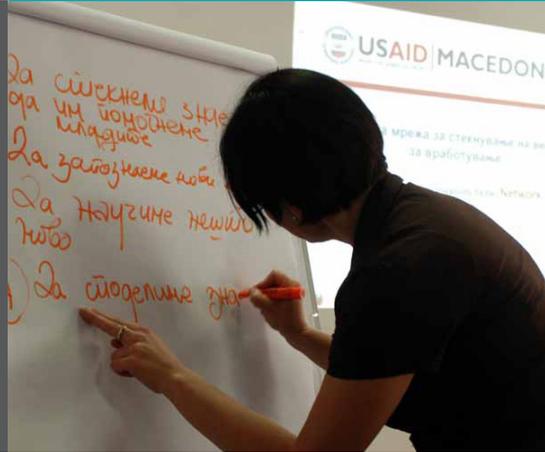




MACEDONIA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SKILLS (YES) NETWORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Introduction

Beginning in 2011, with an agreement formed through the USAID EQUIP3 program, EDC developed a tailored approach to youth development and education in this small, landlocked Eastern European country with a population of about 2 million. Formerly a part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia is in the small group of countries labeled as “pre-accession” —countries with ambitious plans for membership in the European Union. Former state-owned enterprises are privatizing, a more modern economy is slowly taking shape, and Macedonia acknowledges the need for a better-trained workforce to support the country’s economic competitiveness. In recognition of this ambition, USAID supported several initiatives to upgrade both the demand and supply side of the system of skill building and industrial modernization.

The Youth Employment Skills (YES) Network developed as the strategy for building skills of the young workforce, and was designed to match the skills of young potential workers to the fast-changing demand in the workplaces demonstrating the most growth.

Like in many other countries, high rates of youth unemployment in Macedonia are a measure of a more

complex situation. Formal schooling focuses on academics rather than on providing youth with the personal skills they need to succeed in the workplace, and attempts to maintain curricula on current technical skills have fallen short. Moreover, there is no system for connecting either new graduates or older disconnected, unemployed youth with job opportunities. As with other countries in the region, there have not yet been effective structured processes put into place to meet these challenges. However, throughout Macedonia, willing partners exist.

YES Network, led by EDC, was designed to address these mismatches in Macedonian labor markets and to demonstrate that effective strategies could work, while also creating a sustainable system that would outlive the five-year USAID investment. This ambitious project wove together four components:

Component 1: Support municipality-based Local Economic and Social Councils to encourage public-private dialogue addressing youth unemployment

Component 2: Enhance career preparation in secondary schools through work readiness training, career counseling, and work-based learning for senior students

Component 3: Strengthen the capacity of Employment

“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. These technical 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



Service Agencies to prepare unemployed youth with work readiness skills and to connect them with employment opportunities

Component 4: Support inclusion of youth with disabilities in partnership with civil society

YES Network focused on a “bottom up” strategy to begin work at the local level (starting with three key municipalities, expanding to six, and then adding the capital city of Skopje). Graphically, each local network looks like Figure 1.

Each municipality “mixed and matched” a set of tools and program elements developed and adapted to local realities, as seen in Figure 2.

What are the key accomplishments of the YES Network project and what lessons can inform other similar efforts?

Key Component 1 Accomplishments

Initiated and supported by YES Network, Local Economic and Social Councils have developed a new (and replicable) form of public-private social dialogue in seven Macedonian communities, including the largest, Skopje. Co-chaired by municipal mayors and private sector representatives, these councils have taken on a level of agenda-setting on behalf of youth that is unprecedented in Macedonia.

Lesson: Public-private partnerships may be best formed locally, engaging the self-interest of political, civil society, and private employers in modernizing the local workforce in the interest of the local economy. The mayor’s engagement is crucial, as is the credibility of the private sector leaders who agree to get involved.

YES Network Connects the Public and Private Sectors to Address Youth Unemployment



Figure 1: Local Economic and Social Councils (LESCs)

YES Network Project Training and Curricula

Work Readiness Skills



teaches youth soft skills like communication, leadership, teamwork

Work-Based Learning



provides on-the-job training and internships for youth

Career Planning



explores careers and employment pathways with youth

Technical Skills



teaches youth technical skills like welding or ICT

Mentors in Companies



teaches business leaders how to mentor interns

Teacher Externships



brings teachers into the workplace so they can upgrade their lesson plans based on current business practices

YES also adapted all trainings for youth with disabilities!

Figure 2: YES Network Project Training Elements

Key Component 2 Accomplishments

Work Readiness and Work-Based Learning programs were developed and implemented in two thirds of all Vocational Education and Training schools nationwide (52 of 77). Nearly 500 teachers were trained in the content and the methodology, which reached more than 30,933 youth across Macedonia. Both programs are now officially endorsed and included in the National Operational Plan of the Government of Macedonia (GoM) for reduction of unemployment. Similarly, YES Network's designs for Career Counseling and for Mentors in Companies have been adopted on a national scale.

Lesson: Early relationships with national authorities must be reinforced by performance on the ground. In Macedonia, regular dialogue between local schools and the Vocational Education Training (VET) Center (the national certifying body for curriculum and program accountability) was brokered by YES Network, and built around the content of soft skills training and on-the-job learning.

Lesson: Content, quality, and pedagogy matter, and so does a feeling of ownership. The proven WorkReadyNow! curriculum was adapted and refined with full engagement of Macedonian teachers, school leaders, and a group of Macedonian school personnel known as pedagogues. The interactive, student-engaged approach to learning, matched by the quality of the curriculum, was well-received from the very beginning of the project. The message from school-based people to the VET Center was enthusiastic and the results were clear to officials at both local and national levels.

Lesson about Macedonia's vocational programs: That 80 percent of youth passed the international work-readiness competency test (piloted in Macedonia and two other countries by EDC) adds an international endorsement of quality and credibility to vocational programs in this aspiring EU country living in the long shadow of European approaches to vocational training.

Key Component 3 Accomplishments

As with the VET Center, the national ESA has officially adopted both curricula. While officially focused on seven

municipalities and the Employment Service Agency (ESA) Job Centers in each, YES Network exceeded expectations, as all 30 ESA centers nationwide have adopted both work readiness and work-based learning curricula to support youth in building skills necessary for employment. Youth will be more prepared in seeking jobs and in presenting themselves to employers as work-ready. Overall, 80 percent of YES Network participants who received work-readiness training, either through ESA centers or through their schools, passed the EDC WRN! Credential test.

Lesson: Build with local organizations. YES Network staff decided early in the program to emphasize work with out-of-school, unemployed youth. In addition to working with local NGOs, this meant developing partnerships with local branches of the national government's ESA, part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Despite some concerns about whether YES could be effective in the ESA environment, reputed to be an intractable bureaucracy, the strategy to focus on local organizations paid off. The assessment and design that led to the YES Network identified a program, called Job Clubs, in several centers and elected to start there. Investing small amounts of dollars for minor renovations (usually of a single room within the ESA center), and significant human resources in upgrading and partnering Job Clubs, YES Network was able to engage with the registered unemployed youth up to age 25 with a similar program of work readiness and work-based learning services that produced good employment outcomes for youth and for employers. By the end of USAID sponsorship of the YES Network program, ESA staff from 30 ESA centers delivered work readiness skill workshops encompassing 4,436 unemployed young people.

Lesson: The identity, experience, and familiarity of local, in-country staff leadership is crucial. YES Network leaders and program specialists were well-known and respected for their earlier experience—in vocational education, in the employment service, and even in earlier USAID projects. This gave YES Network an early jump in credibility and afforded the time to prove effectiveness through the content and pedagogy of what the project offered.



“My Disability Makes Me Strive for Success”

Ivica Simjanovski, came to the Work Readiness Skills training expecting another certificate to put in his CV. He could not imagine that he would be provided with a chance to implement those skills 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. Simjanovski, a young lawyer with partial visual impairment, was recently hired by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Macedonia. He is one of four youth with disabilities who secured employment after attending Work Readiness Skills training as part of the USAID YES Network. Participants gained communication, leadership, teamwork, job-seeking and financial skills - much needed assets which proved to help them get a job in the open labor market.

This was the first training that YES awarded a grant to a disabled peoples’ organization (DPO) to deliver training to youth in mixed groups. By pairing DPOs with limited training delivery experience with more experienced youth serving NGOs, YES Network is strengthening DPOs’ capacity to take 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.

Key Component 4 Accomplishments

YES Network added inclusive services for youth with disabilities to its agenda in the third year of operations, and demonstrated convincingly that young people with disabilities can both succeed in the preparatory stages of work readiness training, but also in the on-the-job experience of work-based learning. Moreover, the inclusion-centered YES work force training approach is now part of the National Operational Plan of the GoM for reducing unemployment.

Lesson: There is a demand among both young people and education professionals for learning and adapting to the specific needs of youth with disabilities. More than 400 youth with disabilities received work readiness training and 160 teachers were trained in facilitation of inclusive work readiness and work-based learning. More than 60 working professionals mentored young people. Similarly, Job Club staff in the seven targeted ESAs received training and are applying this training in employment services to people with disabilities. While momentum is building slowly, the first young people with disabilities to have been hired in full-

time jobs have convinced their peers, mentors, and the GoM that work success is possible.

Lesson: If you build it they will come. Specialized services began in Year 3 and was offered to students with disabilities who attended both mainstream and special education schools. Over two years, 364 students with disabilities received training in work readiness skills while 124 special school students took part in the work-based learning program. YES was able to reach more youth with its inclusion-centered work force training approach and set the stage for future developments in youth programming.

Finally, YES Network’s accomplishments over the five-year period are evident in the establishment of the Association for Research, Education and Development (RED) Center, an independent NGO based in Skopje, which will continue to build capacity for educational institutions and civil society around youth work force development. RED Center is focused on creating and supporting opportunities for growth and development of the citizens, organizations, and institutions in Macedonia.



Photos by YES Network staff

RED CENTER CONTACT INFO

The RED Center continues the work of the YES Network in Macedonia.

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