



YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Regional Policy
Brief:

“Youth
Participation –
More Than A
Catchword?”

Belgrade / Podgorica /
Zagreb / Ljubljana /
Skopje /

23 July 2014



WEBIN
Western Balkans Institute



MLADINSKI
SVET
SLOVENIJE
NATIONAL
YOUTH
COUNCIL
OF SLOVENIA



SEGA
Coalition of youth organizations
www.sega.org.mk



Centar za građansko obrazovanje
Centre for civic education





This policy brief has been developed within the project "Youth Participation – More Than a Catchword?" funded by the European Commission through the Youth in Action programme, and which aims at strengthening capacities of youth organizations from the Balkans region (Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia) for active participation in the process of preparing the National Youth Reports through 9-day training held in Belgrade during May and June 2014. The project was implemented by the Western Balkans Institute WEBIN in partnership with the National Youth Councils of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia and with the Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA from Macedonia and Center for Civic Education from Montenegro.

Summary

.....

Youth participation is a fundamental principle of youth development and is one of the most common catchwords. It is important that young people are actively involved in shaping their development; through participation they gain transversal skills and strengthen civic awareness; communities can do a better job of creating their services, opportunities and support measures for the youth. Data on youth participation in the EU as well as in the countries of the region show that youth participation is at a very low level. Key reasons for this include: lack of motivation and opportunities; low distribution of information; lack of substantial partnership with adults and decision makers.

Existing regulatory frameworks in all countries of the region and in the EU emphasize the importance of youth participation and seek to further encourage it. In 2015 the European Youth Report for the period 2013 – 2015 is expected to be released. Unlike Serbia and Macedonia that will be participating in this process for the very first, Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro had already delivered the National Youth Reports for 2010 – 2012 period. The European Youth Report shows the progress of EU member and candidate countries in implementation of the European Youth Strategy. In other words, this report measures the progress of countries in 8 targeted areas influencing the

youth position. In order to ensure objective and non-biased evidence – based approach, it is necessary to involve on equal footing the young people in preparation of the National Youth Report. The goal of this policy brief is to advocate with decision makers the involvement of young people in 2015 National Youth Report drafting process in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Introduction

In order to improve the overall position in the political and social system, the umbrella youth organizations, their members and interested stakeholders from countries in the region, gathered in the framework of the project "Youth Participation - More Than a Catchword?" to recognize the importance of youth involvement in 2015 National Youth Report drafting process, express an interest to be involved in this process on an equal level and within the partnerships of youth and adults and representatives of governmental and non-governmental sectors, and to create evidence-based and needs-based policies. In the previous cycle of preparing 2012 National

Youth Report, among YOUNEP project countries only Slovenia (as an EU member), and Croatia and Montenegro (as EU candidate countries) participated in this process. Serbia and Macedonia will participate in 2015 for the first time.

The goal of this policy brief is to advocate among decision makers the involvement of young people in 2015 National Youth Report drafting process in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Why youth participation?

Participation is one of the leading principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Youth participation is a key principle of youth development and is one of the most common catchwords¹. Similar terms to youth participation commonly used are: youth voice, youth involvement, youth engagement, and youth in decision making processes.

A prominent European study² stipulates that "youth participation is about engaging in forming opinions and taking actions to bring about positive change in society" and that youth participation can take different forms such as:

- Participation of young people in representative democracy: standing for or voting in elections or membership in political parties;
- Participation of young people in participatory structures: promoting the involvement of more young people in structures, such as youth organizations or issue-based NGOs or volunteering;
- Participation in debate on youth or community issues; opinion-shaping through written press or youth radio, participating in online discussion fora, writing or following blogs;

- Seeking information and learning about democracy: participating in simulations of political processes, attending training or learning at school, engaging in youth organizations;

"In other words" it argues, "youth participation fosters a sense of citizenship and makes policy processes more transparent and accountable towards young people. At the same time, it helps young people build self-confidence, develop a sense of initiative and acquire and test skills that are relevant for the workplace, such as communication, negotiation or teamwork, in a practical

environment."

The local communities also benefit from youth participation³ as they can do a better job of creating the services, opportunities and support measures for the youth in order to develop in healthy ways. Youth participation happens in youth-adult partnerships that are structured so that both groups (youth and adults) equally contribute, teach, and learn from each other. This concept is also known as the co-management.

¹ Article "What is Youth Engagement, Really?"; www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement

² EACEA 2013, "Youth Participation in Democratic Life"; Final Report

³ Text "What is Youth Engagement, Really?" na www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement

What is the current scope of youth participation?

.....

Analysis of different youth participation researches carried out in the EU and countries of the region for the need of the creation of youth strategic documents show that youth participation is characterized by a lack of active participation culture in societal processes and lack of proper alternatives. European Youth Report 2012 stipulates the conclusion of a study⁴, that young people in Europe lack attractive alternatives among well-established political options, and that young people feel their opinion is not taken into account in forming political agendas.

▪ Data from the National Youth Strategy in Serbia stipulate that majority of young people see themselves as interested and capable in solving problems but only a third of young people reported to be taking part (at least once) in some action that had led to solving some local problem. Most of the young people (over 90%) are not members of any political party or NGO, organizations related to hobbies, cultural-artistic societies nor to religious organizations. Based on this data, there is a sentiment that the culture of active youth participation in society has not been developed enough yet.

▪ Data from Slovenia⁵ indicate that "compared to other Western European countries, youth participation in Slovenia is very weak", fewer young people participate in political processes, and "that young people in Slovenia have a particularly negative attitude towards representatives of authorities and towards public policies". Youth participation in the civil society and their engagement in volunteering for the benefit of the community remain limited. Reasons for this are the following: lack of motivation for all forms of participation, society's disinclination towards taking positions, ideologies and certain public forms of organization, lack of consideration for the voice of youth in

public decision making, non-awareness and low level of information about the possibilities to participate, lack of understanding and awareness among decision makers about the relevance of youth participation in youth organizations, etc.

▪ Surveys from Macedonia⁶ signals that young people in this country "do not participate in decision-making at local and national level almost at all". Young people are not familiar with their rights or with the mechanisms that enable participation in decision-making processes that affect them. It is also indicated that institutions do not know much more about this in comparison to the young people themselves.

At the same time, the confidence level of young people in high school and student organizations is extremely low and they do not consider themselves as proper youth representatives.

▪ According to baseline analysis presented in the National Action Plan for Youth⁷, in Montenegro, "young people in Montenegro are not motivated to actively participate in the society, they are not organized nor they have enough confidence in societal and political institutions. On the other side, the society does not have enough confidence in the young people". This is justified with the following arguments: young people do not see they can make a change; youth is not informed enough; procedures of

involving and accepting young people as equal in the society are time consuming.

▪ Croatian experience is similar. Participation of youth in decision making is rather improvisation than substantial participation.

In order to improve youth participation, it is necessary to strengthen the partnerships between the local, regional, national and EU authorities with youth. In addition, recognition of young people as important stakeholders in implementation and monitoring of the policies that affect them is also necessary.

⁴ The study entitled "Youth Participation in Democratic Life" was conducted from 2010 to 2012 by the LSE Enterprise and for the needs of EACEA. The Study was published in February 2013 and some material from the unpublished manuscript the European Commission used in preparing the European Youth Strategy for the period 2009-2012.

⁵ National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2011, Policy paper: youth participation, pg. 11.

⁶ Coalition of youth organizations SEGA, 2010, Analysis: needs of youth and youth organizing in the Republic of Macedonia, pg. 6.

⁷ Government of Montenegro, 2006, National Youth Action Plan, pg. 26.

To what extent the existing regulatory framework favours youth participation?

.....

The existing regulatory framework unambiguously stipulates the importance of youth participation for achieving the set goals of youth policies on the EU and national levels.

In Slovenia...

In Slovenia youth participation is legally regulated. Youth Council Act⁸ in chapter Competences and Activities, defines the following competence of the National Youth Council of Slovenia: "to provide for the participation of young people in adopting statutory and other regulations having an impact on the life and work of young people." In the same chapter, it has been defined that: "prior to preparing the proposals of acts and other regulations having a direct impact on the life and work of young people, the Government, the ministries, and other national authorities and local community bodies shall be obliged to inform the National Youth Council of Slovenia or the local community youth councils thereof".

The Law on the Public Interest in Youth Sector

stipulates in introductory remarks that the implementation of this Act shall be based on the principle of participation of NGOs in the management of public affairs.

In article which defines the meaning of the terms, youth policy has been defined as "a harmonized set of measures of various sectoral public policies with the purpose of promoting and facilitating the integration of youth in the economic, cultural and political life of the community and appropriate support mechanisms for developing youth work and operation of youth organizations, which is carried out in cooperation with autonomous and democratic representatives of youth organizations and professional and other organizations". One of the regulated fields refer to "Youth participation in

In Croatia ...

in the management of public affairs". The Act defines the National Program for Youth as key mechanism for fulfilling the public interest in the youth sector. It's been defined as: "the fundamental programme document, which, in accordance with this Act, defines the priorities and measures that are in the public interest in the youth sector". The Government is responsible for drafting of the National Program in cooperation with youth organization. Structural dialogue is another indicated instrument of fulfilling the public interest in the youth sector. It's been defined as an open, transparent, long-term, continuous and systematic dialogue between the youth and the holders of power at national and local levels in the youth sector.

In Croatia, there are several regulatory documents emphasizing the importance of youth participation. Croatian Youth Council Act stipulates the following goal: "participation of youth in decision making in the field of management of public affairs is important for youth, active involvement of youth in public life, informing and counseling in the local and regional self-governments". The Act also stipulates that representation bodies of the local and regional self-governments establish youth councils while taking into account the principles of non-discrimination, partnership, cooperation and active participation of youth⁹. It also envisage the obligation of local authorities to provide for active participation of the local youth council in work of representation

body through making opinions, suggestions and recommendations regarding those issues of importance for youth¹⁰.

Among strategic objectives, National Youth Program from 2002 stipulates the following: "to involve as many as possible young people in decision making processes, especially related to needs and problems of youth" and "to forge a constructive partnership with youth and for youth NGOs and local authorities towards fulfilling youth benefits". This document indicates that youth in Croatia has very limited societal and political outreach and influence even when it comes to youth-related issues, and it defines 4 recommendations on how to improve youth participation.

.....

⁸ Government of Slovenia, 2010, Youth Council Act

⁹ Government of Croatia, 2007, Youth Council Act, article 5, paragraph 1.

¹⁰ Government of Croatia, 2007, Youth Council Act, article 5, paragraph 2.

In Macedonia ...

In Macedonia, National Youth Strategy in Macedonia defines the following objective in the field of youth participation: active youth participation in societal processes of public interest and processes of decision making. Among specific objectives the following are set: to enhance active youth participation; to remove all barriers (administrative, inter-generational, legal, etc.) that hamper youth participation at local and national level; to promote youth right to associate;

In Montenegro...

In Montenegro, National Youth Action Plan defines youth participation improvement objectives in the country very precisely and ambitiously. Under Participation in community life chapter, numerous indicators of youth participation improvement have been stipulated including: increased number and ways of youth participation in decision making processes; participation of youth in policy making and implementation of other documents (laws and strategies); raising awareness of the importance of active involvement of youth; open political space for the involvement of youth; increase number and variety of mechanisms for involvement of youth in decision making processes; improved

satisfaction of youth with available opportunities for involvement in decision making processes; increased percentage of youth participation at the local and national levels; positive feedback from citizens, NGOs and governmental officials on the importance and scope of achieved youth participation; increased number and quality of implemented youth participation programs; increased satisfaction of youth regarding youth participation; Existing draft Law on Youth in Montenegro as specific objective stipulates "creation of environment for providing support to youth in organizing, societal activities, participation in decision making processes, development and achieving

In Serbia...

of personal and societal potentials, through using intersectoral approach". Youth participation has been defined as public interest in the field of youth policy¹¹.

Youth participation in Serbia is objective of the National Youth Strategy 2007-2013. One of the Strategy's leading principles is active youth participation in decision making processes and activities contributing to the development of better society. "Encouraging youth to actively participate in the society" is the first general objective set in the Strategy. Among the specific objectives stipulated are the following: to motivate, educate and support youth to actively participate in the society; to enhance the quality and equal coverage of the programs contributing to active participation of youth in the society; to increase the participation of young women on top, leading and/or manage-

rial positions; to develop youth cooperation and conditions for participation in decision making processes through sustainable framework and based on the needs of youth and in partnership with youth; to adopt the concept of joined process and decision making management forming the baseline for cooperation between the local and national bodies dealing with youth.

The Law on Youth from 2011 among key principles stipulates active youth participation: "All, and in particular subjects of the national youth policy, forge supporting environment and give active support in realization of youth activities, taking initiatives and their meaningful partici-

pation in decision making and implementation processes which contribute to personal and societal development and are based on the full information received".

¹¹ Government of Montenegro, 2014, Draft Law on Youth, article 5, paragraph 5.

Youth participation and reporting on the European Youth Strategy

.....

European Youth Strategy for the period 2010 – 2018 was adopted in 2009 by the Council of Ministers responsible for youth as the European youth policy framework for the next decade. The Strategy encompasses 3 comprehensive and interrelated objectives: 1) to create more possibilities for youth in education and employment; 2) to enhance access and participation of the youth in a community; 3) to promote solidarity amongst a community and the young people living in it;

European Youth Strategy tends to encourage the youth to participate in democratic processes in a society. This approach is being realized through: a) development of mechanisms for

inclusion of youth in dialogue and facilitation of their participation in shaping of national policies; b) support to youth organizations, including local and national youth councils; c) promoting participation of less represented groups of youth in politics, youth organizations, and civil society organizations; d) ensuring the “knowhow on participation” from the early age.

European Youth Report covering every 3 year period is a progress monitoring mechanism in the EU member countries and candidate countries for implementation of the European Youth Strategy. This document is based on data gathered from the National Youth Reports that all the EU member countries must and accession countries should prepare and submit to the responsible DG within the European Commission. The process of National Youth Report preparation is lead by the national body responsible for youth. All relevant stakeholders, from national and regional authorities to civil society, youth and “for youth” NGOs should be involved in the drafting process of the National Youth Report.

Eight areas of monitoring of the progress in improving the youth position in European countries are the following: 1) education and training; 2) employment and entrepreneurship; 3) health and well-being; 4) youth participation; 5) voluntary activities; 6) social inclusion; 7) youth and the world; 8) creativity and culture;

Evidence-based policy making is one of the key principles of the European Youth Report. This document is a result of compiling various data and researches. Involvement of young people in drafting of the National Youth Report is necessary for ensuring quality, relevance and

effectiveness of youth policy as public policy. Involvement of young people in shaping implementation and evaluation of youth policies contributes to an overall confidence in final results obtained and the line institutions, indicating position and needs of youth.

Organizations participating in YOUNG project¹² believe that it is important to enable young people to participate in the preparation of the National Youth Report as an equal partner to the national authorities in order to ensure unbiased assessment of the young people position in the stated areas that would be the reflection of the real state of affairs and data collected directly from the target group.

¹² National Youth Council of Serbia, Croatian Youth Network, National Youth Council of Slovenia, Center for Civic Education, Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA, WEBIN YOUTH

Conclusions and recommendations

.....

For governments
in the countries
of the region:

1.

Enable large-scale participation in the process: National Youth Reports should reflect the progress in implementation of the youth strategies that contribute to the enhanced position of youth in 8 relevant areas. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to include all interested stakeholders and youth, youth organizations and organizations for youth in particular, during the progress assessment in preparation of the National Youth Reports. This will increase the accuracy of the image based on the data gathered directly from the target group.

2.

Enable participation in all cycles and phases of the process: It is necessary to include the relevant stakeholders in all the cycles and phases of the Report preparation: from the process conceptualization, situational analysis, data collecting and interpreting, participation in the working groups and teams, to organizing wide consultative process and adoption of the final text of the report.

3.

The process should respect co-management principle: quality and objective tone in reporting will be enabled through the process based on the co-management principles. It is necessary that the report is a product of partnering relationship between youth and adults that will on equal basis participate in all the activities and decisions in the National Youth Report preparation process.

4.

Provide for transparency in the process of National Youth Report drafting.

Conclusions and recommendations

.....

For youth organizations and organizations for youth:

1.

Educate and inform young people about the process: In order to ensure participation of all interested young people in the process of drafting the report, from the local to the national level ("bottom up" approach), it is necessary to educate young people at local and regional level on the drafting process so as to ensure youth fully benefits of participating in the process.

2.

Form the regional team for monitoring of the process that is implemented on the national levels aiming at preparing the Report for the period 2013 - 2015. The team would consist of the delegated representatives of the national youth umbrella organizations. In this way, continuous cooperation and monitoring of youth participation in the reporting process, exchange of information and best practices, would be established.

3.

Forming of working groups on the national level for monitoring the realization of indicators in specific areas as defined by the European Youth Strategy (education & training, employment, entrepreneurship, health, etc.). The working groups should cooperate with all the relevant stakeholders in a particular policy area on the national level which would lead to: a) high quality, accurate and relevant input information necessary for drafting of the Report; b) enhanced intersectoral cooperation in the field of youth; c) increased importance of integrating youth policy into all society spheres and all

policies of interest for the youth. These working groups would be reporting to the delegated representatives within the regional team on the progress in specific areas/policies that are being followed. It is also possible to forge a transnational linkage among the counterpart thematic working groups (knowledge alliances) in order to boost timely information, knowledge and best practice share across the region and related to a specific policy field of interest to youth.

4.

National Youth Councils should encourage participation of vulnerable groups and minorities in their members throughout the preparatory and drafting process, as well as their participation in the working groups for monitoring of indicators in specific areas as defined by the European Youth Strategy.

5.

Advocate with the National Youth Councils of other regional countries - BiH, Turkey and Albania - for their active participation in the preparatory and drafting process of the Report for the period 2016 - 2018, which would further encourage European cooperation in youth policy area and among youth organizations in the Western Balkans as well as strengthen capacity building of youth organizations and exchange of experiences and best practices within the sector.

Sources

.....

Article "What is Youth Engagement, Really?",
www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement

EACEA 2013, "Youth Participation in Democratic Life" – Final Report

ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth_strategy/index_en.htm

European Commission 2009, European Youth Strategy 2010-2018

European Commission 2012, European Youth Report 2012

Government of Montenegro, 2006, National Youth Action Plan (2006-2010)

Government of Montenegro, 2014, Draft Law on Youth

Government of Croatia, 2002, National Action Program for Youth

Government of Croatia, 2007, Youth Council Act

Government of Macedonia, 2005, National Youth Strategy

Government of Slovenia, 2010, The Law on the Public Interest in Public Sector

Government of Slovenia, 2010, Youth Council Act

Government of Serbia, 2007, National Youth

Strategy 2007-2013

Government of Serbia, 2011, The Law on Youth

"Youth Participation", www.un.org/esa/soc-dev/documents/youth/-fact-sheets/youth-participation.pdf

YOUPA 2014 training materials