



UNITED NATIONS
TRANSFORMING
EDUCATION
SUMMIT 2022

Transforming Education Summit 2022

Republic of North Macedonia National Consultations Report

August 2022

North Macedonia - National Consultations Report

1 - TES NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

Convenor's Name: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia

Number of consultations (if more than one consultation takes place):

6 in-person public consultations,
2 online consultation (via UNICEF's U-Report tool for youth engagement) and
4 in-person consultative meetings with representatives of national education institutions.

Basic information on all the consultation(s) convened

Date(s)	May – June 2022 (youth, U-Report), 1 June 2022 (youth consultation); 7 June 2022 (consultation with mayors); 9 June 2022 (members of parliament), 29 June 2022 (teachers), 21 July 2022 (students), 28 July 2022 (CSOs and OPDs), July-August 2022(youth, U-Report), July 2022 (in-person meetings with representatives of national education institutions)
Title(s)	National Consultations for Transforming Education
Types (e.g. National/Subnational)	National
Geographical Focus	Nation-wide (Republic of North Macedonia)
Number of Participants for each consultation	569 in total (youth in-person - 63; mayors - 45; members of parliament - 13, teachers – 54, students – 53, CSOs/OPDs – 22, national education institutions – 7, U-Report – 312)
Language used	Macedonian, Albanian, English, sign language

Total number of participants:

Age Range of Participants: (insert number)	
229	0 - 17
121	18 - 29
214	30 -59
5	60+

Gender Participants: (insert number)	
214	Male
353	Female
2	Prefer not to say

Number of Participants from each Sector: (insert number)			
499	Education		Nutrition
6	Child Protection		Communication
13	Health		Information Technology
5	Labor	8	Social Protection
15	Environment	5	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
18	Finance		Other (please explain)

Number of participants from each Stakeholder Group: (insert number)	
45	- Teachers, educators, facilitators, and professors
313	- Youth and students (including children and adolescents)
9	- School leaders (e.g., from UNESCO ASPnet school network)
45	- City and local government representatives
20	- Parents and caregivers
	- Small/medium enterprises/unions
	- Large national businesses
13	- Members of Parliament
	- Multi-national corporations
	- Local authorities
9	- Government and national institutions
	- Public Servants
	- Regional economic community
22	- Local Non-Governmental Organizations
	- International and/or Regional financial institutions
	- International Non-Governmental Organizations
	- Indigenous people and community leaders
	- Scientific community, academic, universities and research institutes
	- Media
40	- Other (Please explain): U-Report respondents aged 30+ (no information regarding their background)

How did you organize the consultation to ensure the following principles of national consultations?

- | | |
|---|---|
| √ | - A whole-of-government approach |
| √ | - Inclusion and equality |
| √ | - Focusing on youth as 'agents of change' |

3. CONSULTATION FOCUS AND OUTCOMES

The consultations covered a wide range of issues relevant to the education system and education stakeholders in the Republic of North Macedonia, including the five topics outlined in the Futures of Education Briefing Notes, corresponding to the five thematic tracks – 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; 2. Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession; 4. Digital learning and transformation; and 5. Financing of education.

1. Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools

In the past three years, the primary education sector in North Macedonia went through an accelerated reform process, with a number of laws and policies adopted with the view of improving inclusion and the overall quality of education – the Concept for Primary Education, the new Law on Primary Education, the Concept for Inclusion, the Concept for Distance Learning, the Concept for National Assessments and a series of relevant bylaws. The legislative framework provides a solid basis to improve the overall quality and equity of education, raise learning outcomes and ensure all children attend mainstream schools. However, it is imperative that in the upcoming period, the implementation of the laws and policies is prioritized and followed-up.

The ongoing reform processes in preschool and secondary education, and the drafting of the new Law on Secondary Education, need to be aligned with and build on the progress made in primary education, to ensure continuity throughout the different education cycles.

Only 37% of children aged 3-5 in North Macedonia attend preschool education, which is in stark contrast with the EU average of 95%. These statistics are further worrying given the inequalities in participation rates among the different ethnic groups, with 54% of ethnic Macedonian children attending ECE, compared to 14% of ethnic Albanian children and 10% among children of other ethnicities. Furthermore, only 7% of the children from the poorest quintile attend preschools, while those of the richest quintile represent 67%. There is an urgent need to expand the infrastructural capacities of pre-school institutions so that more children can access quality and equitable preschool education. This must go hand-in-hand with improving pre-school teacher capacities and linking the preschool system with primary education.

The most significant progress with inclusive education was made in the primary education sector, where activities are under way to ensure full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education by 2023. The former special schools have been transformed into resource centers that are supporting the schools, teachers, education assistants, parents and children with relevant expertise. Nevertheless, additional investments in capacity development of staff and creating accessible teaching materials, resources and approaches in mainstream schools must remain a key priority. Additional support services, both within and outside the education sector, need to be established to ensure equitable and full inclusion and participation of children with disabilities in the teaching and learning process.

While schools in North Macedonia are well equipped with school support staff, usually a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, their practical preparation for counseling and working with students is often lacking and their work tends to focus on students with major learning and/or mental health and psychosocial support needs, in contrast to a broader approach targeting all students. This problem is further exacerbated by administrative duties delegated to the school support service in lack of dedicated staff.

The lockdowns and school closures during the pandemic have further worsened the problem, with a large number of students and teachers losing access to their support networks and the professionals at school. During the school closures of 2020, over 90% of parents reported that they had never been contacted by support services regarding their child's wellbeing and potential stress or difficulty coping. Furthermore, almost 80% reported that their children never received any resource or guidance in

support of dealing with stress and social isolation.

It is imperative that school support services receive the necessary support to strengthen their capacities alongside tools and materials to support children's mental wellbeing and education. These professionals should be supported to take a leading role in creating a school culture of support and care for the mental health of all students, and staff. There is also a need for establishment of multi-professional collaboration between schools and other professionals at the local level, offering targeted and specialized support when needed as well as proper case management, including referrals to other services, as necessary.

2. Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development

The ongoing primary education reform involved the development of comprehensive and cohesive learning standards and a student-centered curriculum, with new teaching and learning materials, including digital interactive and accessible resources and textbooks. The reform has thus far been rolled-out in Grades 1, 2, 4 and 5, and all teachers from the respective grades have been trained to implement the new curriculum.

It is imperative to continue the roll-out of the new curriculum and continue developing contemporary teaching and learning materials throughout all grades of primary education, to ensure a contemporary and cohesive learning path, and to align the process with reforms in preprimary and secondary education.

The concept for national assessments was recently adopted and its implementation is expected to provide valuable data for the results of the implementation of new curricula, inform future policy making and strengthen the quality assurance system. Further improvements are needed to the school evaluation processes, both regarding self-evaluation and the evaluations conducted by the State Education Inspectorate, with further staff capacity development for evaluation both at schools and the inspectorate.

The Republic of North Macedonia is committed to participating in international student assessments, such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS but there is a need for stronger commitment to further analysis of the findings from these assessments, to diagnose system shortcomings, inform policymaking and contribute to overall education system enhancements.

Reforms are underway in the vocational education and training sector, in order to bridge the gap between the needs of the labor market and the skills that the students acquire through education. The recently introduced dual system offers opportunities for work-based learning and skills development for students, but this process needs to be further expanded. The collaboration with the business sector needs to be intensified in order to provide opportunities for meaningful practicum placements for students and to ensure that they get the relevant skills for the labour market.

3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

Teachers' participation in professional development is relatively low in North Macedonia, reflecting limited supply and quality. More than half of required teacher professional development hours are administered by external providers, such as local non-governmental organisations and universities. Given the limited financial resources, this approach does expand the range of professional development opportunities available to teachers, but it needs to be complemented by mechanisms for quality assurance.

The Bureau for Development of Education is in a process of establishing a catalogue of accredited training providers with support from the World Bank, to ensure that the professional development opportunities offered are relevant and contribute towards strengthening the required professional competencies in teachers.

In that regard, further investments are needed to strengthen teachers' capacities for contemporary teaching and learning, based on an interactive approach and with opportunities for practical application of what has been learnt in day-to-day life. More prominent use of formative student assessments should

be promoted, so as to ensure continuous follow-up and support for students' development.

There is a need for consistent and comprehensive approach towards career advancement. The system for career advancement of teachers and school professional staff has been initiated, with the first round of teacher mentors selected and promoted, but the process needs to continue in the upcoming years and be coordinated with improvements made to the system for professional development.

Initial teacher training at the universities is not aligned with the recent education reforms that focus on curricular changes towards more student-centered, competency-based learning, inclusive education and development of social and emotional skills. The study programmes at the teacher training faculties need to be modernized, offering opportunities for meaningful practical learning experiences of students, while also ensuring a more selective entrance process for students.

4. Digital learning and transformation

The education system in North Macedonia was unprepared for the outbreak of the pandemic and the school closures initially left many students without access to education. Teachers and administrators had poorly developed ICT and digital skills, and there wasn't an adequate digital infrastructure or digital resources in place to ensure quick shift towards distance learning. Nevertheless, within two weeks of the school closures, the national digital platform was launched, with teachers at all levels from preprimary to secondary education volunteering to develop digital lessons and resources. During this process, the teachers developed solid digital skills and competencies that should now be further developed and utilized to complement both in-person and distance learning.

The national learning platform, e-library and databases created in response to the pandemic need to be maintained and investments made in the development of additional digital resources, tools and strengthening teacher competencies. Digitalization should be used as a complement to in-person teaching and as a tool to bridge inequalities, rather than deepening the gap. To support this, further investments should be made in improving the digital infrastructure at schools, while digital tools should be made more accessible to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities.

4. MAIN OUTCOMES REGARDING THE FOUR KEY COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Swift recovery of the education system from the Covid-19 disruptions:

- taking urgent and decisive action to ensure all children, including the most disadvantaged groups, girls, Roma, children with disabilities, refugee and migrant children, develop foundational learning to realize their full potential;
- enrolling all children and keeping them in school, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups, girls, Roma, children with disabilities, refugee and migrant children; increasing access to remedial and catch-up learning, supporting teachers by giving them the necessary tools, and nurturing the health, nutrition and psychosocial well-being of every teacher and child;
- continuing investment in digital teaching and learning materials, and building teacher skills to personalize the materials with the aim of meeting the different learning styles and needs of students.

Schools as inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy environments for students and staff:

- expanding the access to quality and inclusive preschool education to at least 60 percent of children aged 3 to 6 by 2030;
- decreasing learning poverty, enabling the investments and leveraging educational technologies needed to effectively advance foundational learning, so that by 2030, the national share of children who are unable to read and write at the end of primary school is reduced by half;
- creating safe physical and online environments that promote respect and diversity, foster student

academic achievements and nurture the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff.

Improved learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development:

- developing competency-based curriculum that is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and society and promotes a school culture of equity, inclusivity, continuous growth and acquiring 21st century skills.
- ensuring that textbooks and learning materials are aligned with the new curricula, accessible to students with disabilities and available in printed and digital formats.
- strengthening the quality assurance system by aligning school evaluation with its core purposes of accountability and improvement, including empowering principals to lead school transformation; ensuring that school evaluations provide high quality feedback to improve learning and teaching practices; establishing a national assessment system; and strengthening collection and analysis of high-quality data to monitor progress and inform decision-making;
- investing in modernizing vocational education to bridge the gap between the needs of the labor market and the skills that the students acquire through education;
- providing opportunities for lifelong learning, reskilling and upskilling to assist individuals throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices that will help them achieve their career goals.

Strengthened role and capacities of teachers and the teaching profession:

- modernizing the study programmes for pre-service teacher training and enforcing a more selective admission process;
- increasing investments in teacher professional development for contemporary and quality teaching and learning and operationalizing the system for teacher career advancement;

Advanced digitalization of education:

- continuously developing digital resources and tools and maintaining the national digital platforms and the communities within them;
- improving the digital infrastructure of all schools, and specifically rural schools, to ensure that all children, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities can access the content, tools and networks for digital teaching and learning;
- continuously investing in strengthening teacher digital competencies to utilize tools and create resources, but also to support students to use digital venues and devices in a healthy and safe manner, minimizing abuse, violence, and misinformation online.

Improved adequacy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity of public spending in primary and secondary education:

- setting a new funding framework to gradually increase primary and secondary education transfers to municipalities by 35%, thus constituting a major step forward in bringing the country's public expenditures on education as a percentage of GDP closer to the levels of developed countries, thus ensuring sufficient funding for capital expenditures, teaching aids, inclusive education, education in languages of various ethnic communities and teacher professional development;
- ensuring efficient and effective allocation of resources by optimizing the school network, so that all primary schools are able to deliver education in accordance with the national educational standards, enabling equitable primary education that provides good quality teaching to all students.