

# Youth Center Probishtip, North Macedonia

10/04/2024 - Actions in EGL



We had the pleasure of interviewing **Martina Jachevska**, a youth worker and coordinator of the **Youth Center Probishtip**. The municipality of Probishtip established this first youth center to provide services for the young people in the town. The center is a space where youngsters can develop their personal, social, and professional lives. Martina is also the president of **Civic Association GRIT Probishtip**, an organization managing the youth center. GRIT was chosen for this role through an open call by the municipality of Probishtip.

## What is the main field of activity of the center?

Since it was established, in January 2023, our youth center has created activities youth are interested in. We provide activities that serve young people and their needs on the local level. The central part of the work is preparing programs and activities that help youth reach their full personal, social, and professional potential. The Youth Center facilitates the organization of leisure activities for young people to foster non-formal and informal learning opportunities. We organize many diverse activities including Writing skills, English, Theater clubs, game nights, workshops, and events on various topics, such as mental health.



### **What issues and challenges in the local community is the center solving?**

We continuously help and support the local engagement of young people by creating opportunities and promoting youth participation. In our town, young people don't express a high level of interest in participating in decision-making processes. This is a reason why youngsters need to learn that they have the right to participate and be included. We have received a project grant to create a Local Youth Council and use it for this purpose. The council will be assessing the needs of the young people and communicating about them with the decision-makers. This is how the youth will be able to become part of the decision-making processes. Our Youth Center's role will be to promote these activities among young people.





### **How is the youth center helping youth empowerment and participation?**

The Youth Center Probishtip offers various activities that help young people develop new skills and improve on a personal, social, and professional level. Through activities such as informative sessions, non-formal conversations, and counseling, we encourage young people to participate in processes

and activities that directly or indirectly influence their development. Volunteers within the youth center receive mentoring support that prepares them for their future careers. Through non-formal education programs for developing social skills, entrepreneurial and crafting skills, young people get a sense of the community where they live and the opportunities that are available to them. Most of the young people who visit the youth center feel empowered as they now have a designated space and resource center for what they need. Through regular polls on social media, questionnaires, focus groups, and collection of individual feedback, young people can share their needs and opinions on the activities. They can also participate in the creation of the programs.





What were the challenges in starting up the youth center?

The main challenge involved grasping the essence of what the youth center's services are and effectively connecting the local government, youth, and other stakeholders. It proved challenging to convey that the youth center isn't merely an administrative office. We also needed to articulate why both young people and the wider community will benefit from its existence. Communicating the concept of non-formal education and its complementary value to formal education needs time and effort. Additionally, conveying the necessity and level of financial support essential for ensuring the effective operation of a youth center needs lobbying skills and resources.

### **Could you tell us more about the initiative 'My Space' - its aims, activities and impact?**

The initiative "MySpace" was a part of the 'Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia' project which was sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The project was implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The goal was to mobilize young people to ask for responsibility from the decision-makers. Through this project, we also wanted to find ways to take action toward ensuring young people's rights and keep politicians accountable for their pre-electoral promises.

The initiative itself consisted of 3 activities:

1. Workshops on Activism and Artivism with young people from the town of Probishtip;
2. Promo campaign for raising awareness for the need for a Youth Center in Probishtip;
3. Artistic installations that promote the needs of the Youth Center were designed and set up by the young people who participated in the workshops.

Successful implementation of these activities led to multiple meetings with the local government and national stakeholders. The result was the opening of the municipal Youth Center Probishtip, the first one in the eastern part of the country. We are overall the fifth youth center opened according to the law for youth policy and youth participation.





### **What interesting activities are coming up in the youth center?**

We plan to implement three new programs suggested during the focus groups and the questionnaire. The youth identified mental health, activism, and career orientation as significant topics for them. These initiatives will be structured through a series of workshops. Upon program completion, participants will have the opportunity to obtain a certificate. Additionally, we intend to continue our existing Writing skills, English, and Theater clubs, led both by local and international volunteers. We will also introduce a new Film Club. Furthermore, we aim to host a summer camp centered around topics significant to young people.

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