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INFO SHEET

Importance of Civic Right and Youth Participation in the decision making processes



INSTITUTI SHQIPTAR PËR ÇËSHTJET PUBLIKE



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Мрежа за доживотно учење
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Background

According to the World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), 20% of local councillors and only 5% of mayors worldwide are women. Meanwhile in 2019, the representation of women in regional assemblies in the European Union was 33.3%. Only 22.2% of these institutions have women as chair. Currently the representation of women in regional executive bodies is only 35.6% worldwide.

Gender equality policy and women's engagement in public and political processes have long been in the sights of the international community. Gender equality, including ensuring gender parity in the decision-making process, has been identified as a priority area in a number of international legal documents drawn up and adopted by various international organizations and country partners. In particular, "Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls" is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in Albania as well. In this regard, as part of the 2030 Agenda, this goal aims at ensuring, among other things, the full and actual participation of women and equal leadership opportunities for them at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

In Albania, and specifically in small cities is quite difficult for women to defend their own interests, both locally and nationally, due to the limitation and lack of mechanisms help them in order to influence on the system of governance and the decision-making process. The same situation appears to be relevant for Montenegro and North Macedonia as well, where specifically in Tuzi and Tetovo is evident the lack of girls and women participation in decision making processes at local community level. It is local government that resolves the social and household issues that determine the quality of people's life. This is why it is essential that women, especially young women and girls, to have the opportunity to influence the decision-making process, both through direct participation in government and through active public engagement.

Effective participation of young women and girls in community life is essential to building a healthy, inclusive and democratic society. This is especially true given the context of the decline in young people's participation in conventional political processes. As stated in the preamble to the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Youth in Local and Regional Life: "The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society".



Importance of civic participation

Our communities and our democracy become more just and equitable when all people - individually and collectively - get involved and take action. One reason to focus on youth civic engagement is that such participation is a habit like any other: *starting early can form a habit of civic engagement that will last a lifetime. When all young people develop healthy civic habits, skills and commitment, our democracy will prosper.* This will happen when more and more diverse young people have access to opportunities that build their skills and knowledge, and that empower them to effect change, decision-making becomes more representative and communities benefit.

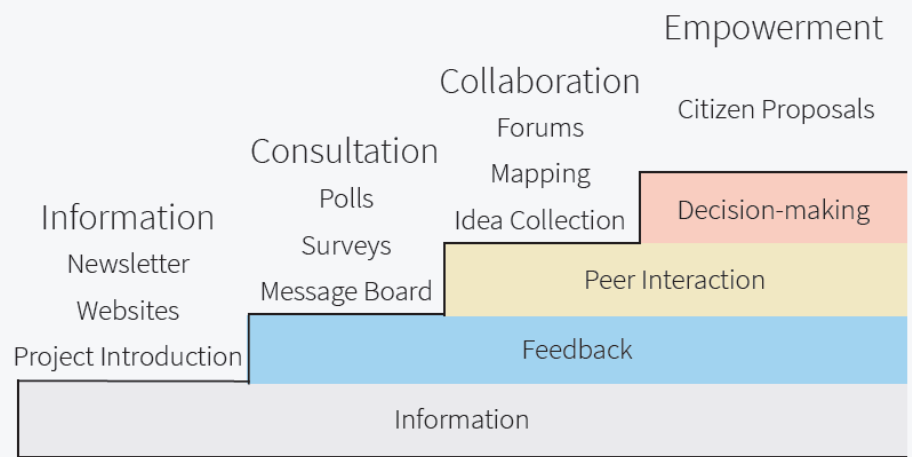
In fact, youth civic engagement is critical for a variety of reasons. Young people, while not a monolithic group, share certain characteristics that have the potential to make them powerful civic actors, and their participation carries benefits. They have unique perspectives on local issues, they often bring new ideas to the table, and they can be an inexhaustible source of energy and passion for social change.

For Democracy: Young people have a massive stake in the decisions that shape the country. Nearly all issues affect youth, and many affect youth differently or uniquely: education, healthcare, the environment, immigration, housing, gun violence, and foreign policy that may send them or their peers to war. When young people vote and participate in civic life, they can bring valuable perspectives to these issues and play an active role in shaping their future. If youth are excluded or do not participate, our democracy is not truly representing all people and not meeting its full potential.

For Communities: Youth are integral to their local communities: they help shape its culture and they have extensive social connections. Just as young people experience a community's problems firsthand, they are often on the front lines of activism and other efforts to help address them. Communities are stronger and more resilient when youth participate; our research previously found that higher levels of civic engagement can help communities weather economic downturns and lead to lower unemployment rates.

For Equity: There are troubling opportunity gaps and inequities - by race, gender, education, socioeconomic status, and many other factors - that prevent individuals and communities from thriving. One source of this inequality is underrepresentation in civic and political life as a result of marginalization or oppression, particularly among non-white, immigrant, and/or low-income communities and individual. Too often their voices go unheard, their problems go unaddressed, and a vicious circle of disengagement and neglect perpetuates injustice.

The Hierarchy of Civic Participation



Young people often talk about the definitions of public participation and its frameworks, but how to apply the concept in real life is remain a question. Prior to plan participation activities in practice, it is necessary to understand various types of participation and the techniques needed for each type. Choosing the appropriate type and tools in different circumstances and contexts is crucial. Following this fact-sheet will be defined a hierarchy of participation including four levels by the mode of communication and degree of public influence on decision-making. Remember no one level is necessarily better or more beneficial than another one.

In the following, the hierarchy of participation is explained in detail, accompanied by the techniques and examples that young people can apply for full participation:

Level	Communication Mode	Public Influence	Techniques	Examples
Information	One-way	No	Pass on information	Newsletters, websites, project introduction, brochures
Consultation	Two-way	Limited	Ask and listen to the public, take their voice in decisions	Polls, surveys, message board, interviews, suggestion boxes
Collaboration	Dialogue-based	Moderate	Organize events, distribute tasks, and make decisions together	Forums, mapping, idea-collection and voting, education events, volunteer activities
Empowerment	Dialogue-based	Full Control	Organize events for citizens, place the full decision-making power in their hands, and implement what they have decided	Citizen proposals, community-run committees



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