

RYDE

Regional Youth Dialogue
for Europe



Funded by
the European Union

Western Balkans Youth in Policy Making Processes

Research on the Attitudes of civil society
organisations and young people



Research Team:

Nirvana Deliu, Senior Researcher, Albania

Olta Murataj, Junior Researcher, Albania

Hata Kurjaković, Senior Researcher, Bosnia and Hercegovina

Daniel Lazarević, Junior Researcher, Bosnia and Hercegovina

Brikena Berisha, Senior Researcher, Kosovo*

Rozafa Berisha, Junior Researcher, Kosovo*

Aleksandar Stojanovski, Senior Researcher, North Macedonia

Mariglen Demiri, Junior Researcher, North Macedonia

Aleksandra Jerkov, Senior Researcher, Serbia and Montenegro

Lidija Kuzmanov, Team Leader

Editors:

Mina Rolović-Jočić, Center for Democracy Foundation

Dajana Ostojić, Center for Democracy Foundation

Publisher:

Center for Democracy Foundation

Kraljice Natalije 70/II, Beograd

www.centaronline.org

info@centaronline.org

For the publisher:

Nataša Vučković

Design: Pozitiv MVP

Photos: Shutterstock

January 2024

This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Center for Democracy Foundation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	6
ALBANIA	8
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	11
Introduction11
Information about the organisations interviewed.12
Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies13
Approaches used by youth organisations to improve youth policies at local/national/regional levels.15
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies21
Conclusion.	24
RESULTS FROM AN ONLINE YOUTH SURVEY	26
Introduction	26
Demographic information about the respondents	26
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies.27
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	29
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies31
Conclusion.32
BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA	34
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	36
Introduction	36
Information on the organisations interviewed	36
Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies	38
Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level.	39
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	43
Conclusion.	45
RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE YOUTH SURVEY	46
Introduction	46
Demographic information about the respondents	46
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies.	47
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	49
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies51
Conclusion.	52

KOSOVO*	54
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	56
Introduction	56
Information about organisations interviewed	56
Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies	59
Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level	60
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	62
Conclusions	63
RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE YOUTH SURVEY	64
Introduction	64
Demographic information about the respondents	64
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies	65
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	67
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	69
Conclusion	70
MONTENEGRO.	72
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	74
Introduction	74
Information about organisations	74
Organisations' standpoints on existing youth policies	77
Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on the local/national/regional levels	79
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	83
Conclusion	85
RESULTS FROM THE YOUTH ONLINE SURVEY	86
Introduction	86
Demographic information about the respondents	86
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies	87
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	89
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	91
Conclusion	92
NORTH MACEDONIA	94
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	96
Introduction	96
Information about organisations interviewed	96

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies	99
Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level	100
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	102
Conclusion	103
RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE YOUTH SURVEY	104
Introduction	104
Demographic information about the respondents	104
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies	105
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	107
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	109
Conclusion	110
SERBIA.	112
RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS	114
Introduction	114
Information about organisations interviewees	115
Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies	118
Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level	120
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	122
Conclusion	123
RESULTS FROM THE YOUTH ONLINE SURVEY	124
Introduction	124
Demographic information about respondents	124
Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies	126
Youth policy-making process according to respondents	127
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies	129
Conclusion	131
ANNEX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWS OF YOUTH CSOS REPRESENTATIVES.	133
ANNEX 2 - QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ONLINE SURVEY FOR YOUTHS	137

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Introduction

This research on the youth policies and policy-making processes in the Western Balkans has been conducted as part of the regional project entitled *Regional Youth Dialogue for Europe – RYDE*. The project is financed by the European Union. The goal of the project is to contribute to strengthening the participatory democracy of European integration and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans by increasing the influence of civil society organisations (CSOs), youth organisations in particular, in promoting democratic values and the political, economic and social benefits of the European integration of the Western Balkans.

The aim of the research is to increase overall awareness by collecting relevant data concerning youth policies and social investment in the Western Balkans. The research provides an analysis of the current viewpoints held by both youth organisations and youths themselves, regarding youth policies in this region. The research covers six economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The research team consisted of paired senior and junior experts from all of the covered economies, with the exception of Montenegro (which was covered by a researcher from Serbia).

The focus of the research was to collect data on the attitudes toward existing youth policies, approaches to improving youth policies at local/national/regional levels and the priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies. Both youth CSOs and young people (civic and political activists, policy-makers, journalists, scholars, etc.) participated in the research.

Following this, two complementary surveys were conducted concurrently in all economies – one focusing on youth organisations through interviews, and the other on a broader spectrum of stakeholders, through an online survey. From August – October 2023, a total of 151 interviews with CSO representatives were conducted in the Western Balkans economies. The interviews were followed by an online survey conducted throughout October and November 2023. The survey included 1,366 youth individuals in these economies.¹ Both surveys aimed to assess the state of youth policies, their effectiveness, and the perspectives of those engaged in youth-related activities.

For the purpose of this research, two questionnaires have been developed – one for interviews (Annex 1) and the other for the online survey (Annex 2). Both questionnaires were translated into the local languages and applied to the 6 economies.

Having in mind the focus of the research, this report has been prepared to follow three topics (attitudes toward existing youth policies, approaches to improving youth policies at various levels and the prioritisation of vulnerable youths in the respective policies) across the Western Balkans economies. Each economy has its own section, containing the results of the interviews with the CSOs and results of the online survey taken by youths, segmented according to the three mentioned topics.

¹ The target was 1,500 youths (250 per economy); however, during the research it became evident that smaller economies such as Kosovo* and Montenegro cannot reach the same number of respondents as other WB economies.

Albania

In Albania the youth organisations survey involved 25 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey resulted in 276 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

The consensus among interview respondents was that Albania has made strides in youth policies with the adoption of the Law on Youth and the National Strategy on Youth. However, reservations were expressed about the effective implementation of these policies. CSOs unanimously identified missing elements in current youth policies and assessed that they inadequately address the current needs of Albanian youths.

The online survey revealed a less favourable view, with 42.3% of respondents describing the quality of youth policies as "neither good nor bad." Dissatisfaction with prioritisation within youth policies was notable, with approximately 76% concerned that current policies inadequately address the needs of youths.

CSOs' involvement in the policy-making process was limited, with only 28% of interviewed CSOs participating. The challenges faced included a lack of CSO capacities, expertise and inadequate recommendations during policy adoption. The consultation process was criticised for lacking organisation and coordination, transparency and information from public institutions.

Youth activists' involvement faced uncertainties, as over half of online respondents were unsure of mechanisms, and 77% had not been involved in policy-making or advocacy. Challenges faced by those involved in the policy-making process included limited resources, lack of political support, bureaucratic obstacles, and inadequate follow-up.

Improving CSOs' involvement in the policy-making process necessitates changing the political culture, providing more financial and technical support, and ensuring active-responsive approaches from public institutions. Individual youth representatives also stated the following concrete improvements that are needed: policy-making process improvement, improvement CSO capacities and youth activists, transparency of the process and political freedom and expression of opinion, etc.

Regarding vulnerable groups, most CSOs fail to work directly with such groups, despite frequently including them in projects. Common vulnerable groups included youth with disabilities, young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET), and those at risk of poverty or unemployment. Policies were criticised for not fully recognising the specific needs of these groups, with effective implementation remaining a challenge, especially in local areas.

The state institutions, including the National Youth Agency and the Ministry of Youth, need to enhance transparency, proactivity and collaboration with youth organisations and youth activists and representatives in prioritising and implementing youth policies.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

Interviews in Albania were conducted with 25 CSOs over a two-month period from August – October 2023. The organisations interviewed were chosen based on their mission and objectives, also taking into consideration their experience in youth-related areas and policies at the local, national and/or regional levels. To diversify the data the organisations also included grassroots and local organisations operating in various regions of Albania (not only in Tirana). 7 out of 25 organisations are international or regional organisations, part or affiliated with other international organisations in the WB region and/or Europe. The interviews lasted 20-30 minutes, depending on the experience and prior knowledge of the organisation's representative providing the answers. The interviews were conducted in person with the executive representatives of the organisations (presidents, directors or vice-presidents and vice-directors), or project coordinators and other representatives directly involved in activities and projects related to youth policy and youth matters. For local organisations not operating in Tirana, the interviews were conducted online by video call. During the interviews it was noted that the respondents had difficulty providing elaborate answers related to the needs of vulnerable groups as they focused on youth issues in general.

Information about the organisations interviewed

Chart 1. Duration of Organisations

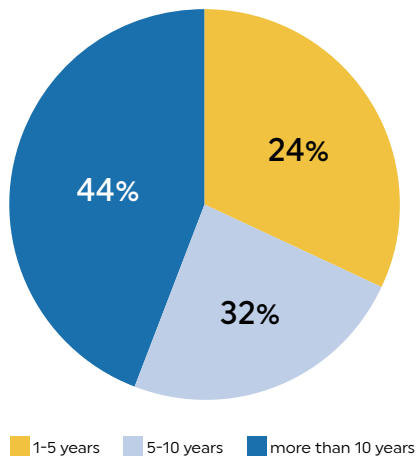


Chart 2. Organisations According to Number of Employees

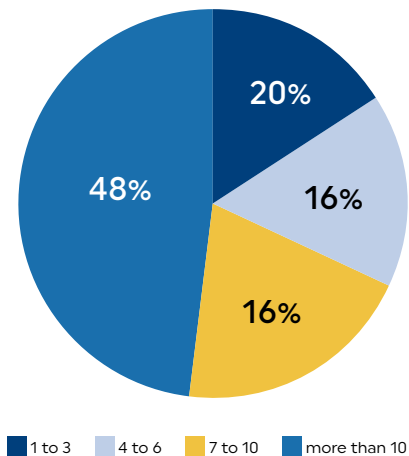
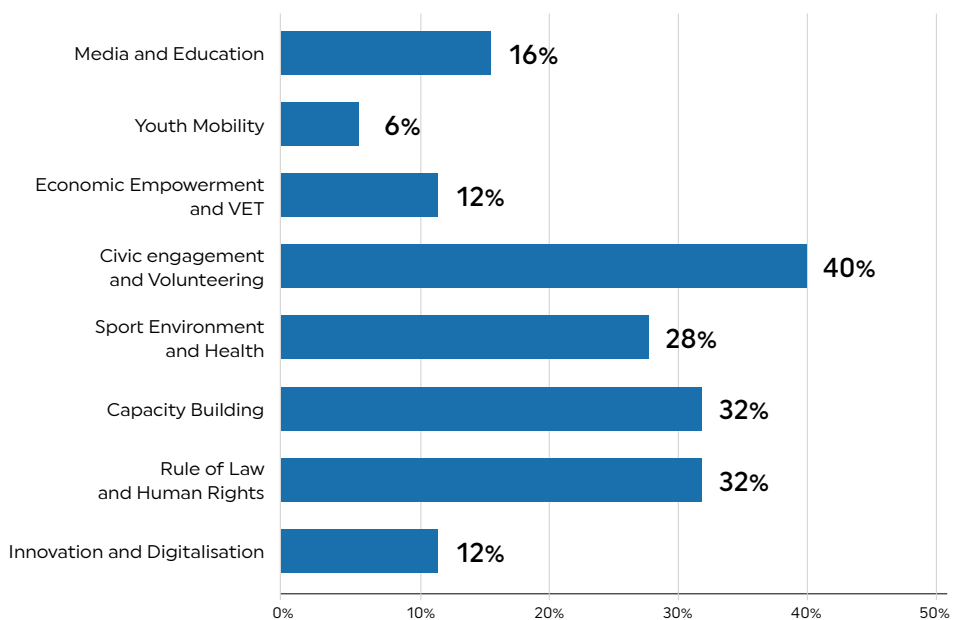


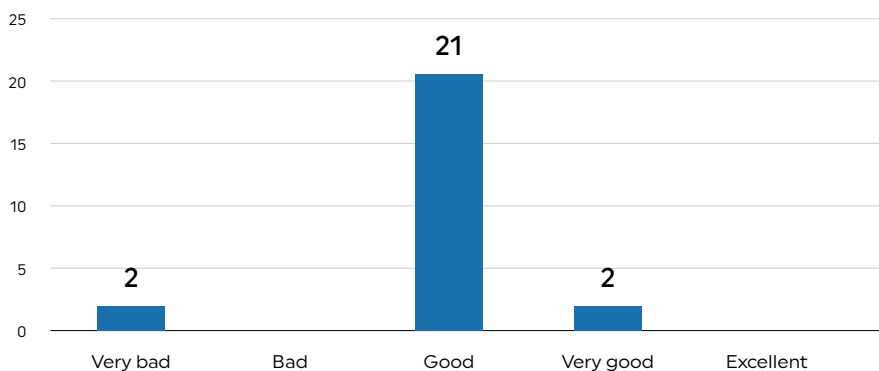
Chart 3. Topics Covered by the Organisations



Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

The majority of the respondents accept that over the past years, Albania has made progress when it comes to youth policies. These changes have come about through the adoption of the Law on Youth² and adoption of the National Strategy on Youth³. However, where proper implementation of policies is in question, most respondents have their own reserves, identifying the following issues: a) the limited budget earmarked for youths, b) limited institutional resources and human resources for CSOs, c) the need to improve enforcement mechanisms and place greater effort on monitoring the implementation of these policies by civil society organisations and other interest groups, d) lack of structured and continuous dialogue between state institutions and youth organisations, and e) a need to prioritise youth policies where organisations have pointed out issues such as unemployment, inclusion of youth in policy and decision making processes, education and brain drain.

Chart 4. Effectiveness of the Youth Policy-making Process



The respondents underlined that youth organisations also need to increase their efforts and address their own challenges, like becoming more active in designating of policies as well as in monitoring the effectiveness of adopted policies. Another element is the lack of capacities, either financial

2 Law on Youth, No. 75/2019 - <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Permbledhje-e-lig-jit-dhe-akteve-n%C3%ABnligjore-n%C3%AB-fush%C3%ABn-e-rinis%C3%AB.pdf>

3 National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 - <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Strategjia-Kombetare-e-Rinise-2022-2029-1.pdf>

or human/institutional, especially for local organisations and grassroots organisations fully depending on donors.

In all conducted interviews the organisations responded that they are familiar with youth policies in Albania, stating the National Youth Strategy 2022- 2029 along with the laws and legislative documents such as Law no. 75/2019 'on Youth', Law no. 45/2016 'on Volunteering', Law no. 15/2019 'on Employment Promotion'. They also mentioned other strategic documents that affect youth policies, including *the National Employment and Skills Strategy, and National Strategy on Gender Equality*. The CSOs identified the following areas as important for youth-related policies: employment, non-formal education, participation in the EU integration process, support for young entrepreneurs, education and vocational education and training (VET), innovation, social and health protection, participation in political decision-making, sports and health.

It is imperative to mention that a number of organisations work in the local field and monitor the local youth policies. Regardless, there should be more focus on how local-level policies target youth issues, which policies are most relevant and what is their direct impact on local youth including the challenges the young ones face such as employment, increasing their ability to build capacity and their level of civic empowerment.

The Youth Guarantee Scheme was not highly recognized by SCOs. The CSOs were not fully aware of the opportunities and benefits this brings in assisting the process of adoption and implementation of youth policies. The reason for this is that the Youth Guarantees were only recently introduced and the proper means of informing and including the organisations are still lacking. Another issue is the inclusion of youth in the EU integration process. Few organisations mentioned this process, despite of its support to the entire economic reformation process in the country. There are many mechanisms available to stakeholders who wish to be informed of measures and policies adopted on behalf of EU integration and there are several fields and chapters linked to youth policies. These include Chapter 19 – Employment, four freedoms of movement, human rights (with focus on gender issues, marginalised group, personal data protection and/or anti-discrimination), Chapter 24 on Migration, Chapter 25 – Science and Research, Chapter 26 – Education and Culture, etc.

Approaches used by youth organisations to improve youth policies at local/national/regional levels

All interviewed organisations agree that there are elements missing in current youth policies in Albania. The majority of them assess that the policies *do not* or *only somewhat* address the current needs of Albanian youth. They mentioned the lack of bylaws, action plans and thus the instruments for effective implementation and monitoring of youth policies, particularly their impact.

They give various solutions on how to improve youth policies in Albania including: a) create a budget dedicated to youth needs and increase the current funds deriving from existing youth-related policies b) institutions should be proactive in terms of preparation of action plans, c) increase the number of interest groups in public consultations and include more youth representatives in the policy-making process and policy implementation in order to properly address and prioritise youth needs and main challenges. This will offer organisations the opportunity to be included in creating and monitoring of policies while ensuring that *"policies and strategies [are] responsive, dynamic, and youth-centred"* d) there should be an ongoing impact evaluation process regarding youth policies that would result in policy updates if deemed necessary. In addition, information of youth policies should be boosted, particularly in local communities in Albania as youth is less informed and thus less active in these areas.

State institutions such as the National Youth Agency and Ministry of Youth in Albania must be more transparent, proactive and effective, prioritize better when it comes to youth policies and make the Youth Strategy policy-making process more inclusive for youth CSOs.

Concerning mechanisms for CSOs involvement in the process of adopting youth policies, the National Youth Council was mentioned being the consultative body to the Albanian Ministry of Youth. It is established by the Law on Youth and led by the Minister of Youth with the majority of youth organization as Council members. Membership is updated periodically, though the open call for CSOs, with the Minister of Youth conducting the final evaluation and selection. The main competences of the Youth Council include: a) drafting of youth policies, corresponding budgets, and action plans and presenting them to the Ministry of Youth; b) proposing the main programmes dedicated to supporting and empowering youth participation; c) offering comments on the National Youth Strate-

gy and monitors its implementation and d) adopting annual reports on the implementation of the National Youth Strategy. The Law on Youth also establishes the Local Youth Councils (Article 10). These are consultative bodies to local Mayors tasked with proposing and monitoring of youth policies at the local level. None of the organisations mentioned the councils as consultative mechanisms for youth organisations. However, the majority of the organisations have good knowledge on the Law on Notification and Public Consultation in Albania, and a number of them have mentioned the online consultation platform operating in Albania – the Electronic Register for Public Consultations.

As one of the respondents emphasised *"A vibrant and representative civil society represents one of the final consolidation factors of democracy"*. Yet only 28% of the organisations questioned had been part of the policy-making process, while the majority had never partaken in this process. Their non-involvement, however, is not the result of a lack of interest, as 88% of the organisations answered 'yes' when asked if they are interested in this process. Interest in involvement is high, yet, there are certain elements which make involvement in this process difficult.

Chart 5. Involvement in the Policy-making Process

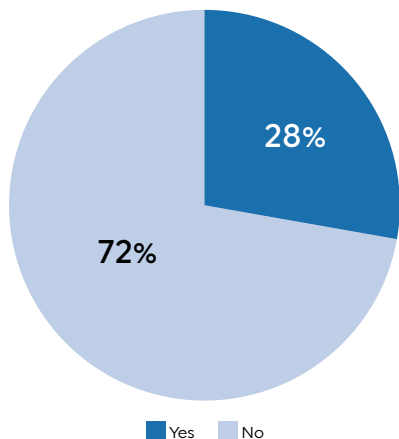
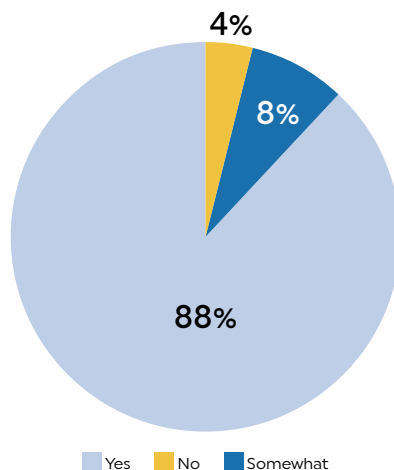


Chart 6. CSOs Interest in Policy-making



The main reason for the low level of involvement is that they [organisations] lack the capacity and expertise required of active actors in the process. Also, the organisations fail to provide adequate recommendations and solutions relative to policy adoption and implementation. Another element is the consultation process which is not well-organised and coordinated in regard to respondents (CSOs), with the lack of transparency, information and regular invitations for consultation from the public institutions.

Some solutions to improving this process for both parties include:

Outreach and disclosure — *disclosing pro-actively and upon request information about projects and services, in line with good international standards.*

Dialogue — *engaging in dialogue with citizens and CSOs, both through high-level exchanges about strategic issues, as well as at the working level in relation to specific projects and services.*

Consultations — *conducting formal consultations with citizens and CSOs in relation to major institutional strategic issues, projects and services.*

Co-operation and partnerships — *pro-actively cooperating, raising awareness and transferring knowledge to local community groups (including informal groups of citizens) and CSOs.*

Organisations that have been included in policy-making processes offered their experience on their involvement in the policy-making and consultation processes, provided information on obstacles faced and the lessons learned. The following is a list of national-level policies that some of the organisations were actively involved in: the National Youth Strategy, National Employment and Skills Strategy, Law on Volunteering, No. 45/2016, Law on Youth, No. 75/2019, Albania Country Report of the European Commission for three consecutive years 2021, 2022, 2023, directly linked to work on the National Plan on European Integration and a policy concerning the development of an extracurricular programme at the national level. Two organisations were involved in regional policies including the Regional Youth Agenda (RYCO) and regional volunteering. At the local level, only two organisations had experience in policy-making process. One was participating in local Youth Action Plans for all 12 districts of Albania and the other in local budget planning.

The main obstacles during the process mentioned are: a) the lack of a regulatory framework to conduct the research required for new policy proposals and evaluating the existing ones, b) missing long-term budgeting and planning with respect to youth policies that would ensure their consistency and coherency and c) the lack of human resources and budgets for the organisations that would allow them to engage in this process, as this process needs time, financial resources and expertise.

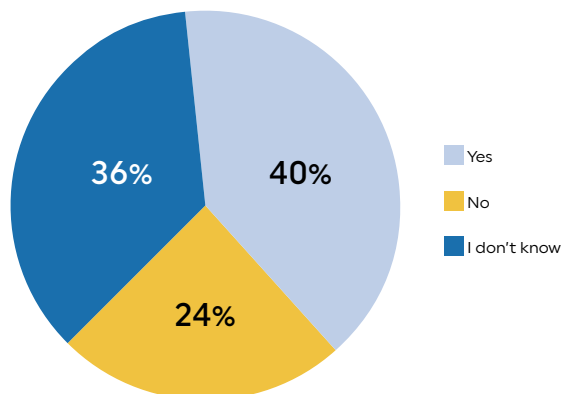
The lessons learned by the organisations relate to the needs of the organisations themselves, their need to coordinate their work with other SCOs, jointly assess the existing policies that would make the monitor and evaluation process easier and feasible. Another issue is that CSOs should be more active and directly involved in the process and raising their capacities and expertise should enable it.

The manner in which the organisations have contributed to the policy-making process are through provision of recommendations over the consultation process or directly as members of the working group designing the policy. The organisations have also contributed by providing technical assistance for monitoring programme implementation and further development. Another way the organisations have contributed is by offering training and capacity building activities on topics of public consultation and how CSOs can increase their activities in this process. As one of the organisations explained *'The organisation was involved in organising educational and training activities with the relevant stakeholders for the policy at the time, and in assisting with technical support for the research and drafting of the document.'*

The organisations involved in the process also assessed whether there is a difference between the different levels of policy-making (local, national and regional). 40% of them believe that there is a difference, while almost the same number (36%) do not know. This high percentage which responded with 'I do not know' is directly linked with the fact that most of the organisations involved in the questionnaire do not have any experience in terms of involvement in the policy-making process, or do have on only one of the levels. This makes it difficult for them to distinguish and evaluate each process. From their statements, involvement at the local level is more limited and problematic as there is higher interest in national policies. Nevertheless, some organisations have emphasised that the local CSOs have more impact on local policies than on national or regional ones, due to direct contact with local youth that provides them with insight in their needs

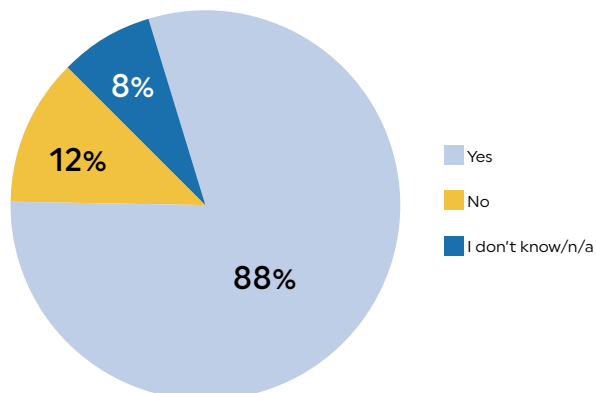
and the challenges they face. The consultation process at the local level has more issues and involvement is difficult to achieve.

Chart 7. Existence of Differences Among Various Levels of Policy-making Processes



The majority of organisations (80%) believe that their own organisations have the capacities and means to fulfil their role in this process, with only 3 responding by saying that they lack capacities. This is linked to the fact that they are new organisations and lack human and financial capacities.

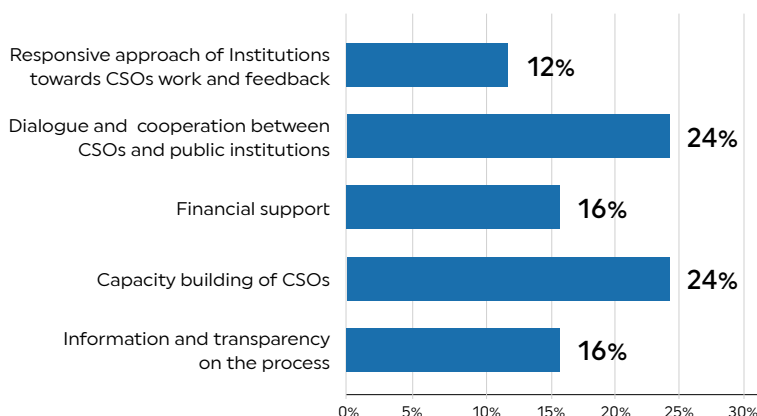
Chart 8. CSOs Capacity for Involvement in Policy-making



Ways of improving CSOs involvement in the policy-making process suggested by the organisations include: a) change of political culture in the economy, in order for the voice of CSOs to be heard. Thus, they suggest better and structured communication and dialogue between CSOs and public institutions. At the same time, information should be more transparent and acces-

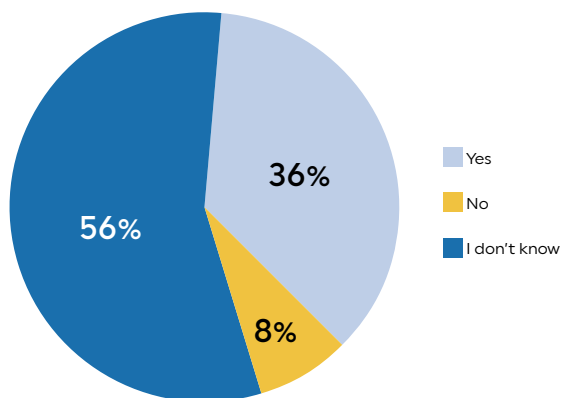
sible to all organisations at the national and local level (and regional, when needed) - "There has to be an active and effective dialogue between the public institutions, government and CSOs during the stages of policy-making, as a successful collaboration between the two can produce sound results"; b) more support in financial and technical terms to CSOs, thus allowing them to increase capacities. This may include more training and workshops and also increased funds earmarked for organisations; c) a more responsive approach is also assessed as essential, including the response of public institutions on the recommendations provided by CSOs in this process. The institutions and CSOs must engage in active communication process where the CSOs provide information and the institution provide the feedback. That is how the CSOs will be heard and will maintain motivation for further and more proactive work in the future.

Chart 9. Room for Improvement of CSOs Involvement in the Policy-making Process



The majority of CSOs have no available information concerning a youth CSO network for peer-to-peer experience and/or good practice or capacity building (14 out of 25 responded with 'I don't know' and 2 responded with 'No'.) Few of them mentioned some of the already established CSO networks (National Youth Council in national level, National Youth Congress, in local and national policies, and also for youth policies in regional level RYCO) can share experiences and building capacities of others.

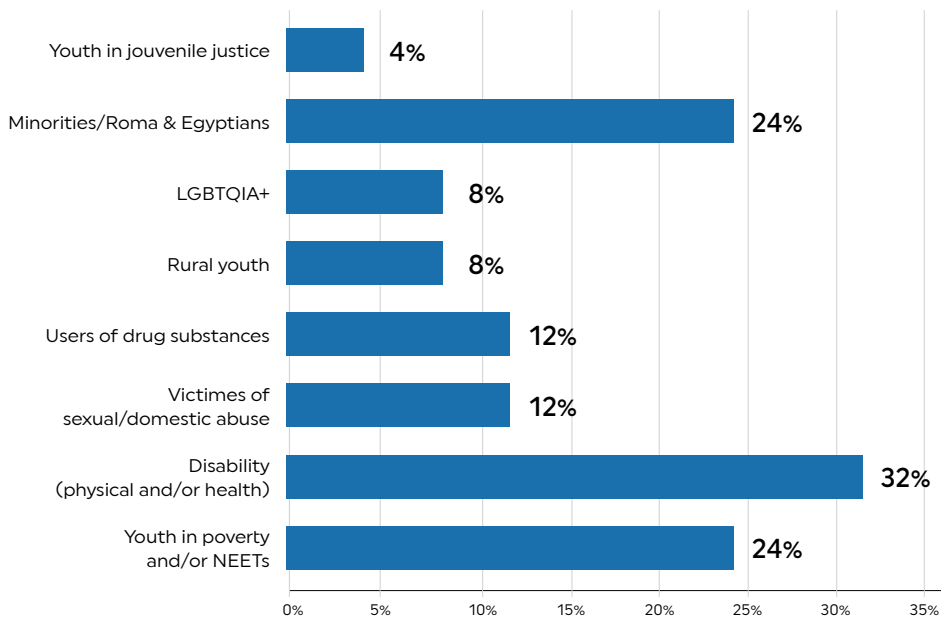
Chart 10. Existence of Youth CSOs Networks and Mechanisms for Peer-to-peer Exchange



Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

There are several vulnerable youth groups in every society. In most of these cases, there are specific and experienced organisations which deal with the main challenges and issues of these vulnerable groups. The majority of Albanian civil society organisations involved in this questionnaire do not work directly with vulnerable groups, despite the fact that they include these groups in implementation of their projects. The three main vulnerable groups mentioned most often by the organisations are: youth with disability (physical/psychological) which were mentioned as a vulnerable group by 30% of the organisations (8 out of 25 organisations referred to this group), young people neither in employment not in education or training (NEET) and youth in risk of poverty and/or unemployment mentioned by 6 of the organisations, and youth coming from national/ethnic minority groups (in particular Roma and Egyptian minorities, mentioned by 6 of the organisations). Other vulnerable groups included are: victims of sexual/domestic abuse, drugs/substance users, rural youth, youth from LGBTQIA+ community and youth in juvenile justice.

Chart 11. Vulnerable Youth Groups



The organisations assessed whether the needs of vulnerable youth groups are recognised in public policies. Although there are several strategic documents and action plans targeting vulnerable youth groups, such as the National Action Plan for LGBTIQ persons 2021-2027, National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2021-2025, National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2023 etc, for the majority of the organisations, public policies currently adopted in Albania do not fully recognise the specific needs of vulnerable groups. Some of the organisations assessed that there has been progress made in adopting policies targeting their needs, but the problem of effective implementation of these policies remains and is especially noticeable in local areas of the economy. They also assess that the political willingness to push forward these dedicated policies is an issue affecting the comprehensive approach of the inclusion and protection of their rights. This general assessment is directly correlated with their overall evaluation that the policies do not adequately address the needs of vulnerable groups and all of them commented that surely there is need for improvement.

They have provided a number of suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the policies to better include and address the needs of

vulnerable groups. The recommendations include: direct and proper inclusion of organisations and interest groups dealing with vulnerable youth on the process of policy-making; a more elaborated budget and increase of financial support; increase of cooperation and dialogue among state institutions and organisations working with these groups; increase of information campaigns on their rights and needs, and inclusion of these groups in all sectors of society, economy and policy; and increase of capacities for both organisations working and dealing in these fields but also to relevant institutions in order to be more aware of their main challenges and issues.

One of the responses summarises in this way: *'practical approach should be taken when drafting these policies, collaborating closely with CSOs that operate in these areas and specifically address disparities and lack of access to quality services (health and education), social exclusion and discrimination these groups face.'*

80% of respondents know that there are organisations that represent the needs of vulnerable groups in the policy-making process in the economy, yet when they evaluate their capacities, 16% assess that they lack capacities and 40% evaluate that they have these capacities. There is a large share of respondents that are unable to evaluate these capacities, 28% of respondents.

Chart 12. Representation of Vulnerable Youth Groups in the Policy-making Process

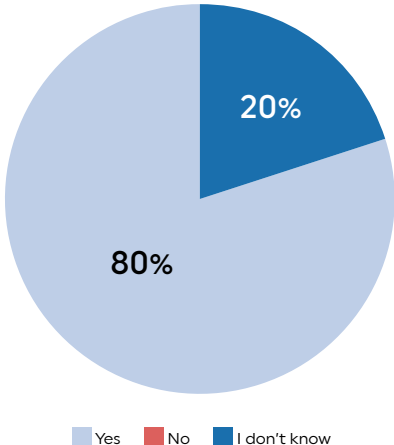
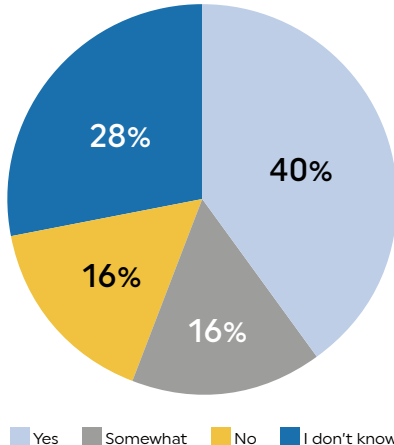


Chart 13. Capacities of CSOs Dealing with Vulnerable Groups for Policy-making



Conclusion

Youth policies in Albania have seen progress and good development over the last years, where a number of strategic documents and legal framework targeting youth have been adopted. Yet, there is a need to continue the proper and effective implementation of these policies, taking into consideration the financial and institutional framework and also the adoption of required bylaws.

The organisations which responded to this questionnaire (25 in total) have good general knowledge on youth policies and youth legislation currently existing in Albania. However, a lack of information was evidenced from these organisations in terms of consultative structures and mechanisms established that directly tackle youth policies at the national and/or local levels.

The majority of organisations are not part of the policy-making process in Albania, even though they state that they have the capacities to be part of this process and are willing to offer their input and experience. The main reasons for this non-involvement include the lack of information concerning consultation meetings, the lack of a proper dialogue and communication with state institutions, and the lack of feedback from public institutions. Some organisations have stated that additional issues include their own capacities (lack of human and financial resources).

There is a need to improve the youth adoption policy in Albania and the organisations evaluate that there are differences at the three levels of this process (local, national, regional).

Concerning the need for greater CSO inclusion in the process and solutions they propose: a) better and structured communication and dialogue between CSOs and public institutions, with information that is readily more available to all organisations; b) more support in financial and technical terms to CSOs, thus allowing them to increase capacities; c) more active and -responsive approach from public institutions towards all the recommendations and work CSOs do in this process.

Only a few of the organisations contributing to the questionnaire are directly working and target vulnerable youth groups – including youth with disabilities, young people neither in employment not in education or training (NEET), minority and ethnic groups, and/or children and women. Yet all of them assess that the needs of these groups are not

properly and adequately targeted by the existing policies. Most of the interviewed CSOs are familiar with organisations working with vulnerable groups but find them to be lacking capacities and expertise in terms of policy-making processes.

Results from an online youth survey

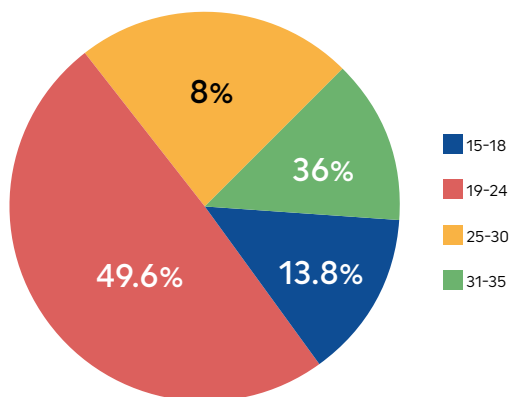
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. in Albania. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, however, it followed the same topics and structure. In total, 276 responses were gathered using the Google form platform for online surveys.

Demographic information about the respondents

Among those who responded to the online survey, most are between the ages of 19-24 (49.6%), followed by 25-30 (22.8%). Women dominated participation in the online survey (62.7% of the respondents are women and 36.6% are men).

Chart 14. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents
(276 responses)



Regarding educational level, 7.6% of respondents have incomplete secondary education, 22.1% have completed a secondary education, 33% have a Bachelor's degree, 33% have a Master's degree and 2.5% have a Doctoral degree (PhD).

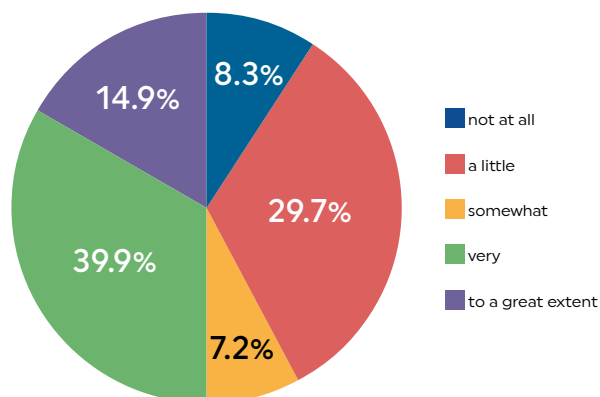
When it comes to labour market status, 49.3% of the respondents said they are employed, 38.8% are still students, 2.2% are completing vocational training, while 6.5% are unemployed.

We also asked the respondents about their role in youth policy-making processes and the majority responded by saying they are youth activists (43.5%), scholars/scientists (28.6%), members of political parties (9.8%), members of a CSO (4.3%), journalists (1.1%), policymaker (1.1%). Among the respondents, a small number stated that they are both activists and politicians, as well as ex-activists and are inactive in terms of the policy-making process.

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

In Albania, respondents were familiar with existing youth policies. 7.2% of respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar, 39.9% are very familiar and 14.9% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (8.3%) were not asked further details about their attitudes regarding existing youth policies but were asked about their opinion on youth priorities.

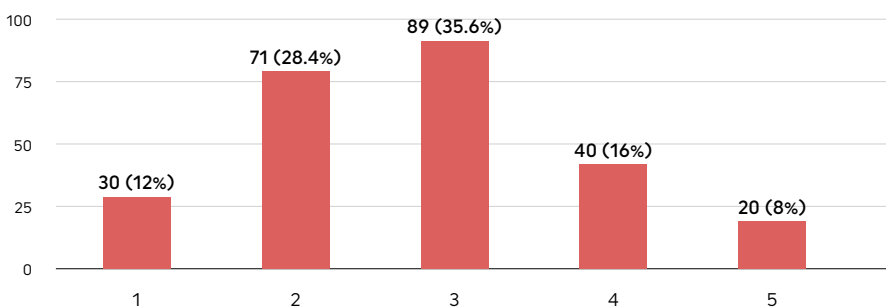
Chart 15. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in Albania



When asked about the quality of youth policies in Albania, 42.3% of respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 30% assessed them as 'bad' and 14.2% as 'very bad'. Only 2% of respondents considered youth policies as 'very good'. The situation is similar where attitudes toward priorities recognised in these policies is concerned – 30% considered recognised priorities as 'bad' and 39.1% as 'neither good nor bad', which implies that the respondents do not agree with prioritisation within youth policies.

The most concerning finding in this section was that approximately 76% of respondents cannot agree with the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided in youth policies in Albania adequately address youth needs.'

Chart 16. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(250 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures provided in youth policies in Albania adequately address the current needs of young people in Albania?

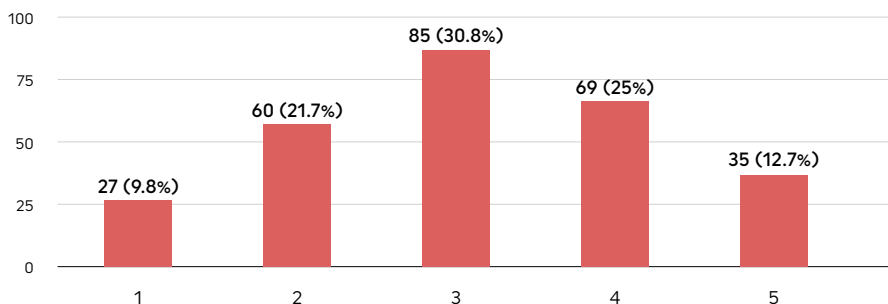
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to respondents of the online survey, the most important priorities for youth, that should be addressed in public policies are employment possibilities (78.3% stated this priority), education (65.9%), youth participation and empowerment (51.8%), housing and affordable living conditions (33.3%), mental health support (21.7%), social inclusion and diversity (20.7%), digitalisation (19.2%), affordable health care (18.5%), lifelong learning (6.9%), issues of sexual orientation and gender identity (4.3%), ecological sustainability (2.5%).

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

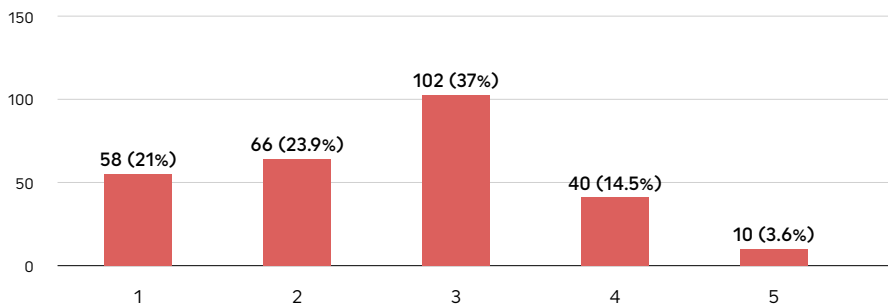
Although the majority of the respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in Albania, they consider the efficiency of this process to be unimpressive.

Chart 17. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(276 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 5. Policy-making Efficiency
(276 responses)



Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

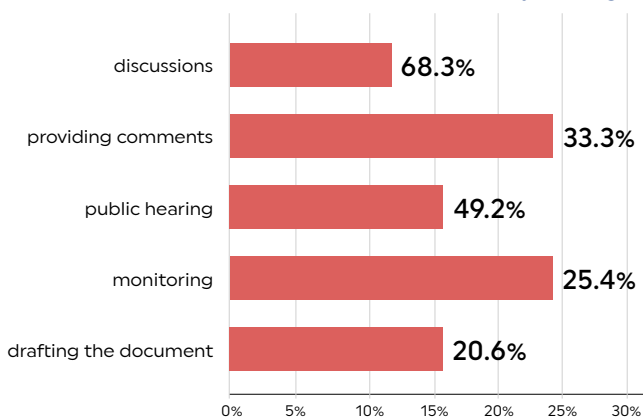
Over half of the respondents are uncertain of whether there are mechanisms through which youth activists can get involved in the policymaking process⁴, while 32.6% know these mechanisms exist. Also, 59.6% of the re-

⁴ Mechanisms such as thematic discussions, focus groups with relevant groups and stakeholders, gathering information concerning the needs of young people, public hearings, public debates, etc.

spondents claim that there is a difference between the levels of policies and their development processes. The policy-making process in Albania recognises the local, national and regional levels as important for this research⁵. An interesting finding is that nearly 30% of respondents find the local level policy-making process to be more inclusive than the other levels (28.8%), while 30.8% assess that the national level is the most inclusive of the three. Another 30.8% assess that the regional level is more inclusive than the local and national levels. In addition to this result, 26.9% of respondents say there are no mechanisms through which youth activist can get involved in the policy-making process at the regional level (while they do exist at the local and national levels) and 23.1% say there are none at the local level (while at the national and regional level they exist).

Over 77% of the respondents were not previously involved in the policy-making process or in advocacy campaigns, while only 22.8% of respondents experienced this. Over one fifth of respondents with this experience (22.2%) assess it as 'neither good nor bad', 30.2% as 'good' and 28.6% as 'very good'. The majority of respondents were involved at the national (54%) and local levels (52.4%) of policy-making processes, while fewer were involved at the regional level (12.7%).

Chart 18. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process



41.9% of respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges respondents encountered were limited resources and funding available to youth activists (55% encountered this), lack of political support or will (41.7%), bureaucratic obstacles (35%), lack of

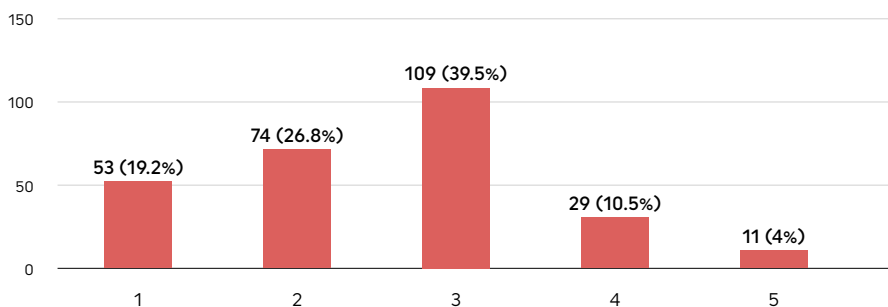
⁵ In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

follow-up after recommendations (33.3%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and representatives of institutions about youth issues (30%). More than 20% of respondents stated limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (23.3%) and lack of transparency (21.7%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

The majority of respondents assessed that vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their problems are not recognised adequately dealt with in public policies. In addition, 67% considered that there is room for improvement in terms of recognising vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 19. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies (276 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5 to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in Albania's youth policy documents?

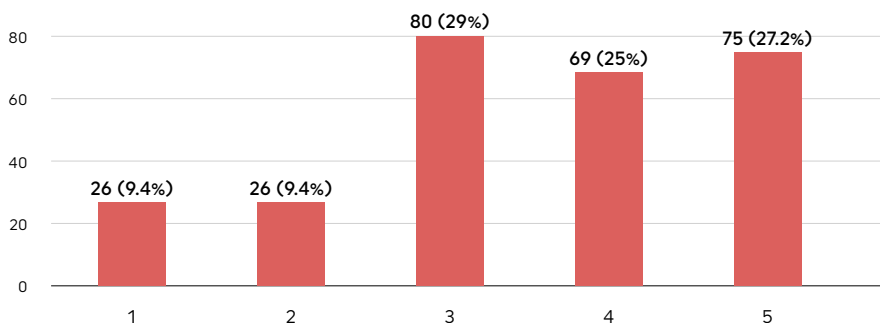
Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, they stated that the policy-making process should be improved, that CSOs and youth activists' capacities should be improved as should process transparency and political freedom and expression of opinion, etc.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of the influence of youth activists, the majority of respondents assess this influence as significant (27.2% very and 25% somewhat), while 29% of respondents are undecided whether this influence is significant or not.

Chart 20. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (276 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in Albania.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (60.1% respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available for youth activists (58%), lack of transparency (48.6%), bureaucratic obstacles (42.4%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (39.9%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and representatives of institutions concerning youth issues (37%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (29%), political polarisation (24.3%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (21.7%), etc.

Key messages from survey respondents:

"Young people must be respected, they must be allowed space to express themselves and be included in issues that affect people, they must be listened to. Old politics must be replaced by young politics, and youth must not be used only for campaigns, everyone should be at the position they deserve."

"It is necessary to encourage young people to propose initiatives that relate to economic support, to support various initiatives and raise awareness among the existing youth structures."

"Politicians should create confidence in politics in general. Whether this is for youth or other important matters, it has to be valuable, humane and logical."

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the youth organisations survey involved 26 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey gathered 281 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

Existing youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina were critiqued for lacking a unified approach at the state level. While there were positive aspects in Republika Srpska and Brčko District, issues included the absence of a comprehensive strategy in the Federation of BiH, ineffective implementation of policies, and the exclusion of youth from decision-making processes. Recommendations included better strategic documents, increased youth involvement, and collaboration between civil society and government. Approximately half of the online survey respondents were somewhat familiar with current youth policies. Evaluating the quality, 40.5% considered it neither good nor bad, while 89% disagreed that existing policies adequately addressed youth needs. Top priorities identified by respondents included employment opportunities, education, housing, and youth participation.

The process of adopting public policies, especially youth policies, was criticised for inefficiency, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of transparency. CSOs, particularly overarching youth councils, actively participated in advocating for youth policies but faced obstacles like inadequate funding and limited networking opportunities. Calls were made for more proactive collaboration, effective communication, and stronger youth participation in policy-making. While familiar with the public policy-making process, online survey respondents deemed its efficiency less impressive. Approximately two-thirds were aware of mechanisms for involving youth activists. Local-level policy-making was perceived as more inclusive, with challenges including lack of political support, awareness gaps, limited resources, and political polarisation.

Vulnerable youth groups, including those with disabilities, rural youth, LGBTIQ, ethnic minorities, and women/girls, were identified. Organisations advocating for marginalised groups often lacked sufficient capacities. There was a consensus on the need for more inclusive policies and increased support for organisations focusing on vulnerable groups.

Both surveys underscore the need for more effective, inclusive, and impactful youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Recommendations include increased collaboration between government and civil society, well-structured action plans, and greater youth involvement in the policy-making process. Recognising and addressing the needs of vulnerable youth groups are crucial for the development of more inclusive policies that support all young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

From 10 September 2023 to 10 October 2023, 26 interviews were conducted with the representatives from various youth organisations or organisations working with youth from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The organisations are centred in the following towns/municipalities: Banovići, Banjaluka, Bihać, Brčko, Bugojno, Cazin, Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica.

The interviews were conducted online due to the logistical challenges posed by the diverse geographical locations of youth organisations, using Zoom or Google Meet platforms. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour.

Challenges were encountered in securing participation from organisations based in smaller towns/municipalities, as they demonstrated a comparatively lower level of willingness to engage in the research process. Several factors could have contributed to this, including limited resources, awareness gaps, and capacity constraints. The researchers were reaching out to these organisations through email and social networks, aiming to communicate the research objectives and encourage their participation, but in most cases without response.

Information on the organisations interviewed

Chart 1: Years of CSO's Existence in BiH

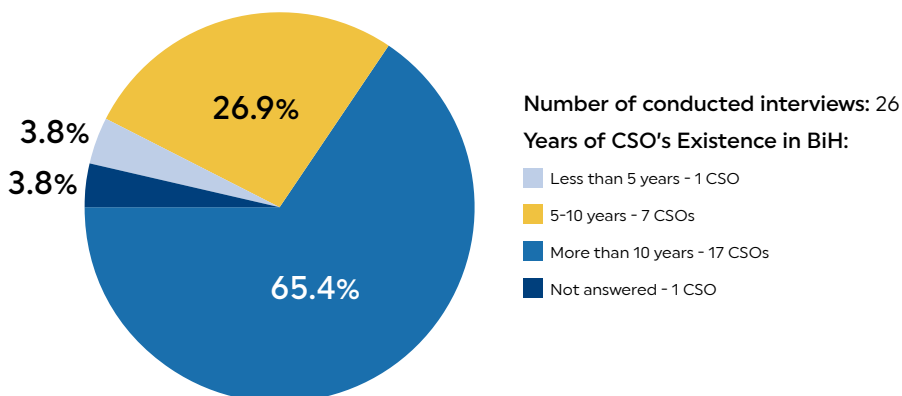


Chart 2: Number of Employees

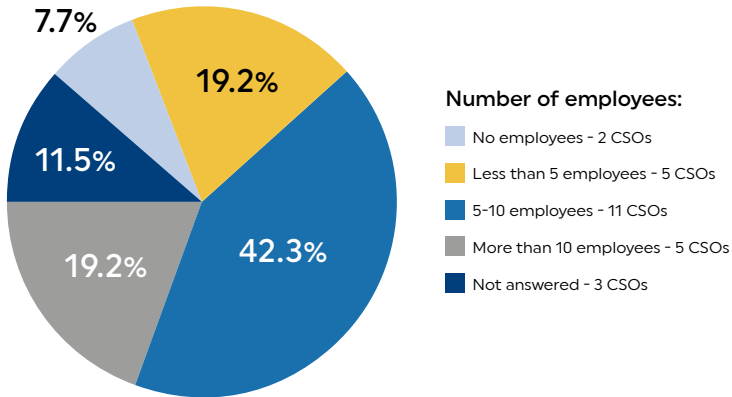
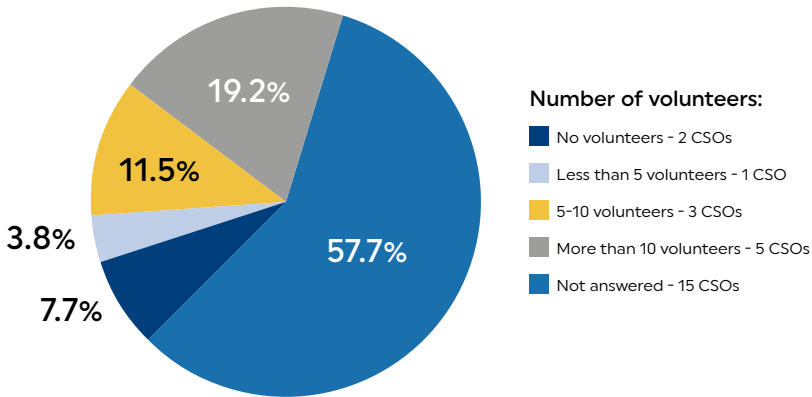


Chart 3: Number of Volunteers



Note: In this question, many Interlocutors, when asked about the number of volunteers, said "it depends on the project", "it varies", "unsure/uncertain", therefore their responses were noted as "Not answered".

Topics organisations deal with: CSOs mainly focus on advancing democracy in general, with emphasis on youth empowerment and involvement. They engage in diverse domains such as informal education, entrepreneurship, sustainable peace, reconciliation, and interfaith dialogue, as well as inter-party cooperation, EU integration, anti-corruption efforts, and security. Other prominent topics include culture, human rights, environmental concerns, hate speech, and media literacy.

The diverse range of topics and initiatives undertaken by the CSOs underscores their integral role in shaping a dynamic and resilient civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

The perspectives on existing youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are characterised by a mixture of challenges, criticisms, and calls for improvement. Several common themes emerge from the interlocutors' responses:

The decentralised political system in BiH contributes to the complexity of policy-making, leading to a lack of a unified youth policy at the state level.

At the entity level, the [Law on Youth Organization](#) in Republika Srpska (Zakon o omladinskom organizovanju Republike Srpske), the [Youth Law](#) in the Federation of BiH (Zakon o mladima Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine) and [Youth Law](#) in Brčko District (*Zakon o mladima Brčko distrikta BiH*) are acknowledged positively as a foundation of the youth policy framework. This legal framework prescribes the existence of a youth strategy/youth policy, the participation of youth in decision-making, i.e. the involvement of youth in youth committees/commissions at all levels, the existence of officers in all institutions responsible for youth issues, and budget allocations for youth projects as well as other financial allocations for young people.

However, the reality is different. The interlocutors pointed out the issue regarding the lack of a comprehensive and effective strategy at the level of the Federation of BiH, unlike the RS and Brčko District where the strategy/policy does exist. The absence of a well-defined strategy impedes the development of an Action Plan (AP) and budget allocation, resulting in a lack of systemic solutions.

Even though there are positive examples of the adopted youth policies at the cantonal and local (municipal) levels, there is a prevalent sentiment that the said policies are not effectively implemented. The interlocutors expressed disappointment with the exclusion of young people from decision-making processes and emphasised the general failure of the government(s) to address their needs.

The lack of initiatives to support young people in articulating their needs and lobbying for themselves is also noted. Crucially, there is a recognised deficiency in discussions around these issues in the society and the overall sentiment is that existing policies are often mere formalities, lacking substance and tangible results.

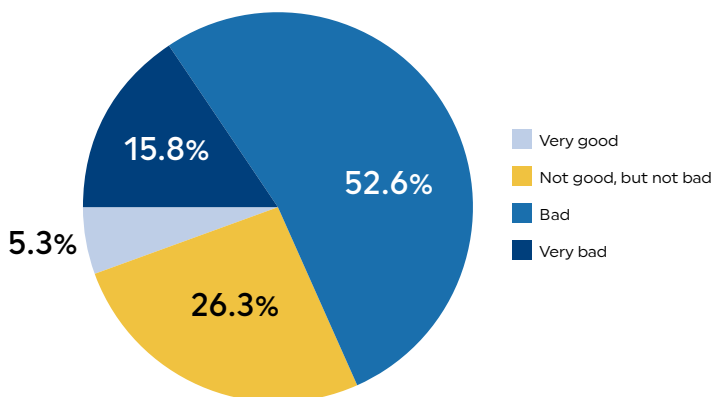
There is a consensus on the necessity to regulate the situation through well-defined strategic documents, considering the challenges of brain drain, education deficiencies, and unemployment. Empowering civil society organisations and strengthening the capacity of youth organisations is crucial for effective advocacy. Providing more space and grants for young people and raising awareness about the significance of youth policies are some of the recommendations for improvement. Collaborative efforts, inclusive approaches, more comprehensive research into the position of young people and evidence-based policy-making are considered essential.

Overall, the improvement of the situation regarding the youth policies in BiH is perceived as a multi-faceted effort requiring collaboration, evidence-based policy-making, and sustained commitment of both the civil society and the institutions of government.

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level

When asked to rate (scale 1-5) the effectiveness of the process of adopting public policies, especially youth policies, most of the interviewed CSO representatives (53%) stated that the process of adopting youth policies is far from effective, rating it as 2 - bad (Chart 4). No one rated the process as 5 - excellent. The reason for this rating lies in several problems that are present in the decision-making process in the economy, including bureaucratic obstacles, lack of transparency, and efficiency. The policy-making process is often slowed down and burdened by political conflicts, which make it difficult to react quickly and effectively to the needs of young people. Moreover, disproportionate progress on these topics is seen on different levels of government, as some of the Cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are actively making youth strategies. However, the lack of progress extends to other levels of government.

Chart 4: Effectiveness of the Process of Adopting Public Policies



Most of the interlocutors agreed that there are processes in place which have been improved over the years, but a lot more can be done to streamline it, connecting messages across cantonal and entity levels. Furthermore, BiH's complex political situation dictates the effectiveness of public policies' adoption, and the situation is similar with all public policies in general, but it is evident that youth issues are not a priority.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are involved in the process of creating and advocating of youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as most of the initiatives come precisely from youth organisations. One thing to note here is that there are three overarching youth CSOs in the economy and those are: the Youth Council of Republika Srpska, the Youth Council/Board of Brčko District, and the Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some organisations often actively participate in advocating the interests and needs of young people and provide valuable input and recommendations to the policy-makers. On the other hand, the question arises whether the authorities take these recommendations into consideration and incorporate them in further planning and formulation of financial and action plans.

Furthermore, there is a recognised lack of proactivity from both sides - the authorities and civil society. A more proactive approach is needed from both the governmental and civil society sectors. This could involve organising campaigns that facilitate widespread participation of young people, allowing them to express their opinions and exercise the rights guaranteed by existing laws and regulations.

Some interlocutors stated that they initiated processes on local, cantonal or entity level and were involved in the working groups, while others think that authorities mostly involve the CSOs during the public hearings, after the document is finalised, and most of the comments are not taken into consideration, since it is too late. Concerns arise regarding the lack of feedback on the acceptance or rejection of comments and recommendations. It's observed that, for representatives of institutions, the significance lies more in organising the public hearing to fulfil a procedural obligation rather than genuinely engaging with and incorporating valuable input.

As previously mentioned, some of the interviewed CSO representatives are involved in the working groups and are cooperating with the governments and parliaments on all levels of government, aiming to advance and influence the process and progress of policy-making in BiH by presenting the critical view on the ongoing situation regarding youth issues (political, economic, social, cultural, etc.). CSO representatives who are involved in the working groups as coordinators/initiators consider that greater CSO involvement in the processes is lacking and it seems that the main reason is the lack of capacities, as most of the organisations are focused on activism, mobility, and volunteerism. Civil society sector needs experts in the field of social/health care, education, employment, culture, sports, and that is what is missed – expertise that would come directly from CSOs.

There are significant differences in the policy-making process and CSOs' involvement between local (municipal), cantonal, entity, and state level. These differences often relate to the level of bureaucracy and political dynamics. There are also differences from city to city, municipality to municipality, canton to canton. In some municipalities/cities, CSOs are not aware of mechanisms for their involvement as they lack capacities. For that reason, capacity building is needed to enhance awareness and engagement in the policy-making process. Furthermore, the interlocutors acknowledged that, even though the involvement of CSOs seems to be the most feasible at the local level, many smaller communities do not have youth organisations, let alone Youth Councils.

Although CSOs are mostly funded by international organisations and work on projects, the interlocutors noted that there is a significant interest from them to be involved in the policy-making process. However, the CSO representatives noted that they face different obstacles in their work, predominantly stemming from inadequate funding, a lack of capacity-building training, and limited networking opportunities. Moreover, there is a

pressing need for enhanced knowledge transfer and collaboration within the broader civil society in the economy. Some interlocutors argued that even well-established youth organisations do not have the knowledge and expertise to contribute to the policy-making process, since that involves tasks such as research, negotiation, lobbying, etc. Notably, there are some youth networks which engage in cooperative advocacy efforts, serving as stable and sustainable organisations and providing the capacity building training for other youth organisations at the local level. This training spans across areas like administration, research, finance, and team building.

Youth policies need to be better positioned on the list of priorities, surpassing their current standing. Youth issues need to be put in the focus of decision-makers' agenda, which is difficult in the given political environment. One of the problems is in the fact that there is almost no coordination in advocating for youth policies – different organisations and individuals are often advocating for the same policy independently from each other. A more efficient approach would be to unite their efforts, exerting joint pressure for impactful advocacy.

The majority of interlocutors acknowledged that the key step towards improving the process would be to strengthen the active participation of young people in the policy-making process itself. The policy-making process should be more transparent and accessible to the public and youth organisations. This can be achieved by publishing relevant documents, decisions, and consultation outcomes online, and ensuring that information is clear and comprehensible. Facilitating collaboration across various sectors –government, civil society, academia, and the private sector—is crucial to ensuring the comprehensiveness and efficacy of youth policies. The establishment of an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the implementation of these policies is essential to guaranteeing they yield the intended results and remain adaptable to the evolving needs of young people. These proposed measures represent only a fraction of the initiatives that could contribute to refining the policy-making process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Continuous evaluation and adjustment are imperative to better align with the evolving needs of young people and pave the way for a more promising future for them.

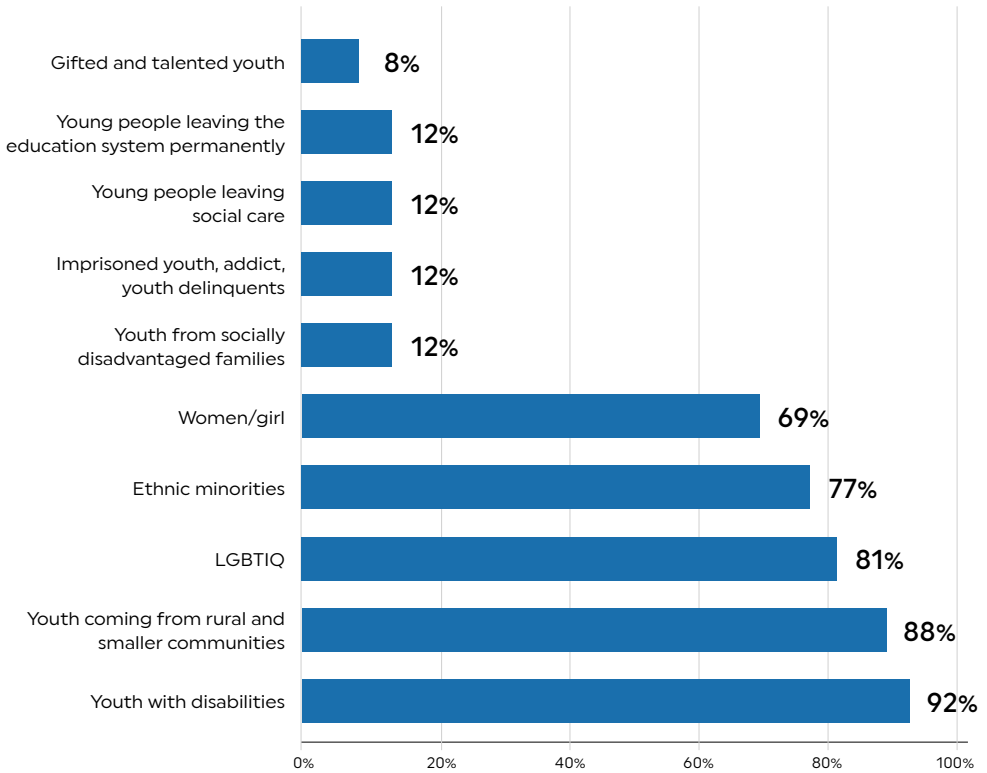
Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

The needs of vulnerable groups of young people are not always sufficiently recognised and addressed in public policies in BiH. Despite some ongoing efforts to address this issue, there is a need for greater sensitivity and concrete measures to more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable youth. This includes providing access to education, employment, healthcare, and other key resources and support that vulnerable youth groups often require to achieve their full potential and build a better future.

The existing political framework and measures frequently fall short in providing adequate support and protection for these young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More efforts are needed to ensure that policies are more inclusive and tailored to confront the distinct challenges encountered by these vulnerable youth groups. The interlocutors noted that there is a great opportunity for improvement when it comes to recognising the needs of vulnerable youth groups in public policies. The current policy framework can be broadened and refined to better address the unique needs and challenges faced by these vulnerable youth, thereby contributing to the development of more inclusive and effective policies that support all young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From the perspective of the interviewed CSO representatives, the most vulnerable groups among youth are youth with disabilities, young people from rural areas and smaller communities, LGBTIQ, ethnic minorities, and women/girls.

Chart 5: The Most Vulnerable Groups Among Youth



The interlocutors highlighted that the capacities of organisations advocating for marginalised groups are often not sufficient to fully perform tasks in the policy-making process. These organisations operate with limited resources and face challenges in building their capacities. Some interlocutors think that CSOs focusing on LGBTIQ issues exhibit higher capacities, yet they still require additional support and empowerment to maximise their impact.

Political processes must prioritize inclusivity, providing ample space for the participation of vulnerable groups of young people. This involves establishing consultations and forums that actively incorporate their voices into policymaking. Policies should be attuned to the diverse needs and perspectives of these groups, considering factors such as ethnicity, gender, and economic differences, leading to targeted measures addressing specific challenges. A key area requiring more attention is research, where a more nuanced exploration of the needs of distinct marginalised groups is essential.

Conclusion

Ensuring effective cross-sectoral cooperation and involving all relevant stakeholders is vital for a well-informed policy-making process that meets the diverse needs of young people. Government institutions should actively engage with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), keeping them informed and seeking their input during decision-making. CSOs, in turn, should strive for inclusivity to represent diverse perspectives, enhancing their credibility and contribution to political processes. Recognition of CSOs' contributions by authorities and society is crucial for sustaining their efforts.

Key elements for improvement include well-structured action plans and bigger financial allocations, backed by thorough research and a platform for youth voices to be heard. Empowering CSOs through capacity building, funding, and networking is essential. Deepening youth understanding of the decision-making process through workshops and projects fosters active participation. Overall, young people represent a key demographic, and their nuanced needs should be at the forefront of policy considerations.

Results from the online youth survey

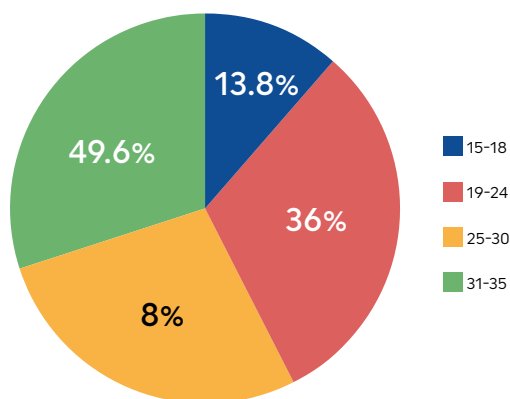
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, however, it followed the same topics and structure. In total, 281 answers were gathered using Google form platform for online surveys.

Demographic information about the respondents

Among those who responded to the online survey, most are between the ages of 19-24 (31.1%), followed by 31-35 (29.9%) and 25-30 (27.4%). Women slightly dominated participation in the online survey (50.9% of the respondents are women and 48.8% are men).

Chart 6. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents



Regarding educational level, 7.5% of the respondents have not completed a secondary education, 29.5% have completed a secondary education, 37.7% obtained a Bachelor's degree, 22.4% a Master's degree and 2.1% obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

When it comes to the labour market status, 50.2% of respondents answered that they are employed, 39.5% are still students, accompanied by 3.6% who are completing vocational training, while 5.3% are unemployed.

We also asked the respondents about their role in the youth policy-making process and the majority of them were youth activists (38.1%), members of political parties (26%), members of CSOs (14.6%), journalists (6.8%), policy-makers (4.3%), scholars/scientists (4.6%). Among the responses were a small number of ex-politicians and ex-activists, as well as those who are inactive within the policy-making process.

Regarding educational level, 9.7% of the respondents have not completed a secondary education, 24.5% have completed a secondary education, 45.8% obtained a Bachelor's degree, 15.5% have a Master's degree and 0.6% have obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

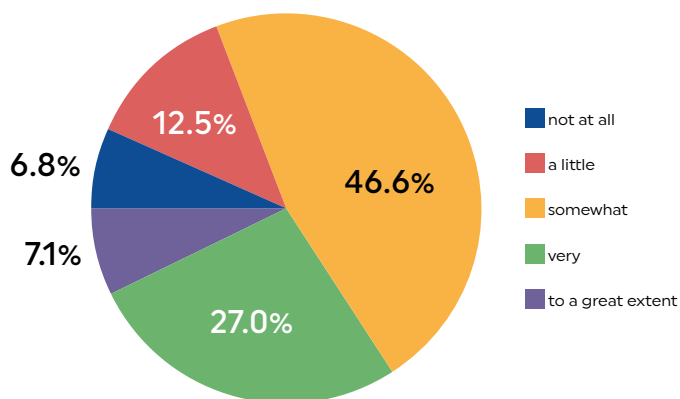
When it comes to labour market status, 44.5% of respondents answered that they are employed, 41.3% are still students, accompanied by 2.6% who are completing vocational training, while 8.4% are unemployed.

We also asked respondents about their role in the youth policy-making process and the majority are youth activists (46.5%), members of CSOs (18.7%), scholars/scientists (16.8%), members of political parties (5.8%), policy-makers (3.9%), journalists (2.6%). Among the responses were a small number of respondents that are inactive within the policy-making process.

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

Nearly half of the respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar (46.6%), 27% are very familiar and 7.1% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (6.8%) were not asked further details about their standpoints regarding existing youth policies but were asked about their opinion on youth priorities.

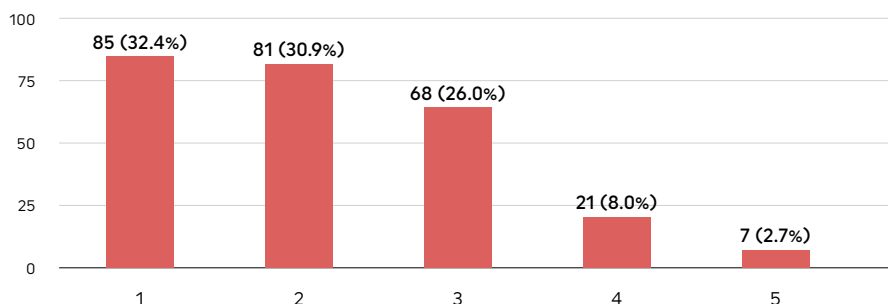
Chart 7. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in Bosnia and Hercegovina



When asked about the quality of youth policies in Bosnia and Hercegovina, 40.5% of the respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 31.7% assessed them as 'bad' and 17.9% as 'very bad'. Only 1.1% of respondents considered the youth policies as 'very good'. The situation is similar in terms of attitudes toward priorities recognised in these policies - 37.8% considered recognised priorities as 'bad' and 32.8% as 'neither good nor bad', which implies that the respondents do not agree with the prioritisation within youth policies.

The most concerning finding in this section was that approximately 89% of respondents cannot agree with the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided in youth policies in Bosnia and Hercegovina adequately address needs of the youth.'

Chart 8. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(262 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures in youth policies in Bosnia and Hercegovina adequately address the current needs of young people in BiH?

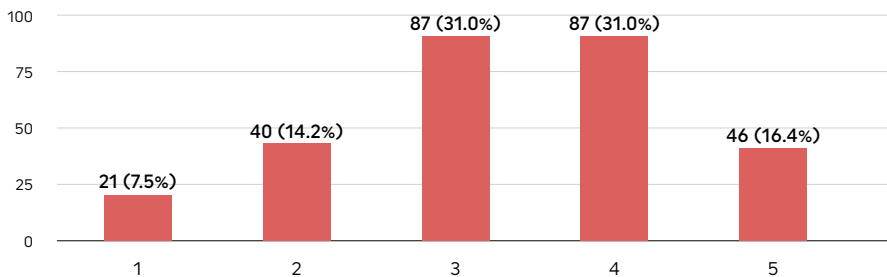
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to the online survey respondents, the most important priorities for youth that should be addressed in public policies are employment possibilities (73.3% mentioned this priority), education (70.8%), housing and affordable living conditions (42.3%), youth participation and empowerment (33.5%), affordable health care (26.7%), mental health support (22.4%), digitalisation (18.9%), social inclusion and diversity, lifelong learning, ecological sustainability, issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, youth mobility.

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

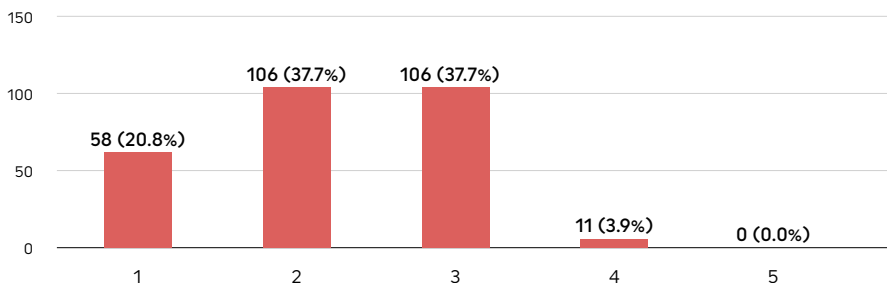
Although the respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in Bosnia and Hercegovina, they consider the efficiency of the process as unimpressive.

Chart 9. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(281 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 10. Policy-making Efficiency
(281 responses)

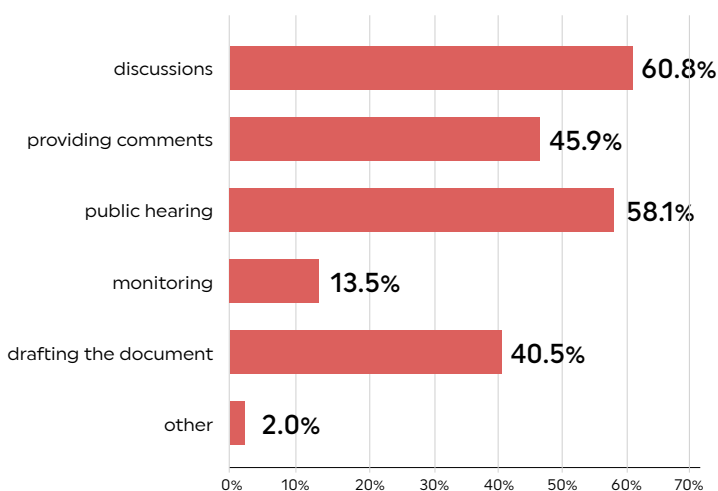


Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

Nearly two thirds of the respondents are aware of mechanisms for involvement of youth activists in the policy-making process. Also, 83.2% of respondents claims that there is a difference between levels of policies and their development processes. The policy-making process in Bosnia and Hercegovina recognises the local, cantonal, entity, state and regional levels as important for this research.⁶ The majority of respondents assess that the local level of the policy-making process is more inclusive than the other levels (78.4%), while only 7.8% of them assess that the state level is more inclusive than the other levels (local, cantonal, entity or regional levels). In addition to this result, more than 31% of the respondents stated that there are no mechanisms for involvement of youth activist in the policy-making process at the state level (while at the local, cantonal, entity and regional levels, they exist).

More than half of the respondents were previously involved in the policy-making process or in advocacy campaigns. Nearly half of them (47.3%) assess this experience as 'neither good nor bad', 33.1% as 'good' and 9.5% as 'very good'. The majority of respondents were involved at local level policy-making processes (72.3%), while other levels involved them in smaller scales (cantonal level – 29.7%, entity level – 14.9%, and only 8.8% were involved at the state and regional levels).

Chart 11. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process



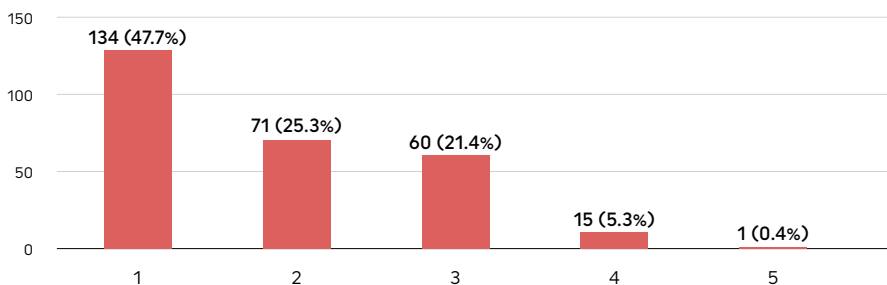
⁶ In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

73.5% of the respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges that roughly 50% of respondents encountered were lack of political support or will (58.5% encountered this issue), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives in terms of youth issues (55.6%), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (54.9%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (47.9%). Approximately 30% of respondents stated limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (37.3%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (33.8%), lack of transparency (30.3%), political polarisation (30.3%) and bureaucratic obstacles (29.6%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

Majority of respondents assessed that vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their problems are inadequately recognised in public policies. In addition, 76.2% consider that there is room for improvement of recognition of vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 12. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies (281 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in Bosnia and Hercegovina's youth policy documents?

Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

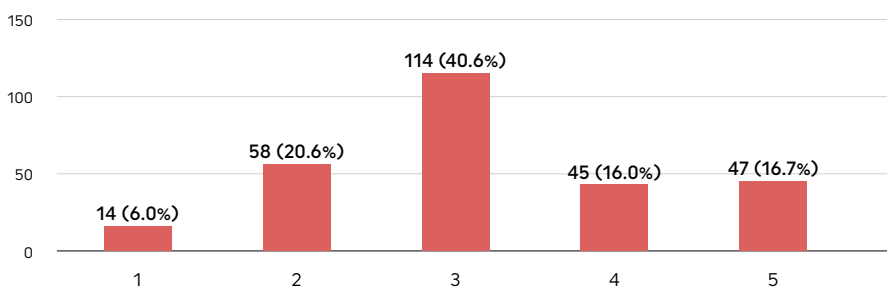
When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, they stated that the policy-making process should be improved, that CSOs and youth activists' capacities should be improved, increased involvement of youth in all aspects of policy-making is needed, and that awareness should be raised concerning youth vulnerable groups and their priorities, etc.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of the influence of youth activists, the majority of respondents are undecided as to whether this influence is significant or not.

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (80.4% respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (73.7%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (62.3%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (50.9%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (48.8%), lack of transparency (46.6%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (45.6%), etc.

Chart 13. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (281 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on the development of youth policies in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

Key messages from survey respondents:

"It is necessary to become part of the youth policy making process, to monitor the implementation of those policies and achieving the set goals, it is essential to improve the position of young people and not approach them only to check the box of having the representative of youth in the policy making process which then remains a "dead letter on paper"."

"It is becoming more and more difficult to engage young people in politics and also in social issues level, particularly in the modern age of the capitalist system and „mass virtualization of life“. Young people are losing touch with reality and living in a far different manner which the current political scene does not understand at all. Youth policies should be made with the participation of hundreds of young people."

"In general, it is necessary to guide and affirm young people a little more in the process of creating public policy, and also to familiarise them with existing policies."

Kosovo*

In Kosovo* the youth organisation study involved 25 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey gathered 155 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

Both the organisations and survey respondents demonstrated awareness of existing youth policies in Kosovo*. The organisations acknowledged progress but expressed reservations concerning policy adequacy. Survey respondents, familiar with the policies, provided mixed assessments of their quality, highlighting the need for improvements in identifying youth priorities.

Organisations identified inefficiencies in the policy-making process, particularly at the national level and called for more inclusive mechanisms. Survey respondents expressed uncertainty about the existence of mechanisms for involving youth activists, with perceptions varying between local and national levels. Challenges included limited resources, lack of political support, and bureaucratic obstacles.

Both organisations and survey respondents emphasised key priorities in youth policies, including employment opportunities, education, and youth participation. Recognition of vulnerable groups, such as minorities and LGBTQ+ youth, was deemed inadequate, with a consensus that improvement is essential.

The findings converge on several key conclusions. Despite variations in size and resources, CSOs demonstrated expertise that could contribute to policy-making processes, emphasising the need for inclusiveness. Both groups identified a lack of equal involvement in policy-making, highlighting the significance of creating a more systemic and efficient networking environment. Challenges included limited capacities, lack of transparency, and the need for increased support for CSOs.

To address identified challenges, findings from both surveys recommend creating a favourable environment for the training of young activists, enhancing transparency, and empowering youth in decision-making processes. Capacity building, more funding, and improved networking are essential to ensure inclusiveness in policy-making, particularly at the local level.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

This report presents the attitudes of 25 CSOs concerning youth policies in Kosovo*. The interviews were conducted between September and October 2023 in different towns, offering a comprehensive overview on youth policies, activities, and organisational aspects of the CSOs. The sample includes a slightly bigger number of CSOs based in Prishtina that has the highest dynamic of CSO activities in Kosovo*. However, even though based in Prishtina, these CSOs usually cover the whole territory of Kosovo* and are most active in terms of youth inclusiveness and volunteer work. The questionnaire offered a basis for the interview, which served as the primary method followed for this research. The majority of the interviews were conducted face to face allowing for longer and more elaborate answers to the questions. In those cases, researchers could follow up on the questions answered and have more open-ended type of interview. Due to limited capacities especially of new or community-based CSOs, there were a few cases when interviews were conducted online and the questions were explained prior to the interview. The CSOs were generally cooperative and willing to share their experiences with the research team, although there were cases that some very active CSOs could not participate due to their activity schedules.

Information about organisations interviewed

The sample of 25 CSOs was diverse in terms of size, location, longevity, and projects they implement. While all CSOs had dealt in one way or another with youth, the focus, projects, scope, and issues they tackle were different. For instance, some CSOs like Activism Roots, Defy them, Youth Initiative for Human Rights and the like dealt directly with youth cultural activities and activism. Others like CEL and Fourth Wave addressed gender discrimination and the needs of LGBTIQ community. YMCA, PEN Centre,

Avonet and iChat dealt with youth empowerment and education. CSO Çohu for example carries out projects aimed at specific target groups such as young journalists. Organisations like Community Development Fund, CIVIKOS or similar ones implement a wide range of projects some of which focus on youth. CSOs like Balkan Sunflowers and AKTI deal with minorities in Kosovo* such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. The sample also includes CSOs from Serbian community. It should be noted, however, that these CSOs function differently in the sense that they are commonly founded and run by the Serbian activists in Kosovo* and their activities target Serbian youth. They work primarily in municipalities with a Serbian majority population. However, there is cooperation between Serbian and other CSOs in Kosovo* through joint activities or through financial support, mainly from bigger organisations to local ones. Serbian young activists, on the other hand, are involved as volunteers and activists in several projects and groups founded by organisations such as Youth Initiatives for Human Rights, PEN Center, Community Development Funds (CDF) or Centre for Equality and Liberty of the LGBT community (CEL) which operate throughout Kosovo*.

In terms of size, the research team classifies organisations that have more than 7 employees as large. Concerning the longevity of the CSOs, this varied from six months old (one of the CSOs being relatively recent) to more than 20 years. Within the sample, the largest organisations in terms of employees were typically those organisations that had existed for longer period. That is the case for Community Development Fund, YMCA, Youth Initiative for Human Rights and Balkan Sunflowers Kosova which are the oldest organisations working with youth since they were founded between 1999 or early 2000s. These organisations were established by larger international organisations or networks such as World Bank, Balkan Sunflower International or Regional Initiative for Youth. This also reflects in the number of employees, activists and volunteers. To illustrate, Youth Initiative for Human Rights has more than 20 employees, while Balkan Sunflower Kosova more than 60. Organisations with a big portfolio and multiple projects such as Kosovo* Community Development Fond has 35 employees working exclusively on youth related projects.

Other local CSOs which are actively involved in youth activism, employ a solid number of people. PEN, Syri i Vizionit or ADCD employ more than 10 people and have more than 15 years' work experience in this field. They have large groups of activists, permanent or on call. Within the sample, CSOs with smaller staff of 5-8 people comprise the largest number of organisations. While relatively small, these CSOs had sufficient capacities with some of them functioning more than a decade and having a high impact on the community of youth. This is the case for CSO AKTI, Avoko, SIT, Dardana Press, Youth Active Gracanica, iChat, Integra and several others. Nevertheless, one significant finding is that many youth CSOs relied on volunteer work. For instance, some activities or projects of a number of organisations attracted up to 50 volunteers.

Within the sample, there were a few CSOs with less than 5 employees. This was usually the case for the newly established CSOs that have been working for 5 or less years. The interviews with representatives of these CSOs were very productive given that they provided information about the motivations behind establishing new CSOs in Kosovo* today. Based on the answers provided by these representatives, the purpose of the new CSOs is to deal with specific topics and addressing certain issues that other CSOs have not dealt with.

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

All CSOs were aware that youth policies in Kosovo* exist. However, the organisation's standpoint and deeper familiarity with existing youth policies depended on various factors. The research team found that more established CSOs with longer activity and presence in this sector showed significantly more familiarity with the content of the policies than organisations that were only recently created. Likewise, organisations which had a permanent staff and implemented projects focusing on youth showed more familiarity than those whose staff was constantly changing, relied on various small projects and struggled to secure funds.

Taking this difference into consideration, the CSOs generally showed familiarity with youth policies because their projects develop based on these policies and legislations. Even though they were relatively familiar with the regulations and legislations in their specific field, this does not necessarily mean that they were involved directly in the working groups, drafting processes or any other form in the policy-making process for the administrative instruction, legislation's drafting or amendment.

Commonly, this was due to the lack of an effective inclusive mechanism within responsible institutions, as their direct email notifications reached only a limited number of organisations. The lack of organisation's involvement also occurs because of lack of information or perceived incompetence on policy-making processes and bureaucratic procedures on their part. In Kosovo*, regulation No. 05/2016 on Minimum Standards for the Public Consultation Process has led to the creation of a Public Platform for Consultation that obliges all stakeholders to develop consultation for one month prior to Law's adoption. Several CSOs interviewed have confirmed that they were not involved in the consultation due to the lack of interest on the process, or even limited capacities inside the organisation, in terms of time or human resources.

There were concerns in several interviews about volunteer work. While the interviewed CSOs mentioned that progress had been made in creating a national platform for registering volunteers, there is still a presumption that this platform is not functioning properly. Given that many CSOs rely on a substantial number of volunteers, there is a generally positive attitude toward the recognition of volunteer work from state institutions and their attempt to take it more seriously. The absence of recognition, on the other hand, directly affects low participation rates and a lack of motivation among young people to engage in activities, affecting their projects.

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level

Currently, Kosovo's institutions are in the process of drafting the Strategy of Youth 2024-2032 and the Action Plan 2024-2026. In the meantime, the Youth Guarantees are being designed by the Ministry of Finance, Transfers and Labour. These processes were reflected in all interviews with organisations, where they expressed optimism that the new documents will be updated and will address the needs and shortcomings of prior strategic documents. There was a general agreement among all organisations that current policies address the needs of youth only to a satisfactory extent and need to be rewritten and tailored to address present challenges youth face. Regardless of their quality, there was a concern with the implementation in practice or the non-compliance with other laws or regulation.

Chart 1. Satisfaction with the Effectiveness of the Process of Adopting Public Policies, Especially Youth Policies



Several CSOs raised concerns on the inclusion in policy-making process. Some declared that they were invited and involved in the policy-making processes, and they received regular invitations by email from the Ministry of Youth Culture and Sports. In these processes, CSOs were invited to share their expertise and add comments and suggestions. However, some organisations considered that despite the efforts, the Ministry should include a larger number of organisations. Moreover, the selection of working groups shouldn't be biased towards larger organisations with ample resources.

These CSOs declared that the working groups are eventually composed of representatives of organisations that have been regularly involved in these processes, something which hinders a more diverse representation of the CSOs in the process. Consequently, smaller local organisations that have more influence and contact with the people in the field and that *can* contribute to the process, feel excluded.

While larger CSOs working on the national minority issues often address discrimination and other challenges, the CSOs that are led by community members are typically smaller, lack financial stability as well as capacities in terms of human resources. Considering that the CSOs that usually get into working groups are those from larger CSOs, the organisations run by the minority members remain underrepresented in the policy-making processes. Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian national minorities lack representation from their own community members.

There are several Serbian CSOs which are financially stable, led by their own community members and involved in the policy-making processes.

According to some organisations, participating in policy-making at the local level is much simpler than doing so at the national level. CSOs can take *ad-hoc* initiatives based on the current needs of the municipality. In the case of civil society organisations, direct consultations with mayors of municipalities are a simpler, quicker and more straightforward process. At the national level, by contrast, the process is slower and more complex because multiple actors must agree to undertake new initiatives. The amendment or drafting new laws and new regulations at the national level also goes through several stages and multiple actors must be included in the process. Considering that the changes at the local level are more straightforward, local CSOs should invest more on their capacities to influence policy-making at that level. More investment in capacity building of CSOs would improve their participation in policy-making processes.

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

Despite the diversity of the sample in terms of scope, activities, and their projects, there was a general agreement among different CSOs that vulnerable groups in Kosovo* are young people from the minority Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian and those from rural areas. CSOs also considered as vulnerable LGBTIQ and youth coming from families that rely on social assistance schemes. In the case of the latter, the family loses the status of beneficiary when children reach the age of 18 and hence youth are compelled to work to support their families. A few CSOs mentioned youth with disabilities as being vulnerable, an issue which requires the involvement of multiple actors at the national level.

The organisations pointed out that there is room for a more inclusive approach. In this regard, they noted that policies lack inclusion of organisations, consultants or experts that are familiar with the needs and requests of these vulnerable groups. For example, organisations that work closely with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities consider that a separate budget in the local level for the young citizens coming from these communities would address their needs more accurately. Other organisations whose activities cover the entire territory of the economy, suggested that separate planning and financing should be oriented toward small initiatives or even organisations coming from rural areas in order to increase their capacities to address the specific needs that these groups.

Conclusions

Despite the active involvement in both local and central level, it can be concluded that there is a lack of equal involvement of all organisation in policy-making processes. While CSOs identified that a formal mechanism for involvement exists, a more systemic and efficient networking coming from both local and central level would be more effective. This would ensure equal participation of all CSOs, despite their background, location and capacities.

Although CSOs in the sample varied in size and resources, it was evident that they had sufficient expertise that could contribute to policy-making processes. Based on the extensive work experience within their respective fields, these CSOs would provide valuable insights and recommendations to youth policies. Despite this, not all CSOs are actively involved in policy-making processes. This is the case particularly for those CSOs which carry out field activities and are work directly with respective communities. A significant issue raised in this regard was the lack of capacities. The heavy workloads in the implementation of their own projects and challenges in securing funds, makes it difficult for these CSOs to dedicate additional time and resources to policy engagement. This constraint was recognised as a barrier to effectively contribute to policy-making in their respective localities. To address the barriers and enhance inclusiveness in policy-making, CSOs need assistance in strengthening their capacities from relevant institutions. As such, more funding and resources, consultations, and capacity building programs would be essential in supporting the future inclusiveness of local CSOs in this process.

Results from the online youth survey

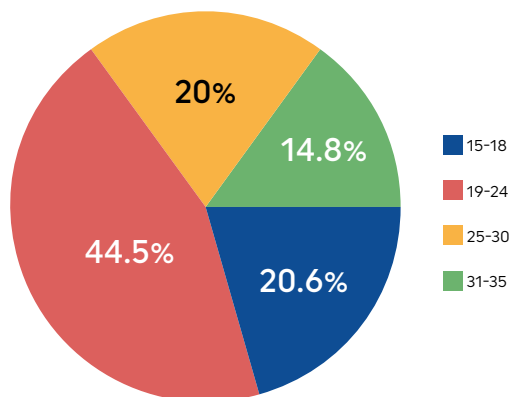
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, however, it followed the same topics and structure. In total, 155 responses were gathered using Google form platform for online surveys (146 in Albanian and 9 in Serbian).

Demographic information about the respondents

Among those who responded to the online survey, most are between the ages of 19-24 (44.5%), followed by 15-18 (20.6%) and 25-30 (20%). Women dominated participation in the online survey (66.5% of the respondents are women and 32.3% are men).

Chart 2. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents
(155 responses)



Regarding educational level, 9.7% of the respondents have not completed a secondary education, 24.5% have completed a secondary education, 45.8% obtained a Bachelor's degree, 15.5% have a Master's degree and 0.6% have obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

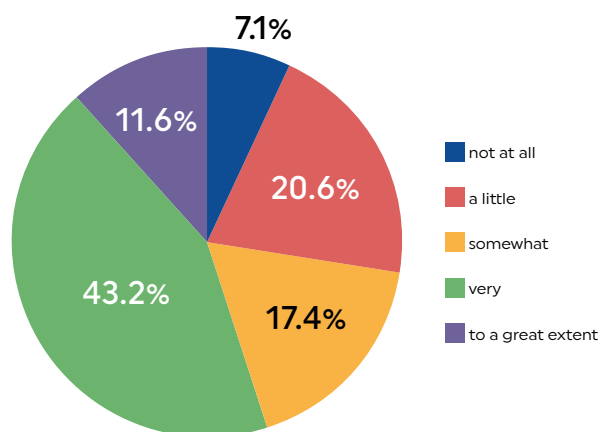
When it comes to labour market status, 44.5% of respondents answered that they are employed, 41.3% are still students, accompanied by 2.6% who are completing vocational training, while 8.4% are unemployed.

We also asked respondents about their role in the youth policy-making process and the majority are youth activists (46.5%), members of CSOs (18.7%), scholars/scientists (16.8%), members of political parties (5.8%), policy-makers (3.9%), journalists (2.6%). Among the responses were a small number of respondents that are inactive within the policy-making process.

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

In Kosovo*, respondents were familiar with existing youth policies - 17.4% of respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar, 43.2% are very familiar and 11.6% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (7.1%) were not asked further details about their standpoints regarding existing youth policies but were asked about their opinion on youth priorities.

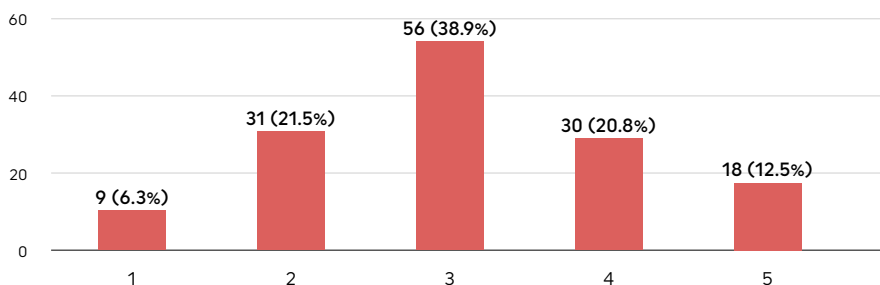
Chart 3. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in Kosovo*



When asked about the quality of youth policies in Kosovo*, 49.3% of the respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 20.1% assessed them as 'bad' and 19.4% as 'good'. Only 2.8% of respondents considered youth policies as 'very good'. The situation is similar when it comes to attitudes towards priorities recognised in these policies – 22.2% considered recognised priorities as 'bad', 39.6% as 'neither good nor bad' and 26.4% as 'good'.

Respondents' answers have a normal distribution when it comes to the adequacy of priorities, and most of them can neither agree nor refute the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided by youth policies in Kosovo* adequately address the needs of the youth', and the share of those who disagree and who agree with the statement are approximately equal.

Chart 4. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(144 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures from youth policies in Kosovo* adequately address the current needs of young people in Kosovo*?

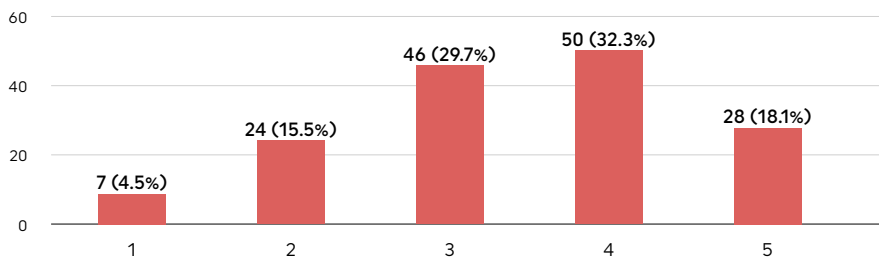
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to respondents to the online survey, the most important priorities for youth that should be addressed in public policies are employment possibilities (62.6% stated this priority), education (59.4%), youth participation and empowerment (44.5%), mental health support (36.8%), affordable health care (31%), social inclusion and diversity (25.2%), housing and affordable living conditions (23.9%), digitalisation (23.9%), ecological sustainability (13.5%), issues of sexual orientation and gender identity (11.6%), lifelong learning (7.7%).

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

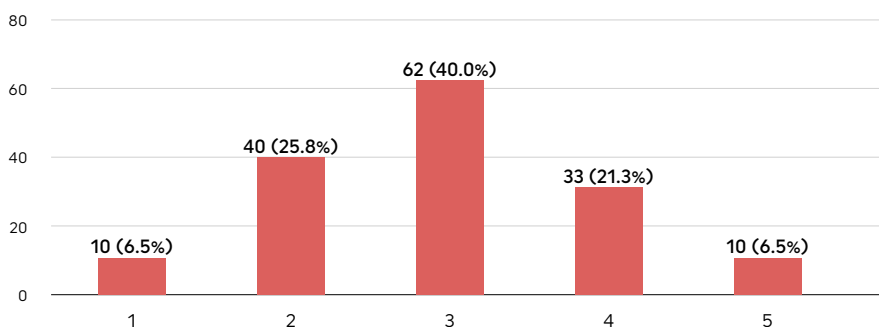
Although the majority of respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in Kosovo*, they consider that the efficiency of the process could be improved.

Chart 5. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(155 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 6. Policy-making Efficiency
(155 responses)



Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

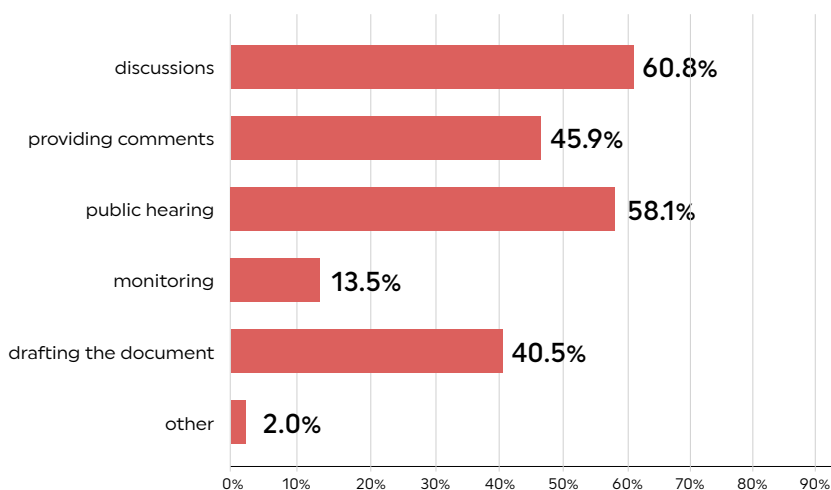
Roughly half of the respondents (47.7%) are unsure about the existence of mechanisms through which youth activists may become involved in the policy-making process⁷, while 38.1% know these mechanisms exist. Also, 61%

⁷ Mechanisms such as thematic discussions, focus groups with relevant groups and stakeholders, gathering information concerning the needs of young people, public hearings, public debates, etc.

of respondents claim that there is a difference between levels of policies and their development processes. The policy-making processes in Kosovo* are noted at local, national and regional levels as important for this research.⁸ Half of the respondents assess that the local (municipal) level of the policy-making process is more inclusive than the other levels (50%), while 38.9% assess that the national level is more inclusive than the other levels (local and regional levels). In addition to this result, more than 16.7% of respondents say that there are no mechanisms for involvement of youth activist in the policy-making process at the national and regional levels.

More than 60% of the respondents were not previously involved in the policy-making process or in advocacy campaigns, while 38.1% of the respondents have experience with this area. Respondents that had experience in policy-making processes generally had a positive outlook on the experience – 32.2% assessed it as 'neither good nor bad', 37.3% as 'good' and 27.1% as 'very good'. The majority of respondents were involved in local level policy-making processes (72.9%), while other levels involved them in smaller scales (national level – 33.9%, and 23.7% were involved at the regional level).

Chart 7. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process



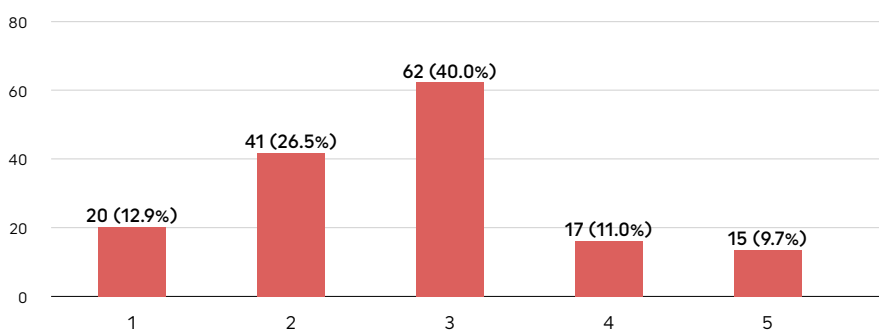
⁸ In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

39% of the respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges that respondents encountered were limited resources and funding available to youth activists (61.4% encountered this issue), lack of political support or will (43.9%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (43.9%), lack of transparency (36.8%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (33.3%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (33.3%), bureaucratic obstacles (31.6%) and political polarisation (31.6%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

The majority of respondents assessed that vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their issues remain inadequately recognised in public policies. In addition, 71% considered that there is room for improvement in terms of recognising vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 8. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies (155 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in Kosovo*’s youth policy documents?

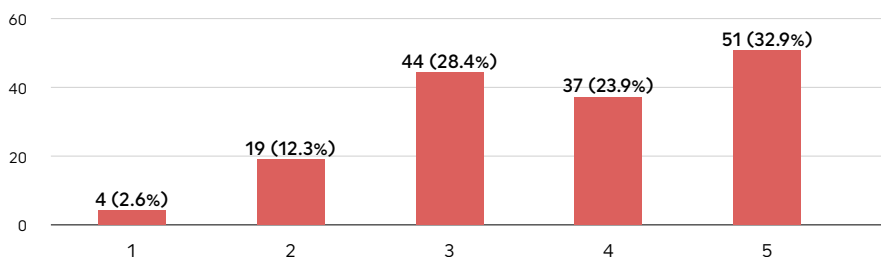
Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, they stated that the policy-making process should be improved, that CSOs and youth activists' capacities should be increased and that greater inclusion of youth is needed, etc.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of youth activists' influence, the majority of respondents assess this influence as significant (32.9% very and 23.9% somewhat), while 28.4% of respondents are undecided about whether this influence is significant or not.

Chart 9. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (155 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in Kosovo*.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (63.2% of respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (58.7%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (46.5%), lack of transparency (45.8%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (42.6%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (36.8%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (34.8%), political polarisation (32.9%), etc.

Key messages from survey respondents:

"To improve the current state of youth policies, it is important to create a favourable environment for training young activists. Such environment can provide space for discussion, debate, and deep learning on youth political situations and issues. Training can include in-depth policy analysis, discussions about concrete examples of political change at the youth level, and the use of case studies to illustrate challenges and opportunities in this area."

"Youth policies should be taken into account with the utmost seriousness as they directly reflect the needs of society and the future of the economy."

"I think that transparency and inclusiveness are main issues. Young people should be given the freedom to decide for themselves. Young people should be entrusted with more work given the knowledge they have. We need adequate space where we can express ourselves."

Montenegro

In Montenegro the youth organisation study involved 25 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey gathered 146 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

Youth organisations expressed concerns about the lack of prioritisation in youth policies. The online survey revealed varied familiarity levels, with 42.5% somewhat familiar and 21.9% very familiar. A significant 93% disagreed that existing policies adequately addressed youth needs.

Both surveys showcased a divide in opinions on the quality of youth policies, with a substantial percentage viewing them as 'neither good nor bad'. Prioritisation within youth policies faced criticism, with respondents disagreeing on the adequacy of solutions.

The online survey identified key priorities, such as education, employment, housing, and youth participation. Both surveys underscored the significance of these priorities, emphasising their central role in effective youth policy.

The interview-based survey provided insights into the inefficiencies in the policy-making process, stressing the need for improvement. The online survey participants expressed familiarity with the policy-making process but indicated room for enhanced efficiency.

Both surveys highlighted challenges faced by youth activists, including political apathy, limited resources, and insufficient awareness among decision-makers.

The online survey revealed a consensus (75.3%) that vulnerable youth populations were not adequately recognised in policies. Both surveys suggest improvements in recognising and addressing the needs of vulnerable youth groups.

Results from both surveys stress the need for a targeted and inclusive approach to youth policies in Montenegro. Recommendations include enhancing the efficiency of policy-making processes, addressing challenges faced by youth activists, and prioritising the needs of vulnerable youth groups.

The synthesised findings emphasise the urgency of bridging the gap between youth priorities and policy responsiveness. Montenegro should focus on creating inclusive policies, improving policy efficiency, and fostering a supportive environment for youth engagement.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

During the months of September and October 2023, 25 interviews were conducted with youth CSOs focused on youth-related topics in Montenegro. The interviews were conducted to address the issue comprehensively, with the questionnaire that allowed for adjusting the interviewing process during the interviewees. It was essential to best capture the unique perspectives of each organisation.

The Survey methodology involved a combination of in-person and online interviews, allowing for engaging a diverse range of organisations. In-person interviews were preferred, but the online interviews were used for discussion with organisations located in remote areas. Overcoming geographical barriers was essential to ensure the inclusion of a wide spectrum of organisations.

Some organisations did not respond to e-mails, while others struggled to identify a suitable representative familiar with the topic of the research. These challenges shed light on the resource constraints faced by some organisations and provided valuable insights into the landscape of youth-related CSOs in Montenegro.

Information about organisations

This section provides an overview of the organisations interviewed as part of the research in Montenegro. From a total of 25 interviews, 10 were youth organisations and 15 organisations focused on youth-related issues.

Geographical Representation: The research aimed to ensure geographical diversity among the organisations selected for interviews in order to provide a comprehensive perspective that encompassed various regions, urban and rural contexts, and the unique challenges faced by organisa-

tions in different locales. This difference is especially visible in Montenegro looking at the situation in urban and rural communities. Out of the 25 organisations, 15 are based in Podgorica, Montenegro's largest city, while the remaining 10 are situated in other cities. Among them, 5 are located in coastal towns, and 5 are in the northern region. This regional distribution not only underlines the intention of the researchers to assess the geographical diversity and to acknowledge different characteristics of various localities with the needs and perspectives of organisations operating in different parts of the economy.

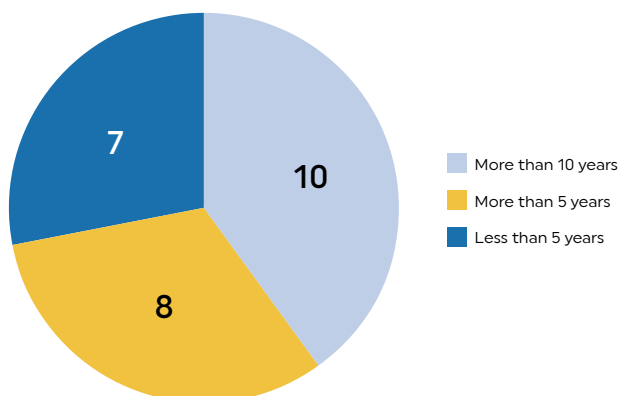
Table 1. Geographical Representation

Podgorica	Coast	North
15	5	5

Duration of Existence: The research revealed a diverse landscape of organisations in terms of how long they've been in operation. Specifically:

- 10 of the interviewed organisations have been active for more than a decade, with two having a history spanning over 20 years, showcasing their long-standing commitment to their missions.
- 8 organisations have been active for over 5 years, reflecting their sustained presence in their respective fields.
- 7 organisations are relatively new, existing for less than 5 years, highlighting the emergence of fresh initiatives within the sector.

Chart 1. Duration of Existence



Number of Employees: The number of employees among the organisations varied, primarily dependent on the projects these organisations were concurrently involved in. The findings indicate the following distribution:

- The majority of organisations (13) maintain a relatively modest permanent staff, typically consisting of 1-5 employees, on average.
- Notably, only three organisations reported having more than 15 permanent employees, with one organisation employing as many as 30 staff members.

Engagement of Volunteers: The participation of volunteers within these organisations showed fluctuations due to the project-based nature of their work. The analysis revealed the following trends:

- Most organisations reported having up to 10 regular volunteers actively participating in their activities, underscoring the significance of volunteer contributions to the sector.
- Three organisations notably engage more than 20 volunteers, indicating a high level of community involvement.
- Two organisations with a broad network of local branches reported having up to 100 volunteers.

Topics and Issues Addressed: In selecting organisations for the research, the effort was made to encompass a wide spectrum of topics, issues, and activities. The goal was to ensure that the research represented a comprehensive panorama of the concerns and initiatives within the landscape of youth CSOs and organisations focused on youth-related matters in Montenegro. The interviewed organisations addressed a diverse range of topics, reflecting the nuanced and multifaceted nature of their work. Some organisations took a holistic approach to youth issues, engaging in education of youth activists, training, and encouraging young people to participate in political processes. They stated that they actively advocated for the amendment of existing youth policies, or the adoption of new ones and that youth policy analysis takes up significant portion of their activities. Additionally, there were organisations specifically dedicated to working with particular groups of youth, including young Roma, young entrepreneurs, the LGBTQI youth community, and youth from economically disadvantaged areas. The presence of such specialised organisations demonstrates the adaptability and responsiveness of the sector to cater to the unique

needs of distinct youth populations. This comprehensive approach, which covers both general and specialised areas of youth engagement, ensures that it includes a full range of topics, issues, and initiatives in the youth CSO sector in Montenegro. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted landscape and the diverse experiences and perspectives of these organisations.

Organisations' standpoints on existing youth policies

This section will provide the civil society organisation perspectives regarding the youth policies landscape in Montenegro. Understanding the intricacies of existing policies and their impact on the nation's young population was paramount to the formulation of effective strategies for the betterment of youth-related initiatives. The organisations featured in this research offered diverse and valuable insights, highlighting both the strengths and areas in need of improvement within Montenegro's youth policies. Their viewpoints encompassed the current state of youth policies, their familiarity with these policies, assessments of their adequacy, identification of any gaps or omissions, and suggested pathways for enhancement.

When asked about the current situation with youth policies in Montenegro, several key themes emerged from the interviews, the first being the delay in adopting a new youth strategy, which was scheduled to commence three years ago, but was postponed. This delay, coupled with a lack of consultation with the youth sector in the development of new laws, had been a significant concern. The period when the Ministry of Sports and Youth had been abolished and then later re-established was also noted in negative context. Organisations expressed concern that youth issues had not been a focus of the government for the past three years. The absence of a functioning strategy, coupled with the desire of many young people to emigrate, pointed to the pressing need for policy changes. The organisations conveyed a sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of youth policies in Montenegro. While there were strategic documents and action plans in place, their practical implementation appeared to be lacking, often driven more by political expediency than genuine commitment. This was reflected in the significant youth emigration trends. The absence of a youth strategy for three years was a source of concern, and the current draft was

perceived as not fully addressing the needs of the youth. This extended to the inadequacy of financial, organisational, and expert support from both the government and local authorities.

'Youth issues haven't been a focus of the government for the past three years. The absence of a functional strategy along with research data that show that many young people want to leave the country is indicating the need for policy change.'

The organisations recognised the existing policies, primarily the Youth Strategy and Local Action Plans, but noted that the current strategy had expired three years ago, and there was a lack of direction and consultation in the development of youth-related laws. It was clear that young people felt excluded from the policy-making process, and there was a sense of apathy towards politics among the youth. Additionally, the organisations highlighted issues with the implementation of youth policies, emphasising that political will was lacking. The migration of young people to larger cities or abroad was seen as a direct consequence of this policy deficit.

The interviewees expressed that the existing policies fell short in several aspects. The issues of employment, quality education, housing, and youth participation were emphasised. Organisations particularly pointed to the necessity of involving young people more meaningfully in policy-making and decision processes. Young people's needs and aspirations were evolving, and their dissatisfaction with the quality of education, the lack of employment opportunities, and a desire for active participation in shaping policies were evident. In essence, the interviewed organisations called for a more inclusive and responsive approach to youth policies.

To improve the situation, the organisations recommended a multi-pronged approach. They advocated for better funding mechanisms for youth-focused organisations and the need for policies to directly address issues faced by youth in smaller communities. The necessity of more meaningful youth involvement in policymaking and a systemic support framework for both youth organisations and civil society organisations was underscored. The interviews also highlighted a lack of comprehensive, reliable data on youth issues, and the need for research and data collection to inform policy changes. The desire for more extensive consultations and collaborative work between the government, youth organisations, and young people themselves was a common thread.

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on the local/national/regional levels

This section dealt with youth organisations in shaping policy-making processes within Montenegro, their experiences and challenges of their engagement in the policy making process, that resulted in gaining insights into the dynamics of youth participation in policy-making.

Finding out about the effectiveness of policy-making processes in Montenegro was one of the goals, particularly with regard to policies directed at youth. The respondents were asked to rate the efficiency of the public policy-making process, especially policies for youth on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor, and 5 is excellent. They offered varying perspectives on the efficiency of the policy-making process, with the average rating from the respondents being 2.7, indicating a general dissatisfaction with the current policy-making process. Majority of them stated that the process is procedurally sound but lacks substance and emphasised that although the formalities are observed, the essential youth perspectives are often overlooked. Some respondents expressed disillusionment with the political leadership, stating, highlighting a perceived lack of interest among decision-makers.

'A public call is issued, organisations apply, the process is handled procedurally, but the substance is still lacking.'

This perspective highlighted a common challenge - adherence to administrative procedures while neglecting the real concerns of young people. There was consensus among respondents that more needs to be done to engage young people meaningfully.

As one respondent noted:

'There is not enough space for young people who do not have permanent and constant access to information and do not have a lot of time to engage in the process and read all the documents. They (the decision-makers) believe it doesn't concern them.'

This highlights the challenge of limited access and the need to raise awareness among young people about the importance of their involvement. These responses collectively underline the complexities of policy-making processes, where formal procedures may be followed, but meaningful youth engagement and consideration of their input often fall short.

One central question focused on the role of civil society and youth organisations in policy creation and adoption. Responses from the participants indicated that civil society and youth organisations do play a role in policy-making processes, but not without complexities. Several respondents underscored the pivotal role of civil society organisations in keeping youth-related issues on the agenda, even in the face of competing priorities and political instability and turbulences in Montenegro for the past three years. However, respondents also highlighted obstacles in the path of these organisations. These responses collectively underline the vital role played by civil society, particularly in advocating for youth-related policies, and also the persistent challenges in engaging youth.

When asked about mechanisms for involving civil society in policy-making, several perspectives emerged. Respondents acknowledged the existence of a legal framework but also highlighted its limitations. They stated that the process of selecting civil society representatives often depends on peer support, and sometimes their political affiliations, which may lead to choices that don't necessarily reflect expertise. Several respondents underlined the importance of proactive engagement and revealed that while mechanisms for involvement exist, they may require reforms to enhance their effectiveness and inclusivity.

The question of differences across local, national, and regional policy-making levels elicited diverse views. Many respondents shared that at the local level, policy sectors often suffer from financial constraints, which can impact youth-related policies.

'The local youth policies are perceived as sectors with limited funding, and political appointees are often sent to local communities as a form of punishment. They view their positions in such way and are not highly interested in their work.'

Some highlighted the challenges of centralisation, where local-level policies may not be effectively translated or adopted at the national level, noting. However, there was some optimism expressed regarding the work of certain local governments, indicating a more receptive environment for youth engagement at the local level. But even those respondents recognised that this is not a systematic situation, but rather an isolated case where certain local officials were open to the work with CSOs. These responses suggested varying conditions at different policy-making levels, with opportunities for improvement at both local and national tiers.

Opinions on the capacities of civil society to engage effectively in policy-making were diverse. One respondent stated that the partisan employment in government and local authorities was a factor affecting expertise, resulting in CSOs having more knowledge and capacities than those responsible. Many respondents pointed out the varying levels of expertise within civil society, stating, and emphasised the resource and time constraints faced by organisations, particularly smaller ones. They stated that, due to this capacity challenges of smaller organisations, the big CSOs get to represent youth standing points in the decision-making process, although they sometimes lack sufficient expertise, especially when it comes to particular and specialised policies, and not general ones. When asked if their organisations possessed the necessary capacities for policy-related tasks, respondents collectively expressed confidence in their capacity but recognised the significant time and effort required for policy work.

Out of the 25 interviewed organisations, all of them have participated in the policy-making process, at least by submitting proposals within public discussions. Furthermore, 22 organisations have officially been involved in the decision-making process at the local or national levels. Among these, 12 organisations took part in shaping local action plans and strategies, while 10 were engaged at the national level. This active involvement in both local and national decision-making processes underscores the commitment of these organisations to influence policies and advocate for the needs of vulnerable youth groups. Experiences of organisations involved in the policy-making process have been far from positive. While these organisations are committed to participating in various policy-making endeavours, their participation often occurs in a rushed and non-transparent manner. In some cases, their experiences have been marked by the need to be assertive and persistent, as their efforts to introduce innovative solutions and youth-oriented proposals have typically faced resistance. Additionally, while there are instances where working groups are designed to include representatives from youth organisations, these structures do not always function effectively. The short notice periods for submitting an application for a working group had been an obstacle for some CSOs. Despite these challenges, they expressed their determination to become more actively engaged in these processes, with a renewed focus on local government entities. These accounts underline the need for more open, transparent, and inclusive policy-making procedures that engage youth organisations meaningfully. They also emphasise the importance of ensuring that financial support and compensation for participants are adequate and guaran-

teed. Youth organisations clearly possess the will to participate actively in policy-making, provided that the process is accessible, fair, and conducive to their contributions.

Regarding the necessary steps to enhance youth organisations' involvement in policy-making, the responses identified a common issue - the need for a fundamental shift in how government institutions and decision-makers engage with CSOs in the creation and adoption of policies, especially those affecting youth. The organisations unanimously stressed the importance of moving beyond mere formalities and box-ticking and genuinely including CSOs in the process, while provide them with meaningful opportunities to shape policy. They emphasised the need for a transparent, open, and collaborative approach that would foster an environment where CSOs felt their contributions were valued. A recurring concern was the selection process for organisations participating in policy discussions. The organisations firmly believed that merit and commitment to the welfare of youth should be the deciding factor, rather than any partisan or size-related considerations.

In terms of improving CSOs' involvement in policy-making, the respondents proposed various solutions. First, they advocated for strengthening CSOs' capacities through institutional funding and expert support. By doing so, CSOs could better allocate their resources, dedicate qualified individuals to the process, and fully understand the intricacies of the policies under consideration. This capacity-building would enable them to contribute more effectively to policy discussions and formulation. Furthermore, there was a strong consensus on the need to educate government officials and public sector personnel about the benefits and significance of collaborating with CSOs. It was recognised that, at times, the lack of understanding and willingness on the part of decision-makers hindered the engagement of CSOs in the policy-making process. By providing training and awareness programmes to these individuals, it was believed that collaboration could become more fruitful and mutually beneficial. Interestingly, several respondents pointed to a more effective period in the policy-making process before a change in government in 2020. They suggested that revisiting the mechanisms and practices that were in place at that time could potentially lead to better outcomes. This implied that the policy-making process had evolved and regressed over time, highlighting the importance of learning from past experiences and making informed changes for the future.

When inquired about the existence of networks among youth organisations, all of them acknowledged the existence of the Youth Network, but

experiences with this network are diverse. While many organisations stated that the membership in this organisation serves as a platform for exchange of experience, knowledge and information, some expressed their concerns that the network does not suit its purpose and that it is deeply corrupt model of functioning with no real responsibility towards members and organisations contributing to its work.

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

In an endeavour to explore the nuanced realm of recognising and addressing vulnerabilities among youth in Montenegro, this chapter delves into the experiences and perspectives shared by interviewed organisations. The inquiry centred around the extent to which the needs of marginalised youth segments are acknowledged in public policies and how well these youth are represented and supported in policy-making processes.

All the interviewed organisations unanimously agreed that the needs, problems, and challenges of young people belonging to vulnerable groups are not adequately recognised in existing youth policies. These youth groups are mostly invisible in strategies that concern the general youth population. Even when policies specifically target these groups, young people are not recognised as a distinct community within those groups. For instance, the organisation representing young Roma who participated in the research cited an example from the development of the Roma Strategy when Roma youth organisations were entirely ignored. In the process, they participated as Roma organisations rather than as organisations representing young people, and young Roma were not acknowledged as a unique group with their own set of issues and challenges. This highlights a clear deficiency in the current approach to policy-making for vulnerable youth. Moreover, the apparent disconnection between policy intent and implementation is a recurring theme. While policy documents formally acknowledge some needs of vulnerable youth groups, the reality on the ground often falls short. Evaluation of the policies formally concluded that around 30% of these policies were effectively realized, although all respondents expressed their doubt when it comes to objectivity and impartiality of the evaluation process.

As per the responses gathered, four key vulnerable groups emerged:

- **LGBTQ+ Youth:** Organisations consistently emphasised the heightened vulnerability of LGBTQ+ youth. They face discrimination, violence, and lack of support in educational settings. The shift in political leadership, particularly towards conservatism, has exacerbated their circumstances. For instance, a notable incident was cited at Podgorica High School, where the principal resisted research on LGBTQ+ youth and formation of LGBTQ+ students' organisations.
- **Youth with Disabilities:** Youth with disabilities also confront multifaceted challenges, including educational limitations due to insufficient support. Despite the presence of a number of civil organisations, the assistance provided is not always adequate or systemic. One striking example of change brought about by a non-governmental organisation was the increase in stipends for high school graduates, which took six months to be implemented.
- **Young Roma Individuals:** Roma youth in Montenegro find themselves in a precarious situation. They are not adequately represented in public administration, and there is a lack of political and economic measures aimed at their inclusion. It's challenging for them to access education, and there is no affirmative action to encourage completion of primary education. Discrimination is prevalent in the job market, where Roma youth struggle to find employment.
- **Young people from underdeveloped and remote communities:** Young people living in remote and impoverished municipalities find themselves excluded from political, social, and other processes, facing a unique form of discrimination. This discrimination extends to the point where, during the suspension of school activities due to the COVID-19 epidemic, they were unable to access education as they lacked internet access. Many of them don't even have televisions and phones, and basic rights such as the right to education are beyond their reach. Furthermore, their organisations can't participate in public discussions, respond to calls for proposals, and engage in various activities for the same reasons. Consequently, they are unable to organise significant initiatives in their communities, which are gradually deteriorating, driving these young people to migrate to larger cities. This paints a stark picture of the challenges these young individuals face in underserved areas.

All interlocutors agreed that while organisations engaged in broader youth issues do touch on these groups, they do so in a superficial manner, often prioritising humanitarian aid over systemic solutions. In order to ensure

the representation of these marginalised youth segments, there is a call for a new methodology in the allocation of funding. Organisational capacity, whether dedicated exclusively to vulnerable youth or operating with a broader youth agenda, is perceived as lacking. This capacity constraint hinders the ability of these organisations to effectively advocate for and address the unique needs of these marginalised youth populations. Capacities are further hindered by the lack of technical and financial support. While there are inherent challenges, the research participants unanimously believe that improvements are possible. The need to view vulnerable youth as both part of the larger youth demographic and as specific, vulnerable groups was a common sentiment. To achieve this, strategies for involving these groups in policy formulation and implementation should be more inclusive, thoughtful, and genuine. Better outreach and information dissemination tailored to these groups were emphasized. To bridge the gap in recognising and supporting vulnerable youth groups, the participants advocate for clear distinctions between organisations focusing on broader youth issues and those specifically centred on vulnerable groups. The latter should adopt a more tailored approach to address the unique needs and challenges faced by these marginalised youth.

Conclusion

The research conducted in Montenegro, involving 25 youth organisations, has illuminated several critical aspects of youth-related policies and the role of civil society. A resounding consensus emerged, revealing that Montenegro's existing youth policies inadequately address the needs of its young population. Delays in policy implementation, a lack of consultation with the youth sector, and a notable discrepancy between policy intent and on-the-ground realities were prominent findings.

Furthermore, the research has underscored the essential role of civil society organisations, particularly youth organisations in the policy-making process. While these organisations have expressed a clear willingness to participate in policy discussions, they face challenges in terms of transparency, access, and meaningful engagement. The need for comprehensive policy formulation, which recognises the distinct needs of marginalised youth segments, requires tailored approaches, improved funding mechanisms, and enhanced outreach strategies. Collectively, these findings emphasize the urgency of enhancing

youth policies in Montenegro, ensuring that they genuinely reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the entire youth population and promoting a more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative approach to policy-making.

Results from the youth online survey

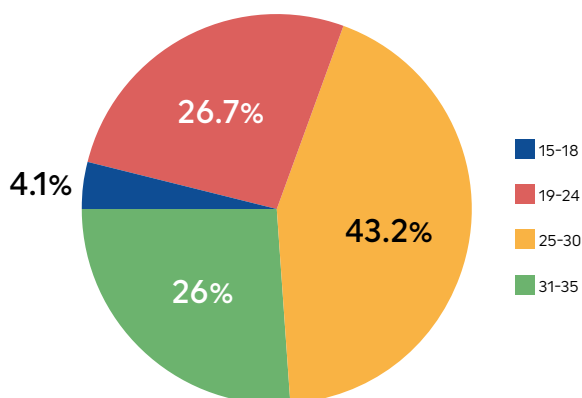
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. in Montenegro. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, but followed the same topics and structure. In total, 146 responses were gathered using Google form platform for online surveys.

Demographic information about the respondents

Among those who responded to the online survey, most are between the ages of 25-30 (43.2%), followed by 19-24 (26.7%) and 31-35 (26%). Women dominated participation in the online survey (54.1% of the respondents are women, 44.5% are men, while 1.4% preferred not to say).

Chart 2. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents
(146 responses)



Regarding educational level, 4.1% of the respondents have not completed a secondary education, 19.9% have completed a secondary education, 45.2% obtained a Bachelor's degree, 28.8% a Master's degree and 1.4% obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

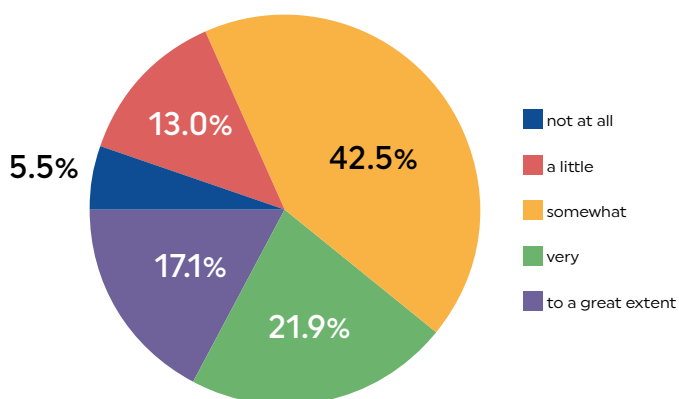
When it comes to the labour market status, 61% of respondents answered that they are employed, 26.7% are still students, accompanied by 6.2% who are completing vocational training, while 2.1% are unemployed.

We also asked the respondents about their role in youth policy-making process and majority are members of political parties (37%), youth activists (24%), members of CSOs (12.3%), journalists (6.8%), scholars/scientists (5.5%), policy-makers (3.4%).

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

In Montenegro, respondents were familiar with existing youth policies – 42.5% of respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar, 21.9% are very familiar and 17.1% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (7.1%) were not asked further details about their standpoints regarding existing youth policies but were asked about their opinion on youth priorities.

Chart 3. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in Montenegro

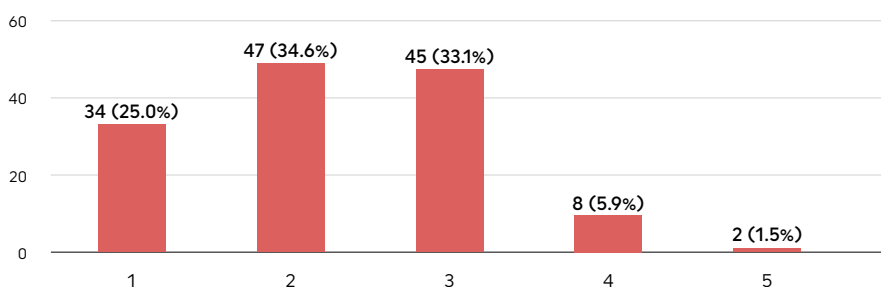


When asked about the quality of youth policies in Montenegro, 42% of the respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 42% assessed them as 'bad' and 12.3% as 'very bad'. No respondents considered youth policies as

'very good'. The situation is similar when it comes to attitudes toward priorities recognised in these policies – 14.5% considered recognised priorities as 'very bad', 33.3% as 'bad' and 42.8% as 'neither good nor bad', which implies that respondents do not agree with prioritisation within youth policies.

The most concerning finding in this section was that approximately 93% of respondents cannot agree with the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided by youth policies in Montenegro adequately address the needs of the youth.'

Chart 4. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(136 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures from youth policies in Montenegro adequately address the current needs of young people in Montenegro?

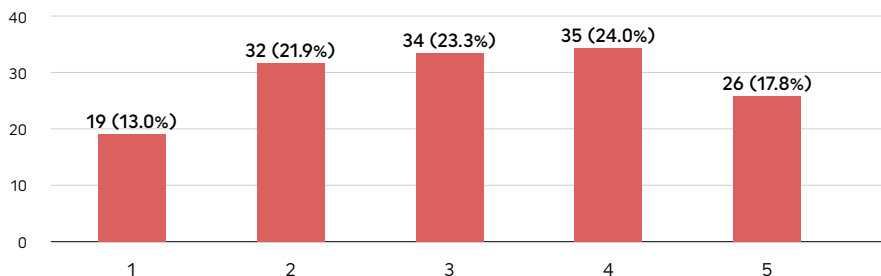
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to the online survey respondents, the most important priorities for youth that should be addressed in public policies are education (69.2% mentioned this priority), employment possibilities (67.8%), housing and affordable living conditions (45.9%), youth participation and empowerment (30.8%), social inclusion and diversity (22.6%), mental health support (21.9%), affordable health care (16.4%), digitalisation (16.4%), ecological sustainability (11.6%), issues of sexual orientation and gender identity (7.5%), lifelong learning (6.8%).

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

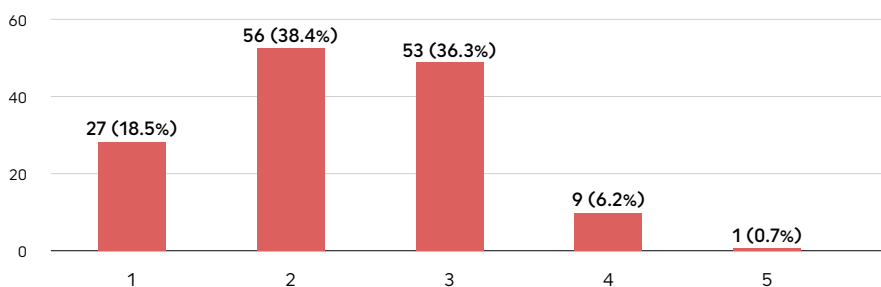
Although majority of the respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in Montenegro, they consider that efficiency of that process could be improved.

Chart 5. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(146 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 6. Policy-making Efficiency
(146 responses)



Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

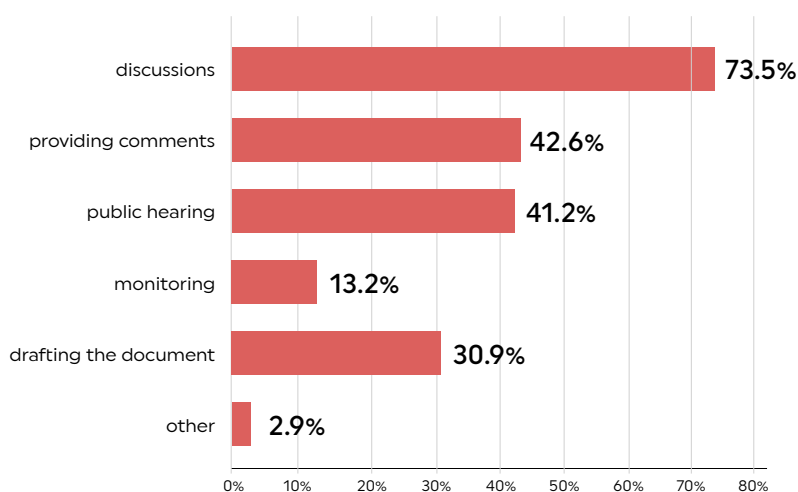
Less than half of the respondents (41.4%) are unsure about the existence of mechanisms through which youth activists may become involved in the policy-making process⁹, while 40.4% know that these mechanisms exist. Also, 74.1% of respondents claims that there is a difference between levels of policies and their development processes. The policy-making processes

⁹ Mechanisms such as thematic discussions, focus groups with relevant groups and stakeholders, gathering information concerning the needs of young people, public hearings, public debates, etc.

in Montenegro are noted at local, national and regional levels as important for this research.¹⁰ An interesting finding is that 26.2% of the respondents find that the local level policy-making process is more inclusive than the other levels, while 33.3% assess that the national level is more inclusive than the other levels (local or regional levels) and 38.1% assess that the regional level is more inclusive than the local and national levels. In addition to this result, 28.6% of respondents stated that there are no mechanisms through which youth activist may become involved in the policy-making process at the regional level (while at the local and national levels, they exist) and 21.4% say these mechanisms are non-existence at the national level (while at the local and regional levels, they exist).

Nearly 50% of the respondents were previously involved in policy-making processes or in advocacy campaigns. Respondents that had experience in the policy-making process generally had a positive outlook concerning this experience – 43.9% assessed it as 'neither good nor bad', 34.8% as 'good' and 9.1% as 'very good'. The majority of respondents were involved in local (75.8%) and national level (54.5%) policy-making processes, while regional level involved them in smaller scales (13.6%).

Chart 7. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process



76.9% of the respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges the respondents encountered were lack

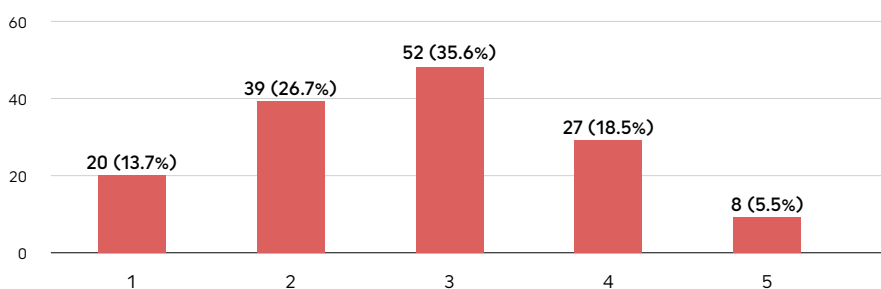
¹⁰ In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

of political support or will (63.1% encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (58.5%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (50.8%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (47.7%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (46.2%), political polarisation (46.2%), lack of transparency (38.5%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (36.9%), bureaucratic obstacles (29.2%) and legal obstacles (12.3%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

The majority of respondents assessed that vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their issues remain inadequately recognised in public policies. In addition, 75.3% considered that there is room for improvement concerning the recognition of vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 8. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies (146 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in Montenegro's youth policy documents?

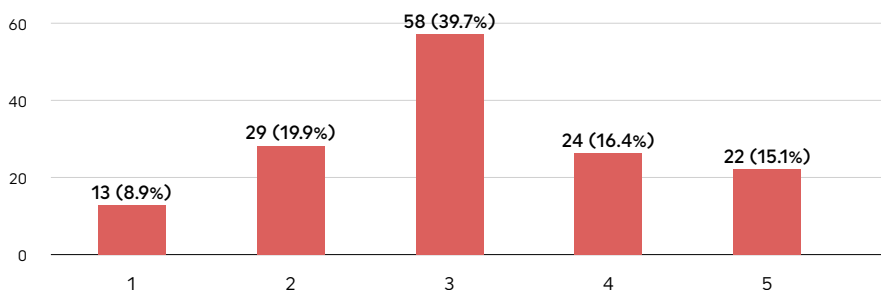
Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, the respondents stated that the following requires improvement: the policy-making process, CSOs and youth activists' capacities, public policy implementation, the capacities of institutions should be improved and strengthened, etc.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of youth activists' influence, the majority of respondents are undecided about whether this influence is significant or not (39.7%).

Chart 9. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (146 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in Montenegro.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (71.9% respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (62.3%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (53.4%), political polarisation (52.1%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (43.8%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (32.2%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (32.2%), lack of transparency (28.8%), bureaucratic obstacles (28.1%) and legal obstacles (16.4%).

Key messages from survey respondents:

"The creation, proposal, adoption and implementation of youth policies in Montenegro currently does not hold a high place on the policy priority list in Montenegro which contributes to demotivation of young people, young people need to be motivated to take part in this process, especially due to the numerous obstacles that appear on the way. As a result, there is a decline of interest of young people to influence the policies that concern them, instead of their concrete and constructive contribution."

"Young people should be given importance - the proposals of young people must be taken into account and respected."

"Concrete policy proposals should be based on consultations and research. These policies can cover areas such as education, employment, housing, health care, culture, and sports. Also, it should be an obligation for young people to actively participate."

North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, the youth organisation study involved 25 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey gathered 251 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

The interviewees generally displayed familiarity with existing youth policies, predominantly recognising the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 and the forthcoming National Youth Strategy 2023-2027. However, evaluations of the policies were largely critical, citing poor implementation and a lack of cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approaches.

Concerns about youth policies centred on their general ineffectiveness and the need for specific laws targeting diverse youth groups in areas like employment and culture. Suggestions for improvement emphasised greater youth involvement, changes in conditions for organisational inclusion, and the creation of cross-sectoral collaborations.

Online respondents expressed mixed views on the quality of existing youth policies, with almost 85% feeling that these policies inadequately addressed youth needs. Key priorities identified included employment, education, housing, mental health support, and youth participation.

While respondents showed familiarity with the policy-making process, they called for increased efficiency and clearer mechanisms for youth activist involvement. Regional differences were noted, with opinions split on the inclusiveness of national and local policy-making processes.

Challenges faced by youth activists included a lack of political support, limited resources, and political polarisation. Additionally, respondents identified the need for improved recognition of vulnerable youth populations in policies and emphasised the importance of enhancing the policy-making process and increasing transparency.

In conclusion, the both surveys result collectively highlight the existing challenges in North Macedonia's youth policy landscape, emphasising the importance of improving policy implementation, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and enhancing mechanisms for youth engagement in the policy-making process. The findings underscore the critical need for tailored policies addressing diverse youth needs and increased transparency for effective implementation.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

For the purpose of this study, a total of 25 interviews were conducted to gather valuable insights into the youth policy-making process in North Macedonia. Of these, 24 interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations with expertise in youth policy-making. Additionally, one interview was conducted with an expert specialising in youth policy issues.

The interviews were conducted within a period spanning from 1 September to 20 October 2023. This time frame was chosen strategically to accommodate the availability of the interviewees, particularly considering that some were temporarily located outside North Macedonia. Additionally, it took into consideration the high temperatures experienced in September, aiming to ensure a comfortable and conducive environment for the interviews.

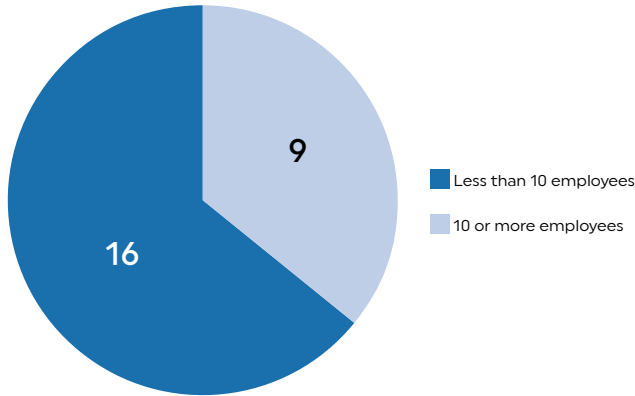
There were no significant obstacles during the interviews, although there were some delays and rescheduling, partly due to the work commitments of the interviewees and to facilitate the efficiency of the process, but also because of the reasons mentioned earlier (travels abroad and the hot weather). All interviews were conducted using the ZOOM online platform.

Information about organisations interviewed

Twenty-five interviews were conducted with representatives from youth organisations and institutions, ranging from 1 to 24 years of existence. While not all organisations possessed direct experience in policy-making or participation in policy-making processes, youth concerns and the advancement of youth rights were central to each organisation's mission.

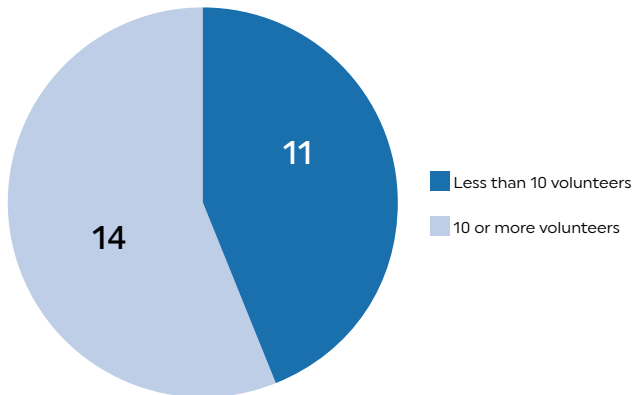
In terms of employee structure, there are a total of 184 employees across all organisations, averaging 7 employees per organisation. Out of these, 172 are full-time employees, while the remaining are part-time.

Chart 1. Breakdown of Organisations Included in the Research Based on Employee Numbers



There are a total of 351 volunteers across all organisations, averaging 14 volunteers per organisation. Accordingly, the number of organisations with more or less than 10 volunteers is presented in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Breakdown of Organisations with +/- 10 Volunteers



The categorisation of topics aligns with the division of organisations whose primary or secondary focus is on youth participation. Fifteen organisations primarily centre on youth participation and policy creation for youth, while the remaining ten incorporate youth participation in policy-making processes and youth activism within their top five priorities.

Furthermore, for this research, the division related to the topics that organisations address is vital. These topics encompass youth education, social inclusion of youth, and the promotion of awareness regarding identity differences and political topics.

Table 1. Topics Addressed by Youth Organisations Interviewed

Educational topics Social topics Identity (minority) topics Political topics	Social topics	Identity (minority) topics	Political topics
The rights of high school students and representation of high school students at the level of North Macedonia	Intercultural dialogue	Gender and LGBT equality	Youth policy
Informal education	Public transport for high school pupils and students (also for unemployed young people up to 29 years old)	Class consciousness	Youth activism and participation
Education of Albanian high school students	The youth standard	Student empowerment	Youth activism
Better quality of higher education	Youth work	Promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms of LGBTI people in North Macedonia	Advocacy for the active participation of young people involved in policy-making and decision-making processes at the local and national levels
Digitalisation of education	Mental health		Youth and Euro integration
Promotion of critical thinking among youth	Local youth work		Increasing citizen participation in creating and implementing policies
Media literacy	Reconciliation and connection of youth in the Western Balkans		Strengthening the capacities of CSOs in creating and implementing policies
	Health and social policy		Good governance

Educational topics Social topics Identity (minority) topics Political topics	Social topics	Identity (minority) topics	Political topics
			Transparency and the rule of law
			Promoting anarchism and anarchist ideas among young people
			Recognising and acknowledging youth work

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

Out of all 25 interviewees, only one representative of an organisation was not familiar with the existence of youth policies in North Macedonia, in any form (law, strategy, or action plan). The organisation represented by this interviewee has been in operation for 2 or less years. The rest of the representatives are mainly familiar with existing youth policies that pertain to the national level, namely the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 and the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027, which is currently being developed, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, the Law on Volunteering, the Guarantee for youth, and the youth section within the National Drug Strategy 2021-2025.

Representatives of one of the three networks of youth civil society organisations attempted to enact a law on youth work 6 years ago (2017). This initiative failed because, in their opinion, the other organisations did not have the capacity or sufficient understanding of the law, as well as the very concept of youth work. The general evaluation of the success of youth policies is low, although a large portion of those interviewed do not have specific views on how to go about changing these policies. What is particularly emphasised as an issue is poor implementation. Three out of 25 organisations have proposals for changes, especially in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, particularly within the section on sanctions. Non-implementation of laws proceeds smoothly and with impunity, despite resources

being invested in their drafting and adoption. Particularly, the area concerning local policies in the form of strategies that the municipalities are obliged to have, according to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, together with the Local Youth Councils.

'The solutions are fine, but the interest and level of real involvement in implementing the solutions on the part of state institutions is not at the desired level.'

One of the perspectives suggests that, in addition to the laws that have a general form of inclusion, bylaws or provisions in already existing laws are needed that will target specific groups of young people and youth policies, for example, in areas such as employment and culture. A representative of one of the interviewed organisations believes that even if the laws and provisions were to be changed and extended in the direction of sanctions, this would still not improve the capacities of the organisations' involvement in the creation of youth policies.

'There is no cross-sectoral work regarding these policies, no multidisciplinary work, no holistic approach.'

Ideas for improvement generally centre around greater involvement of young people, without a specific formal structure and methodology for how to do it. One of the representatives of an organisation and a national union, in his closing words, points out that even the processes of involving young people are not sufficient to improve policies. Changes are needed in the conditions for the inclusion of organisations, and hence the youth, in and through the organisations in the processes of creating public policies at any level (national, regional, or local).

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level

In general, there was average affirmative attitude expressed by the interviewees that there is involvement of the youth and youth-oriented organisations in the policy-making process in North Macedonia. Out of 25 interviewed individuals, 19 have provided their numerical assessment as per the level of quality of the adoption of the youth public policies. The average mark from these 19 answers is 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 5. Six interviewees ab-

stained from providing an assessment on the quality of the adoption of the youth public policies in North Macedonia.

As for the mechanisms for CSOs' involvement in youth policy-making, there is a general attitude that there is an *ad hoc* approach and no firm and systematic approach adopted by the policy-makers. The consultations usually take place by inviting specific organisations and entities which are active in the field and have a visible track record of being interested and focused on youth policies. There is absence of an established methodology or mechanism for inclusion and involvement of youth oriented CSOs and informal groups of youth representatives in the policy-making process at the moment.

Their role in the policy-making process, has varied according to the expressed views of the interviewees. The consensus is that there is inclusion of youth oriented CSOs in the policy-making process, albeit the absence of a systemic approach means that there are variations in the level and quality of the input provided by stakeholders on the CSO spectrum. Some interviewees have expressed concern that youth CSOs sometimes serve as *décor* in policy discussions, and serve to legitimise the process.

Their capacities are varied. Most of the interviewed representatives of the youth organisations in the economy represent organisations that have capacities to contribute to the policy-making and policy implementation process, but this largely depends on the willingness of institutions and state. The difference between local, national and regional policy-making processes is significant. Here, the interviewees believe that there is much more policy-making which focuses on youth issues at the national level, some exist at the local level and is completely lacking at the regional level. It is important to underline that there is much more involvement in the policy-making at the national level, somewhat at the local level, while the regional dimension of youth policy-making is virtually non-existent. In North Macedonia regionalisation exists in terms of statistical regions, and these statistical regions generally lack any initiatives which focus on youth and youth issues.

As for obstacles, there is general lack of data which would aid the planning and tailoring of youth policies in a systematic manner. The lack of data pertains to no real statistics concerning the impact of existing youth policies used to introduce corrective measures for future policy-making. The lack of evaluation methodologies is also linked to the absence of data which would complement the argumentation for improvement or modification of the approach centred on youth when the policy-making process takes

place. Next, there is a general attitude expressed by the interviewees that the youth aspect should be present in the general policy-making process at both national and local levels, as all policies, regardless of their problem areas, have a certain effect on the young population of a society.

In terms of the experience of the interviewed organisations in policy-making processes, most of those represented in the pool of interviews have been included in youth policy-making on multiple occasions. Examples include: The Law on Youth and Youth Participation, the two youth strategies (the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 and the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027), Youth Guarantee, Law on Volunteering.

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

Vulnerable youth groups identified during the interview process range across the following spectrum: young people with disabilities, LGBTI youth, youth originating and living in rural regions, youth belonging to ethnic minority groups, Roma youth, young people living in foster families, delinquent youth, socially endangered and economically marginalised youth.

The general attitudes of the interviewed representatives of youth-oriented organisations are that the marginalised groups of youth in North Macedonia are significantly underrepresented in policy-making processes both at the national and local levels. The main challenge is the lack of capacities within of the marginalised youth groups that reflects in very few CSOs representing them. There are no systematic policy measures tackling their needs and challenges in society. Civil society organisations that directly focus on their specific needs are sometimes visible and vocal, but most of the time they fail to dominate the policy-making process. There is room for a lot of improvement concerning their status and work.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the youth-focused, policy-making process and its current state of play in North Macedonia is existent, however there is significant room for improvement. The number of youth-focused CSOs, informal groups of youth and youth networks representing young people in the county is not small and their involvement in the policy-making process is viable. There are at least three youth networks and youth umbrella organisations in existence. They are acting as support mechanisms to individual youth CSOs and marginalised youth groups. Sometimes these youth network organisations act as a direct competitor to youth CSOs by going after funds made available by various donor entities. State institutions and youth CSOs have a track record of addressing the needs of the general young population. Most of the policy-making process is focused at the national level. There are some local level policies that deal with the youth as a segment of society through the local youth councils established in some municipalities, albeit very few.

In terms of state actors, the main identified flaw is the lack of structured mechanisms for involvement of youth CSOs in the policy-making process. The next identified issue is the lack of adequate monitoring of the impact of introduced policies and the methodology applied to measure the degree of their implementation. This step takes place once new legal and strategic documents are introduced. The lack of metrics and monitoring allow for the absence of generated data, which in turn allows certain state and non-state actors to deviate from the established obligations and general direction introduced by certain youth-focused policies and strategic direction.

The lack of focus on marginalised youth groups in the policy-making process is also a significant concern when it comes to the level of inclusion in both policy-making and policy implementation. The capacities of youth organisations in North Macedonia are not insignificant and they are willing to take part in policy-making and policy implementation. There is room for improvement and room for growth.

Results from the online youth survey

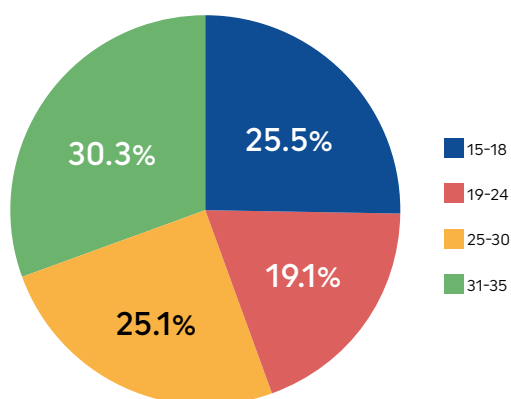
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. in North Macedonia. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, however, it followed the same topics and structure. In total, 251 responses were gathered using Google form platform for online surveys (174 in Macedonian and 77 in Albanian).

Demographic information about the respondents

Among those who responded to the online survey, most are between the ages of 31-35 (30.3%), followed by 15-18 (25.5%) and 25-30 (25.1%). Women dominated participation in the online survey (49.8% of the respondents are women, 39% are men, while 10.4% preferred not to say).

Chart 3. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents (251 responses)



Regarding educational level, 20.7% of the respondents have not completed a secondary education, 17.9% have completed a secondary education, 35.5% obtained a Bachelor's degree, 21.1% have a Master's degree and 4.4% have obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

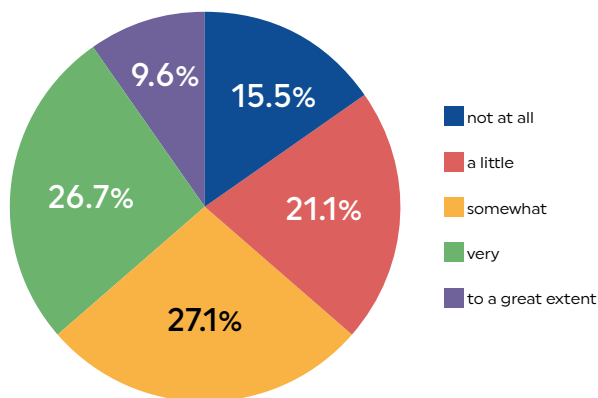
When it comes to labour market status, 39.4% of respondents answered that they are employed, 39% are still students, accompanied by 9.2% who are completing vocational training, while 9.2% are unemployed.

We also asked respondents about their role in youth policy-making process and majority are youth activists (34.3%), members of political parties (12.4%), members of CSOs (17.9%), scholars/scientists (6.8%), journalists (4.8%), policy-makers (5.2%).

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

In North Macedonia, respondents were familiar with existing youth policies – 27.1% of respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar, 26.7% are very familiar and 9.6% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (15.5%) were not asked further details about their standpoints regarding existing youth policies but were asked about their opinion on youth priorities.

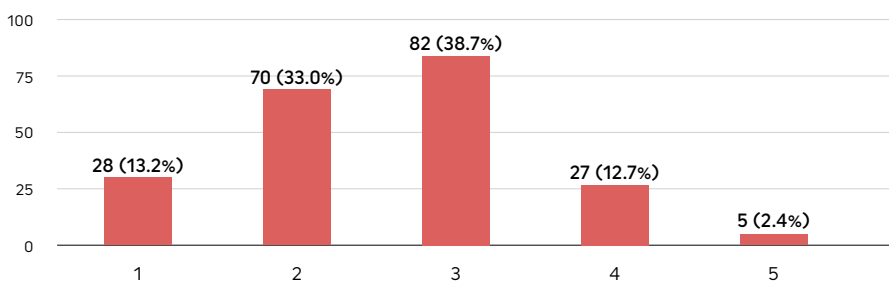
Chart 4. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in North Macedonia



When asked about quality of youth policies in North Macedonia, 49.5% of respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 32.5% assessed them as 'bad' and 5.7% as 'very bad'. Only 0.9% of respondents considered youth policies as 'very good'. The situation is similar when it comes to attitudes towards the priorities recognised in these policies – 13.2% considered recognised priorities as 'very bad', 34% as 'bad' and 38.7% as 'neither good nor bad', which implies that respondents do not agree with the prioritisation in youth policies.

The most concerning finding in this section is that approximately 84.9% of respondents cannot agree with the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided by youth policies in North Macedonia adequately address the needs of the youth.'

Chart 5. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(212 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures from youth policies in North Macedonia adequately address the current needs of young people in North Macedonia?

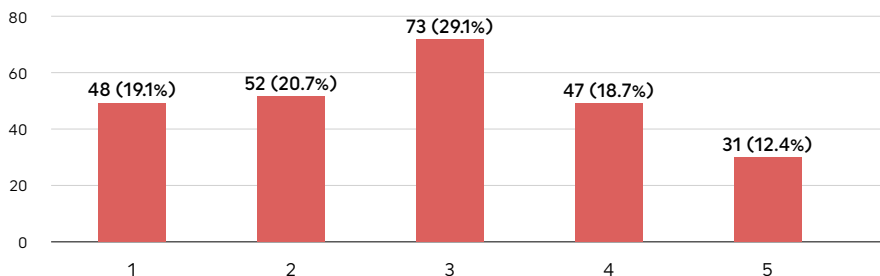
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to respondents to the online survey, the most important priorities for youth that should be addressed in public policies are employment possibilities (56.6% mentioned this priority), education (53%), housing and affordable living conditions (39.8%), mental health support (31.1%), youth participation and empowerment (29.9%), affordable health care (25.5%), digitalisation (21.9%), ecological sustainability (20.7%), social inclusion and diversity (20.3%), etc.

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

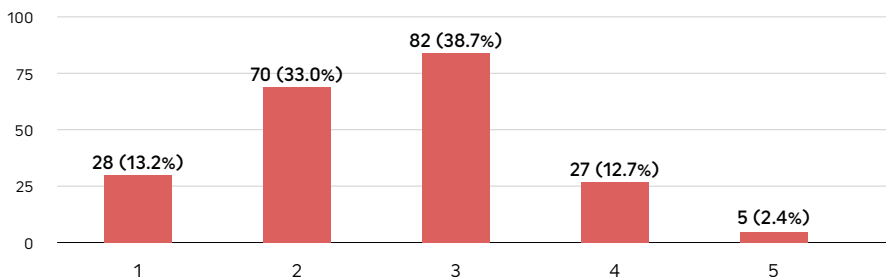
Although the majority of the respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in North Macedonia, they consider the efficiency of the process could be improved.

Chart 6. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(251 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 7. Policy-making Efficiency
(251 responses)



Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

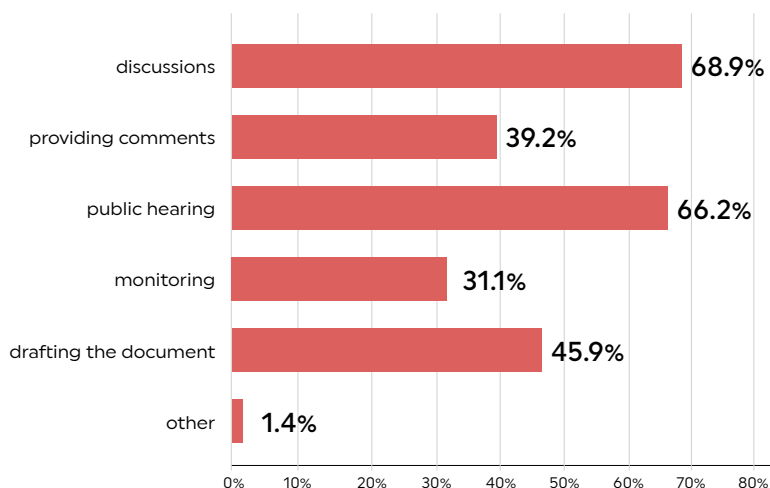
Nearly half of the respondents (43%) are unsure of the existence of mechanisms through which youth activists may become involved in the policy-making process¹¹, while only 29.5% know that these mechanisms exist. Also, 55.4% of respondents claim that there is a difference between levels of policies and their development processes. The policy-making processes in North Macedonia are noted at local, national and regional levels as

¹¹ Mechanisms such as thematic discussions, focus groups with relevant groups and stakeholders, gathering information concerning the needs of young people, public hearings, public debates, etc.

important for this research.¹² An interesting finding is that 47.4% of respondents find that the policy-making process at the national level is more inclusive than at the other levels. 39.5% assess that the local level is more inclusive than the other levels (national or regional levels) and 18.4% assess that the regional level is more inclusive than the local and national levels. In addition to this result, 26.3% of respondents stated that there are no mechanisms for involvement of youth activist in the policy-making process at the local level (while at the national and regional levels, they exist) and 21.1% stated the non-existence of these mechanisms at the regional level (while at the local and national levels, they exist).

More than 70% of the respondents were not previously involved in the policy-making process or in advocacy campaigns, while 29.9% of respondents have experience in this area. Approximately 40% of respondents with this experience assess it as 'neither good nor bad', 20% as 'good' and 26.7% as 'bad'. The majority of respondents were involved at local level (64.9%) and national level (55.4%) policy-making processes, while regional level involvement was in smaller scales (18.9%).

Chart 8. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process



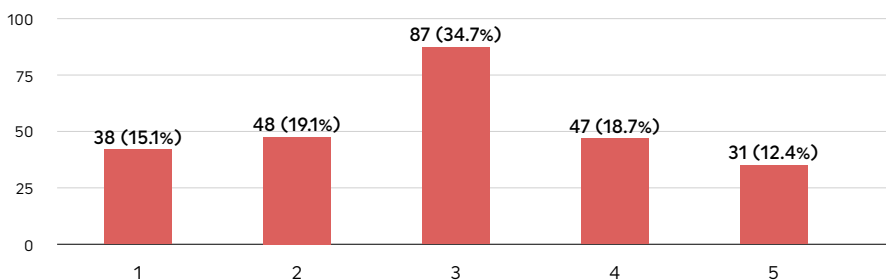
12 In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

44.6% of respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges that respondents encountered were lack of political support or will (20.3% encountered this issue), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (18.9%), political polarisation (16.9%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (14.9%), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (13.5%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (13.5%), bureaucratic obstacles (13.5%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (12.2%), legal obstacles (8.1%) and lack of transparency (5.4%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

Respondents are polarised when assessing whether vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their issues are inadequately recognised in public policies. Still, 57.8% considered that there is room for improvement in recognising vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 9. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies (251 responses)



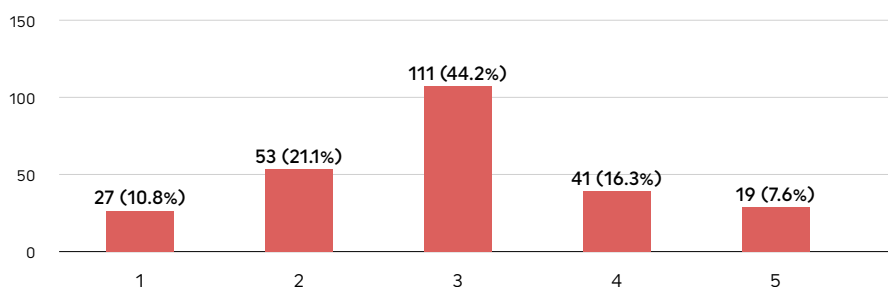
Question: On a scale of 1 to 5 to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in North Macedonia's youth policy documents?
Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, they stated that the following areas required improvement: the policy-making process, CSOs and youth activists' capacities, public policy implementation, level of transparency.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of youth activists' influence, the majority of respondents are undecided as to whether this influence is significant or not (44.2%).

Chart 10. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (251 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in North Macedonia.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (53.4% of respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (50.2%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and representatives of institutions about youth issues (43.4%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (43.4%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (41%), political polarisation (41%), bureaucratic obstacles (39%), legal obstacles (39%), lack of transparency (35.5%) and lack of follow-up after recommendations (33.5%).

Key messages from survey respondents:

"More young people should be involved."

"Do not politicise youth policies."

"If the priority for young people is securing jobs and limiting the brain drain, then appropriate employment and support measures should be implemented according to the needs of young people - incentive measures, financial support/scholarships for soft skills, mergers with companies, active advocacy of the policy-makers."

Serbia

In Serbia, the youth organisation study involved 25 interviews with representatives from diverse organisations, while the online survey gathered 257 responses from youth activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists.

The surveys among diverse respondents, including CSOs representatives, activists, politicians, scholars, and journalists, offered valuable insights into demographic profiles and viewpoints. Employment opportunities, education, and mental health emerged as top priorities. The online survey results underlined concerns about the adequacy of existing youth policies, with a significant portion of respondents expressing dissatisfaction.

Regarding existing youth policies, organisations perceived a less-than-ideal situation, emphasising insufficient attention to youth issues by policy-makers. While all organisations acknowledged the existence of youth policies, gaps were identified in their specificity and consideration of diverse youth groups. Recommendations for improvement included enhanced coordination, communication, and deeper youth representation in policy development.

While there was some familiarity with policies, a considerable percentage found them lacking, emphasising the inefficiency and need for improvement in the policy-making process. Awareness of mechanisms for youth activist involvement varied, with challenges including political support, resource limitations, and a perceived lack of inclusivity.

Concerning the policy-making process, organisations rated its effectiveness as low, highlighting issues of transparency and hasty decision-making. Civil society involvement varied, with an absence of structured mechanisms for engagement. The local, national, and regional levels demonstrated discrepancies in youth involvement, often reliant on personal contacts and enthusiasm.

The surveys highlighted the inadequacy of recognising vulnerable youth groups in policies, highlighting the need for improvement. Respondents underscored the significance of youth feeling heard, calling for enhanced transparency and decision-maker engagement, as well as drawing attention to promising practices, such as Germany's local youth parliaments.

In conclusion, the result from both surveys portrays a multifaceted landscape, echoing the challenges and aspirations of youth organisations and stakeholders in Serbia. Despite the acknowledged shortcomings in policies, the dedication of organisations and the call for improved processes underscore the sector's resilience. The findings stress the urgency of addressing youth needs, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing the impact of youth activism in shaping policies for a more responsive and supportive environment in Serbia.

Results from interviews with youth organisations

Introduction

This section provides a concise overview of the research methodology employed for the investigation conducted among youth CSOs and CSOs working with youth in Serbia. This research venture comprised 25 interviews and spanned the months of September and October in the year 2023. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, a methodological approach that combined both in person and online interviews was meticulously selected.

The research instrument of choice was a pre-prepared questionnaire, strategically designed with a flexible structure that allowed for adaptation in response to the unique insights and perspectives offered by the diverse pool of interviewees. This adaptive approach was instrumental in ensuring that the interviews effectively captured the nuanced stances and outlooks of the participating organisations.

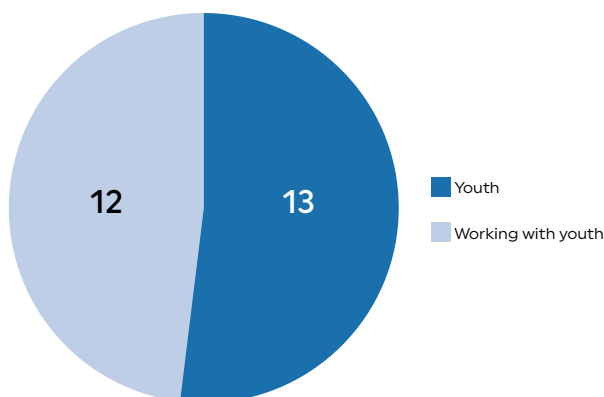
To maximise the depth and breadth of the research, the interviews were planned to be conducted in person wherever feasible. However, a practical consideration came into play with organisations situated in remote locations. For these cases, the online interview method was seamlessly integrated to overcome geographical barriers and facilitate the engagement of a wide spectrum of organisations. The decision to employ a combination of in person and online interviews was made in order to intensify inclusiveness and the variety of viewpoints across.

Undoubtedly, conducting research within the context of youth CSOs and organisations working with youth presented its share of challenges. Particularly, reaching out to organisations based in smaller communities proved to be a formidable obstacle. This impediment was primarily due to the logistical difficulties associated with accessing these remote areas. Consequently, the research encountered instances where organisations were non-responsive to email communications or encountered difficulties identifying a suitable representative familiar with the research questions. These challenges, while indicative of the resource constraints faced by some organisations, also offered valuable insights into the landscape of youth-related CSOs in Serbia.

Information about organisations interviewees

This section provides an overview of the organisations interviewed during the research conducted in Serbia. Out of a total of 25 interviews, 12 were youth organisations, and 13 organisations working with youth.

Chart 1. Breakdown of Interviewed Organisations



The structure of these organisations was analysed based on the geographical representation, duration of their existence, the number of employees, and the engagement of volunteers.

Geographical Representation: It was a pivotal objective of this research to ensure that the organisations selected for interviews were equally geographically represented across Serbia. This deliberate approach aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective that encompasses various regions, urban and rural contexts, and the unique challenges faced by organisations operating in different locales. By doing so, the research reflected the diversity of positions and experiences within the landscape of youth-oriented CSOs and organisations working with youth.

Out of the total of 25 organisations represented in the research, 11 are based in Belgrade, the capital and largest city of Serbia, 8 are located in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, and 6 are situated in central Serbia. This regional distribution not only highlights the commitment to geographical diversity but also acknowledges the significance of considering the distinct characteristics, needs, and perspectives of organisations operating in different parts of the economy. The varying conditions and resources available in these regions can influence the dynamics of youth-focused initiatives.

Table 1. Geographical Representation

Belgrade	Vojvodina	Central Serbia
11	8	6

Consequently, by capturing a wide array of experiences across these regions, the research was better equipped to identify regional disparities, pinpoint best practices, and offer a more nuanced understanding of the youth CSO sector in Serbia. This comprehensive representation ensures that the research findings reflect the full spectrum of positions and show potential differences in experiences across different geographic areas.

Duration of Existence: The research revealed a diverse landscape of organisations in terms of their duration of existence. Specifically:

- 8 of the interviewed organisations have been in operation for more than 10 years, with two being active for more than 20 years, demonstrating a longstanding commitment to their missions.
- 9 organisations have been active for more than 5 years, reflecting a sustained presence in their respective domains.
- 8 organisations are relatively new, existing for less than 5 years, highlighting the emergence of fresh initiatives within the sector.

Number of Employees: The number of employees among the interviewed organisations exhibited significant variability, largely contingent on the projects these organisations were concurrently involved in. The findings indicate the following distribution:

- The majority of organisations maintain a relatively modest permanent staff, with 1-5 employees on average. This aligns with the adaptable and project-driven nature of many CSOs.
- Notably, only three organisations reported having more than 10 permanent employees, suggesting that a significant portion of these entities operate with limited human resources.

Engagement of Volunteers: The participation of volunteers within these organisations similarly showed fluctuations due to the project-based nature of their work. The analysis revealed the following trends:

- The majority of organisations reported having up to 10 regular volunteers who actively partake in their activities. This underscores the significance of volunteer contributions to the sector.

- Three organisations notably engage more than 20 volunteers, demonstrating a high level of community involvement.
- Intriguingly, five organisations indicated that they do not have volunteers at all, which is linked to resource constraints or the specific nature of their operations.

Topics and Issues Addressed: While preparing for the research, an effort was made to encompass a wide spectrum of topics, issues and activities. The objective was to ensure that the research represented a comprehensive panorama of the concerns and initiatives within the landscape of youth CSOs and organisations working with youth in Serbia.

From those addressing broad youth-related issues to those with more specialised focuses, the interviewed organisations engaged with a diverse range of topics. These themes of interest and activities spanned a multitude of areas, reflecting the nuanced and multifaceted nature of their work.

Among the organisations, some were dedicated to youth issues in a general sense, offering a holistic approach to the challenges faced by young people. They stated that they are following, advocating for and developing youth policies and mainly dealt with issues, such as employment, culture, mobility, participation or gender equality. Concurrently, there were those specifically oriented toward certain groups of youth. These included organisations working with young individuals at risk of substance abuse, student-oriented organisations, or those focused on the LGBTQI youth community. The presence of such specialised organisations illustrates the adaptability and responsiveness of the sector, tailoring their efforts to address the unique needs of distinct youth populations.

This comprehensive approach, covering both general and specialised areas of youth engagement, ensures that the research encapsulates the full breadth of topics, issues, and initiatives in the youth CSO sector in Serbia. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted landscape and the diverse experiences and perspectives of these organisations.

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

This section dealt with the perspectives of the interviewed organisations with relation to youth policies in Serbia. Understanding the intricacies of existing policies and their impact on the nation's young population was paramount to the formulation of effective strategies for the betterment of youth-related initiatives. The organisations featured in this study offered diverse and valuable insights, highlighting both the strengths and areas in need of improvement within Serbia's youth policies. Their viewpoints encompassed the current state of youth policies, their familiarity with these policies, assessments of their adequacy, identification of any gaps or omissions, and suggested pathways for enhancement.

In response to the question concerning the current situation of public policies for youth in Serbia, the consensus among the organisations was that the situation is less than ideal. They expressed the view that youth often do not receive sufficient attention from policy-makers, primarily because they are not a significant voting demographic, making them a non-priority. Organisations emphasised the role of civil society in bridging this gap by engaging with local authorities, fostering collaboration, and advocating for the inclusion of youth voices in policy formulation. This was seen as a means of addressing the shortcomings in government attention to youth-related issues.

All organisations acknowledged the existence of youth policies in Serbia, and all of them were familiar with the Law on Youth and the National Youth Strategy, as well as Local Action Plans. While some organisations expressed familiarity with existing policies, they noted that there were certain aspects or themes within these policies that remained unfamiliar or underutilised. A number of the organisations, with more specific focus on certain youth groups, named some of the strategies that are not exclusively aimed at youth, but deal with them in specific sections, such as the Strategy for the Prevention of Drug Abuse in the Republic of Serbia, Cultural Development Strategy, Strategy for the Development of Education, or Strategy for the Development of Sports.

Responses to the adequacy of current policies in addressing the needs of youth varied. Some organisations suggested that certain policies might not effectively address the pressing issues facing young people. An example was given of youth prioritising environmental concerns, and policies dealing with environment in Serbia nowhere recognised this fact or addressed youth in any specific way.

'Other ministries do not sufficiently understand the role of the Ministry of Youth and that they need to communicate and cooperate when they are adopting their policies.'

All organisations felt that there were aspects missing from existing policies, primarily in terms of specificity and addressing specific subgroups of young people. They all felt that the existing policies are too general and descriptive, without recognising the actual needs and situation of young people. They also stated that one of the main issues is that there is no inter-sectoral understanding of the issues young people are facing, which is visible from the complete absence of youth in policies adopted by other ministries, although they address issues which affect youth.

'Young people need to be recognised in public policies that don't exclusively target the youth. The representation of young people is not substantial in the development of these public policies.'

To improve existing policies, organisations emphasised the need for greater coordination and communication between different ministries and stakeholders. The organisations believed that a more in-depth understanding of the youth demographic and their distinct needs should be integrated into policy development. This would include enhancing representation of youth in policies that encompass a broader demographic.

'The policies are too broadly formulated. To improve them, it's crucial to enhance coordination between different ministries and stakeholders. There should be a more in-depth understanding of the issues youth are facing, and their distinct needs have to be integrated into all policy development. For example, the National Employment Strategy fails to recognise the unique and distinct challenges of unemployed youth, nor does it offer concrete solutions to these issues which significantly differ from those of the rest of population.'

'The Ministry responsible for youth affairs needs to be strengthened. It must adopt the position that other ministries should include it in their work. The capacities that need to be strengthened also involve increasing the number of employees.'

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies on local/national/regional level

Interviewed organisations voiced mixed opinions regarding the effectiveness of the public policy-making process for youth policies in Serbia. The average rating hovered at 2.3, indicating a less-than-ideal perception. Some organisations gave it a rating of 4, noting that while organisations are encouraged to participate, capacity limitations often lead them to sidestep the issue, resulting in a somewhat opaque process. Others rated it as 3, emphasising the need for CSOs to assess their sustainability, capacity boundaries, and the potential implications of legitimising a particular process. The involvement of CSOs, they noted, varies significantly based on their relative power. Meanwhile, some organisations rated the process as low as 1, pointing out that policies are passed hastily without adequate consensus or broad discussions.

When answering the question about the involvement of CSOs and Youth Organisations, it was concluded that they are, to varying degrees, part of the process of creating and adopting youth policies. The level of involvement depends on the specific issue and the relevant government ministry. While some positive changes have been observed, like the Ministry of Labour's willingness to include youth-focused organisations, these improvements are not uniform. It's noted that youth representatives aren't consistently included in decision-making processes.

Interlocutors agreed that there is no structured mechanism for involving civil society in the creation of youth policies, leaving the extent of involvement to the interests and capacities of the involved parties. While a legislative mechanism theoretically mandates civil society participation, this does not always represent youth-focused organisations. In certain cases, no applicable mechanisms are put into practice.

Discrepancies exist in the policy-making process and civil society involvement at the local, national, and regional levels. At the local level, youth involvement can significantly vary from one municipality to another. Some, like Novi Pazar and Čićevac, show active youth participation, while many municipalities lack dedicated youth offices. In Novi Sad, the situation mirrors the national level, benefiting from being a hub for established youth organisations. Decision-making processes are more centralised at the national level, particularly for public policies, sometimes influenced by political affiliations. At the local level, involvement often hinges on personal contacts and the enthusiasm of decision-makers.

There is a notable interest among CSOs in engaging in the policy-making process, especially at the local level. However, interest levels vary between organisations. Some are highly motivated, while others grapple with resource limitations, time constraints, and capacity issues. In general, these organisations face challenges when seeking to engage effectively in policy-making. Their capacity for meaningful participation is restricted by these resource and capacity constraints.

All of the interviewed organisations participated in the process of public policy-making through public discussions. Fifteen of them participated formally in working groups for the development of strategies, laws, or action plans. Nine were involved at the local level, and six at the national level. Experiences from this process are mostly disappointing. Organisations highlight that they invested a lot of effort, time, and resources in the bodies they were engaged with, but, in the end, most of their suggestions were not taken into account.

'Sometimes, the invitation to participate does exist, but CSOs often lack the time, knowledge, and capacity to thoroughly review all the documents and make suggestions for changes. They would need a dedicated person in the organisation to focus solely on public policies. Even if an organisation invested resources in this, the most likely outcome is that their suggestions would be completely ignored, and the law would be hastily passed in the end.'

There is a consensus among organisations that the traditional methods of public discussions have become outdated and less effective. Participants agree that more practical mechanisms are needed to enhance the policy-making process. To achieve this, there is a call for greater openness from the government, coupled with an emphasis on transparency.

To promote greater involvement of youth CSOs in the policy-making process, several steps are necessary. These include government support, adjustments to funding processes, and practical education on understanding and implementing public policies. Many young organisations may also benefit from mentoring by more experienced counterparts.

Several networks and platforms exist to facilitate the exchange of experiences, best practices, and capacity strengthening among youth civil society organisations. Prominent examples include KOMS and NAPOR, which offer opportunities for communication, cooperation, and advocacy. How-

ever, even these networks often grapple with resource constraints. Organisations from Novi Sad stated that OPENS serves as an excellent platform for cooperation, exchange of experiences and that it is often the only link they have with local authorities.

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

In response to the question about whether the needs of vulnerable youth groups are adequately recognised in public policies in Serbia, a prevalent concern emerges. Several organisations expressed that the issue extends beyond just public policies. Larger organisations, instead of focusing on advocating for more critical matters, often fail to acknowledge these vulnerable groups. This recognition gap exists not only within the policies themselves but also within the wider civil society landscape.

The interviewees identified several groups among young people as particularly vulnerable. These include young individuals dealing with mental health issues, which often lack sufficient support. The vulnerability extends to young people from the LGBTQ+ community, young Roma and Romani women (despite initiatives like the Decade of Roma), youth with disabilities, and those residing in rural areas. These groups encounter various challenges and experience gaps in opportunities, often due to a lack of consideration for their unique identities and needs. Some of the interviewed organisations focus on inclusive projects to address these issues.

The consensus among the organisations is that existing policies do not sufficiently address the needs of these vulnerable groups. These policies tend to oversimplify complex realities and rely heavily on theoretical foundations. As a result, the practical and specific requirements of these vulnerable youth groups often go unaddressed.

A challenge arises in the form of representation for these vulnerable groups in the policy-making process. Organisations dedicated to advocating for these groups, while participating in public discussions or through platforms like NAPOR or KOMS, often find that they lack the time and capacity to thoroughly review and provide substantial feedback on policy documents. Moreover, there is limited awareness and engagement from the vulnerable youth groups themselves. The policies, as a result, often fail to capture their distinct experiences and challenges.

Conclusion

The comprehensive research conducted among youth CSOs and organisations working with youth in Serbia has unveiled a nuanced and multifaceted landscape. This investigation provided a rich tapestry of insights, perspectives, and challenges faced by organisations dedicated to addressing the needs of young people across the economy. The organisations shared mixed views on the existing state of public policies for young people. Despite a consensus that youth policies are less than ideal and often fail to address youth-specific issues, organisations stressed the critical role of civil society in bridging the gap. The call for improved coordination and communication between different ministries and stakeholders was echoed as a pathway to enhancing youth policies. The need for greater depth of understanding of the youth demographic and their unique needs in policy development was paramount.

The research also delved into the processes of policy-making and civil society involvement at various levels. At the local level, significant variation exists in youth involvement, with some municipalities showcasing active participation while others lack dedicated youth offices. The process tends to centralize at the national level, sometimes influenced by political affiliations. Interest in engaging in the policy-making process is present, especially at the local level, though organisations often face resource and capacity constraints. The participation of youth CSOs in the policy-making process is seen as instrumental in improving public policies for young people. Enhanced mechanisms, government support, and practical education are essential for fostering greater engagement. Networks and platforms like KOMS and NAPOR play a crucial role in facilitating collaboration, experience sharing, and capacity strengthening, albeit facing their own resource challenges.

The needs of vulnerable youth groups, though recognised to some extent, are not comprehensively addressed in public policies. Organisations expressed concerns that larger entities often fail to acknowledge these groups, emphasising the broader gaps within civil society. Mental health issues, LGBTQ+ youth, young Roma and Romani women, youth with disabilities, and those in rural areas were identified as particularly vulnerable groups. Existing policies are deemed insufficient to cater to the unique challenges faced by these vulnerable groups. They are criticised for their lack of specificity and nuanced understanding of the youth demographic. A need for enhanced inter-sectoral cooperation and an in-depth recognition of the problems young people face was a recurring theme.

In conclusion, the research offers a vivid portrayal of the youth civil society sector in Serbia. It underscores the critical role of organisations in addressing the shortcomings of existing policies and advocating for the unique needs of young people. The call for improved coordination and communication among stakeholders is a vital step toward more effective policies. Inclusion, representation, and a deeper understanding of the youth demographic are the cornerstones of an enhanced policy framework. The commitment of these organisations to the betterment of young people's lives is a testament to their resilience and dedication, despite the challenges they encounter.

Results from the youth online survey

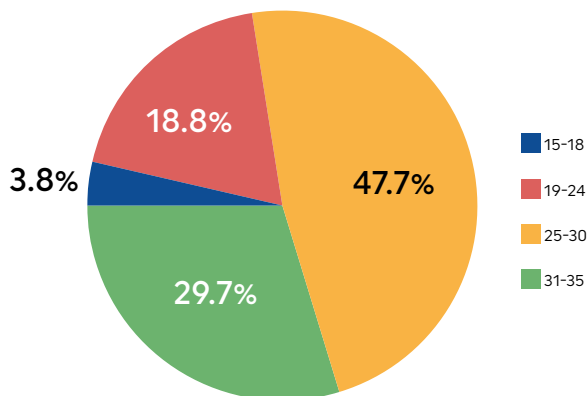
Introduction

Parallel to interviewing youth organisations, an online survey was conducted throughout October and the beginning of November 2023 targeting youth activists, politicians, scholars, journalists, etc. in Serbia. The online questionnaire differed from the questionnaire used during the interviews, however, it followed the same topics and structure. In total, 257 answers were gathered using Google form platform for online surveys.

Demographic information about respondents

Among respondents to the online survey most of them were in the age group of 25-30 (47.7%), followed by age group 31-35 (29.7%) and 19-24 (18.8%). Women dominated participation in the online survey (57.8% respondents were women, 41% were men, while 1.2% preferred not to say).

Chart 2. Age Structure of Online Survey Respondents



Regarding educational level, 3.1% of respondents have not completed a secondary education, 21.1% have a secondary education, 39.1% have obtained a Bachelor's degree, 34% have a Master's degree and 1.2% have obtained a Doctoral degree (PhD).

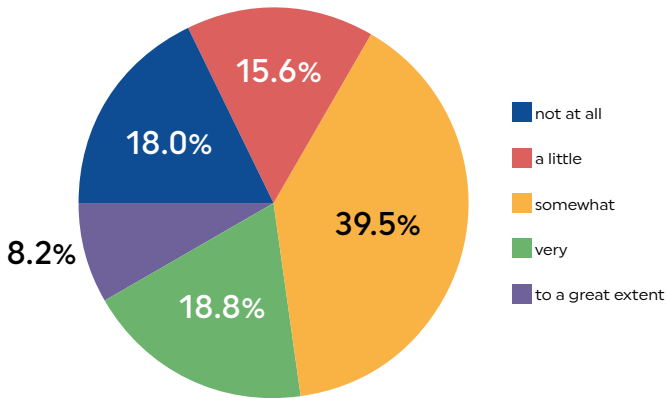
When it comes to the labour market status, 66.8% of respondents answered that they are employed, 19.5% are still students, accompanied by 3.1% who are completing vocational training, while 5.5% are unemployed.

We also asked respondents about their role in youth policy-making process and majority of them are youth activists (25%), members of political parties (21.5%), members of CSOs (16.8%), scholars/scientists (12.1%), journalists (7.8%), policy-makers (4.3%).

Respondents' attitudes toward existing youth policies

In Serbia, respondents were familiar with existing youth policies – 39.5% of respondents answered that they are somewhat familiar, 18.8% are very familiar and 8.2% are familiar to a great extent with current youth policies. Respondents that were not at all familiar with current youth policies (18%) were not asked further details about their standpoints regarding existing youth policies but were asked for their opinion on youth priorities.

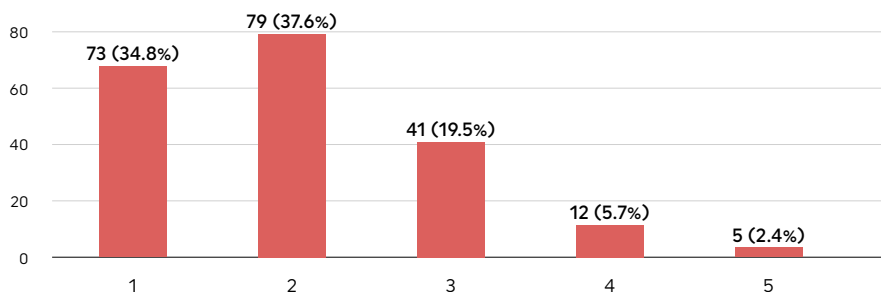
Chart 3. Familiarity with Existing Youth Policies in Serbia



When asked about quality of youth policies in Serbia, 33.3% of respondents assessed them as 'neither good nor bad', 38.1% assessed them as 'bad' and 20.5% as 'very bad'. None of the respondents considered youth policies as 'very good'. The situation is similar where attitudes toward priorities recognised in these policies are concerned – 21.1% consider the recognised priorities as 'very bad', 32.1% as 'bad' and 34.9% as 'neither good nor bad', which implies that respondents do not agree with prioritisation within youth policies.

The most concerning finding in this section was that approximately 92% of respondents cannot agree with the statement that 'Solutions and measures provided by youth policies in Serbia adequately address needs of youth.'

Chart 4. Adequacy of Youth Policy Solutions
(210 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Solutions and measures from youth policies in Serbia adequately address the current needs of young people in Serbia?

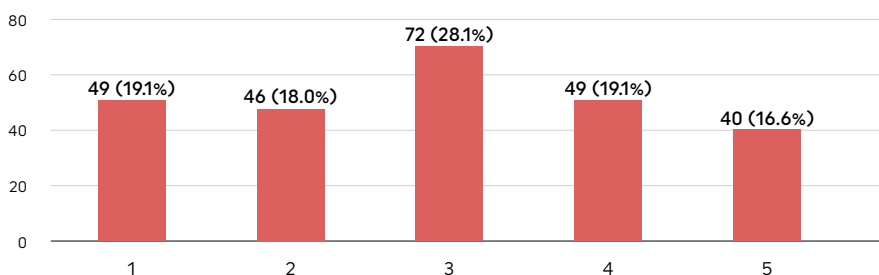
Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – indecisive, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

According to respondents to the online survey, the most important priorities for youth that should be addressed in public policies are employment possibilities (65.2% mentioned this priority), education (63.7%), housing and affordable living conditions (51.6%), mental health support (32%), youth participation and empowerment (28.1%), affordable health care (21.5%), social inclusion and diversity (14.1%), ecological sustainability (9.8%), digitalisation (8.6%), etc.

Youth policy-making process according to respondents

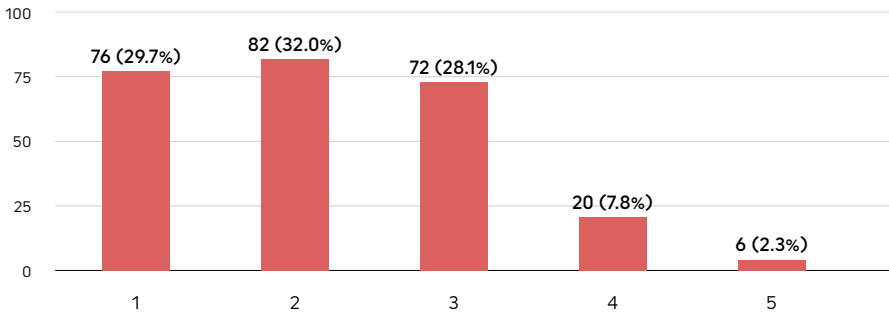
Although the majority of the respondents assessed that they are familiar with the public policy-making process in Serbia, they consider the efficiency of the needs improvement.

Chart 5. Familiarity with the Public Policy-making Process
(256 responses)



Legend: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – somewhat, 4 – a lot, 5 – to a great extent

Chart 6. Policy-making Efficiency



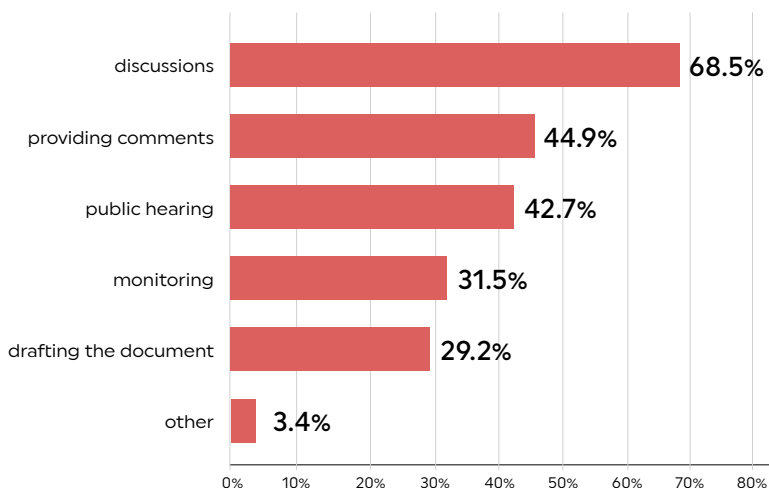
Legend: 1 – very bad, 2 – bad, 3 – neither good nor bad, 4 – good, 5 – very good

Over half of the respondents (51.6%) are aware that there are mechanisms through which youth activists can get involved in the policy-making process. Also, 74.2% of respondents claim that there is a difference between levels of policies and their development processes. One can differentiate between local, national and regional levels¹³. An interesting finding is that 36.8% of respondents find the local level policy-making process is more inclusive than the other levels, while 29.5% assess that the national level is more inclusive than the other levels (local or regional levels) and 24.2% assess that the regional level is more inclusive than the local and national levels. In addition to this result, 28.4% of respondents stated that there are no mechanisms for involvement of youth activist in the policy-making process at the local level (while at the national and regional levels, they exist) and 16.8% said these mechanisms are non-existence at the regional level (while at the local and national levels, they exist).

More than 65% of the respondents were not previously involved in the policy-making process or in advocacy campaigns, while 34.8% of the respondents have had this experience. More than half of the respondents with this experience (50.6%) assess it as 'neither good nor bad', 20.2% as 'good' and 18% as 'bad'. The majority of respondents were involved at the local (58.6%) and national levels (63.2%) of policy-making processes, while they were involved in smaller scales at the regional level (9.2%).

¹³ In the context of this research, the regional level represents the region of the Western Balkans.

Chart 7. Modalities of Involvement in the Public Policy-making Process

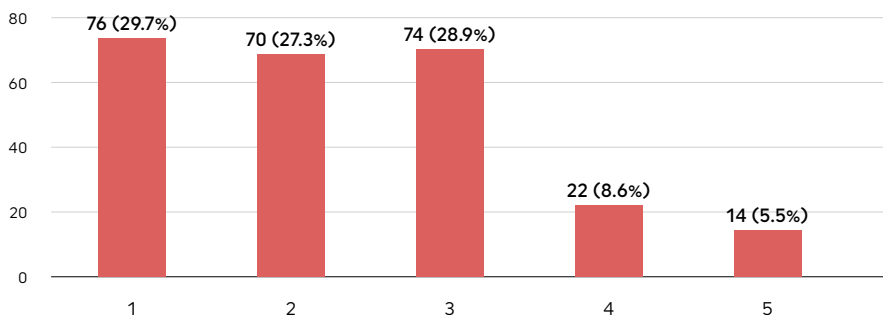


76.7% of respondents encountered certain issues and obstacles during the process. The main challenges that respondents encountered were lack of political support or will (70.5% encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (50%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (50%), lack of transparency (47.7%), political polarisation (46.6%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (43.2%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (34.1%), bureaucratic obstacles (28.4%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (21.6%) and legal obstacles (11.4%).

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

The majority of respondents assessed that vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) and their issues remain inadequately unrecognised in public policies. In addition, 70.7% consider that there is room for improvement in terms of recognising vulnerable youth needs in public policies.

Chart 8. Adequacy of Vulnerable Youth Needs in Respective Policies
(256 responses)



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5 to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, youth not in education, employment or training – NEET, etc.) in Serbia's youth policy documents?

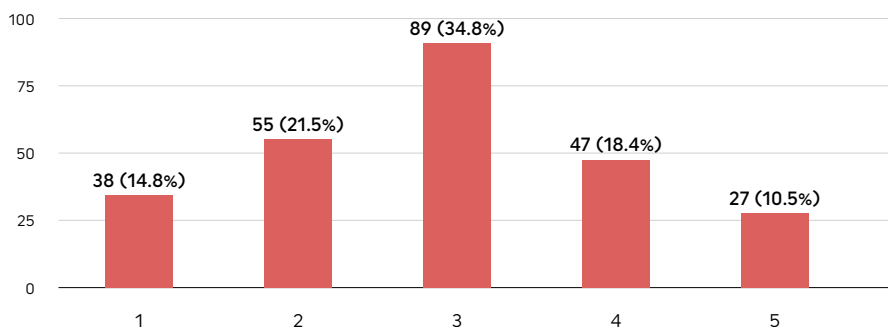
Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree

When asked about concrete improvements that are needed, they stated that improvements in the following were needed: the policy-making process, CSOs and youth activists' capacities, public policy implementation, and that the capacities of institutions and decision-makers should be improved and strengthened, etc.

Conclusion

In terms of the significance of youth activists' influence, the majority of respondents are undecided as to whether this influence is significant or not (34.8%).

Chart 9. Significance of Youth Activists' Influence on Youth Policy Development (256 responses)



Question: In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in Serbia.

Legend: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much

The main issues and obstacles that youth activists encounter when lobbying and advocating for youth priorities are: lack of political support and/or willingness (77.3% of the respondents encountered this issue), limited resources and funding available to youth activists (58.2%), lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues (55.1%), political polarisation (39.8%), lack of transparency (35.9%), limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives (32.8%), bureaucratic obstacles (32.8%), lack of follow-up after recommendations (30.5%), limited knowledge and experience among youth activists (26.6%) and legal obstacles (18.8%).

Key messages from survey respondents:

"Young people need to feel that they are really being heard and that their voice means something."

"An example of good practice is Germany, which has local youth parliaments and local youth representatives who directly influence the creation of youth policies."

"The most important thing is that the decision-makers listen and hear the young people and to understand their needs. It seems that the whole system is designed against the progress of young people or potentially prepares young people to leave the country from early age."

Annex 1

Questionnaire for Interviews of Youth CSOs Representatives

The interviewer introduces the reasons for conducting the research, the name and scope of the project, economies involved and that all answers will be anonymised during data processing.

Information about the organisation

1. Please state the name of your organisation.
2. How long has your organisation been operating?
3. How many employees/volunteers does your organisation have?
4. What are the main topics your organisation is dealing with?
5. Please state your position and the scope of work you do within the organisation.

Organisations' attitudes toward existing youth policies

Interviewer acknowledges that the next part of the conversation will be dedicated to the interviewee's standpoints on existing youth policies

In your opinion what is the current situation with youth public policies in (name of the economy)? Please provide a brief explanation.

Additional questions if needed:

6. Are there existing youth policies?
7. Can you name some youth policies in your economy?
8. Are you familiar with them?
9. Do you think the solutions and measures indicated in these policies adequately address the current needs of youth in (name of the economy)?
10. Do you believe any aspects are missing from these policies?
11. How do you think they can be improved?

Youth organisations' approaches for improving youth policies at the local/national/regional levels

Interviewer acknowledges that the next part of the conversation will be dedicated to the policy-making process and youth organisations' involvement in this process

12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is very bad and 5 is excellent), how would you rate the effectiveness of the process for adopting public policies, especially youth policies, in (name of the economy)? Please provide a brief explanation.
13. To your knowledge are CSOs and youth organisations part of the process of creating and adopting youth policies?
14. Is there any mechanism for CSOs involvement in the process of creating youth policies?
15. Is there any difference, regarding the policy-making process and CSOs involvement, at the local, national and regional levels?
16. If there is a difference, can you provide a short description of the processes at each level and the main differences?
17. Do CSOs demonstrate an interest in becoming involved in the policy-making process?
18. How would you assess the capacity of CSOs to engage in the policy-making process?
19. In your opinion, how capable are youth CSOs of contributing effectively to this task?
20. Does your organisation possess the necessary capacity for these types of tasks?
21. Have you or your organisation been part of the policy-making process lately?
- 23.a. If the answer to question 22 is YES, can you briefly describe the process and your or your organisation's role?
 - 23.a1. Was it a local, national or regional policy?
 - 23.a2. Did you experience any obstacles during the process?
 - 23.a3. What lessons did you or your organisation learn from the experience?
 - 23.a4. Would you do something different now?

- 23.b. If the answer to question 22 is NO, could you please state the reason? Please provide a brief explanation.
24. In your opinion, how can the policy-making process in (name of the economy) be improved?
25. What is, in your opinion, needed for greater youth CSOs involvement in the policy-making process?
26. Is there any youth CSOs network for peer-to-peer experience exchange, good practice exchange and/or CSOs capacity building?

Priorities of vulnerable youth groups in respective policies

Interviewer acknowledges that the next part of the conversation will be dedicated to the vulnerable youth groups and reflection of their needs into public policies

27. In your opinion, are the needs of vulnerable youth groups sufficiently recognised in public policies in (name of the economy)? Please provide a brief explanation.
28. In your opinion, which youth groups are the most vulnerable?
29. Do policies adequately address the needs of these vulnerable groups?
30. Do they have organisations representing them in the policy-making process?
31. Are capacities of these organisations enough for their task within the policy-making process?
32. Do you think there is room for improvement in terms of the recognition of vulnerable youth needs in public policies?
33. What could be improved specifically (policy-making process, capacities of CSOs dealing with vulnerable youth groups, etc.)?
34. Is there anything else you would like to share or any insights you believe are important for us to consider regarding youth policies, the role of youth organisations, or any experiences you've had that could contribute to our research?

Annex 2

Annex 2 - Questionnaire for the Online Survey for Youths

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey about youth priorities and the youth policy-making process. The survey is being conducted as part of the regional project **Regional Youth Dialogue for Europe-RYDE**, financed by the European Union (EU). The project is being implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The goal of the project is to contribute to strengthening the participatory democracy of European integration and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, through the increased influence of civil society organisations, especially youth organisations, in the promotion of the democratic values, political, economic and social benefits of the European integration of the Western Balkans. Your input is essential in understanding the perspectives of youth civic activists, youth political activists and members of political parties, policy-makers, journalists, scholars, etc. This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain anonymous.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. How old are you?

15-18

19-24

25-30

31-35

2. Gender:

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

3. What is the highest educational level you have completed?

- Incomplete high school
- High school
- Bachelor's degree (BA/BS Degree)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree (PhD)
- Other

4. Can you please specify your current employment status or situation?

- Still in education (Student)
- In vocational training
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Not in education, employment and training
- Other (please specify)

5. Can you please specify your status or role regarding the public policy-making process?

- Youth civic activist
- Member of a political party
- Member of a CSO
- Policy-maker
- Journalist
- Scholar
- Other (please specify)

Section 2: Existing youth policies

6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much) how familiar are you with (name of the economy)'s youth policies?

[If the answer to question 6 is 'not at all', 'somewhat', 'very much' – go through questions 7-9]

7. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – poor, 2 – fair, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 - excellent), how would you rate the existing youth policies in (name of the economy)?

8. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – poor, 2 – fair, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 - excellent), how would you rate the priorities recognised in (name of the economy)' youth policies?

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree) to what extent do you agree with the following statement: The solutions and measures from (name of the economy)' youth policies adequately address the current needs of youth in (name of the economy)?

10. In your opinion, what are the top three priorities that should be addressed in youth policies? (Select up to three)

- Access to affordable healthcare
- Digitalisation
- Education
- Employment opportunities
- Environmental sustainability
- Housing and affordable living conditions
- Lifelong learning
- Mental health support
- Sexual orientation and gender identity issues
- Social inclusion and diversity
- Youth empowerment and participation
- Other (please specify max one additional priority)

Section 3: Youth Policy-making Process

11. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much) how familiar are you with (name of the economy)'s policy-making process?

12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – poor, 2 – fair, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – excellent), how would you rate the effectiveness of the public policy adoption process, especially of youth policies, in (name of the economy)?

13. To the best of your knowledge, are there mechanisms¹⁴ through which youth activists' can engage in the youth policy-making process in (name of the economy)?

Yes

No

Not sure

[If the answer to question 13 is yes]

14. Is there any difference, regarding the policy-making process and youth activists' involvement, at the local, national and regional levels¹⁵?

Yes

No

Not sure

[If the answer to question 14 is yes]

14 Mechanisms such as thematic discussions, focus groups with relevant groups and stakeholders, gathering inputs and needs among youth, public hearings, public debates, etc.

15 In the context of this research, regional level is meant for Western Balkan region.

15. Please select the statement you agree with (Select all that apply):

- The local policy planning process is more inclusive towards youth activists (than the national and regional processes)
- The national policy planning process is more inclusive towards youth activists (than the local and regional processes)
- The regional policy planning process is more inclusive towards youth activists (than the local and national processes)
- There are no mechanisms for youth activists' involvement in the process of creating local youth policies (while there are at the national or regional levels)
- There are no mechanisms for youth activists' involvement in the process of creating national youth policies (while there are at the local or regional levels)
- There are no mechanisms for youth activists' involvement into the process of creating regional youth policies (while there are at the local or national levels)

16. Have you been directly involved in shaping youth policies or advocacy efforts?

Yes

No

[\[If the answer to question 16 is yes – go through questions 17-21\]](#)

17. Please select the type of involvement in this process:

- Discussions
- Providing comments
- Public hearings
- Monitoring
- Drafting
- Other (please specify)

18. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – poor, 2 – fair, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 - excellent), how would you rate the experience (in terms of effectiveness and the process).

19. Was it a local, national or regional policy?

Local policy

National policy

Regional policy

20. Did you experience any obstacles during the process?

Yes

No

21. Please select the main challenges you faced during the process. (Select all that apply)

Lack of political support and/or willingness

Lack of transparency

Lack of follow-up after recommendations

Limited resources and funding available to youth activists

Limited knowledge and experience among youth activists

Limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and institution representatives

Legal barriers

Bureaucratic obstacles

Political polarisation

Lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues

Other (please specify)

Section 4: Vulnerable Youth

22. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4- agree and 5 - strongly agree) to what extent do you agree with the following statement: There is adequate recognition of vulnerable youth populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, refugees, disabled youth, national minorities, cultural minorities, youth in remote areas, rural youth, young people neither in employment not in education or training – NEET, etc.) in (name of the economy)'s youth policy documents?

23. Do you think there is room for improving the recognition of vulnerable youth needs in public policies?

Yes

No

Not sure

24. What concretely could be improved (policy-making process, capacities of youth activists and/or CSOs dealing with vulnerable youth groups, etc.)?

Section 5: Conclusion

25. In your experience, on a scale of 1 to 5 (where: 1 – Not at all, 2 – Not really, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Somewhat, 5 – Very much), rate the significance of youth activists' influence on youth policy development in (name of the economy).

26. What are some challenges or barriers faced by youth activists in getting their priorities recognised in youth policy documents? (Select all that apply)

- Lack of political support and/or willingness
- Lack of transparency
- Lack of follow-up after recommendations
- Limited resources and funding available to youth activists
- Limited knowledge and experience among youth activists
- Limited knowledge and experience among decision-makers and representatives of institutions
- Legal barriers
- Bureaucratic obstacles
- Political polarisation
- Lack of awareness among decision-makers and institution representatives concerning youth issues
- Other (please specify)

27. Is there anything else you would like to add or any specific examples you'd like to share regarding youth priorities and policies, as well as the youth policy-making process?

Conclusion

Thank you for completing this survey. Your insights are invaluable in understanding the perspectives of youth activists, policy-makers, journalists, scholars, etc. Your input will help inform discussions concerning youth policies and their impact on youth, especially vulnerable youth, and on youth policy improvement.

