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1. Overview

The Association for Uniting Young Entrepreneurs Phoenix Rising was founded in February 2023 as a nonprofit organization of citizens advocating for the rights of young entrepreneurs in North Macedonia.

Vision: We are better when we work together!

Mission: The Union's mission is networking, improving the entrepreneurial environment, promoting, and supporting businesses of young people from all ethnic groups.

The main goals and tasks of Phoenix Rising are:

- Coordinating young people and developing entrepreneurial skills.
- Protecting the independence and autonomy of young entrepreneurs in conducting their activities.
- Raising entrepreneurial awareness among young people.
- Achieving transparency in conducting activities.
- Continuous professional development of young entrepreneurs.
- Establishing international cooperation with organizations from other countries.

The strategic goals of Phoenix Rising are: strategic development and increased competitiveness of young entrepreneurs' businesses, sustainable economic development, economic empowerment of youth, green economy, circular economy, social entrepreneurship, and promoting the development of research innovations.

In pursuit of its goals, Phoenix Rising promotes the interests of all young entrepreneurs regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnic and cultural background, political and religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or any other form of diversity.

Phoenix Rising aims to be a catalyst for creating a platform to support young entrepreneurs that encourages innovation, collaboration, and sustainable development. This platform provides opportunities for promoting and increasing visibility of their brands and businesses, thereby creating greater possibilities for their financing and investment. Through this project, we motivate and encourage young entrepreneurs from our region to come together to contribute to the development of society and the creation of a prosperous entrepreneurial ecosystem.



1.1 Experience

From its inception, Phoenix Rising has stood out among other youth organizations due to its progressive approach and innovation in all its projects and activities. Founded by 11 young entrepreneurs who lead their own companies, the Union has grown to 63 members, meaning 63 young entrepreneurs managing their own companies across various industries and sectors, in just one year of existence.

Immediately after its establishment, Phoenix Rising managed to establish collaboration through a trilateral agreement with youth entrepreneur unions from Montenegro and Serbia, which have been operating successfully for over 10 years in their respective countries. Together, we applied for a project and received a grant from the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) for regional cooperation, with our Union as the lead partner. Thanks to recommendations from the Montenegrin union, our Union gained exclusivity as the only Macedonian youth organization member of CIYEC (China International Youth Exchange Centre) and an honorary position at the IAYEA (International Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs Unions) conference in Beijing, China, attended by representatives from youth organizations from 33 countries around the world.

In addition to successful international initiatives, we place special emphasis on collaborations with organizations and companies from the domestic market. These collaborations include:

- Partnership with the City of Skopje to organize a trade fair for young entrepreneurs.
- Collaboration with Macedonia2025, providing our members with free tickets to their annual Summit and free participation in their Leader Academy.
- Cooperation with the organization Youth Alliance Krusevo on several projects and activities related to youth inclusion in the region, such as the "Cross Weekend" in Thessaloniki as part of the "Young Leaders Accelerator" project, a collaboration between North Macedonia and Greece.
- Support from the Chamber of Commerce Union and Startup Macedonia for our projects.
- Partnerships with renowned companies supporting our mission, such as Halk Bank, Tikves Winery, Ricomac Copy Service, Swift Data, George Rent a Car, Urban Radio, and the media portal 365.

Moreover, within the first year of existence, Phoenix Rising established over 90 collaborations among its members, assisted three young individuals in founding their own companies, and facilitated the entry of a Montenegrin company into the Macedonian market, which serves as another indicator of the successful operation of the Union.



2. Program report

As part of the annual program, the Union initiated and implemented several activities and projects during 2023.

2.1 Networking of young entrepreneurs

During the past year, Phoenix Rising hosted 12 networking events for its members aimed at fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and community among its members. These gatherings served as vital platforms for young entrepreneurs to pool their expertise, insights, and experiences in navigating the complexities of company leadership and management.

With a focus on sharing best practices in marketing, sales strategies, and operational efficiency, these sessions spurred innovation and growth. Participants not only gained valuable insights but also found comfort in shared experiences, discovering common solutions to shared challenges.

Moreover, these networking events played a crucial role in expanding participants' professional networks and creating significant collaborations. By connecting with like-minded individuals and industry peers, young entrepreneurs had the opportunity to explore new pathways, nurture partnerships, and discover new opportunities for their ventures.

Above all, these gatherings instilled a deep sense of belonging within the entrepreneurial community, fostering camaraderie, mutual support, and a shared vision for success. As the Union of Young Entrepreneurs continues to advocate for the aspirations of its members, these networking events remain a cornerstone of strengthening collaboration and collective growth within the entrepreneurial landscape of North Macedonia.

2.2 "Wisdom&Wine" mentor sessions

"Wisdom&Wine" stands as evidence of the Union of Young Entrepreneurs' commitment to nurturing the next generation of business leaders in Macedonia. This innovative project brought together esteemed and accomplished entrepreneurs from our country for mentorship sessions designed to impart invaluable knowledge, inspire, and strengthen young minds.

Against the backdrop of enriching discussions and mentorship, participants indulged in the art of wine tasting, courtesy of Tikves Winery. This unique blend of mentorship and wine appreciation fostered an atmosphere of camaraderie, relaxation, and open dialogue, where wisdom flowed as freely as the wine itself.

The name "Wisdom&Wine" is more than just a clever title - it embodies the essence of the project, symbolizing the belief that true insights and enlightenment often stem from shared experiences and genuine connections. Each session was a journey of discovery, where



seasoned entrepreneurs shared their triumphs, failures, and pearls of wisdom, inspiring and guiding the next wave of entrepreneurial talent.

2.3 “The Brand Boulevard” Pop-Up Expo

Traditionally, fairs are held in specialized venues where people go solely to attend the event. The PopUp Expo "Brand Boulevard" is an innovative way of presenting products and services where the event itself travels to the visitors, in other words, showcasing the brands and businesses of young entrepreneurs took place at the "ABC by Mosh" location, utilizing existing clientele. By cleverly combining our goals with people's daily routines, we achieved greater visibility and attendance at the events. This mutually beneficial approach not only serves our young entrepreneur members but also promotes local restaurants and other event venues positively, attracting new clients and providing additional value to existing visitors.

This approach creates a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures entrepreneurship, promotes collaboration, inspires personal growth, and stimulates socio-economic progress. The project and initiative for the "PopUp Expo Brand Boulevard" involve 11 members of the Young Entrepreneurs Union (and were accepted and reformulated by all other members during working meetings) who are directly involved in entrepreneurship and face similar obstacles when promoting brands and businesses. The approach, i.e., the strategy to realize Brand Boulevard, was also based on the needs we heard from young entrepreneurs to elevate the visibility of their products and services. Building trust among future clients is one of the reasons, and acquiring it through such events is one of the justifications for Brand Boulevard.

With a focus on sustainability, creativity, and innovation as we planned, through dynamic presentations, networking opportunities, and an energetic atmosphere, all 700 attendees had a positive experience because they witnessed a new concept they had not seen before. At the PopUp Expo, members of the Union promoted their products and services, engaging visitors with positive advice in areas such as psychology, fitness, health, beauty, nutrition, marketing, real estate, blockchain, solar energy, art, as well as legal advice. Additionally, we organized a lottery with many gifts, vouchers, and discounts, and with each coffee, we offered a cookie with "I love Skopje" written on it as gratitude to the donor, the City of Skopje. During the event, the DJ played the advertisement several times, which aired on Urban Radio, mentioning the support from the City of Skopje.

The main goal of the project "PopUp Expo - Brand Boulevard" is to revolutionize brand promotion and stimulate entrepreneurship by providing an innovative platform for young entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services. With a focus on sustainability, creativity, and innovation, through dynamic presentations, networking opportunities, and an energetic atmosphere, the fair aims to facilitate the establishment of significant connections and collaborations among young entrepreneurs and expand their businesses, simultaneously attracting clients and investors who are exploring innovative brands and supporting businesses by young entrepreneurs. The project aims to facilitate the



establishment of significant connections and collaborations among young entrepreneurs and expand their businesses, which happened at the event at ABC, where several collaborations occurred, such as selling a brand of dog shampoos in a pet store, selling a brand of creams in a beauty salon, creating a website for a psychoeducational center, assisting in exporting healthy juices, etc. However, it was also significant for us that many of the younger visitors showed great interest in understanding what our union actually does, and some of them, who are also entrepreneurs, became our new members.

2.4 “Success in the Making” podcast & radio show

"Success in the Making" is a dynamic podcast and radio show led by the president of Phoenix Rising, Ivona Trajanovska. Our show is an energetic platform designed to highlight the extraordinary journeys and diverse approaches of young entrepreneurs, illuminating their path to success for our eager audience.

With an innovative approach, we welcomed several inspiring guests from various industries onto our stage, each sharing their unique insights and experiences. From enjoying delicious ice cream to tasting artisanal beer, our episodes are filled with genuine conversations and authentic moments, offering a glimpse into the entrepreneurial spirit that propels our community forward. Through engaging discussions and lively exchanges, we delve deep into the triumphs, challenges, and invaluable lessons learned along the way.

Moreover, "Success in the Making" is not just about showcasing individual achievements - it's about fostering connections, building bridges, and nurturing a culture of collaboration. Whether through our regional initiative, the "Balkan Entrepreneurial Bridge," or our local pop-up exhibition, the "Brand Boulevard," we are dedicated to amplifying the voices and visions of young entrepreneurs, at home and abroad.

"Success in the Making" is not only an informative podcast - it's also incredibly entertaining! In addition to our in-depth discussions on entrepreneurship, each episode is infused with humor, and even some improvised laughter, all while listening to Macedonian music. From diving into trendy topics to sharing fun anecdotes, we ensure that our audience not only learns but thoroughly enjoys themselves. Tune in to Urban Radio and their YouTube channel and join us on this exciting journey as we celebrate the resilience, innovation, and boundless potential of the next generation of business leaders. Success is truly in the making, and we are here to share every step of the way.



2.5 Partnership project “Balkan Entrepreneur Bridge”

The project "Balkan Entrepreneur Bridge" has kicked off at full speed, embarking on a transformative mission to strengthen the entrepreneurial spirit in North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. With a shared commitment to regional cooperation and a strong belief in the potential of young entrepreneurs, the project has created a successful platform for empowerment, inspiration, and regional unity.

The greatest achievement for any project is when all participants are satisfied. Participants in the BEB project are young entrepreneurs who own or manage businesses/startups. During the mobility journey to Skopje, 46 young entrepreneurs participated in the hybrid conference where we visited 9 companies owned by members of the Union of Young Entrepreneurs from North Macedonia, along with a large networking event featuring a tasting of innovative food products from Macedonian startup companies, as well as panel discussions about our project for regional cooperation and entrepreneurship among young women. During the second mobility in Budva, 40 young entrepreneurs gathered for more networking and idea exchange, visited 3 companies owned by members of the syndicate from Montenegro, had an inspirational session with 6 young entrepreneurs working internationally, visited the new cable car in Kotor, and had a personalized group psychotherapy session where participants had real-time for connection and deeper understanding that we all face similar problems as young entrepreneurs.

The BEB project was a real opportunity for young people from the Balkan countries, who own and manage companies, to come together with their peers and share their knowledge and skills. After the project ended, many of them offered their products and services for free to be used by the BEB project, as a gesture of gratitude. Meanwhile, when the project started, we helped a member of the Montenegrin Union to open his own company in North Macedonia and now he successfully places his products on the market, which is another proof of the fruitful results of the regional cooperation project. We can proudly say that the Balkan Entrepreneur Bridge project exceeded our expectations.

After BEB, the plan is to continue the cooperation with the Union of Young Entrepreneurs in Serbia and Montenegro and to form the first Regional Unions of Young Entrepreneurs. With the Regional Unions, we will gain access to a wider network and reach a larger geographical area. This networking opportunity will allow young entrepreneurs to connect, share experiences, and learn from each other, as well as provide them with a chance to gain insight into how other businesses operate, learn about new trends and digital innovations, and prepare for potential future collaborations with companies outside their country. Networking will lead to collaborations, partnerships, and valuable mentorship relationships. This regional association will have a greater influence and greater representation power in all 3 countries. The greater the power, the greater the chance for change and creating policies for a better entrepreneurship ecosystem, an ecosystem tailored to young people. Additionally, we plan to make BEB a traditional event that will be held annually.



2.6 “Your Network is Your Net Worth” conference

The Union of Young Entrepreneurs in North Macedonia held a significant innovative conference, "Your Network is Your Net Worth," at the premises of Hotel Arka, attended by 90 selected guests, 70 of whom were young entrepreneurs. This event, strategically aligned with the ongoing "Balkan Entrepreneur Bridge" project, saw the coming together of young entrepreneurs not only from Macedonia but also from neighboring Montenegro and Serbia, strengthening the spirit of regional cooperation and collaboration.

During the event, two key panel discussions were held on relevant topics such as regional cooperation and empowering young women in entrepreneurship. Renowned speakers such as Kosta Petrov and Uroš Bulatović contributed their expertise and insights, enriching the discourse and providing active strategies for the growing entrepreneurial community. These discussions not only shed light on key challenges and opportunities but also inspired attendees to explore innovative approaches for business development and cross-border collaboration.

In addition to intellectual exchange, the event provided an energetic networking platform characterized by a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Attendees mingled and forged valuable connections, complemented by carefully curated innovative products for tasting from local startup companies, such as vegan burgers and craft beer. The addition of live DJ music further elevated the ambiance, providing an attractive and memorable experience for all participants.

The inclusive nature of the event fostered an environment where attendees felt free to engage in conversation with each other, transcending traditional hierarchies and fostering a sense of community and camaraderie. Indeed, the presence of esteemed guests such as Minister of Local Self-Government Risto Penov and President of the Chamber of Commerce Trajan Angelkovski underscored the importance of the event and demonstrated institutional support for the efforts of young entrepreneurs.

In essence, "Your Network is Your Net Worth" encapsulated Phoenix Rising's commitment to strengthening and catalyzing the growth of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Macedonia and beyond. By providing a platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and networking, the event served as a catalyst for driving positive change and fostering an energetic culture of entrepreneurship in the region.

3. Organizational development

3.1. Board

The leadership team of Phoenix Rising, composed of successful young entrepreneurs, embodies a diverse blend of expertise and passion, directing the organization towards influential initiatives and sustainable growth. At the helm is President Ivona Trajanovska, whose dynamic leadership with vision sets the tone for innovation and strategic direction. With a keen eye for opportunities and dedication to the organization's mission, Ivona oversees all aspects of operations, ensuring cohesion and effectiveness across projects. Playing a key role in implementing activities is Vice President Aleksandar Momirovski, whose technical sharpness and problem-solving abilities drive the seamless execution of initiatives. Simona Tasevska is credited with the duty of properly managing the finances of the Association, given her experience as a financial director in a private company. Tiffany Trajanovska, entrusted with nurturing the members of Phoenix Rising, brings a wealth of interpersonal skills and organizational talent to foster an energetic community of young entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, Sladjana Shtimac, the astute advocate of the organization, provides invaluable leadership on legal matters, safeguarding the interests of the organization with precision and diligence. Together, this dynamic team sets an example of leadership excellence, united in their dedication to strengthening and advancing the entrepreneurial atmosphere in North Macedonia.

3.2. Strategic planning

Phoenix Rising functions according to the following four verticals:

3.2.1 Strategic development

The regional and global expansion holds immense promise, fostering greater influence and unlocking a vast array of opportunities for young entrepreneurs and for the country. This vision is further solidified through strategically forging partnerships and cooperation agreements with renowned organizations such as the Montenegrin and Serbian Union of Young Entrepreneurs. Additionally, membership in the Chinese International Youth Exchange Center, along with 33 other esteemed member countries worldwide, enhances our reach and influence. Looking ahead to 2024, our ambitious plan entails establishing at least three new collaborations, reinforcing our commitment to fostering innovation and economic prosperity on a global scale.



3.2.2 Sustainability

The Union conducts its operations through various streams of financing, ensuring financial stability and sustainability. Chief among these sources is the annual membership fee, an indispensable contribution from our esteemed members. In addition to this core support, funds are raised through tailored projects, each designed to advance our comprehensive mission. Furthermore, strategic sponsorships from leading companies and institutions bolster our financial framework, facilitating the realization of our ambitious goals. It is important to note that every collected penny is earmarked for the meticulously crafted program for the year 2023, underscoring our unwavering commitment to maximizing impact and strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

3.2.3 Innovative approach

Since its inception, the Union has been characterized by its commitment to innovation, injecting creativity and progressive strategies into every aspect of its operations. From the initiation of projects to the flawless execution of events, innovation remains a cornerstone of our approach, guiding us towards new solutions and revolutionary initiatives. Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of our mission is to instill a culture of innovation within our member companies, fostering an environment where new ideas thrive and flourish.

3.2.4 Actions

In addition to our quest for visibility, the Union is deeply committed to fostering active change. This means not only raising awareness but actively initiating steps to bring about transformative results. We are dedicated to introducing fresh and innovative networking and educational opportunities for young entrepreneurs, equipping them with the skills and resources needed to excel in today's competitive landscape. Furthermore, promoting our member companies is a priority, strengthening their presence and influence in the entrepreneurial sphere. By combining visibility with proactive initiatives, we pave the way for continuous growth and progress, shaping a future marked by innovation and success.

