairing DPOs with limited training delivery experience with youth-serving NGOs experienced in Work Readiness Skills training delivery to unemployed youth, YES Network is strengthening DPOs’ capacity to take up the role of lead training providers. Following these successful workshops in Skopje, YES replicated this approach with DPOs from Bitola, Prilep, Stip, Strumica, Tetovo and Gostivar. “All trainers from our association are persons with disabilities. Thanks to their experience in the inclusion field, they did well and made the group work as a whole,” says Daniela Stojanovska - Djingovska, President of the Association of Students and Youth with Disabilities.

Delivering Training to YwD

In order to bolster the capacity of inexperienced disabled people’s organizations’ (DPOs) staff, the project borrowed from its own model of pairing NGO and ESA facilitators: the project connected staff from DPOs with facilitators from experienced youth-serving NGOs.

School teachers, on the other hand, were trained by experienced inclusion consultants and monitored, during mixed-group training delivery (meaning groups of participants with and without disabilities), by ESA and VET Center advisors. Using this model, the YES Network project:

- Trained DPO and NGO facilitators delivered YES Network curricula to inclusive groups of out-of-school, unemployed and unregistered youth, using accessible DPO premises or centers for social work as a venue;
- Trained ESA facilitators from all 30 ESA centers in the country to deliver the YES Network Curricula to inclusive groups;
- Adapted the YES Network curricula to create tailored versions for use in both mainstream schools and special secondary VET schools for students with visual, hearing and intellectual disabilities, and trained selected teachers in how to integrate students with disabilities in the optional courses; and
- Trained mentors certified through the YES Network Mentors in Companies program, and representing seven municipalities, to include students and youth with disabilities in practical training and internships.

Engagement through Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs)

With the establishment of the Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities component, YES Network used LESCs to bring together all project stake holders to organize and support local awareness raising initiatives on inclusion and employability of youth with disabilities. All six LESCs, with the exception of EC Prilep, appointed DPO representatives as full-fledged members who contributed to the inclusiveness of all LESCs initiatives like Local Action Plans for Employment, LED strategies, as well as events and panels organized by the LESCs. Below are two successful examples of LESCS that stood out as inclusion champions:

- LESCS Bitola partnered with a local DPO to organize a series of events on social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities:
 - **Crafts fair and a panel on employment of persons with disabilities.** Bringing together the Bitola Mayor, municipal officials, business community, ESA, NGO, and DPO representatives, this panel was organized to raise awareness about the Law on Employment of Persons with Disabilities and to discuss legally guaranteed incentives for both employees and employers of persons with disabilities.
 - **Panel on safety and protection of persons with disabilities in the workplace.** The Bitola Mayor applauded the involvement of persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in municipal decision-making.
- Social inclusion and employability of persons with disabilities was one of the priorities of the LESCS Strumica Local Action Plan for Employment (LAPE). As follow-up to the LAPE, LESCS Strumica, supported by the municipality's Local Economic Development (LED) Department, applied for EU funds and developed an Action Plan for Employment of Persons with Disabilities which was presented in front of MoLSP, ESA, business community, special school, NGO and DPO representatives. The action

plan is expected to contribute to increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities in Strumica.

Sustainability

- The YES Network curricula adapted for YwD have been formally adopted by the national VET Center, and also included in ESA's Annual Operational Plan for active labor market measures and Services. This ensures the sustainability of this inclusive training, as the ESA Annual Operational Plan incorporate ongoing budgeted training workshops for YwD.
- In addition, the Work Readiness Skills (WRS) and the Work Based Learning (WBL) programs were officially adopted as optional classes/curricula for the special schools for students with disabilities (SwD). These programs were endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) which will ensure their implementation by allocating funds for the optional classes from the state/municipality budget. However, the official endorsement of the programs is no guarantee for their continuous implementation in special schools for SwD. This will primarily depend on the availability of WRS and WBL trained teachers, their willingness to teach these classes as standalone subjects and the dedication of the school management to mandate the offer of the optional classes, in the Annual Work Programs for each school year.
- Special schools have a strong incentive to introduce WRS and WBL as optional courses for the upcoming school year. The number of regular classes is constantly decreasing, with the decrease in the number of SwD enrolling in special secondary schools. For this reason, special school management readily accepted this commitment, as they look for additional sources of funding to keep dedicated teachers on board.

Lessons Learned

- **Attitudes count.** Throughout implementation of the YwD component, the YES Network project found initial resistance to inclusion on the part of teachers, facilitators, businesses and others. However, once youth with disabilities were included in activities, their inclusion catalyzed change, and many formerly reluctant stakeholders became champions of inclusion.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

In 6 years, the YES Network project was able to create a model for systemic, sustainable, and scalable change within Macedonia that:

- Connects the private and public sectors through Local Economic and Social Councils;
- Has seen the national adoption of all YES Network programs by the VET center and ESA, ensuring the ongoing rollout of these programs in secondary vocational schools and ESA centers nationwide; and
- Creates a model for inclusion of youth with disabilities in learning, in the workplace, and within civil society.

This section includes YES Network's achievements by component, as well as the project indicators table. These are the results, as reported through the fifth project component: Monitoring and Evaluation.

Component 1: A Municipality-based Approach to Youth Employability

The YES Network project launched 7 Local Economic and Social Councils through:

- Strategic planning, networking and capacity building workshops that were organized with all six LESC and one LEC participating.
- The annual operational plans of five LESC are included in the local economic development programs of the Municipal Councils
- In Strumica, secondary schools added four new vocational profiles for students, as a result of the Local Labor Market (LLM) Analysis initiated through the Strumica LESC.

Component 2: Career Preparation in Secondary Schools

Secondary schools were brought into the YES Network through training on the following curricula:

- Four academic years in a row (2012/2013 – 2015/2016), the WRS program has been implemented in schools as a full 72-school hour either as an optional course, or via integration into existing mandatory subjects. Evaluation findings reveal that, on average, 47% of trained teachers implement⁶ the program each year. Over the life of the project, 7,289 students completed the entire program through the free classes, and 23,704 students participating in select activities integrated through various regular subjects.
- The WBL program was implemented through partner schools for a consecutive three academic years (2013/2014 – 2015/2016) as a 66- school hour either as an optional course, or through integration into existing mandatory subjects, such as Practical Instruction. On average, this program is implemented by 50% of the trained teachers each year. Over the life of project, 2,431 students completed the entire

⁶ Due to staff rotations at schools, not all trained teachers in a given school are able to teach free classes each year.

program, and 1,839 students participating in select activities integrated through classes on Practical Instruction.

- The career counseling program was implemented for two consecutive academic years (2014/2015 – 2015/2016) as a full 72-school hour optional course in VET schools, and as a 33-school hour optional class in the form of a “project-based activity” in Gymnasia, as well as through integration in the existing mandatory subjects, or through individual counseling sessions. A total of 242 teachers from 49 of the 52 schools (three were not yet included) were trained to use the career counseling program with their students; 82% have since implemented the program with their students. In total, career counseling has reached: 1,557 students through the free classes; 938 through integration during the regular classes; 287 students through individual career counseling; and 333 students in group career counseling.
- More than half (58%) or 141 of the trained teachers and psychologists for the Career planning program were trained to use BIPO, and of them 63 teachers/psychologists from 31 school have administered BIPO to 1843 secondary school students.
- On average, 82% of all three groups of youth completing the WRS program report an improvement in their employability skills.
- WRS, WBL, Career Counseling, and Mentors in Companies curricula, and their adapted versions for inclusion of YWDs, have been officially approved and adopted by the VET⁷ center.

Component 3: Preparing Unemployed Youth for Work through Employment Service Agencies

Through ESA centers, YES Network reached unemployed, and unregistered youth through:

- YES Network invested in creation of venues for delivering workforce related activities by upgrading/establishing seven Job Clubs in the ESA centers and 52 Career Centers (CCs), in secondary schools, including 4 special schools. These venues have been actively used for the implementation of the three programs, but also for other activities of the students, such as presentations, preparations for competitions etc.
- YES Network enhanced ESA services in 30 ESA centers with WRS, WBL and CCP training programs, although Job Clubs were furnished in only 7 of the 30 centers.
- Staff from 7 ESA centers were trained to deliver inclusive WRS and WBL workshops to unemployed youth.
- 7 Job Clubs in ESA centers in Bitola, Strumica, Tetovo, Gostivar, Stip, Prilep and Skopje were renovated, equipped and functioning.
- ESA staff from 30 ESA centers delivered WRS workshops encompassing 4,436 unemployed young persons, including 40 youth with disabilities.

⁷ Vocation Education and Training

Component 4: Supporting inclusion of Youth with Disabilities in YES Network programs

The youth with disabilities component saw the inclusion of:

- NGOs and DPOs delivered WRS training to 401 unemployed and unregistered at ESA young persons, 33 being youth with disabilities. Seven (7) of these YwD secured employment after the training.
- A total of 40 YwD registered as job-seekers with ESA took part in mixed-group WRS workshops in ESA Job Clubs. Four (4) of these YwD secured employment, with the support and mediation of ESA staff.
- Students with disabilities (SwD), attending both mainstream and special education schools, benefitted from YES Network programs for two fiscal years in a row. In FY 15, 30 mainstream and 160 special school SwD benefitted from WRS, while eight mainstream and 36 special school students benefitted from the WBL Program in both “free” and integrated classes. In FY 16, 25 mainstream and 149 special school SwD completed the WRS Program in both “free” and integrated classes. Eighty (80) special school SwD completed the WBL Program in integrated classes.
- Additionally, 144 teachers were trained on use of assistive technology for inclusion of YwD in their practices. Assistive Technology use was assessed as needing further development, though, and should be encouraged and supported through future interventions to maximize the potential of SwD and make use of the AT already deployed by YES Network. To this end, the project sent letters to all 7 mayors (regarding the AT deployed in secondary schools) and 7 ESA centers listing what AT was provided and how it can be used, or loaned to DPOs or other schools that teach SwD.
- A total of 67 business community representatives were trained to mentor students and youth with disabilities in the workplace, within the Mentors in Companies Program.

YES Network Project Indicators

Project Goal: Enhance the Employability Skills of Macedonian Youth

Indicator Type	Indicator Number and Definition	LOP Target	LOP Actual	Source/ Frequency
Standard	4.6.3-2 Number of persons receiving new employment or better employment (including better self-employment) as a result of participation in USG-funded workforce development programs <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	1,051	1,181	ESA and NGOs reports/Annually
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-2a Number of men	368	406	
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-2b Number of women	683	775	
Standard Output	4.6.3-9 Person hours of training completed in workforce development supported by USG assistance	555243	733673,5	Project DB/Annually

Indicator Type	Indicator Number and Definition	LOP Target	LOP Actual	Source/Frequency
	<i>Disaggregation: gender</i>			
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-9a Number of men	254888,5	349491	
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-9b Number of women	300354,5	384182,5	
Standard Output	4.6.3-10 Number of days of USG funded technical assistance in workforce development provided to counterparts or stakeholders	1315	1520	Finance docs/ Annually
Custom Outcome	Percentage of youth reporting on improved level of employability skills <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	40% ⁸	80% (WRS) ⁹ 91% (WBL-students) ¹⁰ 79% (WBL-ESA youth) ¹¹	Surveys, focus groups/ Annually
IR1: Demand-Supply labor exchange at the local level improved through Public-Private dialogue				
Custom Outcome	1.1 Number of Local Economic and Social Councils (LESC) functioning ¹² <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>	7	7	Project DB, surveys/ Annually
IR2: Capacities of NGOs and DPOs for development of employability skills in youth (including YWDs) strengthened				
Custom Outcome	2.1 Local youth NGOs and DPOs provide career related services to number of unemployed, unregistered and out of school youth, including youth with disabilities <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	383	308 (34 YWD)	Project DB/Q/A
IR3: Capacities of ESA centers for development of employability skills in youth (including YWDs) strengthened				
Custom Outcome	3.1 Number of Job clubs (JC) functioning ¹³ <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>	7	7	Project docs/Q/A
Custom Outcome	3.2 Number of unemployed youth participating in career related workshops delivered by ESA staff <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	4400	4436	Project DB/Q/A
IR4: Relevance and responsiveness of Secondary Schools and VET Center increased, including continuing professional development for secondary schools				
Custom Output	4.1 Number of Career centers (CC) functioning ¹⁴ <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>	48	48	Project docs/Q/A
Custom Outcome	4.2 Percentage of trained secondary school teachers implementing career related activities	50%	46% (WRS) ¹⁵	Surveys, observation,

⁸ This percentage is not increasing because it refers to measurements of the employability skills obtained from more objective sources which we still search for. If we continue using the self-reporting the targets will be at least doubled.

⁹ 2626 out of 3279 surveyed youth (all youth) that participated in WRS program in FY12, 13, 14, 15

¹⁰ 619 out of 678 surveyed secondary school students that participated in WBL program in FY13, 14, 15

¹¹ 336 out of 423 surveyed youth trained through ESA centers that participated in WBL program in FY14, 15

¹² Calculated by number of LESCS functioning (according to the definition given in the PIRS) in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new LESCS, they are not cumulative.

¹³ Calculated by the number of job clubs functioning in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new JCs, they are not cumulative.

¹⁴ Calculated by the number of career centers functioning in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new CCs, they are not cumulative.

¹⁵ Average from FY12, 13, 14, 15

Indicator Type	Indicator Number and Definition	LOP Target	LOP Actual	Source/Frequency
	both through the free classes and integrated in the existing subjects <i>Disaggregation: gender, muni., program, disability</i>		47% (WBL) ¹⁶ 57,5% (CP) ¹⁷	school reports/Annually
Custom Outcome	4.3 Number of curricula developed by YES Network Project adopted by the relevant institutions. <i>Disaggregation: program</i>	3	3 ¹⁸	Project docs/Annually
Custom Output	4.4 Number of students completing the elective courses based on the new curricula (WRS, WBL and CP)	9083	11520 ¹⁹	Project DB/Annually
Standard	4.6.3-2 Number of persons receiving new employment or better employment (including better self-employment) as a result of participation in USG-funded workforce development programs <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	1051	1181	ESA and NGOs reports/Annually
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-2a Number of men	368	406	
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-2b Number of women	683	775	
Standard Output	4.6.3-9 Person hours of training completed in workforce development supported by USG assistance <i>Disaggregation: gender</i>	555243	733673,5	Project DB/Annually
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-9a Number of men	254888,5	349491	
Sub-Indicator	4.6.3-9b Number of women	300354,5	384182,5	
Standard Output	4.6.3-10 Number of days of USG funded technical assistance in workforce development provided to counterparts or stakeholders	1315	1520	Finance docs/Annually
Custom Outcome	Percentage of youth reporting on improved level of employability skills <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	40% ²⁰	80% (WRS) ²¹ 91% (WBL-students) ²² 79% (WBL-ESA youth) ²³	Surveys, focus groups/ Annually
IRI: Demand-Supply labor exchange at the local level improved through Public-Private dialogue				
Custom	I.1 Number of Local Economic and Social	7	7	Project DB,

¹⁶ Average from FY13, 14, 15

¹⁷ Average from FY14, 15

¹⁸ (WRS, WBL, CP, Mentors in Companies) + adapted versions for inclusion of YWD in all 4 programs

¹⁹ This number includes 6886 students completing WRS, 2541 WBL and 2093 CP programs implemented during the length of the project

²⁰ This percentage is not increasing because it refers to measurements of the employability skills obtained from more objective sources which we still search for. If we continue using the self-reporting the targets will be at least doubled.

²¹ 2626 out of 3279 surveyed youth (all youth) that participated in WRS program in FY12, 13, 14, 15

²² 619 out of 678 surveyed secondary school students that participated in WBL program in FY13, 14, 15

²³ 336 out of 423 surveyed youth trained through ESA centers that participated in WBL program in FY14, 15

Indicator Type	Indicator Number and Definition	LOP Target	LOP Actual	Source/Frequency
Outcome	Councils (LESC) functioning ²⁴ <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>			surveys/ Annually
IR2: Capacities of NGOs and DPOs for development of employability skills in youth (including YWDs) strengthened				
Custom Outcome	2.1 Local youth NGOs and DPOs provide career related services to number of unemployed, unregistered and out of school youth, including youth with disabilities <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	383	308 (34 YWD)	Project DB/Q/A
IR3: Capacities of ESA centers for development of employability skills in youth (including YWDs) strengthened				
Custom Outcome	3.1 Number of Job clubs (JC) functioning ²⁵ <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>	7	7	Project docs/Q/A
Custom Outcome	3.2 Number of unemployed youth participating in career related workshops delivered by ESA staff <i>Disaggregation: gender, municipality, program, disability</i>	4,400	4,436	Project DB/Q/A
IR4: Relevance and responsiveness of Secondary Schools and VET Center increased, including continuing professional development for secondary schools				
Custom Output	4.1 Number of Career centers (CC) functioning ²⁶ <i>Disaggregation: municipality</i>	48	48	Project docs/Q/A
Custom Outcome	4.2 Percentage of trained secondary school teachers implementing career related activities both through the free classes and integrated in the existing subjects <i>Disaggregation: gender, muni., program, disability</i>	50%	46% (WRS) ²⁷ 47% (WBL) ²⁸ 57,5% (CP) ²⁹	Surveys, observation, school reports/Annually
Custom Outcome	4.3 Number of curricula developed by YES Network Project adopted by the relevant institutions. <i>Disaggregation: program</i>	3	4 ³⁰	Project docs/Annually
Custom Output	4.4 Number of students completing the elective courses based on the new curricula (WrS, WbL and CP)	9083	11520 ³¹	Project DB/Annually

²⁴ Calculated by number of LESCS functioning (according to the definition given in the PIRS) in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new LESCS, they are not cumulative.

²⁵ Calculated by the number of job clubs functioning in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new JCs, they are not cumulative.

²⁶ Calculated by the number of career centers functioning in the FY. Targets and actuals refer to new CCs, they are not cumulative.

²⁷ Average from FY12, 13, 14, 15

²⁸ Average from FY13, 14, 15

²⁹ Average from FY14, 15

³⁰ (WRS, WBL, CP, Mentors in Companies) + adapted versions for inclusion of YWD in all 4 programs

³¹ This number includes 6886 students completing WRS, 2541 WBL and 2093 CP programs implemented during the length of the project

IV. ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

YES Network conducted five annual evaluations to produce four extensive annual evaluation reports (for FY2012/13/14/15) and one brief evaluation report for the nine-month period from October 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. The purpose of these evaluations was to inform the project about its achievements, and to identify challenges and potential solutions. For these evaluations, the project gathered data from all participants: direct beneficiaries, such as teachers, ESA employees, NGO facilitators, as well as the indirect beneficiaries, such as secondary school students, unemployed youth (both registered and unregistered), and youth with disabilities.

Multiple methods were used to analyze findings, including paper-based and online surveys, focus groups, workshop/class observations and interviews. Throughout the five years of measurement, these findings show consistent progress towards the YES Network project objectives. The positive attitude of the beneficiaries, consistently elicited throughout data collection, is promising in regards to the potential sustainability of the project activities. Nonetheless, the findings from these evaluations indicate that to reach true sustainability, additional certain amount of resources and organization efforts are required. The findings and implications for sustainability are outlined below.

Evaluation Findings

1. The seven LESC, including EC Prilep, which was under the project umbrella, have been supported by, and in turn supported a series of capacity building activities at the local level. They have initiated and implemented a local labor market analysis, held public debates on locally relevant topics (i.e., youth employment green jobs) or initiated events such as Job Fairs or Crafts Fairs exhibiting handicrafts made by youth with disabilities. As the LESC gained maturity, they began organizing events with significant impact, such as the development of the Rapid Response Technical Skills Training model, the launch of the Socially Responsible Business awards, and the Social Entrepreneurship Ideas Competition.
2. Despite the fact that the YES Network project was designed as a supply-side intervention that did not have in its mandate to generate jobs, some successful pilot initiatives, such as the Rapid Response Technical Skills Training, resulted in employment of 19/30 (63%) of youth. This suggests that the model holds promise for expansion.
3. Three basic curricula relating to youth employment have been developed to address the workforce skills gap: Work Readiness Skills, Work-based learning and Career planning. All three have been approved and adopted by the VET Center, the responsible institution for the VET curricula. All three basic programs were adapted to be used in groups where students and youth with and without disabilities are included.
4. The Career Planning program has been enhanced with the first nationally developed Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation (BIPO) aimed to be used with

secondary school students and unemployed youth at the age of 16 and above to help them make appropriate career choices, because the self-assessment is a first and very important step in development of realistic and achievable plans. BIPO consists of three tests: a Professional interests test; a Professional values test; and a Personality inventory. In addition, an on-line version of the BIPO has been created and featured on the MOES and ESA websites.

5. Alongside the three core programs, two additional curricula have been created: Mentors in Companies and Teacher Externships. The Mentors in Companies program is aimed at engaging private sector partners in actively mentoring youth during work-based learning or internship programs. It is already approved by the MoES. The Teacher Externship program is designed to help provide VET teachers with first-hand experience with current and emerging technical skills in the teacher's area of expertise. This program applies a workplace-based approach to upgrading and up-skilling teacher instruction in technical skill domains.
6. WRS workshops have been included in the ESA Operational Plan for 2015 and 2016, which is to provide for sustainability of the programs after project ends. During five years of implementation 4,037 unemployed youth registered through ESA completed the programs, 46 of whom were youth with disabilities.
7. In response to a request from the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, ESA staff from additional 23 ESA centers were trained to deliver WRS program to unemployed, including youth with disabilities. It means that now, the WRS workshops to unemployed youth have been delivered in all 30 ESA centers that exist in Macedonia.

Feedback from Youth

Evaluations consistently found that youth enrolled in YES Network activities felt more confident in their preparedness for work, and more certain that they understood the steps needed to secure employment.

Findings from focus groups with students regarding the Work Readiness Skills curriculum

Youth reported:

- Increased self-confidence
- Acquired practical knowledge and skills useful for life
- All students participate, express their opinion, ask questions
- There was a non-judgmental and relaxed atmosphere
- The teachers are completely dedicated to the students and have a friendly attitude
- Students have received more than they had expected



- The curriculum to be implemented without greater pauses
- The self-evaluation tools to be regularly used
- An interview with an employer would be helpful
- More examples relevant for the vocation would be helpful
- When not encouraged by the teachers to contact employers, students should take the initiative themselves
- Students who attended training the previous year would be best to promote the program at school
- Information about the curriculum could be shared on Facebook or another website

Findings from focus groups with youth at ESA regarding work readiness skills curriculum

Youth reported:

- Increased self-confidence
- They had a more complete picture of the complexity of the job searching process
- A greater initiative for searching for a job and internship
- They had learned about modern forms of applying for job
- They had interviewed with an employer
- The reality does not support the benefits — employers should be trained as well

Findings from focus groups with youth – NGO regarding work readiness skills curriculum

Youth reported:

- Greater self-confidence, awareness of oneself, composure and self-control
- Readiness to speak in front of a group
- Greater motivation and initiative for searching for a job and internship
- Improved CV and motivation letter writing skills, as well as self-presentation in an interview, as a result of which, according to some, they are invited for an interview



Youth participate in a workshop in 2013.

Youth Quotes

“Our time in the future is better planned, something which we would never have done if it wasn’t for this curriculum.”

— Secondary School Student, regarding the WRS curriculum

I thought that it would be some regular lecture, the second day I went there and it was very interesting and in the end it was even strange to finish the socialization every day. We learned many things and we perfected our previous knowledge. I am satisfied!”

—Unemployed Youth, regarding ESA WRS/WBL programs

“I thought that one could apply for a job only after a vacancy announcement, and in the lecture I learned, realized that one could go to a company self-initiatively and ask for a job.”

—Unemployed Youth, regarding ESA WRS/WBL programs

“Through games I learned how to recognize people's qualities and work better in a team, which is the case with me after the workshop.”

—Youth participant, inclusive workshop

“The interview, the simulation, helped me a lot. I went to an interview and as a result of it I was called for an internship. Thanks to the training I have greater self-confidence.”

—Unemployed, unregistered youth, NGO workshop participant

“I know that now I have greater self-confidence, I have greater courage to go [to an interview] and to be more composed in presenting my strengths. I have the perception that I know something more than the one who has not attended such training.”

—Unemployed, unregistered youth NGO workshop participant

Feedback from Facilitators and Teachers

Teachers and facilitators consistently reported a high degree of motivation and engagement with the project and project curricula. These participants reported that the content was approachable, making it easy to “hook” youth. Indeed, for ESA facilitators, many of whom had never been trainers, the approachability of the curricula and pedagogy was key to transforming ESA staff into deliverers of training.



Findings from focus groups with teachers regarding the Work readiness skills curriculum

Facilitators participate in a training on WBL.

Teachers and facilitators reported:

- More secure, more independent and more responsible students
- Students with more interest for the class than usually
- Increased motivation in weaker students
- Better assessments by the employers when students went on to practical training
- Integration increases student interest for the subject
- Organizational difficulties – schedule, transportation, materials

Facilitator and Teacher Quotes

“...those [students] who are involved are much more different, they are independent, they can present at any moment, they believe in themselves and in what they have acquired.”

—WRS/WBL Teacher

“At a certain moment, when the children are not interested in the class, if I include some of these exercises, they immediately wake up from the dream and are motivated to work.”

—WRS/WBL Teacher

“The experience from my training in the company was very positive. I did learn more about the production process, the organizational structure and the new technology they’ve been using. It helps me a lot especially in improvement and updating of my teaching materials with new content which is very relevant to what students are going to be faced with during WBL activities.”

—Teacher Externship Participant

Findings from workshop observation in ESA centers

Participants reported:

- An interactive approach is used
- Content is relevant for youth
- Job Club resources are used
- An employer is invited as a guest
- Improvement of some of the training facilitating skills is necessary

Impact of the YES Network Project

While overall youth unemployment and under-employment remain high in an overall weak labor market, the YES Network has made an observable impact on the system of work preparation and labor exchange. While public institutions have a well-earned reputation for

being able to absorb innovation without actually changing, YES Network impacts seem likely to have had lasting impacts – on several municipalities, most VET schools, and all ESA centers. Here are some reflections on each:

Civil Society

- LESC's are likely to become innovation laboratories, experimenting with local solutions to addressing youth unemployment.
- Some innovations from LESC's have already been scaled, or demonstrate a high potential for scalability. These include the Socially Responsible Business Awards (LESC Tetovo), and the Rapid Response Technical Skills Training (LESC Skopje, LESC Tetovo, and MAMEI's idea for job-specific skills training in Prilep).
- All LESC's initiated awareness-raising events and LESC Bitola organized a panel on employment for YwD.
- DPOs became better service providers to their members and constituents; NGOs delivered inclusive mixed-group trainings.

Teachers, Administrators, ESA, NGO, and DPO Facilitators

- Teachers were active and eager adopters of the five YES Network curricula, viewing each one as steps to increasing professional development.
- ESA staff learned how to become effective trainers and facilitators. Many ESA staff reported feeling content and proud that they can offer the youth training that fits their needs and way of communication. For most of the ESA staff, participating in the YES Network project was their first experience acting as a facilitator of an interactive training. The ESA facilitators put a lot of effort into learning this role, and most of them had very positive experiences with facilitation. The project found that ESA staff reported being eager to continue delivering such trainings to other youth groups. ESA facilitators felt that one of the key components of their success was the support that they received from local NGOs for preparation and delivery of the training programs.

Youth and Employability, Youth with Disabilities

- Youth reported an increase in confidence in their job-seeking skills, and a greater understanding of how to prepare and pursue a career.
- Youth learned about entrepreneurship/self-employment as a positive and exciting alternative to traditional career pathways. Social entrepreneurship held a particular interest for youth, indicating a desire to positively engage with civil society.
- Youth with Disabilities were included in all YES Network programs, and participating youth with disabilities reported feeling welcome and wanted in their schools and youth training groups. They felt more confident in their job seeking skills, and more independent as they could rely on themselves, not on their parents and teachers, to find and secure a job.
- MOLSP supported YwD inclusion in the labor market, specifically listing these youth as beneficiaries of the Active Labor Market Measures included in ESA's Annual Operational Plan for 2016.

- National intuitions (MOES, MOLSP, VET Center, and ESA) have adopted YES Network programs into their national curricula and programs.

Gender

- YES Network activities encompassed all genders, reflecting the natural proportion in the target groups. Regarding the general population, women and girls were more present in all target groups, more teachers are female and this was reflected in the demographics of ESA facilitators and of students and youth.
- The majority of the youth participating in inclusive group trainings were male. In consultation with local DPOs, it was confirmed that the girls and women with disability face double discrimination – based on their gender and their disability. They are less encouraged to be included in the wider social life and in mainstream education. This is an issue that needs to be taken seriously in the future projects on inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Young women with disabilities who took part in YES Network programs felt particularly empowered as they have fewer opportunities, than their male peers, to access training and jobs. They felt encouraged to get out of their comfort zones (homes, special schools, etc.) and look for jobs and volunteering opportunities.

This training instilled in me a can-do attitude to persist despite the challenges.”

—Hazize Jonuzi, 30 year-old unemployed

WRN! Credential

The WRN! Credential is an objective exam designed to measure the adoption of the skills and knowledge obtained through the WRS curriculum implementation. The piloting of the exam started in September 2013 with WRS graduates from 5 secondary schools and 4 ESA centers. Secondary schools participated in testing only during the 2013 pilot. Following the pilot administration, the exam was administered to ESA graduates in subsequent years on a quarterly basis, encompassing 137 students and 176 ESA graduates. 96 of the students, or 70% successfully passed the exam, while among the ESA graduates the pass rate is 81%, or 143 graduates. All youth who completed the exam were awarded a certificate and an on-line badge for passing the exam and having the performance skills for employment.

Challenges

As with all ambitious projects, the YES Network met some undeniable challenges during its implementation:

Mayoral Buy-In for Local Economic and Social Councils

While early LESC (Tetovo, Strumica, Bitola) and in Gostivar and Stip, there is considerable local commitment and optimism. However, in LESC that were unable to engage municipality council support (Skopje and Prilep), sustainability is threatened because LESC cannot guarantee funds for their action plans. In LESC Skopje, private sector support mitigated the lack of mayoral support, perhaps indicating a potential alternative model for institutionalizing LESC.

Commitment for Meaningful Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities

Few resources are available to support the inclusion of YwD in mainstream schools. For example, with the exception of Strumica, no secondary schools had special educators on staff. In addition, large class sizes (over 30 students per class) placed a heavy burden on teachers, who needed to balance resources and time for all students within a classroom.

There was a general lack of support for inclusion of YwD in Employment Service Agency centers, and few examples of collaboration between ESA centers and disabled people's organizations to reach out to YwD, particularly in Tetovo, Bitola, and Strumica.

In schools, ESA centers, Job Clubs and Career Centers, there was wide underuse of assistive technology. A few notable exceptions were the Iskra secondary school for students with intellectual disabilities, as well as two mainstream schools from Skopje and Prilep whose teachers attended extensive assistive technology training and monitoring as part of USAID E-Accessible Education project.

Lower participation of young women with disabilities in YES Network programs. The project found that young women with disabilities dropout from school at a higher rate than their male peers, often leading to increasing isolation and stigma. However, young women who did participate in YES Network programs reported feeling empowered and encouraged to look for jobs.

USAID's Vision of Workforce Interventions

A supply-side project is only one half of the supply/demand picture originally envisioned by USAID. With the new, separate "demand-side" project component beginning in Year 2 of the YES Network project, some of the project's initial structures and activities focused on training or other supply-side measures. While compensatory measures were somewhat effective (e.g., LESC development, Work-based Learning, and Mentors in Companies), it would have been better to have a forthright full partner project on the "demand" side to develop a more robust private employer presence (i.e. there was no mechanism to help stimulate the private sector participation in this endeavor). Moreover, and in hindsight, the most effective solution may likely have been not to even separate "demand" and "supply" sides of workforce, but to have one activity and a single award that would work on both sides of the equation.

GOM Buy-In and Sustainability

Following the signing of an Annex to the Memorandum of Understanding with YES Network to cover the period of a nine months no-cost extension, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), formed a working group to develop separate WRS and WBL curriculum plans for four special secondary schools for students with intellectual, visual, and hearing disabilities. The curricula were adopted as "free classes" (optional courses) by the national VET center in March 2016, and endorsed by the MoES with an official letter to school directors requesting to incorporate the YES Network programs in their regular "free classes" (optional course) schedule. While an excellent development, it could be argued it occurred a little late, and would benefit from ongoing YES Network facilitation and communication. In addition, for the contents of these courses to become available to all students in secondary schools, be it only VET or both VET and gymnasiums, and for students to be able to acquire the soft skills needed in the modern workplace through their

formal education, the project and the MOES should have initiated a review of mandatory subjects' curricula in order to integrate the skills/modules in these regular subjects.

The project had an MOU with MOES only in regards to the Career Counselling component (and not the WRS, WBL, Mentor is in Companies, or Externships programs), and only with ESA (rather than the MOLSP) on the new services and trainings it was introducing for youth in ESA's offering. Entering more complex MOUs with partner institutions such as the MOES, MOLSP from the very beginning may have helped guide discussions on sustainability from early on, and may have facilitated a clearer division of responsibilities on the part of the project providing the assistance and the beneficiary institution that would need to include the newly introduced program contents and services into the regular work of its staff and into its regular offerings.

At YES Network's request, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MoLSP) enlisted YwD as a separate category of WRS training beneficiaries in ESA's Annual Operational Plan for 2016. All ESA Job Clubs are expected to invite and include YwD in their WRS and WBL workshops.

At least two other promising measures would have benefited from earlier and longer implementation:

- **Teacher Externships** could benefit from creative use of both national requirements and teacher development stipend resources. The work on this initiative could have been better coordinated with USAID's Teacher Professional and Career Development project that worked from December 2012 to June 2016 and helped the BDE and MOES develop a system for continuous professional development and career advancement of teachers, principals and student support staff in schools.
- **Career Centers:** There are now Career Centers in 52 secondary schools, and 286 teachers and psychologists from 66 secondary schools have been trained to perform career counseling and vocational guidance/professional orientation. Regarded as a highly successful innovation, EDC is concerned that without concentrated MoES and VET support they may languish as previous such interventions before them. Follow up will be required to assure that institutional support happens to ensure sustainability.

VI. SUSTAINABILITY AND WAY FORWARD

Sustainability

From the program’s inception in 2010, both EDC through YES Network and USAID have designed strategies and program elements with one focus on implementation, and another on the desire for longer-term impacts and sustainability. It’s believed that the first mission – successful implementation – was accomplished fully, and there is reason for hope that there will be lasting impacts. By sector, here is a summary:

Schools

Since the beginning of implementation of school project activities, the YES Network team worked very closely with national educational institutions to include YES Network training programs as a regular – if optional (non-mandatory) -- part of the school schedule. As the project progressed, more teachers were trained to ensure that schools could meet the needs of additional student groups interested in the programs. Coverage of students, however, was limited to a few groups of 20 – 25 students per school.

Work Readiness Skills (WRS) program is nationally approved and adopted by the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Center as an optional course for the so-called “free-classes”, where WRS modules are being delivered to third year vocational school students. Likewise, an adapted Work Based Learning program has been approved and adopted at the national level as an optional course for fourth year students. A **Career Planning program** aimed at VET school students in their second year followed the same pattern.

The Bureau for Development of Education formally approved a career planning program as a ‘project



YES closing ceremony in June, 2016.



A youth speaks at the closing ceremony, June 2016.



YES Network recognizes partners in the program at the closing ceremony, June 2016.

activity' for implementation among gymnasia students in their final year of compulsory education. This program was piloted in four gymnasia covered by our project, but due to lack of interest of the BDE it was not continued with rollout in gymnasia.

A **Career Counseling System** was allegedly one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). To this end, the YES Network conducted a comparative analysis of such systems in European and neighboring countries, developed professional competencies, and standards for career counselors. A Training of Trainers (ToT) program was then developed based on these standards and competencies, and the project trained the first group of Career Counselors. YES Network worked closely with USAID's Teacher Professional and Career Development Project on integrating career counseling competencies into the National standards of Student Support Staff (i.e. pedagogues, psychologists, social workers/sociologists and special educators).

In its efforts to improve work-based learning experiences, YES Network initiated support of the private sector. Namely, YES Network collaborated with the VET center to develop standards for **mentors in companies**, i.e. the staff members who work directly with teachers and students in the process of practical training. These standards have received positive feedback from the Ministry of Education and Science, and have been adopted by the VET Center, as well as the Chamber of Crafts of the Republic of Macedonia.

The MOES also officially adopted the mentors in companies training curriculum. The YES Network was actively engaged with the business sector encouraging them to provide feedback on the VET's curriculum and strengthening mentorship through involvement of the business associations.

Employment Service Agency (ESA)

The YES network project has achieved sustainable results in the introduction of a new training course at the Employment Services Agency (ESA) centers. Originally, selected staff members from 7 ESA offices were trained to deliver WRS training (with an overview of internships as a form of WBL during the fifth day of the WRS training) to unemployed youth. The WRS and WBL trainings started to be continuously delivered as part of regular ESA's Job Clubs activities. In partnership with the ESA, the YES Network encouraged unemployed youth to make the most use of all ESA Job Club services.

Per the request by the Minister of Labor, the YES Network trained selected members of staff from the other 23 ESA centers in WRS, WBL and Career Counseling. This means that the 3 YES Network programs are available to unemployed youth all over the country. By including the WRS training and the Career Counseling service as measures/programs in the operational plan for reducing of unemployment, the Ministry ensures the availability and sustainability of these training programs/services nationwide.

Local Economic Social Councils (LESC)

In order to overcome the lack of an effective public-private response involving collaboration among employers, government and educational institutions, YES Network facilitated the process of establishing 6 Local Economic Social Councils (LESCs) as well as supported the Local Economic Council of the municipality of Prilep directly.

To help LESCs sustain and make the best use of resources (e.g., human resources potential, knowledge and expertise, networking, funding, partners), YES Network provided an on-going support to LESCs members in the implementation of main priorities of LESCs strategic documents, strengthening the partnership between mayors and LESCs, building capacities of LESCs as a relevant factor on the local labor market and supporting LESCs networking and sharing of best practices. While no formal assessment was conducted, EDC is of the view that the LESCS approach has long-term merit as a way to engage multi-sectoral participants in local leadership. Because the LESCS approach is so dependent on local leadership (especially from mayors), there is variability in likelihood that the effort will be sustained.

Youth with Disabilities (YwD)

The inclusion of youth with disabilities in the YES Network activities was a major focus during the final two and a half years of the project. This new component was established with the aim to ensure appropriate modification and adaptation of the core curricula to be implemented for ALL youth, with and without disabilities in homogenous and inclusive groups of beneficiaries served by the various project partners: secondary schools, ESA, NGOs and DPOs. Work Readiness Skills, Work-Based Learning, Career Planning and Mentors in Companies curricula were enhanced with guidelines for inclusion of youth with various types of impairments – sensory, physical and intellectual – and with alternative activities to be used in inclusive groups. The adaptation of curricula was followed by the training of facilitators currently implementing programs with their relevant youth group. It is notable that the YES Network curricula were introduced in all 4 of the nation's special secondary schools that cater to the needs of students with disabilities: one school for hearing impaired, one for the visually impaired, and 2 for students with intellectual disabilities.

The VET center advisors, MoES and ESA officials were familiarized with the inclusive version of the program to advocate for its implementation after the end of the YES Network project.

The Work Readiness Skills (WRS) and the Work Based Learning (WBL) programs were officially adopted as optional classes/curricula for special schools for students with disabilities. These programs were endorsed by MOES, which will ensure the continued implementation of these programs through the allocation of funds for optional classes from the state budget

The RED Center

Although this process might have started earlier, in its final year of implementation YES Network nurtured a core group of employees as they launched an independent NGO, the Research, Education, and Development (RED) Center. While YES Network project funding

from USAID has concluded, the key YES Network staff who formed RED Center are determined to find ways and means to continue the YES Network's mission through other means.

Links to Government of Macedonia Agencies

Throughout its lifespan, the project worked closely with relevant government agencies, including (but not limited to) the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Vocational Education and Training Center and Employment Service Agency. Also, YES Network has established good relations with 7 partner municipalities in implementation of project activities on a local level, especially in strengthening the PPD through establishing of Local Economic and Social Councils. For reference of future such initiatives, earlier development of formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) might facilitate earlier assumption of responsibilities by governmental entities.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons Learned

The following lessons summarized for the four components are as follows:

- 1. A dual (national and local) approach is critical for systemic change.**
Throughout the project, and across all project components, the YES Network worked simultaneously with local and national entities (i.e., Local Economic and Social Council (LESCs) and municipal LESCs, VET Center and secondary schools, the central ESA and ESA centers). This dual approach generated buy-in both from top-down and from bottom-up, and was a key element of securing the nationalization of the YES Network curricula. While relationships with national entities were strong, even more regular communication might have contributed to even stronger, more durable buy-in by governmental partners.
- 2. The face of the project should be the entities who will manage activities after the project closes.** From the very beginning, all beneficiaries were referred to key institutions – LESCs, the VET Center, and ESA – for any questions, comments, or concerns. This positioned these institutions as the public face of the project, but maintained **YES Network staff available for support in the background**. This model allowed local institutions to learn from the YES Network how to manage the program elements, and enabled the project to transfer ownership of programs to local institutions very early and very successfully.
- 3. Start with mayors.** The most successful LESCs were the ones in which mayors learned to view LESCs as their partner and a vehicle for promoting municipal agenda items regarding youth employment, economic growth, or the engagement of civil

society. With mayors on board, LESC's were much more likely to have municipal funds available to implement action items, and to organize or host large events, fairs, or other public forums to enhance public-private dialogue.

4. **Budget Counts.** In the last year, five of the seven LESC's were able to link their Annual Operation Plan to municipal priorities by including it as an annex of official Local Economic Development Department. This step often occurred after LESC's were able to demonstrate their capacity as agenda setters, but is a critical and necessary step for LESC's to continue in this capacity after the YES Network project close.
5. **Experience sharing across LESC's strengthens engagement at all levels.** The YES Network project invited members from other municipalities' LESC's to participate in each and every capacity-building training workshop for LESC's. This enabled LESC's to form peer relationships with one another, strengthening the exchange of ideas and sharing of best practices. This experience sharing also allowed LESC's to take the lead in workshops where they had particular strengths.
6. **Transportation costs were an issue.** Since most of the program was implemented through optional courses, which are not held during school hours, schools struggled with how to best transport students to/from the courses throughout the week. In some cases, such as in Stip, schools were able to partner with the private sector to fund transportation costs. However, in many cases, schools were on their own in terms of finding transportation funding.
7. **Fidelity to the model isn't 100%.** Even with highly motivated school administrators and teachers, it was difficult to ensure that all teachers implemented curricula using the same methodology. For some schools, this was because teachers were not always trained on all the YES Network curricula, meaning that not all teachers received the same level of training from the project. However, within each school, and across the YES Network, certain teachers emerged as champions of the program – and it is these teachers, now recognized as Master Trainers, with whom the sustainability of the program rests.
8. **Scalability is not enough.** With a participatory learning paradigm like WRS and WBL, transmitting best practices in terms of pedagogy is just as important as training on the curriculum content. The YES Network project did train a cadre of Master Trainers able to disseminate pedagogical techniques, in addition to content knowledge. However, as the YES Network curricula gain national adoption, the onus will be on the MOES to make sure these Master Trainers are engaged to disseminate the training in schools not included in the project and to have them ensure that new training incorporates and continues to promote the participatory pedagogical model of these curricula.
9. **Set up Job Clubs in inviting spaces.** The YES Network promoted an open-door policy at Job Clubs, which were renovated, attractive, inviting spaces located within

high-traffic areas of ESA centers. This resulted in the Job Clubs playing a significant role at the heart of each ESA. ESA centers began to use Job Clubs as training venues, encouraging youth, government, and business partners to actively use the space to engage with ESA activities. These spaces also served as a signifier of the commitment of the GOM and USAID to ESA as significant partners within the YES Network. It will be up to the MOLSP to ensure the remaining 23 ESA centers where there is already trained staff that can deliver WRS and Career Counseling to also have an accessible, furnished and equipped Job Club that will be an inviting space for youth to come and benefit from ESA's services.

10. **Job Fairs bring together stakeholders and signify sustainability.** The success of Job Fairs demonstrate how a well-organized event that allows organizations to showcase their interests (businesses, in finding employees and customers; ESA in providing links to the private sector; LESC, in hosting public-private dialogue) can quickly become self-sustaining. It took only one Job Fair, organized in 2013, for ESA to view these events as critical to their broader mission of supporting youth employment. Once ESA viewed these events as part of their mission, the budget, capacity, and interest in continuing these events followed. Job Fairs have the merit of being relatively easily organized, and potentially quite public, providing positive public relations value to otherwise little-known local entities.



A youth participates in a YES Network event.

11. **Pair NGO facilitators and Employee Service Agency employees for successful training delivery.** The YES Network project envisioned ESA as true service and training delivery organizations, providing youth with the resources and skills needed to gain employment or launch a business. However, most ESA staff had never been at the front of a classroom, much less facilitated a training event. By pairing experienced facilitators from local NGO partners, the YES Network project was able to build the capacity of ESA staff to successfully deliver trainings. In the future, ESA should consider hiring NGOs/DPOs/outside Training Providers (as they already do for some of their services) in order to provide the best quality services to the registered job-seekers.
12. **Attitudes count.** Throughout implementation of the YwD component, the YES Network project found initial resistance to inclusion on the part of teachers, facilitators, businesses and others. However, once youth with disabilities were included in activities,

their inclusion catalyzed change, and many formerly reluctant stakeholders became champions of inclusion.

13. **“Nothing about us, without us” approach works.** YES Network actively involved youth with disabilities and their representative organizations (DPOs and NGOs) in the design and implementation of all-inclusive project activities. All-inclusive curricula were piloted with both homogenous YwD groups and mixed groups of youth with and without disabilities. Their feedback was always requested and incorporated to improve the programs. YES Network’s Coordinator for YwD inclusion was a blind person and she served as a role model that inclusion is not only possible, but that when given appropriate accommodations, persons with disabilities can develop their full potential and become full productive citizens.
14. **DPOs and NGOs were active promoters of YES Network trainings.** As a result, many YwD and/or their parents approached their schools and ESA centers to request places in YES Network employability skills trainings.
15. **Inclusion of youth with disabilities takes time.** The YwD component should have been started earlier, or the project should have adopted more incremental approach to expanding inclusion of youth with disabilities in YES Network programs. However, as teachers and facilitators have been trained to include YwD in all core YES Network curricula, it remains their responsibility to encourage students and youth with disabilities to participate in the trainings.

Recommendations

After working in Macedonia with the YES Network project for 6 years, EDC has the following recommendations for future programming.

1. **In order to be effective, local economic social councils (LESCs) must connect their annual operational plans or action plans to a budget.** Greater capacity building for LESCs, paired with a policy-oriented project to link LESCs with municipal budgets will help to formalize the role of LESCs.
2. **Local NGOs and Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs) need additional strengthening** of their organizational, administrative, and leadership capacity in order to effectively design, manage, and implement projects, including inclusive projects.
3. **It is essential to provide networking opportunities for local stakeholders.** Some of the most effective project components were built through peer mentoring and engagement: LESC workshops that incorporated peers from other LESCs; NGO/ESA facilitator pairs, and later, NGO/DPO facilitator pairs. Fostering peer engagement allows for learning through informal as well as formal channels.
4. **Provide and budget for professional development opportunities for teachers and ESA facilitators.** Currently, professional development opportunities for

secondary school teachers and ESA facilitators in workforce training, inclusive education, and other key topics, are not readily available. Suggested domains for professional development include: recognition/identification of students and youth with disabilities, student needs assessment and development of Individual Educational Plans for special education students, and especially a disabilities curriculum adaptation targeted towards girls with disabilities, and awareness raising on diversity and human rights. This needs to be supported by other interventions such as providing teacher assistants and lowering the number of students per class when there are students with disabilities included. Physical adaptations and provision of assistive technology is crucial.

5. **Introduce Quality Assurance systems for the work of CCs and JCs in schools and ESA.** This is something the MOES and MOLSP need to consider establishing to ensure the CCs and JCs remain relevant, provide a high-quality range of services to youth, and ultimately, ensure youth transition into employment.
6. **Youth with Disabilities (YwD) inclusion in the mainstream society is not among the current priorities of most DPOs.** These organizations primarily design and implement projects that directly benefit their members, not the entire community. Future programs should focus on DPO capacity building to design and implement projects involving inclusion as the primary goal or objective.
7. **Set up a system for monitoring the school-to-work transition.** Macedonia is lacking an effective system for monitoring the school-to-work transition, with a particular weakness regarding monitoring this transition for YwD. YwD drop out of school at higher rates than mainstream students, and there is a corresponding lack of official data on the number of job seekers with disabilities. Relatedly, the current ESA system for registration as an unemployed person places the onus on the unemployed to seek services. As a result, many youth, including YwD, drop off the radar of the exact institutions intended to assist them. Future interventions should address this gap by setting up an official, perhaps school-based, database for monitoring students and youth with disabilities during their school-to-work transition.
8. **Ensure de-institutionalization of students and youth with disabilities by transforming special schools into resource/support centers.** Special schools for students with disabilities are mainly isolated institutions, with few examples of collaboration and support to mainstream schools. A future program should prioritize special schools' transformation into YwD resource centers where mainstream primary and secondary schools can turn to for help and support with their students with disabilities.

IX. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Home Office

From the very beginning, the YES Network project was supervised and led by EDC's Erik Butler, based in the United States. As the Senior Project Director, he led the initial workforce development assessment in 2009, and headed the team that wrote the project proposal and design. Dr. Butler had deep knowledge and understanding of project objectives and deliverables as well as the Macedonia context.

As part of the Home Office team, the Project Coordinator and Financial Analyst closely supported the field office and implementation of activities in Macedonia.

In 2014, the Senior Project Director became EDC Distinguished Scholar, but continued as Workforce Advisor for the project. The project support was strengthened by appointment of Michael Tetelman as new senior Home Office position of Project Director and Public-private Dialogue (PPD) Specialist. Dr. Tetelman continued as Project Director until the project's conclusion on June 30, 2016.

Field Office

Dr. Jan Karpowicz, was hired by EDC in early November 2010 as international Chief of Party (CoP), and was posted to Skopje, Macedonia in the same month. The re-registration of the local EDC office was finalized in late December 2010, and local staff hiring was completed as scheduled by April 2011.

The initial staffing schedule was based on a plan that included a head office in Skopje with three satellite offices in Bitola, Strumica, and Tetovo. The CoP, Finance and Administration (F&A) Manager, Office and Information (O&I) Manager, Grants Manager as well as a Senior Technical Specialist (STS) for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) were intended to be based in Skopje. Also, a local Deputy Chief of Party (dCoP) was planned to be hired and based in Skopje for the first two years of the project and transitioned to Chief of Party in the third year. The STSs for Vocational Education and Training (VET), Labor Market and Public Private Dialogue (PPD), and Employment Service (ESA) were to be hired and based in the satellite offices along with a local Office Manager and a Coach/Trainer in each of office.

Since most qualified candidates for the positions of STSs were based in Skopje and relocating would require extra costs, the project decided that the organization model should adapt to assure best talent. Satellite offices were established in Bitola, Strumica and Tetovo with three local Regional Coordinators hired and based in each office. The STSs for VET, Labor Market and PPD were hired and based in the Skopje head office. Related to these changes and the fact that the core staff would be based in head office, the DCoP position was postponed.

In 2012, the STS for VET – Gjorgji Kusevski – was promoted to DCoP. After the transition period of six months when both expat CoP and local DCoP were in place, the DCoP became CoP in January 2013. With this, the localization of the CoP position was finalized. A new qualified STS for VET was hired in September 2012 to succeed Kusevski in his former role. In

May 2013, the STS for PPD had moved to another job. In June 2013, a new and qualified STS for PPD was hired.

In early 2013, EDC was awarded the Youth with Disabilities (YwD) disabilities funding which greatly enriched YES Network with a new component for more youth. The project hired a professional who is blind, as the YwD Program Coordinator in October 2013. Initially the YwD component was planned and budgeted for period of 2 years, i.e. until September 2015, however as the YES Network was extended for 9 months, the YwD component remained in operation until the end of the project.

The YES Network project was continually diligent in practicing the developed models such as promoting internship and mentoring. A total of ten interns accomplished six months internship during the life of project under the careful and patient mentoring of YES Network senior staff. After they successfully completed internship, five of them were hired as full time assistants with paid benefits for different periods of time, but more than 1 year. The rest of the interns found jobs almost immediately after completion of the internship within Network projects and are currently employed.

X. BUDGET

A comparison of actual expenditures with budget estimates, including analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs, and any other pertinent information including leverage report.

Category	A	B	C	D	E=A+B+C+D	F=E-A	
	Total Award Amount	Actual Expenses through Mar 31, 2016	Actual Expenses FY 16 Q3 (Apr 1, 2016 - Jun 30, 2016)	Estimated July-August 2016 expenses* (see note)	Total Estimated Expenses	Variance	Narrative
Salaries	\$1,965,107	1,851,739	78,482	6,156	1,936,377	(28,730)	Savings generated by lower Level of Effort of Home Office Support staff
Fringe Benefits	\$832,038	788,981	33,684	5,719	828,383	(3,655)	Savings generated by lower Level of Effort of Home Office Support staff
Allowances	\$99,760	99,760	0	0	99,760	0	No variation from budget
Consultants	\$439,963	428,238	24,028	14,946	467,212	27,249	Local Consultants/Expert Costs were more than anticipated
Travel	\$310,435	279,387	15,082	6,073	300,542	(9,893)	Travel costs were less than anticipated
Equipment	\$17,053	17,053	0	0	17,053	0	No variation from budget
Other Direct Costs	\$793,927	732,082	33,859	14,557	780,498	(13,429)	Other Direct Costs were less than anticipated
Sub-awards	\$164,397	146,995	7,228	0	154,223	(10,174)	Sub-awards were less than anticipated
Indirect Costs	\$1,501,923	1,414,034	70,298	18,031	1,502,363	440	This change is a result of the other variances discussed above and their effect on the indirect costs calculation. All indirect costs continue to be calculated in accordance with the terms of EDC's Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA).
Participant Costs	\$365,397	354,218	20,102	86.18	\$374,407	\$9,010	Participant costs were more than anticipated
Total USAID Contribution	\$6,490,000	\$6,112,487	\$282,765	\$65,567	\$6,460,819	(\$29,181)	Estimated Unexpended Funds

	Leverage Commitment	Leverage reported as of March 31, 2016	Leverage reported April 1, 2016 - June 30, 2016	Estimated Leverage generated June 2016 reported in July 2016	Estimated Total Leverage	Variance	Narrative
Non-Federal Leveraging Amount	\$401,400	\$450,919	\$65,195	\$0	\$516,114	\$114,714	EDC Generated more non-federal leverage than anticipated

*Note: The above financial report includes estimates for expenses still being processed through out accounting system, and; therefore, does not reflect the final figures. The final costs will be reported to USAID on our Final SF425, which will be submitted after receiving confirmation of our final FY2016 NICRA rates from our cognizant agency, USAID.