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# YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ALBANIA

PARTNERS ALBANIA FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

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## Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.1 Facts about Youth in Albania .....	3
1.2 Methodology.....	4
2. REVIEW ON YOUTH LEGAL FRAME AND POLICIES.....	5
2.1 Youth Institutional Structures.....	8
2.2 Civil Society Institutional Approach .....	9
2.3 Youth Budget .....	10
3. YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.....	14
3.1 National Youth Policies .....	17
3.2 Youth Local Policies.....	19
3.3 Youth Political Participation at Centre Level .....	23
3.3.1 Participation and Information Tools on Centre Government.....	24
3.4 Youth Participation at Local Level.....	25
3.4.1 Local Representative Bodies .....	26
3.4.2 Youth dedicated local budget and spaces .....	27
3.4.3 Participation and Information Tools on Local Level.....	28
3.5 Good example of youth participation in local decision making.....	29
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....	33
5. References .....	35

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since January 2016 Partners Albania for Development and Change is implementing the project “Youth Bank Hub for Western Balkans and Turkey” in partnership with “Ana i Vlade Divac” Foundation in Serbia, Association for Education – MLADIINFO International in Macedonia, ”Prima” organization in Montenegro and “Community Volunteers Foundation” in Turkey. The project aims to improve youth participation in decision-making processes in Western Balkans and Turkey, through capacity building of youth organizations, advocacy initiatives, and awareness-raising activities. In order to develop and undertake effective youth advocacy initiatives, a monitoring report on the state of affairs regarding political, social and economic participation of youth is periodically elaborated. 3 annual report are issued heretofore from each of the country network followed by 3 regional reports. The reports provide updated data on youth participation based on a set of predefined indicators on political, social and economic participation on the national level. The findings from the reports are used as a guide for evidence-based policy recommendations and advocacy initiatives for the network regarding youth inclusion. Aiming to have also a deeper local knowledge and understanding of the state of youth inclusion and predefined indicators, the network undertook a country-based research, focusing in analysing one specific advocacy area. The consisting overarching disproportion<sup>1</sup> of the youth’s population share to their actual political inclusion – and the resultant lack of influence on own socio-economic future – is evident in both representative and in participatory streams of the country policy-making. Considering so young women and men are very much likely to remain outsiders to policy-making, and so unable to influence own social and economic positions. Considering the lack of studies and evidences on national and local political youth inclusion, youth legal frame and policies on both levels, standard model of youth representative structures in decision making, mechanisms implemented by government institutions and efforts aiming to increase participation of youngsters in local and centre level, Partners Albania undertook this research.

The research offers a detailed overview of current youth legal frame and policies developed in national and local level, with focus on initiatives increasing youth inclusion in decision making processes, responsible institutions and structures for developing and implementing of national and

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<sup>1</sup> YBHWBT Annual Monitoring Report, Albania, 2016

local youth policies, their role and functions, up to date data on youth participation in centre and local government institutions, youth budget and financing resources and implemented mechanisms of young people inclusion in policy and decision making. The research also provides good example of implemented initiatives on local level trying to offer successful models to use from interested actors such as municipalities, youth organizations or other bodies. Based on research findings and stakeholders' consultations a set of recommendations is provided at the end of this document.

## 1.1 Facts about Youth in Albania

About 25,2% of the population in the country is composed by youth (15-29 years) based on Instat 2016 data and population under the age of 30 represents 40% of population. Considering the fact that youth constitutes one of the fourth of the entire population, its role in countries development is crucial in several areas.

Despite its important representation compare to the entire population, the state of participation of youth in the economic, social and political areas, remains low in all levels.

So despite that in the last three years, 45.6%<sup>2</sup> of Labor Force is composed of youth, transforming the youngsters in the main force of the country economy development, 25.9% of youth is unemployed and 15% of it is considered in risk of poverty. There are significant disparities from rural to urban settings regarding infrastructure, access to services, and income. About 29.7% of young people are neither in employment, education or training (INSTAT, 2017). In June 2018, 48.3%<sup>3</sup> of people in prisons were young people. This data has been increasing only in the last 3 years of 11.7%. In the same period the number of youngster enrolled in tertiary education is decrease of 5.5%, though there is not yet any correlation proved between these two data.

The aforementioned data show only a part of the youth participation picture since there is evidence of lack of official statistic youth data on national and local level in particular on youth social and political inclusion indicators. Based on INSTAT publications, there is no data on youth participation in decision making processes, compare to gender data that are periodically updated. Also the lack of data on 15-29 age target is noticed also in other important institution and indicators such as the participation of young people in election which is not measured by the Center Election

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<sup>2</sup> Unemployment rate, Employment rate and Labor force, Instat 2017 <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3979/press-release-labour-market-2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/YBH\\_Jan\\_June\\_2018\\_ENG.pdf](http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/YBH_Jan_June_2018_ENG.pdf)

Committee. Even in the MESY web-site there is no data or evidences on youth situation in the country nor activities/policies implemented. This lack in the statistic approach becomes an important aspect when drafting or implementing interventions or rehabilitation activities. This may show a low level of awareness among decision making bodies on youth important role, as a consequence not considering youth issues as a priority nor their inclusion in the political, economic and social spheres.

Such statement is supported also from foreign monitoring bodies. in the Youth Policy in Albania document by the Council of Europe of 2012, there is a paragraph that synthesizes some of the above mentioned challenges: “*Albania has a growing economy but, for at least three reasons, an unfavourable position for young people: the extensive informal and black market; the disproportionate number of graduates compared to the number of jobs requiring that level of qualification; and the fact that age, rather than qualification, remains a key factor in seniority*”. (Council of Europe, 2012; p.114).

## 1.2 Methodology

The research findings are a result of secondary desk research data, and official request for information sent to responsible institution such as: Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, National Youth Service and Central Election Commission. A review of existing researches, policies and relevant documents was undertaken for purpose of exploring the concept and legal instruments of youth and its participation in decision making. Online research was conducted on identifying participation information tools and mechanisms applied from central and local government institutions in youth inclusion. A questioner was sent to 61 municipalities in order to identify local youth institutional and representative structures, local policy development and implementation, youth dedicated local budget, data on youth participation in participatory local processes and possible state of relationship and collaboration between youngster’s and municipalities structures. The recommendations were elaborated based on the civil society organizations, local government institutions and other stakeholders’ view on findings of the Monitoring Report on Social, Political and Economic Inclusion of Youth , for the period January – June 2018 gathered on consultation meetings organised by Partners Albania during September-December of 2018.

## 2. REVIEW ON YOUTH LEGAL FRAME AND POLICIES

Albania does not have yet a youth law therefore there is not a legal age definition of youth. Nor in the Albanian Constitution youth is mentioned as a legal concept. The only important youth policy document is National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020, in which the age definition of youth is adapted to 15-29 years old. The same age definition is used by National Statistical Institute INSTAT, based on research and statistic demands.

The creation of Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports in 1991 can be define as the first government approach regarding youth policies, through the establishment of youth ministerial directory. Since then youth ministerial directory has been subject to many changes<sup>4</sup>, transferring from one ministry portfolio to another with the passing of years. During this time 3 national youth policies are developed, the first in 2003 named national Youth Strategy, second National Youth Strategy 2007-2013 and the last one National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020. The NYAP is a cross-sectorial plan, engaging many stakeholders and institutions. The Plan was developed from a group of experts from the former ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, in collaboration with national independent experts and 12 inter-ministerial working groups, supported by UNFPA Albania Country Office. With the support of Olof Palm Centre the draft NYAP was consulted with 12, 000 youngsters<sup>5</sup>, students, youth organization and civil society all over the country.

The Action Plan aims at designing transversal policies for the full integration of youth in schemes of health care, education, social work, and political participation, in order for them to become active member of society in all its facets. This action plan is based on six strategic objectives such as: Youth promotion and participation in democratic processes/decision making; Youth employment promotion through effective labour market policy; Health, Sport and Environment; Youth Education; Social Protection; Culture and Volunteerism.

Each of the main 6 objectives is composed of Specific Objectives, in total 29, which are composed by activities. Objectives are also completed with the relevant indicators (qualitative and quantitative) and a detailed costing for each activity. The budget is planned mainly based on mid-

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<sup>4</sup> Before 2013 under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. After the general elections, youth was integrated into the former Ministry of Labour known as Ministry of Social Welfare and in 2016, was transferred under the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.

<sup>5</sup> National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020

[https://un.org.al/sites/default/files/plani%20kombetar%20i%20veprimit%20per%20rinine%202015-2020\\_ENG.pdf](https://un.org.al/sites/default/files/plani%20kombetar%20i%20veprimit%20per%20rinine%202015-2020_ENG.pdf)

term budgetary programmes of the line ministries involved in its implementation. The contribution of donors has been taken into consideration for uncovered cost of some of the activities of the plan. Monitoring of the Plan, was foreseen to be managed and implemented by the former MSWY who at the time had created an internal group that co-ordinates and reports with the inter-ministerial group established with the other institutions involved in the process. The National Youth Action Plan was developed in line with the Government Platform for Young People, the National Strategy for Development and Integration, the Europe - an Union Youth Strategy, and the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the SEE Regional Strategy (2014-2020).

Youth is also mentioned, but not specifically categorised, as a target group in other important strategies such as the *National Action Plan for LGBTI 2016-2020* or the *National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian people in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020*, adopted at the time by former MSWY. Both strategies include improving of school curriculum for young people. Also issues such youth employment and vocational education are targeted in the *Employment and Skills Strategy 2013-2020*.

Another national document related to youth policies is *National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020* (NSDI) – which defines an integrated approach for the socio-economic development of the country as well as for the integration in the EU. The impact the NSDI is seeking is threefold: firstly, a greater economic development through enhancing the job markets, strengthening education services – including vocational trainings and voluntarism- and minimizing the informal economy. Secondly, it aims at turning economic growth into social welfare, through investing in public services that further inclusion, cohesion, and quality of life. The third axis of the strategy is based on strengthening governance, democracy and rule of law parameters.

On June 2018 Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, started to work on the first project proposal on “The Law on Youth”. A working group has been created for drafting of the law and several consultation meetings with youth NPOs and other stakeholders all over Albania were organized during the last months of 2018.

The main purpose of the law is to create a legal definition of youth<sup>6</sup>, activities, mechanisms and responsible authorities for protection and promotion of young people human rights.

The draft-proposal <sup>7</sup>law envisages several youth related issues starting from the creation of dedicated youth legal frame, yearly budget for youth and youth issues and mechanisms for establishing of youth structures that will increase youth participation in decision making. Some of the main issues that will be stipulated in the law are:

- ✚ Establishing of mechanisms for youth strengthen and increase of young people participation in policymaking and decision making processes;
- ✚ The draft law presents and regulates several concepts such as youth safe spaces (public and digital spaces) specifically for adequate standard fulfilment, “ youth non-formal education” and its importance, the “youth work” and “youth worker” concepts aiming to establish some basic criteria for professions that work with young people;
- ✚ The new draft law defines the role and the responsible authorities, through detailed lists of institutions’ responsibilities and structures at local and centre level, that within their activity working field exercise responsibilities in protecting and strengthen of youth including ministries and municipalities.
- ✚ The law enables the legal frame for creation of two consultative structures, National Youth Council and Local Youth Council that will operate in national and local level and will participate in the design and development of policies and activities in the youth field.
- ✚ In the new draft law on youth, presents a new national youth structure such as the National Youth Authority that will be replacing the actual National Youth Service, enhancing also its competencies and responsibilities.
- ✚ The draft law regulates youth organizations criteria and of national youth organization which will be an umbrella organization and serve as a fast reference unit for all policies consultations affecting youth. Through the proposed criteria, the aim is to increase youth activism and increase interaction among youth organizations, in order to unite knowledge and potentials and create synergies for achieving common goals;

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<sup>6</sup> The draft law on youth defines youth as people of age 15-29 years.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Draft Law on Youth Report, [http://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Relacioni-i-ProjektLawt-Per-Rinine\\_15.11.2018.docx](http://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Relacioni-i-ProjektLawt-Per-Rinine_15.11.2018.docx)



- ✚ The draft law aims to regulate the Youth Database, its purpose and content for ensuring updated information regarding young people needs and to serve as a support in designing, management and evaluation of youth policies impact at local and centre level.

The draft law on youth provides also a dedicated youth budget, supported from the state budget, local governance budget and also donors support.

In the same time during 2018 another initiative of drafting a law on youth was also undertaken by CRCA Albania, the Albanian National Youth Network and over 40 youth organizations. The draft-law seeks to establish a whole new national and local architecture for the youth work, participation and empowerment. The Law brings a series of changes to the institutional framework and state policies for youth in Albania, different from the first draft law on youth proposed from the ministry such as the establishment of the Youth Ombudsman, of a National Youth Coordinator Office, a youth quota of political representation and decision making, a higher and dedicated budget for youth, and a new national and local mechanism for youth of Albania. After two years of drafting and consultations with over 1,000 youth, the draft law was sent to Albanian Parliament to adopt the draft Youth Law and support publicly youth rights.

## **2.1 Youth Institutional Structures**

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MESY) is the designated institution for creating and monitoring the implementation of youth policies in the Republic of Albania, but youth issues are not restricted to this ministry. The Ministry of Finance and Economy is responsible for youth entrepreneurship, Ministry of Justice (juvenile delinquency), the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (youth health and social inclusion), the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main parliamentary committee dealing with youth issues is the Committee for Education and Public Information Tools. At the MESY the Youth Development Programme Sector, under the supervision of Directory of Programme Development for Education, Sports and Youth is the responsible structure for youth issues meanwhile The National Youth Service (NYS) is responsible for implementing of youth policies through Regional Youth Centres (RYCs).

Since the Administrative Reform, legally finalized in 2014, the Republic of Albania is composed of 61 municipalities. Local youth structures are created based on municipalities strategic priorities, but there is not yet a by-law mandatory administrative structure in the local level.

## 2.2 Civil Society Institutional Approach

Youth issues has always been one of the main focuses of civil society work. According to The Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania, 2016 there is a domination of CSOs working in the areas of youth and children (60%<sup>8</sup>). Same situation is faced also in the field of operation activities where 21% of implemented programme is dedicated to youth and children. Their activity is financially supported in major part from foreign donors (42%) and only a small part from public funds and local governments funds (respectively 8% and 5 %). Regardless of youth implemented programmes from CSOs, the youth participation in all of the three areas is still low compared to the region and Europe.

Based on a survey<sup>9</sup> conducted in 2016 from PA, on youngsters' inclusion within CSOs structures and executive position, the average of young people in managerial positions was half of the average total number of managers in CSOs. Meanwhile the percentage of average young members in CSOs' Decision Making Bodies (DMB) was one third of the average total number of members in these decision making bodies. Only 14.8% of Presidents/Directors of respondent CSOs were young people.

In 2015, Albania adopted the National Council for Civil Society (NCCS), an advisory body close to the Prime Minister's Office and responsible for securing cooperation between state institutions and civil society organizations, in order to increase transparency in public decision making, through better engagement of civil society in the process. Youth organizations are represented in the council under three main categories divided by their mission.

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<sup>8</sup> The Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania, 2016, Partners Albania

<file:///C:/Users/xhoanazeqo/Downloads/Monitoring%20Matrix%20on%20Enabling%20Environment%20for%20Civil%20Society%20Development,%20Country%20Report%20for%20Albania%202016.pdf>

<sup>9</sup><file:///C:/Users/xhoanazeqo/Downloads/2017%20Monitoring%20Report%20on%20political,%20social%20and%20Economic%20participation%20of%20youth%20in%20Albania.pdf>

Another body working in the youth area is Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) an independent functioning institutional mechanism, founded by 6 Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. This body aims to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through several youth exchange programs.

Un other national structure contributing through its implementing programs to youth initiatives is The Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS) which mission is to encourage, through financial assistance, of a sustainable development of civil society and the creation of favourable conditions for civil initiatives to the benefit of public, including here youth organizations. Some of the main strategic objectives regarding youth political participation based on the NYAP are foreseen to be financed and implemented in collaboration to the agency.

### **2.3 Youth Budget**

Since there is not a dedicated youth ministry but this matter is under the competencies of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, in the state budget there is not a specific budget for youth but its included and divided as per ministries responsible for youth policies implementations and youth service provider i.e. vocational education is under the competencies or the Ministry of Finance and Economy, social inclusion under the competencies of Ministry of Health and Social Protection etc so is difficult to conclude and analyse specific and detailed data on youth budget. As such youth budget can be considered a complex issue. When we speak of young people, we are actually referring to a diverse and highly heterogeneous group in society with a complex variety of identities, socio-economic and educational backgrounds as well as needs therefore to be considered and reflected while planning of a dedicated budget. Each of the specific areas within age target 15-29 years is accompanied with deeper problematic issues/aspect that require different political approach and collaboration among various responsible institutions for implementing youth policies or providing youth services.

Based on youth policies and donor programme for the period 2013-2020, PA has created a table of youth total cost planned activities as in Table 1:

Table 1.

<b>Policy / Programme</b>	<b>Time line</b>	<b>Spending</b>	<b>Source</b>
Health as percentage of GDP	2013	5,9%	UNDP
Education as percentage of GDP	2013	3,3%	UNDP
Employment Promotion Fund	2015	490 M ALL	ALGov.
Official Development Aid ODA	2014	2.1%	WB
<b>National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020</b>			
Strategic Objective no 1: Youth promotion and participation in democratic processes/decision-making	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities foreseen for this objective is ALL 1,048,928, of which 52% is covered by the state budget and 48% remains uncovered but could be ensured from cooperation with donors or stakeholders.	
Strategic Objective no 2: Youth Employment Promotion Through Effective Labour Market Policy	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the foreseen activities is 6,166,247 ALL, of which 91% are covered by the State Budget and 9% are uncovered funds that could be sought from cooperation with donors or stakeholders.	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 3: Health, Sport, and Environment	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities foreseen in this objective is 47,062,470,000 ALL, 59% of which are covered by the State Budget, 1% by the UNFPA and 40% are uncovered costs that could be sought through cooperation with donors and stakeholders.	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 4: Youth Education	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities foreseen for this objective is 6,166,247 ALL, 91% of which is covered by the state budget and 9% uncovered costs that can be sought through cooperation with donors and stakeholders.	NYAP

Strategic Objective no. 5: Social Protection	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the planned activities in this objective is 164,005,000 ALL, of which 40% is covered by the State Budget and 60% is uncovered costs that could be secured through cooperation with donors or stakeholders	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 6: Culture and Voluntarism	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities planned in this objective is 343,410,000 ALL, 60% of which are covered by the state budget and 40% are uncovered funds that can be sought through cooperation with donors or stakeholders.	NYAP
<b>National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020</b>			
Strategic Objective A: Foster decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 15,770,000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective B: Offer quality vocational education and training for youth and adults	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 52,960,000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective C: Promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 18,000,000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective D: Strengthen the governance of labour market and qualification systems	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 6,900,000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
<b>NOTE:</b> Table created by Partners Albania with information retrieved from UNDP, NYAP, NESS, Albania's government website.			

The table data aims to reflect the planned budget as per important youth strategy documents in order to compare with the current or implemented state of financial data. For purpose of this research PA sent an information request to MESY and NYS asking for detailed information on

youth dedicated budget or budget in implementing National Youth Action Plan, but unfortunately we did not received any answer. Furthermore in the MESY website there is no data on youth budget, implementing of Action Plan, NYS activities nor youth dedicated activities reports.

Due to the lack of monitoring reports on youth action plan and response from the responsible government institution on requested youth budget data, PA revised the last three year government budget as per institutions,<sup>10</sup> for 2018 and 2019, highlighting some of the main youth dedicated or cost budget lines related to youth target age 15-29 years. As it shown in Table 2, under the budget of MESY, for the last two years there is a planned budget under the cost budget Development of Sport and Youth, meanwhile for 2017 according to the financial statement of Ministry of Finance and Economy, there is no specific budget cost that includes Youth.

Table 2

	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Budget /Year 2019</b>	<b>Budget/Year 2018</b>	<b>Budget/Year 2017</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth</b>	<b>39,135,143</b>	<b>38,374,242</b>	<b>34,721,042</b>
<b>09230</b>	Secondary Education	7,286,643	7,094,732	6,333,272
<b>09450</b>	Tertiary Education	7,454,958	7,305,203	6,643,001
<b>08140</b>	Sport and Youth Development	468,000	522,316	
<b>10</b>	<b>Ministry of Finance and Economy</b>	<b>58,031,139</b>	<b>60,868,921</b>	<b>61,571,423</b>
<b>09240</b>	Vocational Education	3,318,344	2,996,800	2,776,570
<b>13</b>	<b>Ministry of Health and Social Protection</b>			<b>57,273,940</b>
<b>10460</b>	Social Inclusion			119,200

As shown in the table 2 youth budget has slightly increased within the last 3 years, but still dedicated sport and youth development budget comprises almost 1% of total MESY budget while the percentage increases to 39% if considering also education budget cost for 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Table of Budget per Institutions and Programmes, Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2017, 2018 and 2019

<http://www.financa.gov.al/buxheti-ne-vite/>

Another state budget that contributes in support of youth initiatives is the grant budget supporting SCOs granted from the Albanian Agency for the Support of Civil Society. Based on the data provided from the Agency under the call no 10, specifically in support of youth projects and initiatives such as rural youth integration, raising awareness of youth in regard to justice system, youth self-employment is allocated 21,400,000 ALL.

### 3. YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Participation is an essential element of citizenship in a democratic society and a democratic country. European institutions and organizations repeatedly emphasize the importance of youth participation to *foster young people's active citizenship, enhance their integration and inclusion and strengthen their contribution to the development of democracy.*<sup>11</sup> It follows that the active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local, regional and national levels is essential in order to build more democratic, more inclusive and more prosperous societies.

Political youth inclusion goes far beyond than voting or standing for election, though these are as important elements as contribution to decision making. Inclusion means not only having the right to participation but mostly having the space, opportunity and tools and where is necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society<sup>12</sup>. The right of a young person to express their views in all matters affecting them is enshrined in a fundamental right, for those aged under 18, in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified international treaty in history, even from Albania.

Inclusion of citizens is considered as an opportunity for decision makers as a process that offers a chance to listen their point of views and opinions regarding decision affecting their health, education etc. so to take them into account during decision making. Participation processes make decision making more acceptable and increase ownership among citizens and consequently increase trust in decision making bodies. Trust in decision making means more electoral supporters

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<sup>11</sup> Lihong Huang (2015) EU-CoE Youth Partnership policy sheet: Citizenship, participation and information. European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy.

<sup>12</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>

and votes, which should make government institution in both level direct interested in having and increasing participation in policy making and decision making. Of course when considering youth participation, is essential to consider the diversity and different social inclusion of target group of age 15-29 years therefore the multiple challenges to be faced.

One of these challenges is also what so called the paradox of youth participation. A number of recent studies that have highlighted the decline in voter turnout, membership of political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions amongst young people<sup>13</sup>. Youth's distrust of institutional politics has been seen as a widespread problem within Europe and in Albania as well. According to the Opinion Poll<sup>14</sup> Trust on Governance for 2017, domestic institutions that received lower trust ratings from more than half of respondents include: Local Government (49%), Central Government (47%), Parliament (34%), President (33%), Prosecutor (22%), Courts (21%) and Political Parties (21%). According to the survey conducted from Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 2015, only 11%<sup>15</sup> of the young people are very interested in the political developments of the country. Asked about exercising their right to vote during the election of 2013, the samples of people age 18-27 years participating in the survey, only 28.3 % of them had voted in each electoral process held, 8.7% had voted almost in every election, 17.2 % had voted in few of them and 44% said that they have never voted. When asked about the representation of youth in politics, 54.5% believe that young people are represented either very little or not at all. Only 4 percent of the young people have trust in political parties while 75 .1% either trust them very little or do not trust them at all. 32% does not have trust at all central government and 30% trust them a little, while trust in local level is almost in the same level, 33% and 29% respectively.

From the other hand based on PA experience in facilitating consultation meeting with various stakeholders including local and central government, there is a perception of government representatives on low level of engagement and participation from youth. This perception is also strengthened from the low number of youth participation during the consultation meetings on the local level, as shows from the data gathered during this research<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Between endangered integration and political disillusion: the situation of young people in Europe. Report for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

<sup>14</sup>Opinion Poll Trust in Governance 2017,Albania, IDM <http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IDM-OpinionPoll-2017-EN-web.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation "Albanian Youth 2015, "Slow change, Internet dependency and ...EU trust!  
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/12300.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> See here: Local Representative Bodies



Despite the paradox the European experience has showed that the main issue arising from research when considering youth participation is to acknowledge the breadth of practices and to extend the scope of what is seen as youth participation and to include multiple forms<sup>17</sup>. The lack of interest and engagement can result from lack of participation tools, available spaces to express their point of view or lack of will from government bodies. Youth being not a homogeneous group has variable access to decision making processes. Social, economic, migration and living condition even physically affects young people participation and education on importance of politic participation.

The Declaration ‘The future of the Council of Europe youth policy AGENDA 2020’ regards “young people’s active participation in democratic processes and structures and equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday lives” a key priority.

In the last years, based on Albania Progress Report 2018, issued by European Commission, government priorities on youth is promoting youth participation employability<sup>18</sup> mostly reforming vocational education and high education. Legal frame on public information and engagement has improved creating new spaces and mechanisms for citizens and youth participation in decision making. The process to access the EU is a major driver for change in the democracy field – i.e. the Law "On gender equality in society". Furthermore, the European integration process is enhancing a trend for public institutions and political stakeholders to look at youth as a social group worth taking into account in the political sphere. European experience on developing a youth agenda in years teaches us that however, what is clear from the review of the literature on new and innovative forms of youth participation is that, as well as ‘teaching’ young people about democracy and participation and equipping educators to do so, the institutions of democracy – our parliaments and many of our politicians – also have to learn much, much more about youth participation and what it actually means to listen and take account of young people’s views, opinions and ideas<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>

<sup>18</sup> Albania Report 2018, European Commission

<sup>19</sup> New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes, Council of Europe, page 18  
<https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>

## 3.1 National Youth Policies

### National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020

Based on the NYAP strategic objectives, youth participation in decision making processes is a key priority. Its first strategic objective is dedicated to youth promotion and participation in democratic processes/decision making.

In overall the first strategic objective activities aim – advocate to political groups to promote political parties to ensure participation and representation of the youth at the level of 20% in the local governance structures, enhancing support to youth through the establishment of financial support mechanisms and the creation of facilities for information exchange and communication sources, establishing the relevant infrastructure for supporting young people in being active participants in the democratic processes and decision making, but also at strengthening the structures and capacities of youth organizations and groups.

Strategic Objective 1 has been divided in four specific objectives and seventeen supporting activities. The total cost of the activities foreseen for this objective is ALL 1,048,928, of which 52% to be covered by the state budget and 48% planned to be ensured from cooperation with donors and stakeholders.

In implementing objective 1.1.1 of NYAP on June 2014 the National Youth Service (NYS) was created, a dependent institution at the time of the former MSWY and MESY today responsible for implementing youth policies. The mission of the NYS is to ensure the support and inclusiveness of youth in social and public life by:

1. Implementing youth policies and programmes drafted by the responsible ministries for youth policies;
2. Monitoring and co-working with the Regional Youth Centres.

The NYS is composed of a General Directory (GD) and Regional Youth Centres (RYCs). The GD itself is composed of two sectors: 1) Programming; and 2) Financing and Supporting Services. Six Youth Centres have been established in the last two years: three in Tirana and three more outside the capital (Vlora and Korça). Based on the NYAP, the MSWY will establish 12 RYCs by 2020. The RYCs are composed of four staff each (a director and three specialists). These centres are

directly responsible for the organization of youth activities and services. Based on local civil society feedback the collaboration with RYCs have been consisted the most in hosting of youth local organizations activities, while contribution in working directly with youth to strengthen and increase local youth activism has been poor. The NYS has an independent budget which covers only operational costs of the institution. For the implementation of activities and projects the NYS has to work closely with donors.

Based on local civil society feedback on the RYCs work have provide physical spaces

Under the Specific Objective 1.2. *Increase of youth participation in decision making processes and local governance structures*, Youth Consultation Board at the former MSWY and local government structures (municipality councils) as a consultation structure of young people for all decision making phases of youth policy development and monitoring was planned to be established till 2016.

1 year from the strategy implementation ending period, there is no action taken in this regard. On the other hand, establishment of youth representative local level (youth board, commission, or offices) is left on the willingness of municipalities.

Under the Specific objective 1.3. *youth awareness raising and education on the electoral process campaign* are foreseen, aiming at increasing youth and youth organization awareness to become active part in the political life and the elections process and stimulating “first time voter” youth to be an active part of the elections process.

CEC commission has developed a specific Strategy for Electoral Education of Citizens <sup>20</sup>in which youth is mentioned and treated under the “first time voters” promoting and educative initiatives. Educative and awareness materials such leaflets, posts, banners, Tv and radio spots, information points, also onsite meetings with first time voters, in collaboration with Regional Education Directories and High School director are foreseen in the strategy.

Despite the strategy and education campaign there is no official data and evidence measured in regard with of young people and “first time” voters<sup>21</sup> participation in election. This is a very

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.cec.org.al/Portals/0/Images/CEC/strategji/Strategjia%20per%20edukimin2017.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Official Request for Information to CEC

important indicator fact on political participation, which should be measured by CEC during next elections.

In the Plan under the activities 1.4.1 and 3.4.1 is foreseen creation of a Specific Fund for youth organization or youth groups' activities and initiatives 2015-2020 in collaboration with Albanian Agency for the Support of Civil Society. After scrutinizing annual activity report of the agency, and sent request for information regarding these two planned activities, we found that there are various fund granted to youth organization initiatives aiming increase of youth participation in decision making but none of the grants is mentioned in the frame of the NYAP implementation as per other strategic documents. Based on the agency response the funds for youth are granted under 3 main priorities areas such as:

1. Supporting initiatives focusing on the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurship, youth, disadvantaged groups and other disadvantaged groups through increasing their capacities and their supporting organizations.
2. Strengthening youth initiatives as well as partnership with regional and international partners in this sector and local and regional development of the country; creation of conditions for social businesses and other activities innovative
3. Strengthen new generation capacities through free entrepreneurship initiatives

## **3.2 Youth Local Policies**

For purpose of gathering data for this research a questioner aiming to identify youth inclusion in local level was prepared and sent to all municipalities. From 61 questioners send to municipalities at the Coordinator for the Right to Information, only 49 municipalities (80%) replied. Hereto a major part of the questioners was partially fulfilled.

Regarding local youth policies, 90% of the municipalities do not have developed a dedicated youth policy, strategy or plan. The only municipality that has issued a Local Youth Action Plan is the Municipality of Tirana. While Municipality of Lezha and Municipality of Saranda and

Municipality of Berat has included within their Strategic Development Plan, youth development policies the Municipality of Permet is in the process of developing a dedicated youth action plan. In the 90% of municipalities' youth policies and initiatives are included within the local planned activities for culture, education and sports initiatives. Lower percentage of youngster habitant, lack of human resources, low staff capacities and limited financial resources are the main reasons for not having youth policies. One of the answered municipalities states that this specific policy was not requested from central bodies, showing lack of understanding and knowledge regarding its legal competencies and responsibilities.

Lack of youth local policies shows indirectly lack of knowledge and understanding of state of youth inclusion in overall and political local inclusion of youth.

### **Tirana Local Action Plan for Youth 2018-2020**

Regarding youth local action plan or strategies the Municipality of Tirana is the only municipality that has developed a Local Action Plan for Youth 2018-2020 (LAPY). The Plan was developed in collaboration with youth network organizations and Tirana Youth Advisory Board with the support foreign donors. The document was drafted through a consultation process with youth organizations in local level, politic forums, youth service providers and other interested stakeholders. In the process were involved also over 1000<sup>22</sup> youngsters living in rural and urban areas of Tirana.

LAPY aims at young people living in Tirana, further progress in participating and involvement in political, social, economic life and decision making.

The priority of the plan was based on the analyse of current state of youth in Tirana, impediments and challenges faced from municipality in increasing youngsters participation in politic, economic and social life and also vision and possibilities offered from this institution in strengthen youth activism in decision making processes of administrative units.

The Plan is composed in 6 main priorities such as:

1. Comprehensive and qualitative education
2. Employment and youth entrepreneurship

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<sup>22</sup> Local Action Plan for Youth 2018-2020, Municipality of Tirana

3. Representation and participation of youth in decision making and politic
4. Arts, sports, culture and environment
5. Support of youth organization and initiatives in Tirana city and
6. Social issues, health and youth public services

The Plan was designed and developed from the Directory of Youth in collaboration with all other directories involved in youth services delivery or implementing of youth policies. The target group of this Plan are young people of age 14-30 years.

Youth participation in politic is scrutinised and treated under the third priority of the plan. One of the concern arise from analyse of current state of youth participation, is the low level of youngsters' participation on policy making and decision making processes. The plan states that there is a form of apathy from youngsters in regard to participation that is even encouraged from the society, culture and media.<sup>23</sup> Also, results lack of information among youngsters regarding municipality activity, so there is a need to increase youngsters' information and motivate them to be more active in regard to this. Even though Municipality of Tirana already has a Consultative Youth Board, the Plan recommends further action and efforts for more effective contribution of the Board. Also insufficient level of youth budget in addressing all their need is another issue identified in this document.

Main objective in regard to increase youth participation in decision making are as follows:

- Effective and well-functioning of the Youth Board at Municipality of Tirana in order to respond needs and requests of city youngsters.
- Youth policies should be developed in consultation and collaboration with young people. They should be informed and participate in special municipality commissions regarding youth issues at the Municipality Council.
- Allocation and a dedicated budget to address Tirana youth needs.
- Increase of youngsters' knowledge on activity and function of Tirana Municipality, Municipality Council and other dependent institutions.

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<sup>23</sup> Local Action Plan for Youth 2018-2020, Municipality of Tirana

- Increase partnership between youth organization in Tirana, youngsters, Municipality Council and the Alliance of Tirana Youth Advisors.

The responsible structure for implementing and monitoring of the Plan will be Municipality of Tirana. By the end of each year a report will be provided on plan implementation results that will be shared, discussed and consulted with all stakeholders and public. Based on online survey on the Tirana Municipality website, there is neither documents nor reports on activities in the frame of the Plan implementation. No information regarding the municipality budget is found at the web as well. Therefore, PA sent a request for information to the Municipality of Tirana with regard to the annual monitoring report on the Plan, but though the municipality responded that there is a report, this report though was not shared with us.

According to Open Data, the expenses of Tirana Municipality for 2018 were foreseen to 16.3 milliard ALL, and only 1.3% went under the voice Youth and Sport Development. For 2019, Municipality of Tirana, has planned to spend 15,000,000 ALL or 0.008% of the total budget on youth activities in implementing of the Action Plan. Each of the municipalities departments responsible for implementing of Plan`s activities foresee, according to the municipality has planned within its annual budget activities in regard to the Actin Plan.

Though Tirana Municipality`s efforts are to be encouraged but once again there is noticed lack of implementation and transparency.

Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development of the Community of Lezha 2013-2030 is another local policy, that scrutinises youth needs and foresees specific activities in addressing Lezha youngsters` needs. Youth employment, social needs (for young disable people, Roma and Egyptian youngsters` etc), housing, youth entrepreneurship are some of the issued included in the strategic objectives of the plan<sup>24</sup> within the category of youth, girls and women social, economic empowerment. The Plan was product of the work and contribution of all important actors despite the Municipality of Lezha such as businesses, civic society local organizations, regional government agencies, citizens etc.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.lezha.gov.al/web/plani\\_strategjik\\_2013\\_2030\\_alb\\_349.pdf](http://www.lezha.gov.al/web/plani_strategjik_2013_2030_alb_349.pdf)

Though Municipality of Saranda and Municipality of Berat states that youth policies are included in their Strategic Development Plan, these strategic plan are not published or sent in response to other request for data to further scrutinise.

### 3.3 Youth Political Participation at Centre Level

During the last 5 years there has been a slight improve in participation of young people in government institution such as parliament and government.

In 2013, after the parliamentary election the new government had 21 ministers (including the prime minister and the deputy prime minister), but no one of them was younger than 30 years old. Also, no one from the deputy ministers was younger than 30 years old. The percentage of MPs under 30 was 2.14%. Meanwhile, the percentage of nominated young people to the parliament was 34.64%. In the last parliamentary election of 2017, the percentage of young MPs in the new parliament was 4.9%, increasing of 2.8% but in the other hand the percentage of young people nominated for MPs dropped to 32.07%<sup>25</sup>. It is obvious that there is a high discrepancy between the nominated young people and elected ones. And this phenomenon might happen because the young people are put in the end of nomination lists sent by parties to the CEC, which decreases the chances to be elected. In the new government of 2017 for the first time there is a participation of 3% of young people as deputy ministers in the government but still there is 0% youth representation in the government as minister.

Another fact that shows the low participation on decision making is the lack of youth representative structures attached to ministries. As previews mentioned although on the National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020 one of the specific objectives is the establishment of Youth Consultation Board within the ministry, 2 years before the strategy implementation ending period, there is no action taken with this regard.

Low levels of youth participation are found also in the important political structures of important parties such as general assemblies. Besides the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) that is known for its young parties' members, where 41% of general assembly is composed of youth, the

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<sup>25</sup> Official Request for Information to Central Election Commission



situation changes in other parties. The Democratic Party has only 7% young people in its general assembly while at the Socialist Party youth comprises 20 % of the general assembly.

After an online observation of websites of 3 major political parties to identify youth inclusion and representation in the main executive decision making bodies such as the Presidency Assembly (Kryesia), 23% of LSI Presidency is composed of young people, The Democratic Party Presidency is composed of youth in 8% meanwhile at the Presidency of Socialist Party there is no member of age under 29 years.

The NYAP, in terms of youth inclusion in decision making aimed to advocate to political groups to promote political parties to ensure participation and representation of the youth at the level of 20% in the local governance structures. Based on the research finding, this indicator is far from to be achieved in the last year of implementation.

### **3.3.1 Participation and Information Tools on Centre Government**

During the last years, there is a willingness and commitment of government and parliament to improve and regulate legal frame on public information and consultation aiming to increase participation, transparency and accountability of public institution in centre and local level.

Law No 146/2014 “For Notification and Public Consultations, Law No 119/2014 “Right to Information”, Law No 68/2017 “For Self Government Finance, Law No 107/2014 “On territorial Planning and Development” and Law Nr.139/2015 “For Self Government” obligated self-government institutions to guarantee public participation in decision making processes. The process of public consultation is the major pillar of transparent governance, enabling citizens and stakeholder discussion, dialog, monitor and evaluation of centre and local institutions work and efforts. Dialog between citizens and elected representatives and participation in local governance is crucial for a local democracy because it strengthens legitimization of democratic local institutions and efficiency of their actions. Public consultation and participatory budget processes are two of the most used mechanisms from centre and local governments.

Information and unconventional participation in politic despite of traditional ones, such as discussing politics, signing petitions, posting political comments is much enhanced by information

and communication technology (ICT). There is why we have conducted an online survey on use of online tools as information and participation ways from central government and municipalities. There are several good examples of citizens and youth engagement and activism were people mobilization in a very short time occupying central public spaces, was facilitated by mobile phones and social media.<sup>26</sup> The same tool can be use from government institution to increase their transparency and foster participation in decision making.

With regard to the openness and accountability of the central government to inform and communicate with the public and particularly with young people through use of online communication tools possessed by public institutions the data findings are positive and increased continuously.

All public institutions at central level (ministries/parliament) have a website and also an active Facebook account while only 93.3% a have a Twitter account. Even though not all the accounts are periodically updated on content or there is a lack of interaction between them and their followers. Furthermore, the web-site of MESY that is the direct responsible institution for designing, implementing and monitoring youth policies and activities, has a dedicated sector on the web for youth that has not any content at all.

### **3.4 Youth Participation at Local Level**

In terms of youth participation at local level there is a slight improvement in the data compare to the last local election. From 4.91% of mayors under the age of 29 years in 2015, today the percentage is increased to 6%. The number of young candidates for mayors during the last local election is even more low, only 1.91% (from 157 candidates only 3 were under the age of 29).

To have a better view of youth dedicated structures and bodies, PA asked municipalities in regard to local administrative structures responsible for youth target group.

From the 49 municipalities that fulfilled the questioner only 14 municipalities have dedicated employee responsible for youth initiatives and policies. The employer usually is a specialist within

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<sup>26</sup> Chemical Weapons Destruction Protest in 2013 and Students Protest against increase of education Tariffs 2018

Directory of Education, Culture and Sport or Directory of Project Development. The rest of municipalities (35) do not have a dedicated youth structure. Asked for the reasons of lack of youth administrative structure, 10 of 35 municipalities argues that these target group needs and initiatives are including within the responsibilities of education, culture and sports directories, 9 of 35 municipalities states that there is limited financial resources to create one and 3 of municipalities is considering creation of a youth structure. 3 of the responded municipalities thinks that the small number of youth citizens within their municipalities do not need a dedicated structure and further cost, meanwhile 10 of the responded municipalities that do not have any youth administrative structure do not give any specific reason for lack of youth structure.

### **3.4.1 Local Representative Bodies**

Youth advisory representative structures is one of the instruments of participation that in the last years has been encouraged and implemented as a tool for increasing youth participation in local decision making from civil society and local governments.

Based on the monitoring reports on youth political inclusion issued by PA, the number of municipalities that have youth representative structures such as Advisory Board or Council attached to their structure has increased. In 2016 only 18% of municipalities had youth advisory structure while today based on the data of the research 49% of municipalities have youth representative structure and 8% are in the process of creating one. In the 66% of the cases the initiatives for creating these youth advisory structure is undertaken and implemented from civil society organizations or supported from donor programs. Only 30% of the cases the initiative has been taken by the municipality and only in one case (Municipality of Korça) the representative youth structure is product of collaboration between the municipality and Regional Youth Centre.

Another youth political inclusion issue raised from the questioner data is the low level of youth participation in public consultations organised from municipalities. Though the municipalities were asked for the percentage of youth participation in public consultation only 7 of 49 has provided statistic data, while the rest of the responded municipalities has classified youth participation as low, high or considerable. So based on these definitions 26 of 49 of the responded municipalities state that the level of youngsters' participation in public consultation is low compare

to other population categories and even that there is a lack of interest from youth to participate in local decision making. Meanwhile 13 of 49 of the responded municipalities state that the level of participation is high or over 40%. 8 of 49 of the responded municipalities have not answered the question and only in 2 cases the municipality states that there are no statistical data produces in this regard. In a few cases municipalities highlight the differences of youth participation in centre administrative units compare to rural and remote local administrative units (i.e. Municipality of Peqin).

Despite the low level of youth participation in public consultation, based on the data gathered from questioners youngster appear to be one of the partners and collaborators of municipality in implementing and organising of cultural, sports or different targeted awareness campaign.

### **3.4.2 Youth dedicated local budget and spaces**

Based on the research data 27 of 49 of responded municipalities do not have a youth dedicated budget while 13 of 49 of responded municipalities even though state that they have youth budget do not provide a percentage that this budget constituted in municipality overall budget. Only 9 municipalities have a youth dedicated planned budget that various from 2-5 % of the municipality budget. As previously stated, when it comes to youth the variety of issues is complex and wide so this is reflected also in planning youth budget. When asked for the budget line costs youth dedicated, the rage of areas is wide and include different issues but in all cases the budget is planned under the responsible structure for youth issues, dedicated structure or not. Some of these planned budget line costs include:

- Education (schools' construction and reconstruction, maintenance, heating, scholarship financing etc).
- Sport (financing of sports clubs, local championships etc.)
- Culture (financing of artistic activities, courses of paintings, dancing, festivals, cinemas, fairs etc.)
- Employment (construction and reconstruction of vocational schools, offering of foreign language courses or ITC, financing and implementation of project of tourism and heritage promotion aiming to increase tourism and employment)

- social services and housing
- Financing of local youth centres or community centres activities.

Based on the data gathered from questioners sent to municipalities only 9 municipalities from 49 of responded has built a dedicated Youth Center. 20 municipalities state that they do not have any dedicated youth spaces or centres while 20 of municipalities consider community centre, culture centres, multifunctioning centres and libraries as spaces that can be used and serve not only to youngsters but all interested citizens.

What is important to highlight is that besides Municipality of Tirana, all other responded municipalities do not have specific activities or budget aiming to increase youngsters' participation in politics and local decision making.

### **3.4.3 Participation and Information Tools on Local Level**

Despite the amends on the legal frame to guarantee public information and consultation to decision making processes, the Evaluation Report issued from PA in 2018 on “ Public Participation and Consultation in Self Government institution in Albania” states that in overall there is a lack of public consultation in drafting important documents. Furthermore the consultation process is considerate to star at the moment of discussing the draft project till its official approval. The consultation process is become more difficult with expanding of the administrative territory after implementation of the TAR on 2015. This report states that there is not any index on citizens' participation to proper evaluate the state of local democracy.

Compared to central government, use of social of media and online tool from municipalities is lower. So from the online survey results that only 88.5% of municipalities has a website, 95.1% a Facebook account and only 18% of them has also Twitter account. Even those municipalities that have established tools such as website, Facebook, twitter reflect poor content and interactions with public in their pages.

To have a better understanding of the efforts and tools implemented from municipalities aiming to increasing youth participation in decision making and public consultations, we asked them to identify some of these tools. Of 49 of the responded municipalities 28 of them have not comment

at all in this regard, 11 municipalities states that use the same traditional instruments, as categorised from them, used as per other target groups such notification in public spaces, social media, through written local media etc. and only 10 of them have implemented besides the traditional communication tools also further information meetings, notification in high schools or through teachers, questioners, representatives youth structures, youth civil society organizations etc. All of the responded municipalities state that the most effective communication tool regarding the youth target usually is the social media such Facebook pages.

### 3.5 Good example of youth participation in local decision making

#### VORA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD CASE STUDY

*VYAB is an independent and voluntarily advisory body that operates since 2016 at Vora Municipality. The board is composed by 15 young people, representatives of all municipality administrative areas. Its purpose is to encourage and empower Vora youngsters to increase their participation in decision making to further foster transparency and accountability. Through its various implemented advocacy initiatives, informing and awareness campaign, youth training programs and active participation in decision making processes, Vora Youth Advisory Board has become one of the most active stakeholders and partners of Municipality on youth policies but not only.*

Vora Youth Advisory Board was created as an initiative of a local group of youngsters. Inspired from the volunteering work of foreign volunteers, in assisting people in need following the events of technological accident <sup>27</sup>of 2008 in Gerdec, Vora Municipality, the group of youngsters started

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<sup>27</sup> At approximately noon local time on Saturday 15 March 2008, at an ex-military [ammunition depot](#) in the village of [Gërdec](#) in the [Vorë](#) Municipality, [Albania](#) (14 kilometers from [Tirana](#), the nation's capital), U.S and Albanian munitions experts were preparing to destroy stockpiles of obsolete ammunition. The methodical destruction of the old ammo was supposed to occur with a series of small, controlled explosions, but a chain of events led to the entire stockpile going up at once. The main explosion, involving more than 400 tons of propellant in containers, destroyed hundreds of houses within a few kilometres from the depot and broke windows in cars on the Tirana-Durrës highway. A large fire caused a series of smaller but powerful explosions that continued until 2 a.m. on Sunday. The explosions could be heard as far away as the [Macedonian](#) capital of [Skopje](#), 170 km (110 mi) away.<sup>[1]</sup> Thousands of [artillery shells](#), most of them un-exploded, littered the area. The blast shattered all the windows of the terminal

to believe that the real change for their village would come only from the habitant and their own contribution to its development. Trained from “Tamam” Sweden staff in offering English courses for Gerdec<sup>1</sup> children, with the departure of volunteer foreign aid in the village, the group continued its work. Being involved in community matters especially in Marqinet village since 2008 and because of lacking of citizens’ representatives’ bodies in local level, on June 2016, the group created the Youth Advisory Board as the next project in influencing decision making process aiming to address community matters.

The Board is composed of 15 young volunteers and works as an advisory and advocacy structure at Municipality of Vora. The members of the board are selected from open call applications, addressed to all youngsters age 15-30, willing to contribute in identifying and addressing youth issues and in the same time undertaking advocacy and lobbying initiatives in their response.

Aiming an inclusive representation of all municipality administrative areas, one representative for each of the villages and center is chosen as member of the Board. The membership of the Vora Youth Advisory Board is composed from local high school and university students.

The main purpose of the Board is to encourage and empower Vora youngsters to increase their participation in decision making processes of Municipality of Vora. The Board operates based on approval regulations including refreshing of board membership procedures. The YAB organizes regularly meetings with youngsters to identify their needs to further prioritize during the Board monthly meeting and present through official requests to municipality.

Some of the objectives of the Board are:

- Identifying Vora youth issues and addressing to local government institutions;
- Raising youngsters’ knowledge and capacities on citizens’ participation in local decision making through trainings programs and seminars in high schools;
- Increasing transparency of Municipality and Municipality Council through monitoring

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building at the country's only [international airport](#), and all flights were suspended for some 40 minutes. Some 4,000 inhabitants of the zone were evacuated and offered shelter in state-owned resorts. The Government declared the zone a [disaster area](#). According to subsequent investigations, a privately managed ammo dismantling process was ongoing in the area

meetings and activities.

In order to present the board and build partnership, various meetings with all stakeholders such as the municipality, municipality council, high schools staff and community members were organized. An intensive social media campaign was published to reach to local youngsters and promote the initiatives. Hearing meetings with local youngsters were held in 3 main administrative areas (Vorë, Prezë and Domje) discussing youth issues in order to prioritize and address to the municipality. As a result, a verbal cooperation agreement was achieved with the Mayor of the Municipality for delivering Board activities. The Office for Public Relations of Vora Municipality was assigned as contact person in order to address Board`s identified youth issues, report results and also organizing joint activities.

As a result of continuing work on addressing public issues, close cooperation with communities in each administrative unit, use of interactive methods of approaching the youngster in community volunteering and raise their awareness in contributing in local decision making, VYAB is today one of the main municipality stakeholders and active civil society actors in this municipality.

Some of the main achievements are:

Due to *active participation to public consultations and continuing lobbying campaigns* in the frame of participatory budgeting, Municipality Council meetings etc, VYAB has achieved to transform youth needs and proposals into concrete public services. Reconstruction of Preza school “Shaban Sheshori”, reconstruction of Marqinet village main street and water supply system, improving of waste disposal infrastructure and service, having of a public transport bus line from Vora to Gërdeci- Marqinet villages, decrease of transport costs from Preza Village to Vora are some of the many problems addressed from the Board.

*Transformation of the non-functional old primary school building* of Marqinet village into the first Community Youth Centre in cooperation with the Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sport. The Centre, through voluntary work of the Board members, offers summer camps for children, English and drawing courses, sportive activities, educative sessions, field trips and other creative services. Currently, the directorate in close collaboration with YAB is working on identifying and analysing the state of economic and social youth inclusion in the municipality area in order to develop youth policy and strategic intervention based on local youth needs.



*Organizing of the first local Volleyball Championship* for Girls aiming to raise awareness of the importance of safe youth spaces dedicated for cultural and sportive activities. This competition sets path for a new tradition that will be cultivated from the Directory of Culture, Youth and Sport at Vora Municipalities in the future as part of its responsibilities'. A dedicated yearly budget voice was agreed to be allocated for this activity after a petition organized from the Board and signed from 440 local youngsters for this purpose.

*Signing of an agreement* with Directory of Culture, Youth and Sport at Vora Municipality for consulting of yearly directorate`s activities schedule with the Board before approval.

*Promoting* local heritage and cuisine by supporting, contributing and participating in the Preza Fest Fair. The fair was designed also as an entertainment space offering traditional local music and dancing performance from children. The board volunteered in creating a more festive spirit through face painting for children, magical show, games organizing etc.

*Increasing of Vora youngsters' knowledge* through various seminars and informing activities to achieve active participation in local decision making process.

*Building community awareness* on the importance of participation and contribution to decision making. Use of attractive and interesting approaches such as of handcraft art installation to highlight and bring to the public eye and attention, local problems, has helped in gaining community trust and built youngsters member of the Board credibility within the community and among peers.

Youth Advisory Board contributes directly to more effective youth policies while also building and strengthening the community's next generation of leaders.

Through YAB activities and awareness campaigns in the framework of project implementation and/or municipality cooperation, the number of active youngsters participating in local decision making has significantly increased. This fact is easily identified from the local structures involved in organizing public consultation or dealing with public relations, where the youngsters more and more are seeking to be part of and make their voice count in local decision making.

### 3.5.1 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the last year there is a positive development in improving **youth legal frame** and youth strategic policy design in national level, nevertheless there is lack of implementation and non-coordination of responsible implementing structures, strengthen from institutional political changes in the last few years. There is no evidence of monitoring reports in regard to youth strategic policy implementation. Lack of data is noticed also in regard to financial costs of youth activities and youth budget in national and local level. Though in the National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020 is foreseen the creation and implementation of structures and mechanisms on increasing youth political participation, at national and local level, there are still no concrete efforts made so far.

- ⇒ More inclusive, participatory processes for decision and policy-making that involve all societal stakeholders is needed to achieving a co-responsibility culture, building a sense of ownership, and fostering positive attitudes toward a renewed governance style.
- ⇒ Additionally, the respective institutions should be pushed to generate specific data on young people participation in election and young people elected at local and central government and be more transparent in this regard. The same should be done for CSOs, because there is lack of published data on CSOs led by youth and composed by youth.
- ⇒ Youth CSOs should play a more active role in monitoring implementation of youth policies in both national and local level, advocating for more transparency in this regard.

Though there has been a slight improve in **participation of young people** in government institution such as parliament and government, there is still a high discrepancy between the nominated young people and elected ones. Young people are put at the end of nomination lists which decreases the chances to be elected. Low levels of youth participation are found also in the important political structures of important parties such as general assemblies. Political parties are the core of the democratic system, therefore in order to increase youth participation in democracy and decision-making processes, it is a must to improve political parties approach to youth. So, young people should be involved at high decision making bodies of political parties.

- ⇒ Reforms range from the composition of the parties, internal rules, governing structures, electoral programs, mechanisms for taking stock about youth needs and include them in their agenda, or empowering the Youth Forums of Political Parties. Successful models of youth leadership in politics such as young MPs, Young Mayors, and Young Deputy Ministers should be further promoted.
- ⇒ Legal reforms regarding political participation of youngsters, such as defining a quota in parties' lists through amendment of the Electoral Code, such as every fifth candidate should be a young person under 30 years old may be considerate.

At the local level there is a considerate **lack of local youth policies** as a consequence there is no evidence and analysis on current youth participation state in all spheres. Lacks of human and financial resource are the main reasons identified in this regard. There is lack of mechanisms aiming at developing youth's interest in participating in the public sphere. Additionally, lack of understanding from local public administration on local government competencies after the implementation of the New Administrative Territorial Reform on 2015, including public consultations, makes implementing of law more difficult.

**Low level of youth participation in local public consultation** is evident in most of the municipalities, furthermore among local governments representatives' youth is considerate as inactive and no interested in local decision making. Youth being not a homogeneous group has variable access to decision making processes. Social, economic, education, migration and living condition even physically should be taken into consideration from local public administrative when planning or designing youth participation mechanisms in local decision making.

**Low commitment and lack of willingness** in institutionalising of participatory mechanisms previously developed by CSOs initiatives such as Advisory Youth Board and Councils is noticed in municipalities, making the efforts and achievement temporary.

- ⇒ The establishment of local youth structures to ensure youth participation in decision making should be stipulated by law. Successful practice model should be further promoted especially on small, remote municipalities.

- ⇒ In response to local administration staff needs, in designing, implementing and monitoring of local youth strategies, action plans and creating of mechanisms to ensure youth participation in decision making processes, more technical assistance and capacity building programmes should be consider, in contribution with all actors involved in youth matters such as donors, civil society organizations, businesses, international bodies etc..
- ⇒ A performance set of indicators on evaluation the process of local public consultation should be developed and monitored including indicators targeting youth participation.
- ⇒ Additionally, to periodic statistic data, local institution should be encouraging to generate also specific youth statistic data.
- ⇒ The expanding of use of Information Communication Technology and social media from youngsters should be used as new opportunities for youth people engagement in public decision making. More interactive and innovative communication tools and models should be developed and promoted aiming youth target political involvement especially youngsters living in remote and rural areas.

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