



YOUTH
IN EU REGIONS

Western Macedonia ► GR

Text of Positions and Proposals (Concept Note)

**1st Conference "Forum" Youth of Western Macedonia
"Youths in EU Regions – Post-lignite Era and Development - Dialogue,
Innovation and Actions"**

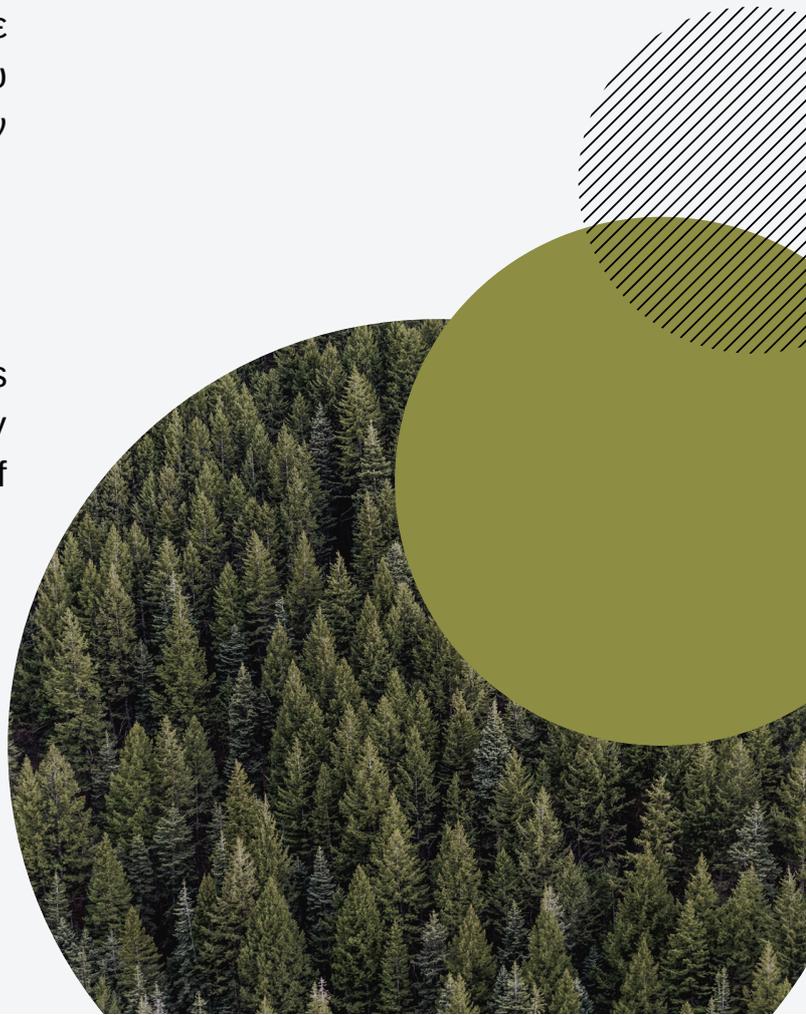
OCTOBER 2022



**ΟΜΙΛΟΣ ΕΝΕΡΓΩΝ ΝΕΩΝ ΦΛΩΡΙΝΑΣ
(ΟΕΝΕΦ)**

Σύμφωνα με το Ν.2121/93 (ΦΕΚ Α 25/04.03.1993) για την Πνευματική Ιδιοκτησία απαγορεύεται η αναδημοσίευση και γενικά η αναπαραγωγή του παρόντος έργου, η αναμετάδοση του σε ηλεκτρονική ή οποιαδήποτε άλλη μορφή και η φωτοανατύπωση του με οποιονδήποτε τρόπο, χωρίς γραπτή άδεια του Ομίλου Ενεργών Νέων Φλώρινας και των δημιουργών του.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means, without the primer permission of the Association of Active Youths of Florina.



CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 04 |
| 2.PROPOSALS | 05 |
| A. ON THE ISSUE OF LIGNITE PHASE-OUT: | 10 |
| B. ON THE ISSUE OF INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN A JUSTICE TRANSITION PROCESS. | 10 |
| B.1.INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN GREEK AND EU POLICIES. | 13 |
| B.2. RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING A JUSTICE TRANSITION. | 17 |
| B.3.PROPOSED FORMS OF INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING A JUSTICE TRANSITION | 17 |
| B.3.1. UPRIGHT PROMPT, TIMELY AND VALID INFORMATION | 18 |
| B.3.2. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION | 21 |
| C. THE PRIORITIES THAT THE REGION OF WESTERN MACEDONIA SHOULD HAVE IN THE FUTURE. | 22 |
| C.1.EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP | 23 |
| C.2 EDUCATION - RESEARCH AND INNOVATION | 24 |
| C.3 CAN IT DEVELOP ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE IDENTITY (BRANDING) AS A REGION? | 25 |
| C.4.INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT | 28 |
| C.5.ECONOMIC - DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK | 28 |
| C.6.PROMOTION - ENHANCEMENT OF TOURISM AND EXTROVERSION | 28 |
| D. THE FACTORS THAT ARE CAPABLE OF MAKING YOUNG PEOPLE STAY. | 29 |
| D.1.ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS | 29 |
| D.2.ECONOMIC FACTORS | 30 |
| D.3.SOCIAL FACTORS | 31 |
| 3.EPILOGUE | 32 |
| 4.REFERENCES | 34 |
| 5. WRITING TEAM | |



1. INTRODUCTION

The young people of Western Macedonia actively participated in the 1st Youth Forum of Western Macedonia, entitled: "Youths in EU Regions – Post-lignite Era and Development - Dialogue, Innovation and Actions" (Erasmus+, Key Action 3 - KA3/KA3:Support of political reforms).The Conference was held from 7th to 9th October 2022, in Florina, implemented by the Association of Active Youths of Florina (OENEF) - Europe Direct of Western Macedonia and was attended by more than 140 young people 16 to 35 years old who live, work, study or are active in Western Macedonia.

Recognizing that the transition to a climate-neutral economy is a commitment made by our country, based on the realization that the climate crisis and its impacts are one of humanity's greatest challenges,

Understanding the importance of implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the 169 sub-targets that specify them, which constitute the compass for a sustainable, equitable, healthy environment for future generations,

Emphasizing the importance of implementing Goal 13 of Climate Action, and welcoming the recognition by the UN General Assembly of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (UN RES A/76/L.75),

Being conscious of the importance of respecting the commitment undertaken by developed States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as all commitments arising from international, regional, supranational, national and local texts of agreements aimed at protecting the environment, Underlining the need to respect and implement the commitments made by the 27 EU Member States under the European Green Deal, which foresees that Europe will be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, as well as all actions that implement the above objectives and that have so far taken place at national and European level in order to protect the environment, improving the quality of life,

Recognizing that the implementation of all these ambitious commitments entails drastic changes not only in the production of goods and the provision of services, in the way we move, work and consume, but also in the economy of local communities, which have been dependent on lignite for decades,

Noting that young people have prospects for our future and were not included in the planning process of the Just Transition Plan, but we will have a voice in the process of its implementation, through the Association of Active Youths of Florina, which claimed and actively participates with voting rights, in the Monitoring Committee of the Just and Development Transition Program 2021 - 2027, the Ministry of Development and Investments,

Having participated with a text of proposals and positions, following the initiative of the Association of Active Youths of Florina and in the context of the implementation of this program, in the public consultation process that was completed on November 10, 2020, and concerned the form of the Just and Development Transition Plan (masterplan) of the lignite regions of Western Macedonia and Megalopolis, the basic principles of which were presented in September 2022,

Recognizing that the local government with Civil Society and voluntary organizations, as the closest body of the State to the residents, must take on a greater role both in environmental education and in the proper recycling of materials,

Wishing to work and remain in the Region of Western Macedonia, seeing our place flourish and prosper, to offer us job opportunities related to the subject of our studies, and to upgrade the quality of life of its inhabitants, after thorough research and relevant consultation during the work of the Conference,

We conclude with the following positions-proposals, which concern both the issue of lignite phase-out and just transition, as well as the issue of the active participation of young people in the Region of Western Macedonia. In addition, we conclude with some proposals on the priorities that we believe the Region of Western Macedonia should have for the upcoming years, in order to evolve into a Region of opportunities, extroversion, development and innovation. Finally, we note the social, economic, environmental and educational factors that are crucial so that we can remain in our country and become active in it.

2. Proposals

A. On the issue of lignite phase-out:

A.1. **We believe** that there are legitimate and critical concerns about the short- and medium-term consequences of the Developmental/Energy Transition lignite phase-out, as well as the lignite phase-out in Western Macedonia, especially in terms of the immediate loss of jobs, the potential of the region and the country in the technical/technological sector and the cost of living.

However, the potential of long-term benefits and the potential to improve the quality of life, as well as the development of new professional and economic activities, also the establishment of innovation and sustainability factors in the Region, seem to tip the balance in favor of the positive effects of the Transition.

Therefore, the young people of Western Macedonia, for the reasons mentioned above regarding their participation, can assess the Development/Energy Transition as a risk, but also as **an opportunity** for a better and truly sustainable future for the region.

A.2. Positive elements and opportunities arising from the decision to disengage from lignite activity are the following:

- Protection of the environment and decongestion of the local ecosystem from pollutants of the coal power generation.
- The improvement of the quality of life for residents and a positive impact on life expectancy, due to the improvement of environmental factors, which affect human health.
- Approval of the first financial program for the support - development of the just transition, which is an opportunity for the Region, as there is a large-scale of financial resources available, based on the Just Development Transition Program, which should be ensured that they will be rationally absorbed to strengthen the local economy. In addition, it is an opportunity to have all the financial tools that can support the transition process, namely, the European Just Transition Mechanism, including the Just Transition Fund (€19.2 billion, estimated to mobilize investments about €25.4 billion), the Just Transition Scheme under InvestEU (which will provide a financial guarantee of the programme framework, and is expected to mobilise €10-15 billion in investment. and the new public sector loan facility (which will combine €1.5 billion of grants, part of the EU budget, with €10 billion worth of loans from the European Investment Bank). Besides, having examined the available financial tools, those of the Recovery Fund, and the European Fund for Rural Development are identified, as crucial because of the role of the various EU competitive programs and the national resources.
- Strengthening investments in other forms of energy production and highlighting the innovation in the field of Energy, as well as promoting research on Renewable Energy Sources.

- Further opportunities for the development of the primary sector, due to the release of arable land from land used for lignite extraction, but also from land that was rendered unsuitable due to the proximity to PPC plants.
- Promotion of employment opportunities in other professional sectors, such as the change of the production model, but also the abolition of the dependence of the local economy on PPC, can create space for the development of new professional activities or the expansion/renewal of existing ones. Indicatively, the following are mentioned: Engineers and professionals in the field of RES, new types of cultivators or evolution of old ones, development of professions of new technologies, construction industry, transport.
- Utilization of existing social, educational and economic structures and/or their modernization.
- Topographically/geomorphologically/climatically, the area favors the greater production of "green" energy from NRSE (Renewable Sources of Energy).
- Opportunity to change the production model of the Region with emphasis on circular economy, based on the "reuse - recycle - reduce" model.
- Upgrading the Region into a "green" energy center point, through the development of NRSE, and investments on a large-scale in hydrogen.

A.3. We identify some challenges and issues to be solved, arising from the process of implementing the release from lignite activity, which should be taken into account during the implementation process of the Just Development Transition Plan, and are set out below:

- **Loss of jobs (more than 12,000) or a change in the main professional activity, both of employees in production units, and of employees in dependent enterprises or entities related to lignite activity, due to the closure of energy production units of them.**

It is proposed to provide rehabilitation/compensation to businesses and freelancers who were professionally active in lignite activities.

It is suggested that we provide and implement targeted training or retraining programs for the workforce, which is called upon to change its main professional activity and be employed in a related activity, while linking them to the labor market, in order to ensure their absorption.

- **Difficulty in immediate rehabilitation/absorption of the workforce, due to the age profile of the existing employees in factories.**

A concerted effort is proposed to design incentives to attract a large-scale, in long-term new investments with local added value, so that the loss of related jobs is not noticeable.

Regarding the difficulty of immediate rehabilitation/absorption of the workforce on the basis of their age profile, it is proposed to implement lifelong learning and training educational programs, and to find new jobs with targeted target groups, on the basis of a fair share.

• **Difficulty in having an immediate rehabilitation/absorption of the workforce, due to the age profile of the existing employees in factories.**

A concerted effort is proposed to design incentives to attract a large-scale, in long-term new investments with local added value, so that the loss of related jobs is not noticeable. Regarding the difficulty of the immediate rehabilitation/absorption of the workforce on the basis of their age profile, it is proposed to implement lifelong learning and training educational programs, and to find new jobs with targeted target groups, on the basis of a fair share.

• **Difficulty in dealing with/managing the "brain drain" phenomena and attracting young scientists to become active in the Region of Western Macedonia. It is proposed to upgrade the model of approach to tackling the phenomenon in a coordinated and multi-level way, and to set three interrelated objectives:**

A. Return of human resources (brain regain),

B. Halting brain retain, and

C. Interconnection of Greeks abroad with the domestic business and research community (brain circulation) [1].

It is essential to coordinate the factors involved, so that the above objectives can be adopted jointly. The package of the measures of the Federation of Greek Entrepreneurs on brain drain, which was made available to the public debate in 2020, includes, among others, a specialized 5-pillar Action Plan, through which specialized measures are proposed to address the phenomenon. Indicatively, horizontal actions for the retention and motivation of return, the lifting of over taxation of productive labor, the reduction of its high non-wage costs, the initiative for special paid employment programs with reduced experience requirements for young scientists, the further support and financial or any other required support of bodies, such as the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (ELIDEK), which through scholarships and grants promote the research and scientific activity of young scientists, the creation of a permanent mechanism of monitoring and designing policies to address brain drain.

In this context, emphasis should be placed on Western Macedonia, which, despite of the brain drain phenomena, is the Region with the highest youth unemployment rates in the EU.

- **The relocation of the residents of Akrini of Kozani, Anargyroi, Achlada and Valtonera of Florina, as these settlements are adjacent to mines and lands with lignite deposits and extensive deposits.**

The immediate, effective and fair implementation of the relocation process, which is carried out both for reasons of public interest and for the sake of protecting the quality of life of the residents, is proposed. In addition, it is proposed to immediately implement the provisions of the "Masterplan" or SDAM regarding the incentives to be provided to the residents of these settlements, such as housing subsidy, and reduced income tax rates.

- **Incomplete technical knowledge for the development and utilization of new technologies and energy production techniques.**

It is proposed that educational activities and programs be implemented steadily and regularly repeated, based on the lifelong education of young workers, as well as employees who are forced to change their main professional activity due to the process of ceasing lignite activity. The training programs offered should include enhancing employees' digital skills, connecting them to the labor market and ensuring the quality of the modules offered, as well as being designed with social inclusion in mind.

It is also proposed to further expand the "Hellenic Alliance for Digital Skills and Employment", which is coordinated by the Ministry of Digital Governance and involves sectors of a wide range of social reality. It is necessary to strengthen the actions addressed to Western Macedonia, and their appropriate formulation based on the needs of the region's potential to reduce digital illiteracy.

Finally, it is proposed to establish a network for the formation of multilevel collaborations with businesses and/or educational institutions active in the technological sector, in order to exchange good practices, offer know-how, as well as technological support for the modernization of existing infrastructure.



- **Increased cost of living, as areas that had access to district heating are affected, by rising heating costs, but possibly also medium-term increases in energy costs in general, as well as increased electricity production costs and loss of a percentage of the region's NRSE.**

It is proposed to ensure a gradual transition to the new model, and its completion should happen only when existing needs are fully covered, without increased costs for households and businesses.

In addition, it is proposed to enforce the involvement of the energy communities of public benefit and the energy communities of citizens, the initiative for the realization of small projects of Renewable Energy Sources, as well as the finding of electrical space for rural photovoltaics, rooftop photovoltaics (residential), photovoltaic small and medium-sized enterprises, given that small RES projects favor the local community and the smooth operation of district heating. Whereas large NRSE projects are taking place, it is proposed to provide for rehabilitation and generous repayments to the local communities affected.

Another of our proposals is to ensure a generous subsidy for lignite regions through the CO2 auction share, and specifically to double the percentage to which Western Macedonia is entitled.

- **Uncertainty about the restoration of the affected soils.**

It is proposed to draw up a complete restoration plan, based on scientific methods and to return the land to local communities, as a matter of priority, after consultation, for their best possible utilization.

- There is uncertainty about whether the energy will be sufficient to meet the needs of citizens, during the transitional stage of the implementation of the Plan, but also in the long term.



In the first stage, it is proposed to provide citizens with more effective information and transparency regarding compliance with the process of covering energy needs, with emphasis on the cities in transition affected, and in particular Kozani, Ptolemaida, Florina and Amyndeon. In addition, it is necessary to reassure the uninterrupted operation of district heating and to implement the central idea of interconnecting energy production points with all consumption points.

In the second stage, it is proposed to continuously redefine and coordinate the long-term plan to meet the energy needs of the cities in transition, and its detailed formulation with the participation of the local community sectors of each city, and the publication of this plan in an comprehensible way to inform the public.

- **Uncertainty about the environmental footprint of the construction of new means of energy production**

It is proposed to draw up and validate a Special Spatial Plan for Renewable Energy Sources as well as the respect to the sites and the habitat of the Protected Areas and the access of the fauna of the area.

- **Uncertainty regarding the development and operation of Energy Communities, which have already been established in the region and have not received a permit for connection to HEDNO, due to insufficient electrical space or priority in large investment projects.**

It is proposed to prioritize the approval of projects of the Energy Communities of the region of Western Macedonia (Municipalities, Communities, groups of citizens and organizations), the reservation and rendering of electrical space, so that they become an essential vehicle for the transition and electricity production.



B. On the issue of involving young people in a justice transition process.

B.1. Introductory remarks on the inclusion of young people in Greek and EU policies.

The meaning and essence of youth participation and inclusion at the level of formation and decision-making, as members of society and not necessarily as elected officials, does not recognize any universal accepted definition. It is often complicated to properly assess the level of youth participation in a particular field, but it can be said with certainty that the current intensity of engagement is insufficient. In 1997, sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book about UNICEF [2], in which he codified some guidelines for cooperation between youth and adults in society development and environmental care. Hart introduced the concept of the "Youth Participation Ladder", at the levels of which eight different levels/forms of youth citizenship participation are outlined and is used by youth initiatives to theoretically frame the concept of youth participation [3]. We consider this recording useful as it highlights the state of youth interaction in society, as well as outlines characteristically each level of participation and engagement, as well as their interaction.

From the perspective of international commitments, youth participation in policy-making and the various approaches in this direction are based primarily on the United Nations International Convention on the Children's Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 [4]. Greece ratified the convention in 1993 and since 2001 has been submitting the Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention. Article 12 of the Convention explicitly states the right of children and young people to have their views taken into account when decisions affecting them are taken.

From the point of view of European law, youth is an area of national policy, so the EU can have a supporting role in this context, and legislative harmonization between Member States is not possible. Nevertheless, the action of the EU institutions in this context is rich and based on Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU [5] . In particular, in this context, the Council of the EU approves recommendations to Member States on the basis of Commission proposals on youth-related issues.



RUNG 8 - Youth initiated shared decisions with adults: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners

RUNG 7 - Youth initiated and directed: Youth-led activities with little input from adults

RUNG 6 - Adult initiated shared decisions with youth: Adult-led activities, in which decision making is shared with youth.

RUNG 5 - Consulted and informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

RUNG 4 - Assigned, but informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process and have a role.

RUNG 3 - Tokenism: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

RUNG 2 - Decoration: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

RUNG 1 - Manipulation: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities.



The EU has adopted various policies, through concrete programs and guidelines, which seek to give young people more equal opportunities in education and the labor market, as well as the possibility to participate fully in all areas of society. Among other things, it is particularly important for the European Commission to involve young people in civil society, democratic dialogue and life [6]. The European Youth Strategy [7], developed in the framework of cooperation in the field of EU youth policy for 2019-2027, based on the EU Council resolution of 26 November 2018 [8], explicitly states that mainstreaming a youth perspective in EU policies is a priority, and recommends that Member States and individual national authorities adopt the context of sincere cooperation and mutual trust, policies of inclusion and integration of this perspective into their policies. Furthermore, the Strategy explicitly recognizes the essential importance of youth councils, as well as the key importance of positive recognition of the creation of such councils, or the support of those created at the initiative of young people themselves, by local or national authorities in the Member States.

At national level, the "National Strategy for Youth (2017-2027) - Strategy Framework for Youth Empowerment" [9] is the text that defines the principles and objectives for young people in Greece, taking into account contemporary youth transformations and their sociological, economic and cultural dimensions, while defining the procedures that ensure the active participation of young people in policy making. While the theoretical framework for empowerment and participation is enriched, and the participation of young people is strong in EU empowerment programs (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, etc.), and given the valuable engagement of the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation towards the provision of these opportunities, young people in Greece still do not participate in democratic dialogue and policymaking in a coordinated or institutional way. Unless they do so by taking their own personal or group initiatives and individualized engagement. This participation gap is filled by Civil Society itself through NonProfit Organizations or youth associations whose activity is to enhance the participation of young people in public debate, upgrade their contribution to public affairs and shape the political, social, cultural, and environmental space through their own perspective. Even forums organized in this context, such as this forum, are crucial for enhancing young people's participation in the democratic process, public debate and social reality. The essence of approving a program within Key Action 3 [10] reinforces support for Member States' public policy reforms. The 1st Youth Forum of Western Macedonia, held with the initiative the Association of Active Youths of Florina and Europe Direct of Western Macedonia, is such a program for the promotion of the Structured Dialogue for Youth.

B.2. Recognising the importance of including young people in the process of implementing a justice transition.

The issue of lignite phase-out and the realization of the Just Transition is for the Region of Western Macedonia, but also for the whole country, a key milestone for the course of the region and our country, and the outcome of its implementation will determine our future. Identifying the gap of our participation in the field of charting and planning, we are optimistic and optimistic for the future, based on the result of the participation of the majority of local and national stakeholders in our conference, and their consequent commitment to work towards our inclusion in the process of implementing the transition that our Region and the country will undergo in the short term. in the medium and long term.

The participation of young people in the process of designing and implementing the just transition processes does not remain a wish list, without tangible results. In a number of regions in transition across Europe, the participation of young people in the transition process has been the motive of innovation, the quintessence of inspiration and vision for the future of the region in transition, and has been one of the conditions for success of a smooth implementation of the transition [11]. The relevant Joint Report of Generation Climate Europe, published in October 2022, which concerns the recording and overview of the monitoring work of the implementation of the political commitment to involve young people in the implementation process of the European Just Transition Mechanism is a compass for understanding the importance of this inclusion. Furthermore, the Report highlights the good practices that have been implemented so far, following a comparative review of the situation in fifteen (15) EU Member States, including Greece [12].



Meeting with the managing team of OENEF and young people from Western Macedonia with Commissioner, Eliza Ferreira

The Report records the actions of OENEF and Europe Direct Western Macedonia towards strengthening the youth presence in the process of discussions on the Transition, the contacts with the Ministry of Development and the positive impact of the regular interaction of young people with the Transition, the submission of our text of proposals to the public consultation process, as well as the meeting of a group of new members of OENEF from Western Macedonia with the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Mrs. Elisa Ferreira, during which, and in the presence of the Regional Governor of Western Macedonia, Mr. Giorgos Kasapidis discussed, among other things, the issue of the participation of young people in the process of formulating and implementing proposals concerning their future, and the state of institutional recognition of the space from which this will happen.



Finally, it is noted that contact with local authorities remains active, but not in general, nor is it addressed to a large number of young participants. In other European Union countries that have experienced the transition process, local authorities have themselves been the initiative to create space for young people to interact, reflect, express their concerns, and actively participate in their proposals, which could be taken into account.

Generation Climate Europe (GCE) [13] is the network of 381 youth organisations in 46 European countries to promote climate change issues at European level. Another important initiative in this direction is the European Youth Energy Network (EYEN), a federation representing youth organisations that have developed energy-related activities across Europe [14]. Lastly, YES Europe [15] is the European network of environmental - national and regional - non-profit youth organizations, supporting youth initiatives aimed at energy transition and sustainable development.



Having as a compass the observations of Module B.1. Regarding the importance of institutional recognition of youth participation at the level of shaping and decision-making, as well as policy making for the future that concerns them, all the above, as well as experiencing the situation of youth participation in our country, we fully endorse the findings of the Green Tank's survey, part of which we quote below: The participation of young people in the Just Transition [16] is a challenge, not only for Greece, but also for European lignite regions. It is well known that the European Union's Just Transition Mechanism leaves a discreet ability to EU Member States to include youth in the governance mechanism. In fact, the Commission, in its Staff Working Document on Territorial Just Transition Plans (NAPIM), published in September 2019 [17] as a guide to the preparation of the NAPPs, underlines the importance of involving young people in the governance of the Just Transition. In particular, it states that "it is important that young people are actively involved in the governance of the Just Transition Fund (JTF). A future long-lasting economy cannot be built without the participation of those who will live in the future and shape it."

Following this, in January 2021, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) published a text of "tools" for youth participation in the Just Transition [18], which young people can use to be included in the Just Transition process, to make use of the Just Transition Fund, given that the future of the transition is in their hands. This document is a holistic guide, which presents methods of involving young people at all stages of the life cycle of the Just Transition Fund and concludes with specific recommendations-proposals, recording good practices from European countries for the participation of young people in initiatives related to the environment, energy and climate in general. In particular, it also focuses on the decisions that Member of the States' ,the authorities can take to ensure the effective participation of young people.

In particular, the European Commission recommends that Member State authorities treat youth as their equal interlocutor from the outset, so that they can be included in the transition with clear objectives and a specific purpose. This is why it is important that the rules for participation and inclusion are co-developed with youth representatives and youth organizations. To ensure maximum participation of young people, the Commission encourages States to make use of all channels of communication and information, while focusing on the need to build cooperative relationships between local people who are in public affairs and youth. It also stresses the need to involve young people at all stages of the transition process (planning, implementation, monitoring) as well as their active role through consultations and projects. Youth are not homogeneous and it is therefore proposed to pay particular attention to reaching out to and supporting the most isolated or marginalised young people, as well as those from vulnerable social groups. In any case, however, the way of communicating with the new situation brought about by the transition should be adapted to the way and needs of youth.

In the context of intergenerational justice and intergenerational interaction, and in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted precisely for a fairer, sustainable and healthier world that we will hand over to future generations, we must work together people from all levels and all institutional or social backgrounds in order to best manage the transition process.



The monitoring stage is also important, which is why monitoring procedures are proposed so that young people know the impact of their interventions and whether or not their proposals have been adopted. The aim is their continuous participation to ensure their involvement in the transition process over time. In fact, in good practices of youth activation recorded in the toolkit, many types of engagement / participation are highlighted, such as structured dialogue, youth councils, youth parliaments, "ambassador" programs, mentoring and entrepreneurship workshops and initiatives, youth funds, etc. Also, the issue of youth participation in the planning and implementation of the Just Transition is of increasing concern to the Just Transition Platform, as it is an issue that interests the society of lignite regions on an equal footing with the economic and technological dimensions of the transition.

During the consultation processes of the young participants of the Youth Forum, some key proposals emerged to enhance the participation of young people in the just transition process, which are presented in the next section.

B.3. Proposed forms of inclusion and participation of youth in the process of implementing a justice transition

We see two levels of strengthening the inclusion and participation of youth in the process of implementing the just transition, so we divide our proposals into two parts. Firstly, we propose solutions-actions and actions at a righteous level, timely and valid information, and secondly at the level of active participation.

B.3.1. Upright prompt, timely and valid information

- Continuous updating the School Units of the Region, as well as the Departments of the University of Western Macedonia, with comprehensible information material, which will be prepared by the competent bodies, or through the organization of programs and seminars by experts, in order to raise awareness so that they can have a comprehensive view of the implementation of the just transition process.
- Encouragement of the continuous retraining of teachers, as well as the implementation evaluation process of the conduct of the course by teachers, professors and educators.
- Adoption by the people involved in the just transition process of an information model through social media on the main activities of the institutions, regarding the just transition process, and interactive depiction of short questions-answers to and from the pupils - students - young people of the region.
- Design and organization of a more friendly and interactive environment for young people, on the existing website of SDAM.

- Establishment of partnerships for the creation of a centralized center of interconnection - and cooperation between universities - companies - public and private bodies involved in the process of just transition, in order to network a more effective interaction, with the ultimate goal of better dissemination of information.
- Local government institutions support the development of entrepreneurial and digital skills in young people, through the initiative of formal and non-formal learning programs and actions, or the support of organizations-companies that implement them.
- Strengthening the presence and provision of educational activities of the Just Transition Institute, the Green Tank, as well as the Bioeconomy Cluster, which, due to their expertise in transition issues, can ensure the quality of the educational approach and deepen understanding on issues of transition for which there is confusion or ambiguity.



B.3.2. Active participation

During the first youth conference on lignite phase-out and just transition, it was realized that until now the young people of the Region were not included in the planning process and decisionmaking for the change of the productive profile of Western Macedonia.

At European level, young people in regions in transition - with similar youth action initiatives - have also become aware of the gap in their participation and perspective in this process, they have claimed institutional recognition and inclusion in decision-making. The non-inclusion of young people, as well as the absence of specific planning and relevant initiatives by stakeholders at local and national level is evident if one browses the Document published by the European Commission in January 2021 that it includes all the good practices of inclusion and participation of young people in the Just Transition.



In this text one can identify only one good practice of Greek origin, while the institutional recognition of youth as a group can be part of the formulation of proposals, the implementation of actions and the integration of their perspective for a fairer future for them is necessary.

A typical positive example of a state that has recognised - following the intervention of young people - their active participation in the transition process is Poland, where the local authorities recognized them as an advisory body on the transition process. A similar inclusion can be found in Ireland.

Through the open discussion and consultation of the participants of the Conference, during its work, and taking into account the positions of the keynote speakers at the round tables, the following proposals-positions emerged.

First of all, we, as young people, understand the necessity to act and declare the present in relation to issues concerning our future. To this end, we will proceed with the creation of a Just Transition Youth Council, which will have as its main activity the monitoring of implementation and participation in the just transition process. This Council will consist of young people from the four Regional Units of the Region of Western Macedonia, with the aim of highlighting the priorities and needs of the young people of Western Macedonia, during the process of implementing the Just Transition, as well as taking initiatives to inform, and strengthen the participation of young people in it, through the organization of relevant projects that will be addressed to young people and all citizens of Western Macedonia.

Youth Councils, as models, are an organized framework for the political participation of young people in the main issues of their country, which has proven to act as a link between young people and decision-makers. In addition, they improve and train their participants in objective ways of selection and inclusion, in the process of their participation in common events, as responsible and active citizens who shape their future. In addition, they create the fertile basis for young people to make policy for the place where they live, study, or work. The Just Transition Youth Council, in line with the existing Municipal Councils for all Municipalities in the Region of Western Macedonia, would be a good practice for youth activation and awareness on the issue of lignite phase-out and just transition.



In addition, we consider it necessary for young people to participate in the GOM mechanism. Although young people and youth groups participated in the public consultation on the GOM, on their own initiative and not in a coordinated manner, submitting a text of proposals and positions, which resulted from a consultation, their participation was excluded from the GOM Mechanism. We therefore propose to reassess the already existing governance framework and integrate representatives from youth groups or youth councils into the GOM Mechanism. These representatives will convey the requests of their working groups to the Commission and share possible proposals and ideas, as well as act as multipliers of information on each stage of the implementation of the process, enhancing the inclusion of youth in it without exclusion

Furthermore, given that extroversion and the exchange of good practices are crucial for the successful and coordinated implementation of a process such as Just Transition for our country, we will proceed to the creation of a Network of Youth Councils/Bodies for the Just Development Transition. This Network will aim to connect with young people from other regions of the EU in transition. The Network will serve as an information center for young people on developments around the GOM and will transfer good practices from other European countries to the local community, highlighting local concerns at national and European level. This Network should have a central base in one of the four Regional Areas of Western Macedonia and branches in the remaining three, in order to maximize the effectiveness of its operation. At the same time, it will conduct educational seminars, speeches, workshops, in which young people of the region and often groups from lignite regions of the EU will participate. In this way, there will be both information and cooperation, two essential assets for this process. The Just Transition Youth Council will be a member of this Network.

Regarding the support we wish to have from stakeholders in the process of implementing the Just Development Transition Plan, we consider it important to encourage and support initiatives for the organization of educational exercises and simulations of local government institutions, in order to consolidate theoretical knowledge and enhance the familiarization of young people's democratic participation in the decision-making process.

The educational programs and simulation exercises are guided by the information, familiarization, inclusion, training and acquisition of technical, digital skills and theoretical knowledge. According to the European Youth Strategy (2019-2027), national authorities and local authorities have a key role to play in strengthening the pillars of youth participation in society.



Finally, we point out that since all actions and every decision, taken on the basis of the implementation planning of the Just Development Transition process, aim at implementing the country's commitments to protect the environment and tackle the climate crisis, and given the importance and weight of the responsibility of the decentralized administration in implementing them, We encourage local authorities, in the first phase, to include in their planning and decisionmaking process the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, decided by the 193 UN member states as the 2030 Agenda, and in a second phase, to participate in the process of drafting and submitting annual Reports on the progress of their implementation of these Goals, as intended. In this way, our Region as well as the Municipalities of the P.E. will become a model for the implementation of the Goals of humanity for a sustainable and just future for future generations, passing the baton to the new generation to continue this effort.

C. The priorities that the Region of Western Macedonia should have in the future

The process of complete disengagement from lignite activity by 2028 is a particularly difficult and demanding undertaking. At this time, geopolitical developments have a direct impact on energy issues and have forced our country to extend the operation program of lignite plants, i.e. to continue lignite mining in the Region of Western Macedonia. This treaty has resulted in the concern of both decision-makers and citizens themselves regarding the adherence to the timetable for the implementation of the GOM and the transition of the region to a new, sustainable and fair economic model.

The time remaining to implement the commitments within the current timeframe is limited and the extremely complex and institutionally time-consuming procedures, as foreseen, raise concerns about the future of our Region. Therefore, the prudent and realistic planning of the next steps that Western Macedonia must follow, in order to properly adapt based on the needs of its citizens, after lignite phase-out, and not to jeopardize the path to its development, is an absolute necessity.

It is worth noting that, despite the concerns we have about the short and long-term consequences of the Transition, we identify that it is an opportunity for our Region, which, however, poses several risks if it is not possible to coordinate the involved bodies, provide adequate information, properly adhere to the timetable and re-evaluate the movements at regular intervals.

In the context of recording during the conference the priorities* that would make our Region the center of our activities, we came up with the following diagram.

*The priorities recorded have been divided into thematic areas to better connect and understand them.

C.1. Employment and Entrepreneurship

The Region of Western Macedonia has historically high unemployment rates both among the general population and among young people (15-29 years old), which constantly exceed the corresponding data of the rest of the European Union (EU). It is observed that Western Macedonia until 2019 held the first place among the 96 coal regions of the EU, falling to second place in the following years. The situation is similar at national level, with this region at the top of the negative employment indicators. The region maintains the lead in youth unemployment at both European and national level.

Adding to this data, there is also the unemployment that will be brought about by the process of Transition, which will be the main impact, especially if it is considered that "for decades 90% of lignite activity took place in FYROM". Studies estimate that after the end of lignite phase-out, in 2029, the lignite regions of our country will have lost 13% of local jobs (13,500 jobs). The approved NAPIM of Western Macedonia foresees that in 2030, the Just Transition Program will have created and supported directly, indirectly and inducibly approximately 10,150 jobs. In addition to the foreseen jobs, young people and the general population of the region should make use of the various financial tools offered and given that there will be a support framework, it is good for individuals to implement various business initiatives.

Ensuring job opportunities and supporting youth entrepreneurship for the young people of Western Macedonia of the Post-Lignite Era is a priority for the social welfare of the region, avoiding the brain drain and halting it so far, as well as improving living standards.

As young people, we prioritize Employment and Entrepreneurship through:

- The creation of sustainable jobs to tackle unemployment and especially youth unemployment in the Region.
- The development of an entrepreneurship center that will support the creation of businesses by young people or other vulnerable economic and social groups of the Region.
- To design and develop professional cooperation of synergies and actions with businesses entities abroad.
- The promotion of the social economy
- The protection of the labour rights of young people in the region, in order to avoid further waves of labour drain of workers abroad.
- The connection of the labor market with the Higher Education Institutions of the Region to ensure the sustainability of the jobs that were to be created, but also the utilization of innovative processes and modern approaches.
- The creation of an attractive working environment and a quality standard of living.
- Establishing incentives for the creation of business initiatives in sectors that Western Macedonia has a competitive advantage (e.g. wine tourism, agrotourism).

C.2 Education - Research and Innovation

The image of education of the citizens of Western Macedonia that can be extracted from demographics does not differ significantly from that of the employment. The general population performance is worse than the average of the corresponding regions in the EU. According to the study by "The Green Tank", until 2021, the percentage of the population aged 15-64 with educational attainment of a high school diploma and above were lower than the average of the rest of the carbonate regions of the EU. Nevertheless, the trend in educational attainment is upward.

In the same context, young people in Western Macedonia occupy a large percentage of young people neither in Employment nor in Education or Training (NEETs) or otherwise in the English terminology "NEETs". Reference is made to young people in the 15 to 24 age group, who are not in the labor market or possibly of an educational process and experience any form of social exclusion. Although the percentages in this case are gradually decreasing, young people who fall into this category in 2021, amounted to 17%.

Despite the disappointing statistics, young people recognize Education as an opportunity and therefore one of the most important priorities. As young people, we propose:

- The creation of energy development research centers, within all levels of education.
- The upgrading of study programs with emphasis on the particularities, comparative advantages and needs of the region.
- Ensuring the retention and attendance of all students in the educational process, regardless of the cultural, national or social group from which they come from or to which they belong to or their place of residence (e.g. remote or rural areas).
- Fair access for all to free quality education and training, regarding the development of digital skills, which are necessary for the integration or reintegration into the labor market of young people, as well as those whose activity is affected or changed due to lignite phaseout.
- The creation of Technical Education Departments in EPAL according to the productive characteristics of the PEs of the University of Macedonia (eg. Amyntaio Viticulture - Floriculture - Organic Farming Kozani).
- The initiation of higher education of departments in local areas of specialization (e.g. RESrelated professions).
- The training of adults through specialized vocational rehabilitation centers based on the needs of the local market.
- The support of the development of entrepreneurial and digital skills for young people from formal and non-formal learning programs and actions, or the support of organizations/companies that implement them.

- The educational promotion of good practices of sustainable development and the development of environmental programs at all levels in education, by concluding partnerships with the competent bodies.
- The direct connection of university departments with the local economy and the labor market.
- The enhancement of extroversion in actions with the University of Western Macedonia and the cooperation with local bodies.
- The appropriate information in relation to the new data arising from the transition to the Post-Lignite Era by a working group that will directly connect the needs of citizens and the region and will consist of civil society organizations and youth bodies, the University, the Region and other bodies of the region.
- The support of students of Universities and IEK with internships that can be provided either by businesses or by civil society actors. At the level that concerns bodies such as legal entities, associations, NGOs that promote culture, extroversion, research, the environment and sports, where the need for scientific support is great as well as the potential of the institutions to develop the local culture, we propose the creation of a digital matrix model to investigate the needs but support them with a direct job offer, through internships and supporting job creation.

C.3 Can it develop its own distinctive identity (branding) as a Region?

In the context of the evolution in our Region, as well as its extroversion based on its development, interaction and the best possible presentation, the need to highlight a characteristic identity for the development of tourism, through its comparative advantages. To this end, coordinated tourism promotion is necessary, following the development of a multilevel tourism plan of personalized nature for all areas in Western Macedonia.

Through the discussion, we recorded some of these factors that would make our Region a center of alternative tourism, a place for the development of the primary production and manufacturing sector, a place of education, research and innovation through its University.

Initially, the Region of Western Macedonia can become a pole of attraction for the development of agritourism, through the promotion of local products of its individual rural areas. Rural tourism in the Region of Western Macedonia can be developed through the support of the upgrading of existing rural guesthouses, in order to enhance the contact of tourists with participation in agricultural work and primary production of our characteristic local products (e.g. participation in the process of collecting Kozani saffron, learning the wine production process, etc.). In addition, it is important to support and take the initiative to organize ecosystem observation activities of the rich flora and fauna found throughout Western Macedonia.

In the context of supporting agritourism, it is important to create favorable conditions for the development or strengthening of entrepreneurship, with emphasis on family businesses operating in such agritouristic areas, in order to create the right conditions for a comfortable stay, recreation, contact with nature, contact with local traditional cuisine. Finally, it is important to provide educational training to those involved in agritourism through special educational programs aimed at developing and upgrading the quality of the services provided by them, so that those who choose Western Macedonia to experience agritourism will be multipliers of this identity.

Another form of alternative tourism that could be a priority when developing the branding of our Region is sports tourism. The deepening of cooperation with sports, mountaineering or other clubs of related activity with the Tourism Company of Western Macedonia can lead to the initiative to organize more and more organized sports activities of hiking, climbing, mountaineering or excursions, in order to exploit this aspect of our Region.

Educational and conference tourism is another way to enhance visitor traffic and interaction with our Region. Indicatively, we mention that the educational Center of Renewable Energy Sources, which was founded on the initiative of the Association of Active Youths of Florina and the Municipality of Amyntaio and with the funding of the Green Fund, is a typical example of activity that contributes to this direction. The new building complex of the University of Western Macedonia of national and European significance can be a focal point for enhancing mobility in the region for attending conferences, educational seminars. Finally, the wealth of our Region in churches of historical importance, as well as in archaeological monuments, is a factor that requires better tourist promotion and promotion of these spots and the appropriate care for their maintenance, based on the accessibility of all our fellow citizens to them.

C.4. Infrastructure and Transport

We consider it important for the improvement of the infrastructure and transport of our Region to strengthen and support electromobility, through the provision of more charging points for electric vehicles, as well as through the financial or investment support of those who choose this form of mobility.

At the same time, a detailed and coordinated redefinition of the use of existing units is necessary, as well as the study for the best possible utilization of both know-how and experience, as well as existing infrastructure.

In this direction, a better transport connection between the regions of Western Macedonia is crucial, since access by public transport to and from many areas and cities of Western Macedonia is not possible, making the transportation of citizens, and especially students, to and from them restrictive.

Finally, with a view to the extroversion of our Region, it would be important to create and reopen the railway connections of the Regional Unit of Florina with the neighboring countries of Albania and North Macedonia, as well as its direct connection with the Vertical Axis of Egnatia Odos, given that there is currently no connection with a Vertical Axis, while it is the only Regional Unit of the Region of Western Macedonia with an active railway interconnection with the port of Thessaloniki.

Regarding the issue of infrastructure and transport, emphasis should be given to the creation of appropriate infrastructures to support activities and services (economic, business, technological, educational, cultural, etc.) within the Region of Western Macedonia and the upgrading of existing ones, where necessary, and the utilization and use of buildings that have already been upgraded or are incomplete. These steps will improve the quality of these activities, aesthetically, energetically, or other upgrading through targeted interventions in the individual regions of Western Macedonia.

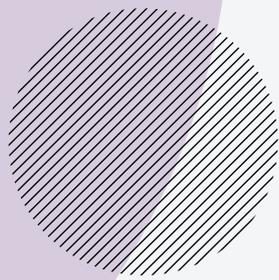
Indicatively, and not exclusively - we mention - to every competent body:

For the **Regional Unit of Florina**, it is necessary to reform and utilize the swimming pool of Florina, which was constructed but never operated, to find an ecological heating solution that will provide sustainability and support the economy of the city of Florina (district heating with RES), the completion of the Indoor Gym of Filotas, the completion of the irrigation networks of the dams of the Regional Unit of Florina, as well as the creation, reform, improvement and utilization of sports and tourist facilities at the beaches of Koula Prespa and Agios Panteleimon in Amyntaio. Also, necessary and catalytic for the development of higher education in the region is the creation of dormitories for students of the University Departments in Florina. Also important is the promotion and maintenance of mountaineering shelters along the E4 throughout Western Macedonia, the reinforcement and maintenance of public ski facilities in Vigla Pisoderi, the promotion and reconstruction of the Anno Bouat of the Municipality of Florina, and finally, the promotion of cultural heritage through the conservation of the neoclassical buildings in Florina. As far as transport infrastructure is concerned, there is an extremely urgent need for the reconstruction, maintenance and promotion of the train railway of Caucasus, Mesonisi, Sitaria Florina for the connection with North Macedonia, as well as the construction of a Customs Office in Lemos Prespa and the direct connection of Florina with a vertical axis with the Egnatia Odos.



For the **Regional Unit of Kozani**: it is necessary to complete the process of elaborating the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) of the city of Kozani and to accelerate urban interventions, in order to improve the quality of life of residents, the accessibility of all public service buildings by our fellow citizens with some form of disability, the utilization of the historic Camp of Macedonian Fighters, the completion of maintenance and restoration of the mansions, as well as the re-evaluation, determination of the usage of the unused buildings, not only in the city of Kozani, but also in all Communities and Municipalities of the Region. In addition, the completion of the required procedures for the utilization of "Xenia", the better promotion of the railway station OSE in Kozani. Moreover, targeted interventions in the city of Kozani are necessary, since there are certain points that can be considered a source of danger for drivers (e.g. road surface damage). In some places in the city of Kozani it is necessary to install traffic lights to conduct of daily traffic, and to serve our fellow pedestrians as well.

For the **Regional Unit of Grevena**: it is necessary to maintain/upgrade the Swimming Pool and the Municipal Sports Center of Grevena, to upgrade and promote the National Ski Center of Vasilitsa, to upgrade and promote the National Park of Northern Pindos - "Valia Calda", and to promote and staff the Paleontological Museum of Milia in Grevena. In addition, it is crucial to upgrade and promote the mountainous Refuge of Vounasa Deskatis, as well as to support the development of (alternative) tourist infrastructure for the Mastorochoria and Vlachochoria of Grevena. The completion and further development of the irrigation networks of the Region. Grevena, as well as the railway connection of Grevena with the National Railway Network, with a view to promoting the Region. Grevena to a transport center for the whole country, in combination with the completion of the E65 road axis (road connection with Athens). The creation and development of an "Innovation Enclave" in Grevena, under the control of the local departments of the University of Western Macedonia, and the establishment and creation of an Organized Business Reception Area (e.g. Craft Park), near the road axis of Egnatia Odos and the E65 under construction, are also important. In addition, it is necessary to promote existing cooperatives and other processing structures, and to develop a network of cooperatives of similar activity throughout the O.C. as well as to complete and promote the Orliakas Astronomical Educational Park. Finally, the creation and development of tourist trails on the theme of Naturalism and the Environment, throughout the O.E., while promoting the Grevena-Kozani Geopark is of decisive importance for the overall upgrading of infrastructure.



For the **Regional Unit of Kastoria**, it is necessary to upgrade the road connection, and the better road interconnection of the villages-municipalities within the region unit, the coordinated development of a holistic plan for the exploitation and promotion of the lake, both as a tourist product and as a habitat, but also as fishing area. In addition, targeted interventions are necessary in order to utilize the abandoned buildings, the rehabilitation and the energy upgrading of the entire building infrastructure, starting with the buildings that host public services.

The above proposed intervention points are indicatively mentioned in the form of notes. They are, in short, the result of a brainstorming process and are not the only infrastructure and transport issues of the above-mentioned in the Regional Units.

C.5.Economic - Development Framework

Among our proposals for improving the economic and development framework in Western Macedonia, we have identified a number of factors that are decisive for this improvement. Initially, it is important to seek funding for the installation of Renewable Energy Sources infrastructure by the citizens and institutions of the Region of Western Macedonia. In addition, it is crucial to provide for and prioritise a special loan scheme for the development of small renewable energy projects.

In the context of the implementation of the provisions of the Development Law, it is important to ensure that significant funding is absorbed under the law, emphasizing on the financing of young startups, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs operating in Western Macedonia. In this context, they could be provided with funding directly by an independent body under the supervision of local government.

C.6.Promotion - Enhancement of Tourism and Extroversion

In order to promote the extroversion of the region, important factors are the promotion and targeted advertising of local customs and products produced in Western Macedonia, and the creation of touristic - cultural zones is crucial.

As was mentioned in more details above, it is important to create infrastructure to support alternative forms of tourism, with emphasis on winter tourism (creation of a lift - gondola e.g. Pisoderi in Florina), ecotourism and conference tourism and the promotion of sports tourism and agritourism.

D. The factors that are capable of making young people stay.

Regarding the factors that would contribute to our decision to remain in Western Macedonia, having delineated them into environmental, economic, educational and social factors, we conclude the following:

D.1.Environmental Factors

One of the main factors for staying in the region of Western Macedonia after lignite phase-out would be the friendlier environmental conditions of the region, since with the gradual reduction and eventually the cessation of lignite mining and combustion, there will be a reduction in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, expecting a reduction in deaths due to cancer and diseases stemming from chronic air pollution in the area.

In this context, there is an urgent need to strengthen the protection of biodiversity, given the geomorphological diversity of the region, in order to preserve sectors that are directly dependent on the natural environment, as well as the adoption by all actors operating in the region of a sustainable model of action and operation. The re-institutionalization, strengthening and support of the Lake Management Body, the Management and Protection Body of Protected Areas of Western Macedonia, Prespa etc. is of major importance in this direction.

Another environmental factor that could be a reason for young people to stay in Western Macedonia is the fact that in these areas electromobility could be achieved and incentives could be given to citizens with increased rates of subsidies and tax exemption for those who may use electric means of transport - in the region of Western Macedonia we could, firstly, focus on building an electric train – but also for those who will seek to buy an electric or hybrid means of transport.

D.2.Economic Factors

As for the economic factors that would motivate young people to stay in Western Macedonia, a good proposal would be to transform the region into a transport hub with the immediate aim of accumulating investments in the region. The above-mentioned investments could also be made in areas that would facilitate access to inaccessible areas, thus preventing any activity from being hindered by the inhabitants of these areas. The facilitation of travelling to and from each Regional Unit, as well as the interconnection of Western Macedonia with the rest of the transport network in a more citizen-friendly way, is a factor that facilitates their access to more opportunities, without geographical restrictions. Funds from existing investments could be spent on modernizing the infrastructure that will attract even more investments, creating new jobs in the local community. It is a fact that the above condition contributes to the deterrent that the regions of Western Macedonia are affected by adverse weather conditions, especially during the winter months, which is a halt for those who wish to operate in the region permanently.

In addition, Western Macedonia is known for its water resources as the area of its water district is 13,624km. Understandably, the use of these resources, possibly through the construction of hydroelectric plants, would be another way of combating unemployment, providing jobs for people in the region and giving them professional opportunities to stay in their place of origin.

Another project with the above purpose would be the utilization of Western Macedonia as a hub of technological development and enhancement of innovation through the construction of technology parks. Technology parks are places that will be able to provide a wealth of activities, experiences and new perspectives to young people.



They provide high quality services since they have Academic and Research Foundations and Institutes, businesses and programs related to nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, clean energy and applications that support sustainable mobility.

Securing job opportunities and supporting youth entrepreneurship for the young people of Western Macedonia in the Post-Lignite Era is a priority for the social welfare of the region and the avoidance of brain drain and the improvement of the living standards of the inhabitants.

D.3. Social factors

The above argument, which was mentioned last in order in section D.3., could also be considered a social factor in order for someone to remain in Western Macedonia since it will attract many investors, in order to support the local industry, which will be directly linked to the information and employment of people of the local community (locality).

The increasing flow of capital on a local and regional scale could result in lower housing and living costs being offered through subsidies. This, combined with the establishment of an anti-corruption observatory in the context of transparency and participatory budgeting - which are consistent practices with citizens' participation in decision-making through various tactics such as voting or representation and bringing about a logical consolidation of the administration - would make the region an ideal place to live and work.

At the same time, the participants of the conference proposed the creation of recreation areas, exhibition and networking spaces, the establishment of more institutions as well as the creation of more programs related to higher education by expertised educators, in the context of proper career guidance, development and communication of the potential of the region and its inhabitants.

It would be important to take measures to support tourism and upgrade its zones, based on the promotion of communities, local products, folklore museums, etc. Through this, more jobs are created and the culture of each region is supported.

Last but not least would be the technological development of the primary sector, which could bring a plethora of new possibilities to employees in the sector. New means of production, modernization of existing units are only a few of what could contribute to the better exploitation of the primary sector of the region.

3. EPILOGUE

In conclusion, the clear aim of our efforts is to highlight and strengthen youth participation at the level of policy making and decision-making, but also in every aspect of their participation in the social, economic, cultural and political reality of the Region of Western Macedonia.

Through the present text of our opinions, as firstly recorded during the 1st Conference - Youth Forum of Western Macedonia, the anxiety of the young people of the region for the vehicle of transition, but also for the possibility of their interventions in the decision-making process for changing the productive model of their place, are depicted.

The opportunity given to young people to master new tools and discuss their future was made possible after the effort of the Association of Active Youths of Florina and with the support of the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation (INEDIVIM) and the Erasmus+ program. In this Forum all the ideas, proposals and exhortations recorded in this paper were heard, and the possibility of conciliation and exchange of views with politicians, policy makers and representatives of civil society already involved in the transition process were given.

The dynamic intervention of the young people of Western Macedonia is now reflected in the fact that the Association of Active Youths of Florina is a Member of the Monitoring Committee of the Just Development Transition Program (2021-2027), as it emerges in article 1 of no. 84408 decision of the Alternate Minister of Development and Investments (Government Gazette 4757/τ.Β'/09.09.2022) with voting rights. Therefore, it should be considered a main concern the promotion of these positions, proposals and warnings about the opportunities and challenges of the Transition to all stakeholders and to communicate as much as possible throughout Greece.

Having as a compass, both our positions and proposals in relation to de-lignitization and the transition process, the present Text of Positions and Proposals constitutes the starting point of coordinated and multi-level actions, for a better future for our cities, our Region and our country so as to pass on to future generations a fairer, more beautiful and healthier world.





4. REFERENCES

- 1.ΣΕΒ. (2020). Πώς θα πάμε από το brain drain στο brain gain. Διαθέσιμο σε:https://www.sev.org.gr/Uploads/Documents/52684/Final_SR_Brain_Drain.pdf
2. Roger A. Hart. (1997). Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship. Διαθέσιμο σε:https://www.unicefirc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf
3. Adriana Bascone. (2022). Uniting the voice of youth towards the European just transition: best practices from youth-led networks. Διαθέσιμο σε: https://sustainable-energy-week.ec.europa.eu/news/uniting-voice-youth-towards-european-just-transition-best-practices-youth-led-networks-2022-07-12_en .
4. United Nations General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNGA RES 44/25). Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.
5. ΕΕ, (2007). Ενοποιημένη απόδοση της Συνθήκης για την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση και της Συνθήκης για τη λειτουργία της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016ME%2FTXT>
6. Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή, (2022). Πολιτικές - Νεολαία. Διαθέσιμο σε: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/youth_el.
7. ΕΕ (2018). Ευρωπαϊκή Στρατηγική για τη νεολαία (2019-2027). Διαθέσιμο σε: https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_el
8. Συμβούλιο της ΕΕ, (2018). Σχέδιο ψηφίσματος του Συμβουλίου της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης και των αντιπροσώπων των κυβερνήσεων των κρατών μελών, συνελθόντων στο πλαίσιο του Συμβουλίου σχετικά με το πλαίσιο ευρωπαϊκής συνεργασίας στον τομέα της νεολαίας: Η στρατηγική της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης για τη νεολαία 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01). Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>

4. REFERENCES

9. Γενική Γραμματεία Νέας Γενιάς και Διά Βίου Μάθησης, (2018). Πλαίσιο Στρατηγικής για την Ενδυνάμωση των Νέων (2017-2027)
10. Erasmus+. (2022). Key action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-3>
11. Βλ. ενδεικτικά την Εκθεση: Generation Climate Europe. Bankwatch Network. (2022). The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism of the EU. Διαθέσιμη σε: https://www.just-transition.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Report_youth_engagement_in_EU_just_transition_2dEdition_October2022.pdf και συγκεκριμένα την Ενότητα 2: Situation of youth engagement for the Territorial Just Transition Plans of fifteen EU Member States. σελίδες 15-57.
12. Ibid, υποσημείωση 9, σελίδες 32-34
13. Generation Climate Europe. 2022. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://gceurope.org/> .
14. European Youth Energy Network. 2022. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://youthenergy.eu/>.
15. Yes Europe. 2022. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://yeseurope.org/> .
16. Green Tank, (2022). The role of Youth in the Just Transition: The Case of Western Macedonia. Διαθέσιμο σε: <https://thegreentank.gr/en/2022/10/04/the-role-of-youth-in-the-just-transition/>
17. Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή, (2019). Έγγραφο Εργασίας των υπηρεσιών της Επιτροπής για τα εδαφικά σχέδια δίκαιης μετάβασης. Διαθέσιμο σε: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/funding/just-transition-fund/swd_territ_just_trans_plan_el.pdf
18. European Commission, (2021). Youth for a just transition - A toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund. Διαθέσιμο σε: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2021/youth-for-a-just-transition-a-toolkit-for-youth-participation-in-the-just-transition-fund

5. WRITING TEAM

This text was created during the consultation and discussion of young people who participated in the 1st Youth Forum Conference of Western Macedonia, "Youths in EU Regions – Post-lignite Era and Development - Dialogue, Innovation and Actions".

For the collection of the results of the Conference, the final formulation and writing of the Position Paper, the following collaborated in alphabetical order:

Zourka Stefania, Kotlidas Georgios, Konstantinou Eleni, Marou Katerina, Papoutzis Lazaros, Stamatopoulou Sofia, Stergiou Konstantinos, Sidiropoulos Zafiris, Stiouki Georgia Rafailia, Filippidis Konstantinos, volunteers of the Association of Active Youths of Florina and members of the Organizing Committee of the Conference.

SCAN TO SEE THE FULL
OUTCOMES OF THE 1ST
FORUM CONFERENCE

