



Analysis report

assessing the factors affecting youth employment in the region of

Vidin, Bulgaria and the region of Attiki, Greece

Analysis of the results of a qualitative survey

This report was carried out under the Project " Youth Digital Kickstart "
No. 2022-1-BG01-KA210-YOU-000081205, under the Erasmus+ program

The project is implemented by the Association "ESTETIKA " in partnership with
the Association " NEOANALYSIS "



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INTRODUCTION

The labor market in Bulgaria and Greece is directly related to the main processes and trends in the development of their economies. For years, there has been a tendency of alarming statistics regarding the employment of the population, especially the younger and unqualified staff, and, especially, in certain areas and regions.

As small open economies with limited domestic demand, Bulgaria and Greece are highly dependent on foreign markets and investments. However, the trend of foreign direct investment in recent years has been downward.

Employment is most likely expected to rise in sectors with a tendency of catching up to developed economies. These are the fields of information products, communications, electronic and optical products, as well as various services.

According to data for 2021 from the Employment Agency in Bulgaria, the largest number and relative share of jobs available are in the processing industry (25,226), trade, repair of cars and household appliances (14,706), and state administration (8 901). The number of available places in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (7,534), hotels and restaurants (6,796), education (5,892), and construction (5,866) is relatively large.

The most sought after with the help of the labor offices are the workers with the professions of tailors, machine operators in sewing and textile production, etc. - more than 9,700 places. In September, due to the beginning of the school year, 9,500 places were announced for teachers in kindergartens, preschool, primary, and secondary schools, as well as in specialised schools. Unqualified workers are also sought after - cleaners and assistants – with over 8,000 places available. Next in line, are the places for administrative and office staff - over 7,300, for agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting - 7,250, in the processing industry - 6,600, for administrators, cooks, waiters, bartenders, etc. in hotels and restaurants - over 6,000, as well as personnel providing health care for people - 5,580. The vacancies for specialists in the field of finance (brokers, application specialists, tax officers, etc.) are 5,400, for salespeople in shops and demonstrators, as well as sellers at markets and stalls - over 5,000.



The situation in terms of statistics for the labor market in Bulgaria is more than worrisome. According to a World Bank analysis, Bulgaria's labor productivity is the lowest in comparison to all other countries in the region, and far below that of the entire EU. According to data from the Employment Agency, the average monthly number of unemployed persons registered at the labor offices in the country in 2021 is 157,283. The number of long-term unemployed persons for more than a year is 37,900 in 2021, including 20,200 men and 17,800 women.

According to data from the National Statistical Institute (further referred to as NSI*), the Vidin region has the fewest inhabitants in Bulgaria - as of 2020, their number is 81,212. The population is very unevenly distributed. Data from numerous studies on the matter show that the largest number of people registered as unemployed is in the region of Vidin - 14.8%, followed by Vratsa - 12.9%, Silistra and Montana have almost the same levels - 12.3% and 12.2%.

The data confirm that these areas have been characterized by low employment and a lack of jobs for years. Montana, Vratsa, and Vidin generally have the lowest employment rate among the population of working age.

According to NSI data, the highest percentage of the aging population in our country over the age of 65 is registered in the Vidin region - 29 percent of the people there are over 65 years of age. For these individuals, once they have lost their jobs, there is a high probability of dropping out of the labor market as few employers would hire them because of their age. It is here that the active labor policy, aimed at flexible forms of employment and social security, could contribute to the full participation of the elderly in the social and economic life of the country. This would lead to the achievement of a high quality of life for people of all ages, improved productivity, and much-needed intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion.

Specifically in Vidin, according to NSI data, in 2020, the unemployment rate in the region was 18.9%. As of 31.12.2020, the number of unemployed persons registered at the labor office in Vidin reached 4,997. In practice, this means that 6.15% of the residents of the district are registered as unemployed.



In Greece, the situation is no better than in Bulgaria. According to the Greek Statistical Office, the unemployment rate for 2021 is 10%. Despite its huge decrease since 2013 by around 17%, the unemployment rate in Greece is still much higher than the average in the European Union, which is 6% for 2021.

As for youth unemployment, the trend is the same, according to the Greek Statistical Office, the unemployment rate has dropped in the years 2013 to 2021 from 60% to 22%. Despite the large fall, this is still above the European Union average of 16% for 2021.

Another serious problem with the Greek labor market is the aging population, according to a Eurostat study, in 2020 the positions held by people between the ages of 55 and 63 are approximately 45%. In addition, 21% of the population of Greece has already reached the age of 65. An aging population has a serious impact on the labor market, as older workers may decide to retire, which would drastically reduce the labor force, and there would be a demand for skilled labor that most young people would not meet.

In the age structure of the unemployed, young people up to the age of 29 stand out as a group that is disadvantaged in the labor market. The total number of unemployed youth under 29 changes depending on the periods of completion of education. The trend of unemployed young people without degrees having a very high relative share continues. More than half of the registered unemployed youth up to the age of 29 have primary or lower education, and their relative share is 49.2%. A large portion of young people feels insecure in their choice of career path for development, especially at the beginning of their separation from the school and parental environment. This leads to a number of difficulties for their future professional realization, and in some cases to permanent unemployment, as a result of a prolonged inability to meet the requirements of employers.

The present study will be aimed at determining the factors that determine unemployment and economic inactivity among young people from Bulgaria and Greece. The main goal is to analyze the possibilities and attitudes of the target group to use the innovations in the digital age and art in particular.



PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

In the years since the last economic and financial crisis, the successful inclusion of young people in the labor market and ensuring a smooth transition between education and employment have emerged as the main challenges to the stable development of the labor market and social systems.

This process is of particular importance for the European Union, and Bulgaria and Greece in particular. It emerged from the negative demographic processes taking place in both countries and came about due to the challenges which the European social model faces in the conditions of low economic growth at the moment.

In these conditions, young people face difficulties when they have to realize themselves in the labor market. This leads to a number of problems and consequences, aggravated by the fact that these are young people without professional experience.

Unemployed persons have low purchasing power because they are deprived of income. A consequence of this is that they are often marginalized, some of them are even criminalized, while others become the object of political populism. These conditions appear as a factor of social instability.

Another problem is the inability of young people to increase their productivity and professional experience, so they are placed in a closed circle - between the employer's requirements for work experience and the long time of their unemployment. As a result, they become a serious burden on the social system in Bulgaria and Greece.

Youth employment is important in view of the development of demographic processes. The unemployed persons themselves are economically unstable, especially in cases where they are financially responsible for other people, children, or relatives.

A significantly long period without work causes dissatisfaction in the young person. It can lead to other adverse mental conditions such as anxiety, apathy, stress, and depression.

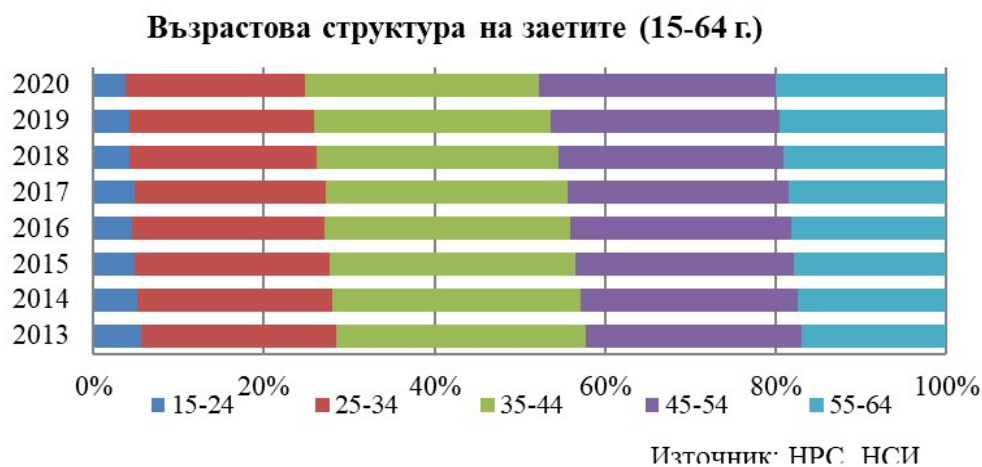
All of these problems must be minimized and, eventually, eliminated. Thus, young people in Bulgaria and Greece will feel more free, and more motivated, with more opportunities for development, qualification and improvement. In the new conditions, they will be realized both on the labor market and on a personal level. This realization must take place within the territory of the two countries and not outside them. Economic migration in

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the last two decades is a serious negative phenomenon. In Bulgaria and Greece, young people often choose education and career abroad. That is why there are many examples of young people who left Vidin and the Attica region. Solving the problems of youth unemployment will make young people feel like a full part of society.

In the period indicated in the graph, there is an increase in the employed of all ages, except for the 15-24 age group. The decline in youth employment is mainly due to the aging of the population and the low birth rate.



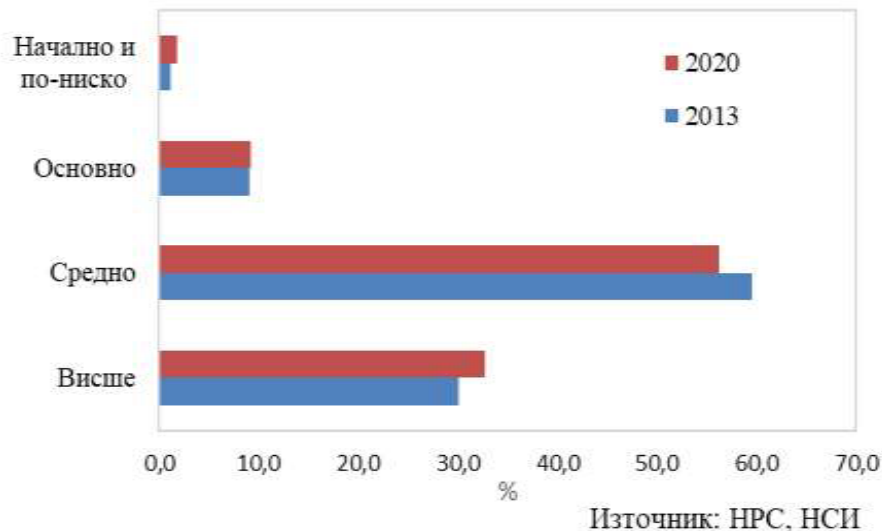
In this regard, the statistics in Greece are also negative, according to the Greek Statistical Authority. In 2013, the employed persons between 15 and 24 years old, were 8.8%, and between 25 and 34 years old - 24.6%. In Bulgaria and Greece, the trend continues, and for 2021, the employed persons between 15 and 24 years old are already 7.8%, and those between 25 and 34 years old are 22.9%.

The following graph shows employment data in Bulgaria according to the level of education completed, for 2020, compared to 2013. The trend of employed persons aged between 15 - 64 years, who have completed different levels of education is increasing, with the exception of those who have completed secondary education with a professional qualification, with the largest increase for graduates with higher education by 106.5 thousand or 12.2%. The decrease reported for those who graduated secondary education with an acquired professional qualification is 97.5 thousand or 8.6%. Respectively, in 2019, the highest employment rate was for graduates of higher education (88.5%) and graduates of secondary



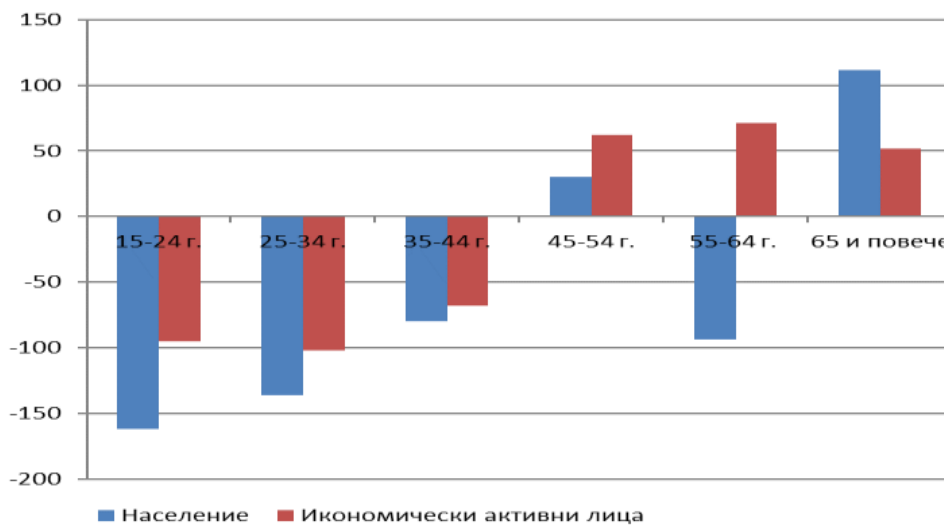
education (74.6%), as well as for the subgroup of employed persons with secondary education, with an acquired professional qualification (80.5%). The lowest value of the employment rate is for persons with primary and lower education (33.4%).

Образователна структура на заетите (15-64 г.)



According to the educational structure of the employed, Greece again shows a similar increase, although the number of secondary education graduates does not decrease as in Bulgaria, the tendency of employment among higher education graduates is definitely noticeable. Of those who graduated from secondary education, 58% are employed, 78% of those who graduated from higher education are employed, and the employment rate for those who graduated from primary education is the lowest - 34%, says the Greek Statistical Authority.

The decrease in the population in Greece and Bulgaria has the negative consequence that the age groups between 15-24 years, 25-34 years, and 35-44 years mark high levels of economic inactivity. Despite the observed decrease in the population in the age range 55-64 years of age, an increase in economic activity is observed due to the longer stay in the labor market.



Source: Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030

To achieve improvements in economic growth and to achieve sustainability in an ever-changing labor market, an increase in the qualifications, motivation, and capabilities of the workforce is required. It is in this direction that the actions of institutions are directed, which, through the active policy of the labor market and the inclusion in a number of programs of the Employment Agency under the Operational Program "Development of Human Resources" to increase qualification and education, ensure the possibility of persons from risk groups to distinguish themselves from the permanently unemployed, to get an opportunity for realization and to contribute to the construction of a stable market economy.

The report, titled: "Recovering Learning: To what extent are children and young people on track with skills development?" includes an analysis of skill development in early childhood as well as among elementary school-age children and young people.

Almost three-quarters of young people aged between 15 and 24 in 92 countries are failing to acquire the skills they need for work, according to a new report published by UNICEF. According to the report, most children and young people around the world have been failed by their education systems, leaving them uneducated, uninspired, and unskilled - a sure combination for unproductiveness.

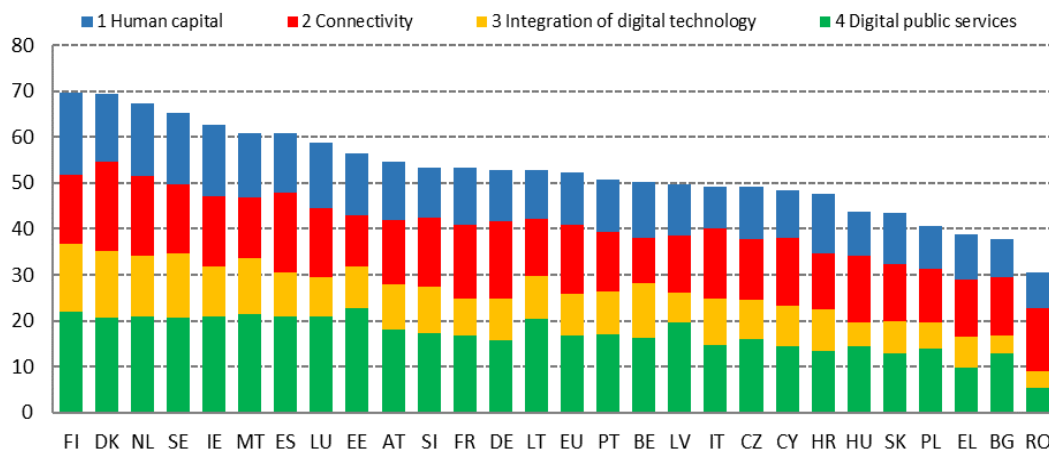
The data highlights low levels of skills among children and young people in all age groups. The report also shows that, in countries with low income, such as Bulgaria and Greece, the probability that young people will acquire the necessary skills for future opportunities for



employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship is the smallest. In Bulgaria, nearly half (47.9%) of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 do not have the basic skills they need for secondary education - this is shown by data from the PISA and TIMSS international assessments. At the same time, 44.5 of the same age group also lack the digital skills that are increasingly needed in today's world.

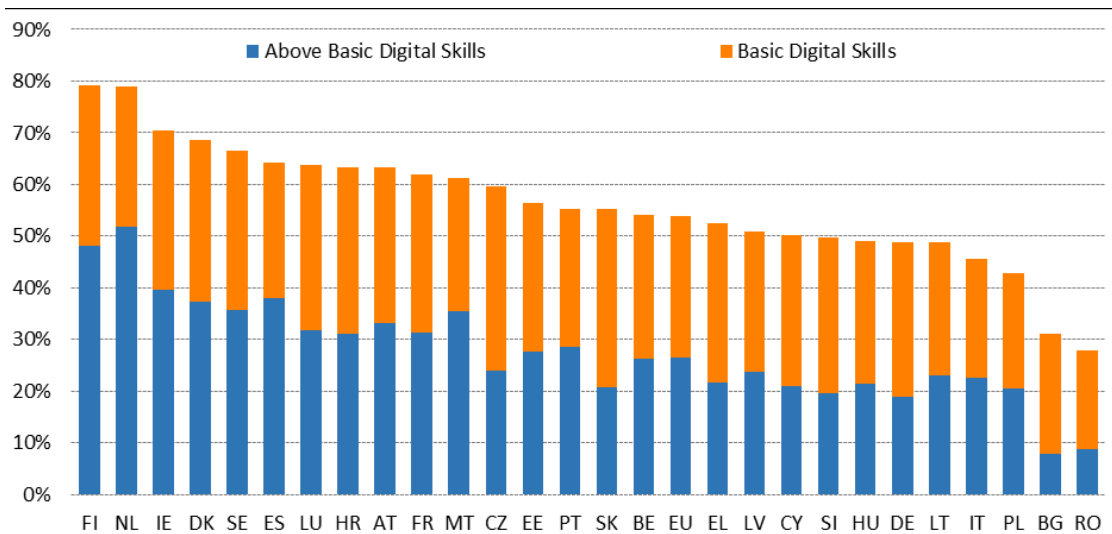
"Digital skills" refers to the ability to understand and use technology and is measured by the proportion of young people who can perform basic activities on a computer, for example: copy or move a file or folder, copy and paste functions to duplicate or move of information in a document, sending emails with attachments and transferring files between devices.

The challenges the populations of Bulgaria and Greece specifically face when it comes to digital skills can also be seen from the data in the Digital Technologies in the Economy and Society Index (DESI), where, according to the index for 2022, Bulgaria and Greece hold the penultimate places in all of Europe, with the exception of Romania.



Source: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022 .

According to the same analysis, as of 2022, according to EUROSTAT data, Bulgaria is in second last place in the European Union in terms of basic and above-basic digital skills, as shown in the relevant graph. Greece shows significant improvement, but is still below the European Union average and the leaders.



Source: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022.

The main conclusion is that the dynamics of youth unemployment in Bulgaria follow general European trends. At the same time, a number of factors stemming from structural problems in the labor market in the country, a not-quite-reformed education system, labor legislation, and some cultural features suggest lower economic activity among young Bulgarians and more challenges to inclusion in the labor market.

There are differences in the interpretation of the youth unemployment rate as an indicator showing the problems young people face in the inclusion in the labor market. This leads to the development of policies and programs that fail to improve the competitiveness of the youth. For the development of more effective measures, it is necessary to collect additional information about the economic activity of the 18-30 age group, which will provide sufficient, reliable, and appropriate information and will become the basis of subsequent in-depth analysis. This necessitates the conduct of additional research among young people with an emphasis on the field of digitalization and ensuring the sustainable integration of young people in the labor market.



METHODOLOGY, TASKS, AND ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

- **Aims and objectives of the study:**

The purpose and tasks of the research were related to the organization and conduct of a survey in Bulgaria and Greece. The survey questions focused on the various factors influencing youth employment and the economic inactivity of the youth in the two countries; what capabilities and attitudes the respondents have and their desire to benefit from the innovations of the digital age and, specifically, the arts. We used the accumulated data to identify the portion of youth who are motivated to realize themselves in the labor market and acquire basic digital skills.

The survey method of research is a very effective way to collect data from large groups of people. The survey is convenient for establishing the opinions, attitudes, and evaluations of the respondents and, accordingly, for formulating adequate conclusions. The anonymous aspect also contributes to encouraging respondents to be honest and not be affected by questions of a sensitive nature.

- **Organization and methodology of the research:**

The survey was conducted online in the locations of Bulgaria and Greece with the participation of 300 individuals, 152 in Greece and 148 in Bulgaria, who belong to the group of young people aged 18 to 30, including young people at risk of social exclusion, and those from marginalized communities who are interested in developing digital skills.

We have created two questionnaires of 31 questions. The first questionnaire in Bulgarian for Bulgaria and the second questionnaire in English for Greece. In its main part, the questionnaire includes standardized (closed) questions and a small section of open questions. The survey was implemented in the form of an online survey with an average duration of about 10 minutes.

To achieve greater credibility, the survey is conducted through a questionnaire, guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants.

The survey was conducted by direct filling in Google Form.

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When compiling the questions, we were guided by the following guidelines:

Demographic Information:

- What is your age and gender?
- What is your place of residence?
- What level of education do you have?
- What level of education do your parents have?
- Do you belong to any risk groups?
- Are you looking for a job?
- How are you looking for a job?

Specific survey topic questions:

- What do you think about digital technology?
- What is your awareness of the emergence of digital technologies?
- Do you have intentions to develop in the field of digital arts?
- Do you have digital skills?
- Are you planning to improve your digital skills through additional qualifications (courses, seminars, internships, etc.)
- Are you interested in or have experience in the field of digital arts?
- Would you develop as a digital artist?
- Would you get family support if you were doing digital arts?
- What is required of a digital artist?



ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the results of the conducted survey is based on the information collected through questionnaires from a total of 300 respondents, representatives from the Vidin region, Bulgaria – 148 respondents, and Athens, Greece – 152 respondents.

The questionnaires were filled in properly and in good faith, with very minor omissions that did not affect the final result. In the tables attached below, the calculated arithmetic mean results are given, both by region and overall, so that comparisons can be made, as well as differences can be found.

Demographic Information Analysis:

A total of 300 participants from Bulgaria and Greece took part in the survey: 152 participants from Greece and 148 participants from Bulgaria. Of the participants, 37.9% were men - 32.8% from Greece, and 38.5% from Bulgaria. Participating women were 63.3% from Greece 65.8% and 60.8% from Bulgaria. Those who chose not to indicate their gender for both countries amounted to 1%, respectively 1.3% for Greece, and 0.7% for Bulgaria.

The age range differentiated the participants into two groups. Between the ages of 18-24, a total of 51.8% filled out the survey for both countries - respectively in Greece at 62.5%, in Bulgaria at 41.2%. In the other group, from 25 to 30 years old, there was a total of 48.1% - 37.5% from Greece, and from Bulgaria - 58.8%.

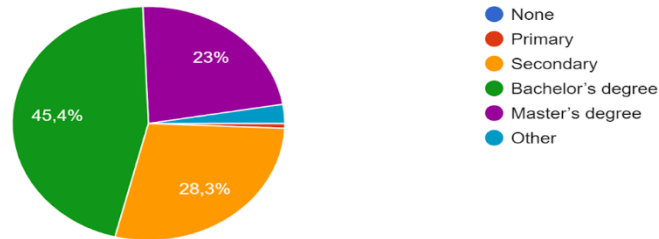
The answers to the question about marital status show the following results: the single group is the largest - 211 out of 300 participants. The fewest are married: 27 people out of 300. The rest indicated that they were in a relationship or divorced.

As can be seen from the graphs below, according to education, the results for Greece are: 0.7% have primary education, 28.3% have secondary education, 45.4% have a bachelor's degree, 23% have a master's degree and 2.6% indicated another level or type of education.



What is your level of education?

152 отговора

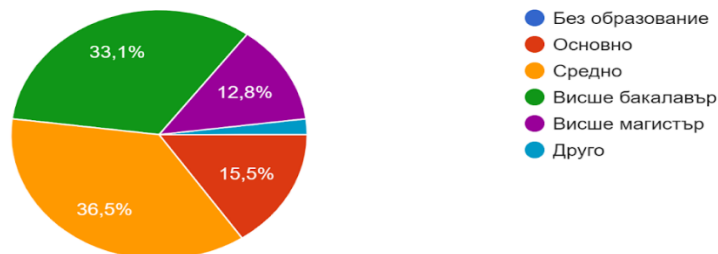


Source: Questionnaire for identifying factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

In Bulgaria, 15.5% of the participants had a primary education, 36.5% had a secondary education, 33.1% had a bachelor's degree, 12.8% had a master's degree, and 2% of the participants indicated that they had another level or type of education.

Каква степен на образование притежавате?

148 отговора



Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

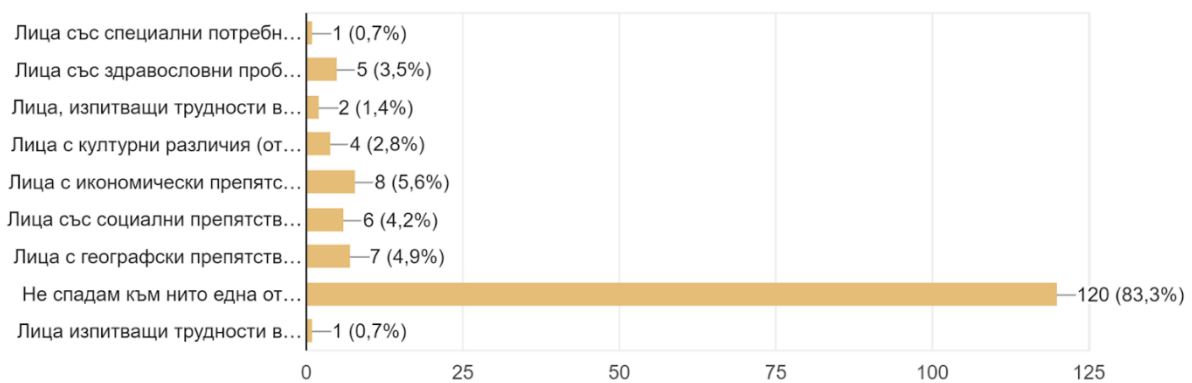
On the question about the place of residence, the respondents indicated the following answers: in Greece, 43.4 % live in the capital, of which 42 people are between the ages of 18-24, and 24 are between the ages of 25-30. 34.9% live in a regional city, of which 33 people are from the younger group - from 18 to 24 years old and 20 from the group of 25-30 years old. 17.1% of the respondents live in a smaller city, of which 11 are between the ages of 18-24, and 9 are between the ages of 25-30. There are 4.6% in the village, of which two people are from the 18-24 age group, and 4 from the 25-30 age group. In Bulgaria, the results show that 69.6% live in a regional city, of which 61 people are between 18-24 years old, and 42 are between 25-30 years old. 16.2% live in the capital, of which 6 people are aged 18 to 24, and



12 are aged 25 to 30. 10.8% live in another city, of which 6 people are in the 18-24 age group, and 4 are in the 25-30 age group, and 3.4% (or three people in total) between 18-24 years old live in a village.

Self-reference to a given social group in the two countries shows significant differences. In Bulgaria, the total number of those who did not choose any of the indicated groups or did not answer the question was 120 people, the remaining 24 indicated groups with economic, social, geographical obstacles, and cultural differences.

Определяте ли се към някоя от изброените групи? (допустимо е повече от един отговор)
144 отговора



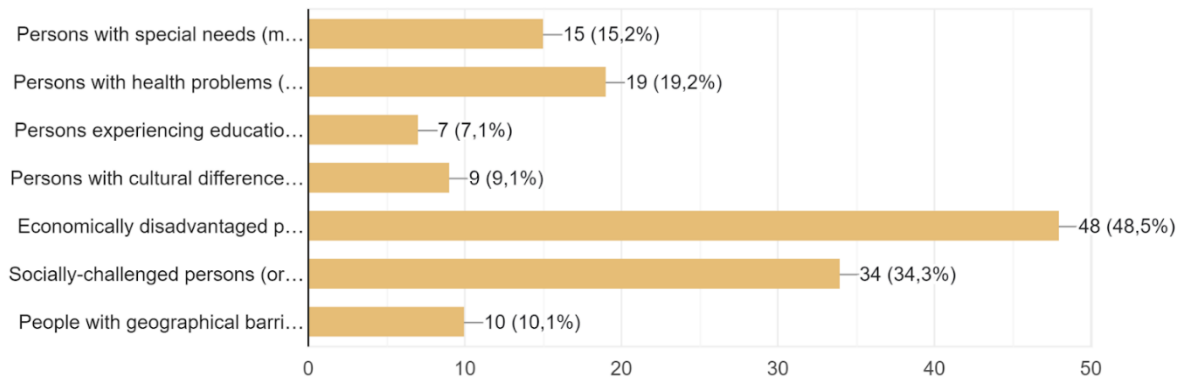
Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

Of the respondents in Greece, 53 people did not answer the question. However, in contrast to Bulgaria, in Greece more participants were assigned to each of the given groups. 48 respondents identified themselves as belonging to the group with economic obstacles, specifically low income, long-term unemployment, low standard of living. Those referred to as persons with social obstacles (orphans, semi-orphans, persons exposed to discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability, etc.) are 34 of the respondents in Greece, 19 persons have health problems, 15 persons have special needs both physically and mentally.



Which of the following groups do you identify with? (multiple answers accepted)

99 отговора



Source: Questionnaire for identifying factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

Regarding work experience, the answers in both countries are similar. In Bulgaria, 46.9% of the respondents have up to 3 years of work experience, 20.9% have no work experience, and the rest of the participants have more than 3 years of work experience. In Greece, 59.2% have up to 3 years of work experience, 13.8% are without any work experience, and 26.3% have more than 3 years of work experience.

To the question: " Do you think that the higher level of education of your parents has a positive effect on your professional development?" the results of the two countries are similar, more than half of the participants in the survey believe that the education of their parents has a positive effect - 80 in Bulgaria and 87 in Greece. Of these 80, the Bulgarian respondents are 53, where at least one of the parents has a higher education. In Greece, 68 out of 87 meet this criterion. The data from the survey prove the tendency that the level of education in the family environment has a positive effect on the professional development of young people and further affects the labor market.

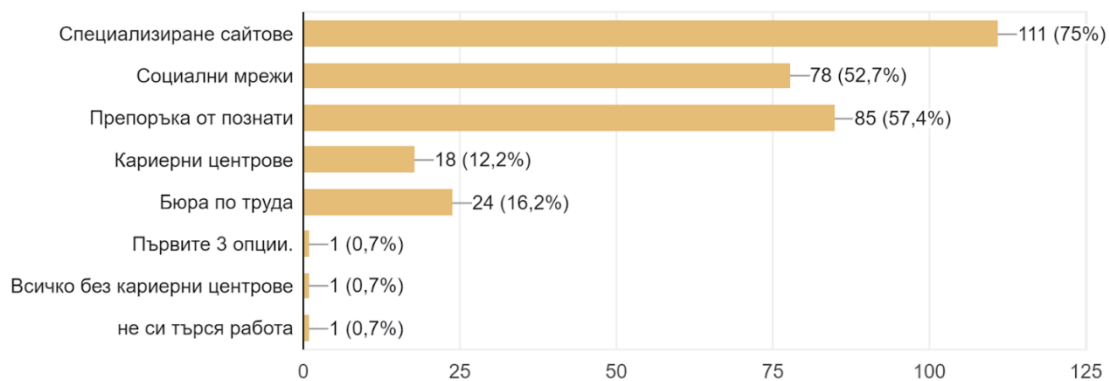
To the question: Are you actively looking for a job, 76.4% of the participants in Bulgaria answered "no" - of which 66 were women and 46 were men, and 23.6% answered "yes", of which 24 were women and 11 were men. In Greece, 52.6% are actively looking for work, of



which 52 are women and 26 are men, 47.4% are not looking for work, of which 48 are women and 24 are men.

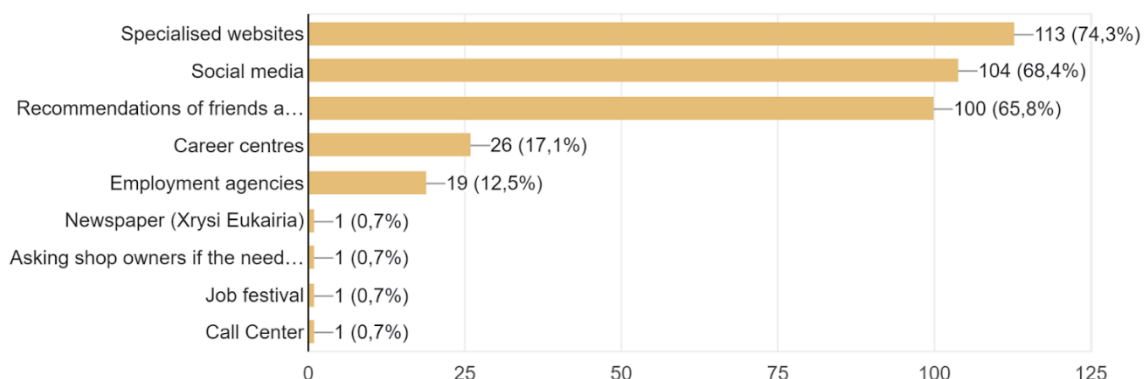
Regarding awareness, as can be seen in the graphs below, the participants in Bulgaria and Greece give almost identical results.

От къде се информирате за възможности за работа?(допустимо е повече от един отговор)
148 отговора



Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

Where do you search for job opportunities? (more than one answer accepted)
152 отговора



Source: Questionnaire for identifying factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece



To the question "Where do you find out about job opportunities?", specialized sites, social networks and recommendations from acquaintances predominate, while career centers and employment offices are far less common. As can be seen in the next question " Have you sought assistance from a government institution or a private job agency to find a job?", in Bulgaria 79.1 % and in Greece 82.9 % did not seek any assistance. Of these, a total of 154 people from the two surveys belong to the 18-25 age group and 89 belong to the 25-30 age group. The data show that neither in Bulgaria nor in Greece, young people do not trust institutions regarding their professional development.

The tendency is that, both in Bulgaria and in Greece, employers increasingly require job candidates to have work experience without having where to gain it. The survey data proves this trend. In Bulgaria, 65.5% believe that the lack of work experience is the main obstacle to their realization in the labor market. In Greece, an even higher percentage of participants answered this way - 78.3%. In both countries, employers do not have developed training systems for young people without work experience, they expect schools/universities to provide candidates with the necessary work skills, however, according to our survey participants, this is not the case. In both countries, to the question "Do you think that the school/university gives you the necessary skills for an effective job search?", two-thirds of the participants in both Bulgaria and Greece believe that the education system does not contribute to the development of their work skills, of them 58.6 % are between 18-24 years old and 41.4% are between 25-30 years old. From these data, we can conclude that in both countries there is no effective transition between the education system and the labor market.

Analysis of specific questions on the survey topic:

In today's society and with the pace of technology development, we have to pay a lot of attention to digital skills. Increasingly, digital skills will have an impact on the labor market, both in Bulgaria and Greece and throughout the world. Respondents from both countries share this opinion. To the question: "Do you think that

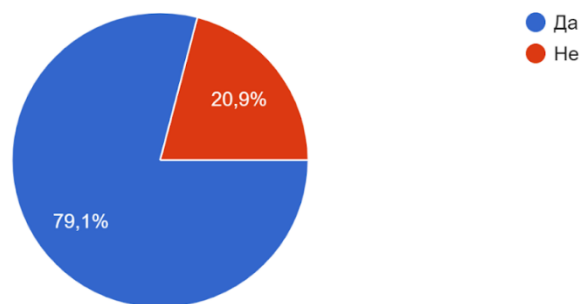


the mastery of various types of digital skills is increasingly necessary for successful implementation on the labor market?" 95.3% of those asked in Bulgaria answered positively, as well as 96.7% in Greece.

In the answers to the self-evaluation of computer skills, 86.8% of the respondents in Bulgaria and approximately two-thirds in Greece consider themselves computer literate. Of these, 59.6% are between the ages of 18-24 and 40.6% are between the ages of 25-30. When analyzing the open-ended question: "Indicate what computer programs you can work with?", the majority of those who defined themselves as computer literate indicated that they were able to work with Microsoft Office including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and others. Programs such as Photoshop and Light room also prevail, as do others related to graphic design and any of the varieties of Adobe. Some of the participants also indicated their knowledge of different programming languages.

Very high percentages are observed in the answers to whether the participants are interested in arts - 75.7% of the Bulgarians and 85.5% of the Greeks answered positively. The participants are also well acquainted with what digital art is, with 53.9% of respondents in Greece and 79.1% of respondents in Bulgaria.

Знаете ли какво представлява дигиталното изкуство?
148 отговора



Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

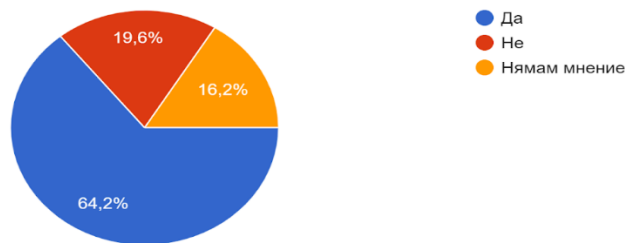
We also inquired about participants' awareness of popular digital skills related to cryptocurrencies, blockchain technologies, and NFTs (Non-Fungible Token). To the question "Do you know what cryptocurrency is?" 94.6 % of Bulgarian participants answered yes, the



percentage of Greek participants who answered yes amounts to 55.9%. The percentage of participants' knowledge of blockchain technology is relatively lower: 56.8% from Bulgaria and 24.3% from Greece. To the third question "Do you know what an NFT (Non-Fungible Token) is?" 57.3% in Bulgaria are familiar with it, as are 41.4% in Greece. From the indicated data it is clear that the awareness of the Bulgarian participants is approximately 30% greater than that of the Greek ones.

The following questions are related to the acquired experience of the participants in relation to digital arts, future plans, implementation in the labor market, availability of social support, and the level of motivation for improving these skills. When asked "Do you have experience in digital art?", the data shows a worryingly low experience in digital art in both countries. Among the Bulgarian participants, it was indicated that 18.2% have relevant experience, and in Greece - 14.5 %. A small percentage of participants have the desire to develop in the field of digital arts: In Bulgaria - 22.3%, in Greece - 34.9. It is to this group of participants that the team's efforts will be directed when carrying out the project's activities.

Смятате ли, че дигиталните артисти могат да се реализират на пазара на труда в страната?
148 отговора

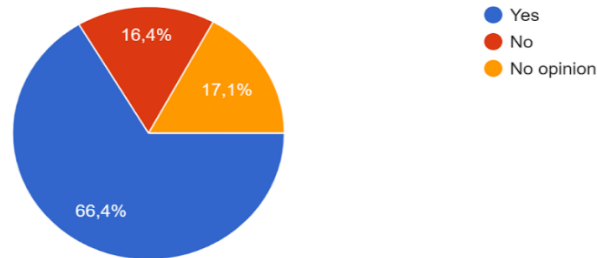


Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece



Do you think digital artists can be successful in the country's labor market?

152 отговора



Source: Questionnaire for identifying factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

The similar results of the graphs show that in both countries, young people's perception of successful realization, with the presence of digital art skills, persists. More than half of the participants believe that digital artists can be successful in the labor market.

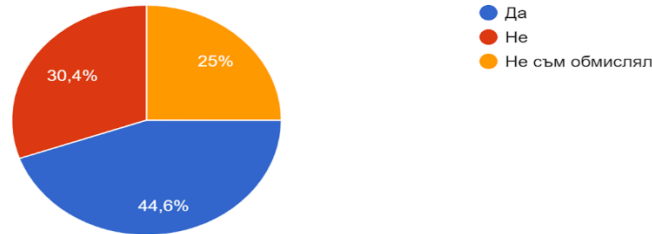
The results of the question of whether the participants would receive support from their families if they decided to develop in the field of digital art are worrying. More than half of the participants indicate that they do not have such support in Bulgaria - 56.8%, and Greece - 63.2%. However, regarding the results regarding the digital skills of their friends and acquaintances, the participants indicate that 86.5% in Bulgaria and 63.2% in Greece have acquaintances involved in digital arts.

Despite our unsatisfactory results for the availability of experience and skills in digital arts, a positive trend can be noted regarding the motivation of young people to learn and grow in this field. On average, half of the participants from both countries gave a positive answer to the question "Do you plan to improve your digital skills through additional qualifications (courses, seminars, internships)?". This shows that young people understand the role and importance of digital arts in their realization in the labor market in the coming years.



Планирате ли да повишавате дигиталните си умения чрез допълнителна квалификация (курсове, семинари, стажове)?

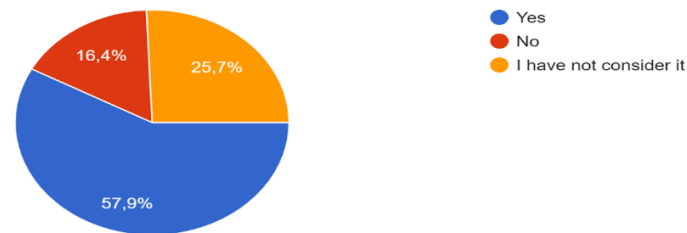
148 отговора



Source: Questionnaire to identify factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

Are you planning on developing your digital skills via additional qualifications (courses; seminars; placements)?

152 отговора



Source: Questionnaire for identifying factors affecting youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece

At the end of the survey, two open-ended questions were asked regarding the participants' perception of the necessary skills for the realization of the digital artist in the labor market and what skills they possess themselves. Despite the nature of the last two questions, and the fact that only about half of the respondents gave an answer, there is still a certain similarity in their attitudes and perceptions. From the answers received, the respondents can be synthesized into three main groups. To the question "What skills should a digital artist have", a part of the participants indicated skills related to fine arts - for example, composition, working with colors, proportions, etc. Another group of responses refers to specific technical skills related to using different types of computer programs. The third group of answers refers to the personal qualities of the artist such as discipline, creativity, persistence, and others. In terms of skills, our participants indicated various personal qualities



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



HUMAN
RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT
CENTRE

Project Title „ Youth Digital Kickstart “,
№2022-1-BG01-KA210-YOU-000081205

such as patience, resourcefulness, imagination, adaptability, and even courage, while others indicated available knowledge of digital literacy.



Conclusion

The employment of young people is one of the most pressing problems in Europe. In the current economic and financial crisis, the lack of job opportunities affects young people more than any other group in society. This is reflected in the high and increasing levels of unemployment and insecure work among the youth.

The dynamics of youth employment in Bulgaria and Greece follow general European trends. At the same time, the economic activity of young people is traditionally lower, and their inclusion in the labor market is more difficult, due to a number of factors of the local environment. Among them are the structural problems of the labor market, the unreformed education system, anachronistic labor legislation, and some cultural peculiarities. When analyzing the phenomenon of "youth unemployment", it is extremely important to take into account the fact that the majority of young people aged 19-29 are not economically active. Thus, each young person looking for work has a much greater impact on the final youth unemployment rate than individuals in other age groups.

The problems of the labor market in Bulgaria are no different from those in Greece. They are related to the fact that the population in both countries is aging, there is a mismatch between supply and demand for the labor force, significant migration within the European Union, integration of young people between the ages of 19 and 29 in the labor market, problems with the quality of youth employment and young people's qualifications. In both countries, the indicators that stop the process of equalization with the rest of the European Union are also similar - unemployment, relatively low incomes, working conditions, and the quality of the workforce, among others. These problems are clearly visible in the Vidin region, which is classified as one of the poorest regions in Europe.

The problem of youth employment is one of the biggest problems of our time, not only from an economic, but also from a social point of view. Employment problems in both countries still have a regional character, the reason for this being that social policy is not a common policy of the European Union. Young people are heading to the big cities, which provide better opportunities for realization, pay and social benefits. As a result, a large part of the agricultural areas are depopulated and there is a lack of labor.



The industrial sector also faces challenges related to declining interest in vocational education, engineering occupations, and occupations related to digital technologies. Although these professions are well realized on the labor market, the present study shows that there is not an adequate amount of necessary interest among young people in Bulgaria and Greece. The data from the survey show that young people are well-informed about the importance of these professions and have weak motivation for their realization in this sector of the labor market. The results show that, in general, young people in Bulgaria and Greece rate their digital skills highly, feel confident that they can create different types of online products, and know the digital environment well.

The crisis has intensified the challenges of youth unemployment in many countries, especially for disadvantaged groups. In both countries, more than half of young men and women in the labor market are already unemployed. Urgent action is needed to secure more and better jobs for young people and to avoid lasting negative consequences for them and European economies and societies as a whole. When entering the labor market, many young people have no work experience. Therefore, in order to achieve a rapid introduction of new workers into the labor market, it is necessary to further analyze this issue. In addition, insufficient basic skills, a lack of focus on learning outcomes and qualifications, and a negative perception of initial vocational education and training can lead to difficult integration into the labor market.

Another serious problem related to the transition from education to the realization of the labor market stood out from the conducted survey. This implies placing an emphasis on long-term policies to improve the competitiveness of young personnel on the labor market – such as, for example, increasing the flexibility of regulations and reforms in the education system. Policy formation to tackle youth unemployment should be concentrated at the sectoral and regional level, including a significant practical element. Education in both countries does not always manage to be adequate to the new requirements and does not effectively take into account the technological changes that are occurring at the global level. It is necessary to build a unified virtual platform for online learning, which aims to provide flexible and accessible forms of learning such as online distance learning courses and electronic resources for self-learning.



New strategies oriented towards the development of digital skills and literacy, a new long-term vision for the realization of young people in the labor market and more systematic actions are needed. The latter refer to employers who have to build training systems that build on education and give specific competencies to staff.

The conducted survey also shows that in both countries few people in search of work resort to the services of institutions and employment offices. These institutions themselves are aimed at directly creating employment, and not so much at training and qualification, especially in the field of digital technologies. As an alternative to this practice, relevant institutions should promote the importance of digital skills, increase the qualification of the workforce and move to policies to increase employability – skills, competences, guidance and support. For this purpose, the improvement of digital skills is a priority of various programs in Bulgaria and Greece. In Bulgaria, these are "Lifelong Learning Strategy", "Employment Strategy, 2021-2030", "National Digital Bulgaria Program 2025". In Greece, such programs are "National Digital Strategy 2021-2025", "Action Plan for Youth Employment", "National Employment Strategy" and others.

In this direction, it is necessary to turn policies and strategies into real actions that can be put into practice in order to be effective and productive. It is also necessary to improve the information security of the policies and measures aimed at reducing youth unemployment. The age group 19-29 years, which is the basis of the analysis and the formation of policies to deal with youth unemployment, is extremely heterogeneous - i.e. includes persons whose status is radically different. For example, according to Eurostat data, economic activity among 15-year-olds is about 5%, and among 24-year-olds it already reaches nearly 80%. Even the regulatory and documentary preparation of such programs is a challenge, since the labor and social rights of persons aged 17 and, for example, 22 years old are fundamentally different. This makes the programs cumbersome and difficult to administer and subsequently evaluate. It is necessary to move to a qualitative model of evaluation of the implemented policies, based not only on the number of people employed under individual programs, but also on a long-term analysis of the economic activity and employment of the persons involved.



Youth unemployment is a major European problem that we need to tackle. The main goals of creating the right conditions to promote employment opportunities for young people and ease the transition between education and work are shared by both sides.

Bulgaria and Greece aim to address three interrelated challenges:

1. Creating more and better jobs and attractive opportunities for professional development for young people, including digital technologies;
2. Strengthening the quality and correspondence between education and training and labor market requirements at all levels, to address skills and competence mismatches;
3. Optimizing the role of all sectors of the economy and of highly efficient and digital public services in Europe as an engine of sustainable and inclusive growth

In this direction, it is necessary to turn policies and strategies into real actions that enter into practice in order to be effective and productive.

In addition, as highlighted in the "Employment Strategy of Bulgaria for 2021-2030", the long-term goals that Bulgaria sets for itself to ensure social protection and social inclusion and reduce people living in poverty are related to the combination of measures for access to the labor market, the provision of quality social services and the provision of adequate incomes for the prevention of the transmission of poverty between generations and the promotion of economic activities with the potential to create new jobs and achieve sustainable economic growth.

Similar development guidelines are presented in the Greek "National Employment Strategy" in force for the period 2021-2027. Therein, some of the key measures laid down in the strategy refer to encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation through financial support, improving the skills and qualifications of the workforce, improving working conditions, and promoting the employment of youth and vulnerable groups.

The upcoming years are key for both Bulgaria and Greece. Technologies are developing at a very fast pace and place corresponding demands on all other spheres of life. States have a duty to urgently address these issues, and we believe that the present study contributes to this.



Key inferences

The family environment is very important for human development, as it is the first and main social environment in which children develop and grow. This is where they learn to relate to other people, communicate and build social bonds. The family environment can have a great impact on children's achievement and success in school, their self-esteem, and their ability to adapt to different situations in life. This is also proven by our survey. Of the respondents whose one or both parents have completed higher education, almost all are about to complete it (students or pupils) or have already completed it. In other words, the family environment can determine a child's path to success or failure in the future. It is important to strive to create a healthy and supportive family environment that will contribute to the successful development of children. This brings us to the essential problem. Respondents in Bulgaria and Greece do not receive the necessary support in the family environment when it comes to digital skills or digital arts in particular. We can draw this conclusion from the question of whether they would receive support from their parents if they decided to engage in digital arts, 60% or respectively 180 people (96 in Greece and 84 in Bulgaria) answered that they would not receive such support. In Greece, only 23% think they would find support in the family environment.

After the problem of the family environment, comes the problem of education. The role of education is extremely important in the development of students. When the educational environment is stimulating, students are more motivated to learn and develop. This can lead to greater engagement and better results. The education environment can help in the formation of skills and qualities such as independence, work discipline, responsibility, communication skills, etc. These skills and qualities are very important to students' success both in school and in their future. If the school environment is well structured, and stimulating and provides the necessary resources and training, students can acquire skills and knowledge that are in demand in the labor market. For example, if students have access to modern technology and learning methods, they can acquire computer and other technological skills that are in demand. This is something that the educational system in Bulgaria and Greece cannot cope with. Moving on to our survey, a large number of our respondents think so too. In Bulgaria, 101 people, and in Greece, 102 think that neither universities nor schools give you



the necessary skills to look for a job. On the same question, 16 people in Greece and 17 in Bulgaria have no opinion, 31 in Bulgaria and 33 in Greece have received the necessary skills. These are serious numbers, and although the education system had a positive effect on some of the respondents, for a much larger part it did not provide the necessary skills to make a smooth transition from education to the labor market.

The educational system in Bulgaria and Greece is not the only one to blame for the lack of a smooth transition to the labor market. New graduates with no experience face challenges when looking for work. Many employers are looking for candidates with more and more experience because they want to make sure that the candidate has the practical skills necessary to perform the tasks of the particular position. This is extremely demotivating for the youth, especially when it comes to recent graduates. We draw this conclusion based on our survey. To the question: "Do you think that the lack of practical experience is a major obstacle to finding a job?" 65.5% in Bulgaria and 78.3% in Greece are of the opinion that experience is the most significant obstacle to finding a job. In Bulgaria and Greece, a large number of employers cannot afford or do not want to have the necessary systems for training personnel.

At the same time, bureaucracy and legislation play a role in the lack of a smooth transition between education and the labor market. For example, the process of finding a job can be difficult or require a lot of formalities, making it difficult for young people to enter the labor market. They seek the assistance of state institutions in finding a job less and less. In Greece, 82.9% (of them 82 women and 42 men), and in Bulgaria 79.1% (of them 73 women and 43 men) have never relied on employment offices or recruitment agencies. This is due to distrust of state institutions, ignorance of their existence, and the complexity and inefficiency of their procedures.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the survey and the results above is that the respondents are quite well-informed about the importance of digital skills and their various manifestations. They are also well-informed about their entry into the labor market and how necessary it is for them to master digital skills in order to realize themselves - 95.3% in Bulgaria and 96.7% in Greece of the respondents share this opinion. A large part of them is also defined as computer literate - 128 (80 women, 47 men and 1 did not specify their gender)



in Bulgaria and 91 (63 women, 27 men and 1 did not specify their gender) in Greece. Despite the knowledge and skills they possess, they cannot take advantage of the prospects that this sector offers in the labor market. We can immediately draw this conclusion by looking at the results of the question "Do you know what digital art is?" - approximately 66% in total from both surveys answered positively, and the question "Do you have experience in the field of digital art?" on average from both countries about 16% have experience. This could be due to any of the problems we described above. A large part of young people do not receive support in the family environment, their education is not at the required level, and neither the employers nor the state institutions are interested in their development



Recommendations

The labor market is one of the determining factors for the standard of living of a person and his family. Integration and timely employment for each person are of great importance. A well-educated and qualified workforce is a prerequisite for a competitive, innovative, prosperous economy. Unconditionally, educated people are more adaptable to the changing needs of the labor market and have a greater chance for career growth. Young people are the future of a nation. They are the most valuable and irreplaceable resource on which the well-being of the entire society depends.

We recommend developing active labor policies aimed at young people and their self-employment. Also to create an effective framework to support businesses to provide staff training systems. Businesses could provide training opportunities and support for young people to develop their skills and gain the necessary experience. Providing mentoring or on-the-job training programs can be very helpful. Employers, instead of focusing on candidates' experience, should look at their skills and potential. Of our respondents, 219 people (130 between 18 and 24 years and 89 between 25-30 years) consider themselves digitally literate, of which 124 are interested in improving their digital skills. Of these 124 people, 50 are between 25-30 years old and 74 are between 18-24 years old, and employers' efforts should be directed toward them. Young people may have many skills that are not directly related to the job, but which can be of benefit to their company. Providing traineeships and internships can be extremely beneficial for young people, giving them the opportunity to gain real-world experience in the workplace. A work environment that is stimulating and motivating for young people must be created. They are looking for employers who are willing to invest in them and give them the opportunity to develop professionally. Businesses need to be flexible and open to different ways of working, such as telecommuting or flexible working hours. This can be attractive to young people who want to balance work with education or family commitments.

Education is of utmost importance for the successful transition of young people to the labor market. A high-quality education not only provides young people with the knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific job but also helps them develop broad-based skills that are critical to their success in the labor market. As it became clear that a large part of our



respondents - 60%, would not receive support from their family in future development as digital artists, here comes the role of education. Of our respondents, 69 people think that they are not computer literate. Of these, 63 people have already completed their education, except for 6 people, which means that the school has not been able to give the necessary computer skills to 63 respondents. Educational institutions must periodically revise curricula and programs to meet the modern requirements of the labor market. This may include introducing new courses and programs as well as updating existing ones. Young people need practical experience to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to work in the field. Educational institutions can work with employers and provide internships, internships, and other work programs to give young people the opportunity to apply their skills and gain practical experience. Digital skills are extremely important for gaining competitive advantages in the labor market and for successfully adapting to the rapidly changing technological conditions of the modern world. On average, 50% of respondents in Bulgaria and Greece do not know what blockchain and NFT are (Non-Fungible Token), terms related to innovative and digital manifestations, that became famous worldwide. Of this 50%, almost all have completed their secondary education. The education system has a key role in developing these skills in students, which prepares them for a successful start to their careers. It is important to develop digital skills such as programming skills, information management, data and networking, cyber security, communications, and more. These skills can be acquired through specialized subjects, such as information technology and computer science, but can also be integrated into almost all academic subjects.

For the transition from education to the labor market, state institutions also play a key role. They can provide support and services to facilitate young people's access to education, vocational training, apprenticeships, and work. One of the most important functions of government institutions is to create policies and programs to promote youth employment. According to our survey, a large part of young people would not rely on state employment agencies, they would resort to specialized sites - 224 people, to social networks - 182 people, they would even rely on a recommendation from an acquaintance - 185 people, only 43 people would trust at the labor office. Government institutions should provide education and training support to the youth, such as scholarships, study loans, internship programs, etc. This



can help them acquire the necessary skills and experience for a successful start in the labor market. They can create and support career guidance programs that will help young people find the right job and understand how to develop professionally. At the same time, government institutions can support employers to encourage them to provide jobs to young people. This can be done through various incentives, such as tax breaks or financial support for the education and training of young workers.

Cooperation between all interested parties is very important for the successful realization of young people in the labor market. Such a mechanism could include representatives of state institutions, educational institutions, employers, professional organizations, youth organizations, and other interested parties. These groups can work together to identify priorities for the realization of young people in the labor market and develop strategies to achieve these goals. One of the key aspects of this mechanism is to ensure multilateral dialogue and the active participation of all stakeholders to ensure that the policies and programs that are developed respond to the specific needs and challenges of young people. Such a cooperation mechanism can be a key tool to achieve better results in supporting youth in the labor market.



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