



Where we are,
and where we want to be
when we talk about the
political, economic and
social participation of
young people



Podgorica, December 2022.

Policy paper: Where we are, and where we want to be when we talk about the political, economic and social participation of young people

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Why Youth Participation?

Youth participation and representation have been at the core of the NGO Prima's work for years. Within this context, the NGO Prima has implemented numerous trainings, round tables, workshops, seminars, youth camps, and advocacy campaigns and developed a number of policy documents that integrate the human rights-based approach and gender equality component.

Youth participation is an essential element of a functional democracy. Engaging young people in political and civic life is crucial for the development of a healthy, democratic society, and their direct involvement in the decision-making process is crucial for

the sustainable development of Montenegro and Europe.

Theocharis, Yannis & Deth, Jan W. van. (2016) in their work state that the repertoire of political participation in democratic societies is expanding rapidly and covers such different activities as voting, demonstrating, volunteering, boycotting, blogging, and flash mobs. Young people play crucial role in these process. Therefore, continued work on improving youth participation is important for several reasons.

First, young people represent a significant portion of the population but are often

not

included in decision making in Montenegro and Europe. According to Eurostat, in 2020, the percentage of the population aged 15-29 in Montenegro was 18.5%, while in the European Union, it was 16.9%. This demographic group's involvement in political and civic life is essential for ensuring that their voices and perspectives are represented

in

decision-making processes.

Second, youth participation is crucial for promoting social and political cohesion. When young people are engaged in political and civic life, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and belonging in their society. This, in turn, can lead to increased trust and confidence in democratic institutions.

Third, youth participation can contribute to the development of new ideas and innovative solutions to societal challenges. Young people often bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the table, which can be valuable in addressing complex issues.

Participation is a very important element when talking about the human rights of

youth.

It helps youth to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, for example

with regards to education, employment, sexual and reproductive health, and among others depends on the socioeconomic context in the country, but also globally – in the region, Europe and the world.

Therefore, youth must have a say in the policies that will shape their future!

Montenegro has made significant progress in recent years towards promoting youth participation in decision-making processes. However, there is still a long way to go. According to the latest available data, only 14% of young people in Montenegro feel that their opinions are heard in the decision-making process. This is far from satisfactory, and more efforts are needed to ensure that young people are actively engaged in the policy-making process.

In European Union, the situation is slightly better. The EU has recognised the

importance

of youth participation and has taken steps to ensure that young people are represented in decision-making processes. For example, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 aims to increase youth participation in democratic life across Europe. However, the level of youth engagement varies across the continent, and there is still room

for

improvement.

Why is it important to know the data?!

The recommendation of the Council of Europe member states to award high priority to

youth participation in their public youth policies was included in the

recommendation

of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on citizenship and participation

of young people in public life in 2006. This document states that “education for participation and providing opportunities for experiencing participation is a prerequisite

for the necessary and ongoing improvement of democracy”. The European Union's (EU)

Youth Strategy "Youth – Investing and Empowering" 2019-2027 places youth

participation at the forefront of youth policy. Member States are invited to encourage

and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in democratic processes and society, to actively engage them, support youth representations at

local, regional and national levels and explore and promote the use of innovative and

Alternative Forms of Political Social and Civic Participation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Development³ also recognizes the active role of young people as “critical agents of

change. The first priority of the UN 2030 Youth Strategy⁴ is “Engagement,

Participation

Transforming Our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

³Youth 2030 – United Nations Youth Strategy - [https://5d962978-9e17-4b96-91be-](https://5d962978-9e17-4b96-91be-93983605fae8.filesusr.com/ugd/b1d674_9f63445fc59a41b6bb50cbd4f800922b.pdf)

[93983605fae8.filesusr.com/ugd/b1d674_9f63445fc59a41b6bb50cbd4f800922b.pdf](https://5d962978-9e17-4b96-91be-93983605fae8.filesusr.com/ugd/b1d674_9f63445fc59a41b6bb50cbd4f800922b.pdf)

and Advocacy - Amplify youth voices for the promotion of a peaceful, just and sustainable world”.

Recognizing the need to continuously work on the improvement of youth

participation

in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, as well as the necessity to have reliable data and to contribute to making this issue more visible, the

YBH4WBT

Network developed YPI as a composite index of different dimensions of youth participation: political, economic and social, providing an overview of the context supporting or hindering youth’s active involvement in society.

Each of these dimensions is assessed through a set of carefully selected indicators.

The **political dimension** refers to the possibilities of young people to be involved in political processes - to be informed about the work of the government, parliament and municipalities, to be engaged in youth networks and to be elected to political positions. The participation of young people in political life has recently become a priority all over the world, because it is recognized that they should have a say in political decisions because they make up a significant part of the population and are disproportionately affected by certain political decisions (especially long-term ones).

The **economic dimension** refers to the degree of inclusion, or conversely exclusion, of young people from the labor market. It includes the degree of their activity, employment and self-employment.

The **social dimension** refers to the active participation of young people in social life. It is assessed through the integration of young people into the community through formal and informal education, as well as the absence of indicators of potential exclusion - due to poverty, dependence on the social protection system, time spent in prison, etc.

The Youth Participation Index (YPI) provides insight into the possibility of young people

to getting involved in society. It includes their involvement in decision-making processes, their access to the labor market and their participation in social life. It consists of 25 indicators of political, economic and social participation. Work on this index began in 2016 and so far data series have been published over a period of 6 years, with data from 2016 to 2021. The data were collected individually in five countries and then consolidated into one regional report for the Western Balkans and Turkey.

One of the goals when the index was created was to create a concrete tool that will be able to be used by public administration and civil society organizations to systematically identify and solve the most urgent challenges related to the

participation

of young people in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Specifically, through regular publication, the goals of the Youth Participation Index are:

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Improve the practice of using data as a reliable basis for every decision concerning young people;

To compare countries according to key indicators of youth participation in all

The index is based on official statistics, i.e. data collected through desk research and through the data collection system by sending official requests for free access to information to competent institutions.

Barriers to Youth Participation

Despite the importance of youth participation, several barriers prevent young people from engaging in political and civic life. These barriers include:

Lack of information: Many young people are unaware of their rights and responsibilities

as citizens. They may also lack knowledge about the political system and the decision-making processes.

Limited access to decision-making processes: Young people often face structural barriers that prevent them from participating in decision-making processes. For example, they may not have access to decision-making bodies or lack the resources and networks needed to participate effectively.

Lack of trust in democratic institutions: Some young people may feel disillusioned with the political system and lack trust in democratic institutions. This can lead to apathy and disengagement from political and civic life.

Socioeconomic barriers: Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional barriers to participating in political and civic life. For example, they may lack access to education, economical resources and other resources that are essential for effective participation.

The youth participation index in Montenegro includes data on the political, social and economic participation of young people, which includes indicators collected from official statistics. It is based on data collected during desk research and responses to official requests for free access to information addressed to competent institutions (MONSTAT, Parliament of Montenegro, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions, local governments, etc.).

Political participation data shows that traditionally there are no young mayors in Montenegro and no young ministers in Montenegrin Government. The number of young MPs in the Montenegrin Parliament is four (around 5%) but with no gender balance (all four are males).

Political participation

Value		Female	Male
Young ministers in Government	0	0	0
Young deputy ministers in government	0	0	0
Young MPs in the parliament	5%	0	4 MPs
Young mayors			
On-line tools for information and participation in decision making of government and parliament	100%	/	/
On-line tools for information and participation in decision making of municipalities	100%	/	/
Existence of youth structure (councils/parliaments/unions) on national level	100%	/	/
Existence of youth structure (councils/parliaments/unions) on local level	37,5%	/	/

There is a strong commitment towards providing opportunity for online consultations and communication with the citizens on a national and local level, but the latest research of Montenegrin CSO CCI shows that less than 30% of citizens of Montenegro who use the Internet are familiar with and have used some of the electronic services in the public administration, while in addition, over two-fifths of those who know that these services exist but have never used them, and over a quarter of respondents does not know that such services even exist in Montenegro.

Social participation

Value	Female	Male
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Young people at risk of poverty	Not available	Not available	Not available
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Young people in prisons	24.65%	1,2%	25,1%
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Young people part of the social welfare system	no data	Not available	Not available
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Dropout from the secondary education	data not provided by the Ministry of education		
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Young people enrolled in tertiary education	43.0%	//	
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Young people graduated from tertiary education	16.5%	18%	14.7%
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Economic and social data show a further decrease in the quality of life of young people in 2021.

Economic participation			
	Value	Female	Male
NEET rate	26.5%	24.6%	28.3%
Youth unemployment rate	32.5%	31.5%	33.2%
Long-term youth unemployment rate	18.3%	16.5%	19.7%
Youth Labor force participation rate	44.4%	22.9%	24.2%
Youth Employment rate	30.0%	27.2%	32.7%
Self-employed young people	6.8%	/	/

There is evident increase in the unemployment rate in 2020 that continued in 2021 e.g., unemployment rate – the highest in the last 7 years.

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Unemployment rate (15-29)	29.2	28.8	26.5	26.0	22.3	30.7	32.5

The percentage of young people aged 15–29 years who are neither in employment nor in education or training in 2021 is the second largest recorded in the past 7 years (just 0.1 less than in 2020); This year it is higher for young men than young women (28.3 vs 24.6).

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NEET (15-29)	23.4	22.3	21.4	21.0	21.3	26.6	26.5

Since the youth participation index has been monitored, there is no data available in Montenegro about young people who have started their own business with financial support from the state, except for periodically published data from the IRF, which cannot be used because they include only this instrument.

The main conclusions related to the situation in Montenegro and recommendations for improvement

The year 2021 was extremely turbulent in Montenegro, which affected the implementation of the youth policy and the quality of life of the youth directly. Compared to the previous six years, the report on youth participation for 2021 shows a lack of data due to problems caused by cyber-attacks that were levelled against Montenegro end of August and September have caused disruption to public and government services. Montenegro's government and institutions are still struggling to deal with a wide-ranging cyberattack targeting several ministries and agencies. The country had never before seen a cyberattack of this greatness, certain services were switched off temporarily for security reasons, and access to data is slowed down or impossible, depending on the sector.

Nevertheless, available data shows a decrease in the quality of life and participation of youth in Montenegro during 2021, and a lack of recognition of the importance of youth policy development and implementation. The Law on Youth foresees that young people actively participate in the creation and implementation of youth policy through the coordination and development of intersectoral partnerships, cooperation with other young people and all other subjects that plan and implement youth policy. However, since the fall of 2020 and the changes in the structure of the Government, the area of youth policy was no longer in focus. The Ministry of Sports and Youth was abolished and this area was merged into one bulky apparatus - the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. After some progress, the reconstruction of the Government and the Directorate for Sports and Youth was carried out, as the body dealing with this topic was once again transferred to the newly established Ministry Sports and Youth. Although the validity of the Youth Strategy expired in 2021, no report was made on its implementation, nor was there an evaluation/assessment of its implementation.

Also, there was no competition for support of civil society organizations working in the field of youth policy during 2021, which led to an additional weakening of the youth sector that gathers young people, and together with them creates and implements programs for their strengthening and better integration into society.

Another important policy document, the Program for the Realization of Public Interest in the Field of Youth Policy, stipulated as mandatory by the Law on Youth, has not been prepared, nor has a report been prepared on the implementation of the previous one.

In order for young people to have a better quality of life, measures in the area of improvement of the process of creating public policies and greater coordination of relevant institutions are necessary. Therefore, NGO Prima believes that it is essential to:

Increase investment in youth policy and ensure sustainable funding for youth CSOs and networks implementing programs with and for youth, in line with the national youth policy framework.

Urgent evaluation of the implementation of the previous strategy and creation of a new Youth Strategy and new Program on achieving public interest in the field of youth policy, as per requested by the Law on youth.

Further strengthening of local CSOs and local youth services so that they could implement meaningful, continuous activities with and for young people, in line with their local needs.

Increase the level of cooperation and coordination between different sectors implementing youth policy in Montenegro.

Establishment of more Local Councils as part of mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making.

Provide sufficient, structural, reliable and sustainable resources and necessary political support for youth organisations to engage in youth participation and representation mechanisms.

Ensure direct involvement of youth groups, youth-led CSOs, and CSOs working with and for youth to create the new inclusive and gender mainstreamed Youth strategy that will cover the period after 2021.

Improvement of the policy framework for protecting the human rights of youth, especially young women, and prevention and fight against gender-based violence, which escalated and took over online space even more than before during the pandemic lockdown, and during 2021.

Enrich strategic and other policy documents and begin the urgent implementation of additional measures to improve the economic participation of young people, especially young people from the NEET group.

To increase youth participation policymakers should additionally consider the following recommendations:

Increase access to information: Policymakers should invest in educational programs that provide young people information about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They should also ensure that information about the political system and decision-making processes is readily available and accessible to young people.

Increase access to decision-making processes: Policymakers should create opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making processes. This could include creating youth councils or other advisory bodies that give young people a voice in decision-making.

11 | Build trust in democratic institutions: Policymakers should work to build trust in democratic institutions among young people. This could involve increasing transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, as well as providing opportunities for young people to engage directly with decision-makers.

political and civic life. This could include investing in education and training programs that provide young people with the skills and resources needed for effective participation.