YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND DECISION-MAKING IN ALBANIA 2011-2015

A NATIONAL STUDY

Tirana, 2015
This study was made possible thanks to the support of:

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<td>PS</td>
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<td>Democratic Party</td>
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<td>PR</td>
<td>Republican Party</td>
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<td>PBDNJ</td>
<td>Party of Union for Human Rights</td>
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The research study “Participation of youth in politics and decision-making in Albania” was carried out thanks to the support of Olof Palme International Centre (OPIC) with financing from the Government of Sweden. CRCA and OPIC, since 2006, have been dedicated to the advancement of political rights of women and youth. Together we have set up several models and working practices that aim at the advancement of girls and women, marginalised groups and those that lack political representation. It was time for us to support this research study, as an effort to present a complete picture of the participation and representation in politics and decision-making of the young, one of the largest social groups in Albania.

CRCA and the team of researchers wish to give full-hearted thanks to all of the staff members of the organisation and the support team that were involved in the consultations with youth groups, and who facilitated and made possible the collection of information from youth organisations, government and local administration. Without their support, the completion of this study would not have been possible.

We would like to give special thanks to all the parliamentary political parties in Albania, who shared a copy of their statutes with us; the Political Youth Forums, that were involved in consultations and focus groups and were consulted several times on specific data related to their role and responsibilities within their respective political parties; and finally, all the member organisations of the Youth Leadership in Tirana, that were actively involved during all the focus groups and consultations for the completion of this study.

CRCA Albania also gives special thanks to Ms. Fatlinda Berisha, Ms. Irena Shtraza, and Mr. Altin Hazizaj for formulating and completing this study, the first of its kind in Albania that provides detailed information on the participation of youth in all levels of decision-making that have never before been published in Albania.

We wish that findings and conclusions of this study might assist political parties in Albania in revising their statutes, to ensure a wider participation and representation of the youth. We also encourage youth forums of all political parties, and youth organisations of the civil society, to use these data to launch advocacy actions, that may bring about serious improvements of the role, rights and positions youth should enjoy within political parties and their interaction with the civil society. This should upgrade participation and representation of the youth in politics and decision-making both at local and national level.

CRCA Albania
1. Executive summary

Even though young people under the age of 25 make up for half of the population in many developing countries, and one-fifth of the world population, the level of participation of youth in politics and decision-making is very low. Global data show that only 1.65% of MPs of all the countries are under the age of 20 and only 11.87% are aged 30 or younger.

In the meantime, the average age for members of parliaments in the whole world is 53 for men and 50 for women. This situation challenges the very nature of representation in the political system mad may lead to a rift or marginalisation of our young citizens. Furthermore, this causes an enforcement of stereotypes that label youngsters as people uninterested in politics, or just as mere subjects of social policies.

Young people are at the heart of what many scholars refer to as “a crisis of representation in democracy.” Low voter turnouts in European Parliament elections in western Europe, or local polls in eastern and central Europe; dwindling numbers of youth in traditional organisations such as political parties, trade unions or even youth organisations in western Europe as compared to late 80s and early 90s; these are all signs of accumulation of problems linked to youth participation in politics.

The youth played a very important role in changing the system in all former communist countries from a single-party system to a pluralistic democracy. However, in the last three decades, the focus of attention regarding the youth were mostly related to problems that young people faced in a democratic system, such as unemployment, inequality, social exclusion, addiction, etc. In our country, also a fragile post-communist democracy, the situation of the youth is problematic, especially when it comes to participation in decision-making, within political parties or civil society organisations. Data and studies on empowerment and equal opportunities seldom take into account the youth, and are limited to sporadic initiatives of the civil society, but this has never produced a clear picture of real participation in different levels of politics and decision-making.

This study is the first of its kind, producing both quantitative and qualitative data collected from several levels of decision-making institutions in Albania. The study presents an overview of the participation of the youth in the Albanian government and parliament, the local government (city halls and municipal councils), political parties and their youth forums, and the participation of the youth in civil society organisations.

The data that we have collected and analysed for the purpose of this study have led to some main findings:

- Albania presents to some extent a positive image regarding the drafting of national policies for the youth, including their participation in politics and decision-making. However, even though there have been improvements in the democratisation of the political environment
in the country, these positive steps were not followed by legal initiatives to support the participation of the youth in politics.

- Statutes and regulations of all political parties in Albania include specific roles, duties and responsibilities for their youth forums, even though some of these functions are limited or in some cases are decided based on certain quotas and proportions. The role and importance of these youth organisations diminishes when it comes to assigning young people in decision-making positions within a party, or at a local or national level;

- The number of young people in the central and executive government is still low, only 7.1% in the level of representation in the legislative (parliament). Representation at the local level, although most mayors continue to be over the age of 35, back in 2015 local elections marked a significant increase of young people under age 35 for members of the City Councils;

- The rate of inclusion of the youth in the decision-making process within political parties is very small, as most of the political parties have not fully endorsed or sanctioned the right of youth to representation. Thus, they are deprived of the opportunity to play a pro-active role in politics and influence legislation, policy and new programs, both at local and national level. At the same time, the gender component of that small group is disappointing and varies from party to party;

- Financial dependency and lack of funds is a major issue of concern for all youth forums. The lack of a dedicated budget hinders any boost in participation and representation of the youth in the decision-making process within a party;

- Problems related to the youth not always receive the necessary attention from policy-making and decision-taking institutions, such as party leadership, parliament, government, and municipal councils and that is a major point of concern. On the other hand, the commitment and the level of organisation of the youth to further their cause is poor, on exchange of information, and coordinating actions on youth problems;

- The youth often get involved in the civil society as a stepping-stone towards politics and decision-making. The inclusion of youth in the decision-making process is often obstructed by the old-fashioned mind-set of traditional party members, who consider the youth as inexperienced;

To improve the situation of the youth and to increase their participation at different levels of politics and decision-making, we have listed at the last chapter of this study a number of recommendations for the parliament, the government, political and decision-making institutions within political parties, both at a local and national level. Some of these recommendations are directed to the members of youth forums of political parties and youth organisations of the civil society.
Some of the main recommendations include:

- The need to approve news laws and improve legislation “on the Youth” and “Voluntarism”;
- Amendments of the Electoral Code, to allow for a minimum representation quota of 20 per cent for the youth;
- The parliament should pay much more attention to issues and problems related to the youth;
- The establishment of an Alliance of Young MPs;
- The allocation of the funds necessary to implement the National Action Plan for the Youth (PKVR) 2015-2020¹;
- The introduction of youth quotas for every leading and decision-making structure within a party;
- The adoption and implementation of new models of financing for the youth political organisations;
- Transforming of Youth Forums of Political Parties into empowering and motivational associations for the youth;
- The establishment of an association to amplify the youthful messages and needs of all FRPPs;
- The improvement of the political environment and discourse; etc.

If all the actors include in their agendas issues related to the youth and coordinate actions to improve participation of the youth in politics and decision-making, they would bring about positive change not only to the youth, but it would foster democracy and cooperation between all citizens and all the links in the society chain.

It is very important to understand that political changes in the young generations today will have long-term effects for the future of democracy. Because young people are only discovering politics in a period of mistrust, protest, and growing abstention, these new parameters of their relationship to politics will probably continue to influence their future attitudes and behaviours².

2. Introduction

Participation in decision-making is a broad term that includes several aspects of direct participation of citizens in the realm of politics, economy, society and many other arenas. Ideally, participation in decision-making requires that all actors have their saying in decisions that directly or indirectly affect their lives. This form of government empowers citizens, by giving them control and making up for a more sustainable decision-making and implementation process.

Youth is revolutionary; it builds the future and affects development (Bell, et al. 2008). Youth initiatives are an important part of its direct involvement and civic commitment in the community. Initiatives undertaken by the youth allow them to be actively involved and directly engaged in working with their local communities, and this serves as a springboard for participation and civic commitment. The active participation of the youth in decisions and actions taken at the local level and further up the chain is fundamentally important if we want to build a comprehensive and more democratic society. However, local and national policies are seldom discussed, developed, or implemented with and by the youth. The existing legislation says that local governments should work with committees of local communities, but actually these committees are fictitious and in most cases, the rights of young people to take part in these committees are ignored. Experience shows that this lack of active participation is harmful to the youth and makes their stance and input non-existent.

Changes in the nature of civic and political commitment are conditioned on the ever-changing socio-economic context of a country. From this point of view the lives of the youth has changed tremendously during these last decades. Scholars and scientists, especially sociologists, have studied and addressed these social changes that affect (young) citizens in a democratic society. According to their findings, the lives of the young are defined less by traditional social structures and are more inclined towards choices and risks (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). These changes are affected and reflect the transition from youth to adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Considering that, citizens of emerging democracies are more inclined towards improving their living conditions (Giddens, 1991) their political and civic participation is oriented towards certain socio-economic changes that have affected changes in values.

The involvement of youth in circles that can affect change in society, in post-communist countries has developed in several directions that have to do with the cultural context and the aspirations of these societies. During the communist dictatorship, the participation of the youth was sanctioned and directed by the single-party political system. Youth activism that contributed in the collapse of the communist regimes did not last long, and presently we may say that youth activism in post-communist countries, is below satisfactory levels.
required by the European Union (especially for those EU candidate member countries)\(^3\) (Kovachev, 2000).

In all post-communist countries, the youth played an important role in changing the system, from a single-party system to a pluralistic democracy. However, in the last three decades, the focus of attention regarding the youth were mostly related to problems that young people faced in a democratic system, such as unemployment, inequality, social exclusion, addiction, prostitution, etc. The youth in these countries is strongly oriented towards consumerism, and is influenced from the freedom of action and chaos that accompanies democratic developments (Mitev & Riordan, 1996; et al, 1998). Also, changes in the level of political involvement of the youth, has left a mark in the development of post-communist generations. During the first years of the post-communist era, the youth tended to support pro-democracy parties, while today they are freer on their political choices, and sometimes these choices are affected by personal pragmatism or family connections.

The concept of juvenile involvement has evolved from the youth as a problem (vulnerable young people, going through hard times, marginalised, youth facing poverty, limited or scarce education, different forms of discrimination and limited job opportunities) towards youth as a source (of change and dynamism) as referred to in the EU White Paper 2001. Policies on youth consider the young people today as a powerful creative and innovative force that affect politics through participation, as an important catalyst in reforming political systems and economic opportunities.

However, the situation of youth involvement continues to be problematic, when it comes to real participation and access to decision-making in political parties and the civil society. Data on the youth are seldom listed in empowerment and equal opportunities research, and are limited to sporadic initiatives of the civil society, but this has never produced a clear picture of real participation in different levels of politics and decision-making. For this reason, we believe that this study is a useful contribution, the first and so far, the only of its kind, in presenting data collected from different levels of politics and decision-making in Albania.

We wish that this study be used as a tool to increase the awareness of the youth on the rights and opportunities available to them to engage in politics and decision-making processes. We also hope to serve as a reminder to politicians, decision-makers, and public officials regarding their obligations to implement existing policies to ensure the participation and representation of the youth in all levels.

The study "Participation of the youth in politics and decision-making in Albania," being the first of its kind, aims at analysing opportunities that the Albanian young have today to

\(^3\) Kovachev, S., Keys to youth participation in Eastern Europe. Council of Europe, (2000).
partake and be represented in decision-making institutions in government and local power, and political parties. This study and the analysis are on the Albanian legislation and use as a starting point existing policies that in theory should facilitate participation and representation of the young in politics and decision-making.

This study also aims to measure the true level of youth participation in politics, via their inclusion in consulting bodies such as advisory boards, local councils, etc. In addition, we aim to research their actual representation in decision-making institutions such as the parliament, the government, town halls, municipal councils, political parties, etc, then comparing pledges and promises with what transpired in real life.

In this study, you will also find some positive examples relating to the participation and involvement of the young in politics and decision-making at central and local levels, as well as a range of good working practices in politics, implemented by youth organisations of the civil society.

In conclusion, we want to point out that during these last decades there has been a profound political change in the intergenerational dynamics and within the socialisation process itself. Future citizens will not be the citizens of yesterday. They will probably continue to be more critical, more likely to abstain, more likely to protest, more sophisticated and to have less confidence in politics. In this sense, an obvious generational gap does indeed exist. Therefore, the transformations observed today will affect not only the way politics is practised and the expression of political choices, but more broadly speaking they will change the future of democracy. The introduction of more young people in politics and decision-making today, will secure a stronger democracy and more confidence in politics tomorrow.

*Note:* We would like to remind that the definition of “youth” might differ in different countries depending on specific situations and historical context, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic, and socio-cultural settings. However, United Nations's definition that uses 15-24 age cohorts as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development. Some other institutions refer to “youth” for people up to the age of 35. Considering that the average age in Albania is 35 (Census, 2011) and the poor participation of the young in decision-making and politics in Albania, for the purpose of this study we will define “youth” as people aged 15 to 35.

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http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8422373/26_chapter_3.pdf/36718682-8625-41c4-8082-9b1fcd2f9db8

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to measure the true level of participation of the young in politics based on the results of the local elections of 2011, parliamentary elections of 2013 and local elections of 2015 in Albania, while to examine their actual representation in political and decision-making institutions. This chapter offers a detailed outlook on research methods used for the purpose of this study, to meet the objectives and the aim of the research, by delineating the research population, methods on analysing the data, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

3.1 Nature of the study

This study aims to measure the true level of participation of the young in politics and to examine their actual representation in political and decision-making institutions, through secondary analysis of statistical data, based on the reported age of all the members of parliament in Albania’s National Assembly, chairpersons of local government units and youth in leaderships of parliamentary political parties.

We used a mixed methods research to complete this study and to provide data and answers on the main points of this examination of the political landscape.

A mixed methods study results in an understanding that goes beyond simply adding together separate quantitative and qualitative studies (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Furthermore, the combining of two methods, can show us how the contextual nature of qualitative data, may be used to make more representative and generalise quantitative finds (Greene & Caracelli, 2003).

Mixed method design includes the process of collecting, analysing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative data to answer research questions (Bryman, 2006; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). By using this research approach we realised the triangulation of the information, and through methodology triangulation, the use of qualitative method to explore quantitative data, we gained more understanding of the finds of this study. Its usage allows us to compare findings and results from one method with those deriving from the other method. This comparison between methods enables the researcher to keep the information in check, and making possible that the findings may be (i) corroborated by contrasting data amassed from different sources and (ii) enriched by adding something new and diverse from one method to the other.

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3.2 Research tools and collection of data

**Review of records and reports** – During the first phase of this study, we researched a wide range of official records and reports on the participation of the youth and the actual situation of their involvement in politics and decision-making in Albania and other countries. This phase of the study also focused on reviewing official reports and legislation on the youth. Parts of this research include indicators and findings from analysing of the data, evaluation reports, national and international studies on this subject.

The data for this study were collected during the period January-March 2015. As mentioned above to complete this study we used a two-method approach: (i) quantitative research and (ii) qualitative research.

**3.2.1 Quantitative Research**

We carried out a secondary analysis of statistical data on the age and gender of members of parliament and local government officials. This segment of the study was used to analyse the actual level of inclusion of the young in politics in Albania. For the purpose of this study, we used data published by the Central Election Commission (KQZ), and other personal data on mayors and municipal council members collected from parliamentary political parties in Albania.

This study contains an analysis of data and information on the age of people elected as MPs in the 2013 parliamentary elections and local government officials following the 2011 and 2015 local results. This data has been updated to reflect any changes that may have occurred in the Parliament and the Government of Albania until March 2015 and the final results of Local Elections of June 2015. The statistical information came in different formats and some of the data were not useful to the purpose of this study, and for this reason the data were processed from scratch leaving out elements of no relevance to the study. The end product revealed the actual rate of youth involvement in parliament and local government institutions.

**3.2.2 Qualitative Research**

Focus groups with the young (FGD)

a. Representatives of youth organisations of political parties (FRPP). The purpose of FGDs – was to collect information on the actual involvement and inclusion of the young in decision-making processes within their own political parties, their interaction with other party
institutions, cooperation of the young with each-other, and discussions on what can be done to improve the inclusion of the youth in politics and decision-making within and outside of a political party. The working group drafted a set of guidelines that was used throughout the duration of FGDs to ensure continuity and avoid discrepancies in the structure of discussions from a focus group to the next. FGDs with members of youth organisations were held in the offices of the organisation in charge of this study, while FGDs with the leaders of parliamentary FRPPs took place in neutral venues. During the course of FGDs some interesting dynamics came into play, and that helped to identify problems and hardships that the young are faced with, based on the experience and the point of view of participants in the FGDs. In total, we organised two FGDs with a group of representatives from all the major political parties, mainly parties with representatives in parliament. The nonattendance of a representative from the leadership of the youth organisation of the Democratic Party in FGDs with leaders of parliamentary political parties was addressed afterwards with an interview with the same questions and topics as suggested in the set of guidelines. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was compiled for each of the FGDs (see appendix 1).

b. Representatives of the civil society (organisations involved with addressing youth issues). These FGDs aimed at collecting information regarding the positions of the young not involved with politics, but who still contribute, in a way or another, to further the cause of the young.

FGDs with youth representatives of the civil society took place in the premises of the organisation in charge of this study. These FGDs lasted 80-120 minutes each. The audio of the discussions was recorded and transcribed within the next 24 hours. During the course of these meetings, notes were kept to identify important topics, problems, and sub-problems. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was compiled for each of the FGDs (see appendix 2).

Semi-structured interviews with persons identified as being successful in politics and decision-making in political parties. Interviews were conducted with people elected in parliament or at the head of local government units at the time the study was conducted, and who were younger than 35 when they were elected. Interview subjects were identified, and contacted by the project team and informed on the nature of the study and their role in it. In preliminary meetings was decided on the times and venues of the next meetings to conduct interviews. Interviews took place in neutral venues. For these interviews, we compiled a single questionnaire that used for each of these interviews (see appendix 3).

Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were conducted at a time deemed suitable by the interviewee, including early in the morning, late afternoons, or weekends. There were no interruptions during the course of the interviews. All of the interviews were recorded, and
transcribed within the next 24 hours by the person that conducted the interview. The interviewees consented to the recording of the interviews.

**Templates of good working practices in politics** are a collection of success stories by organisations dedicated to issues and problems of the young, concerning the involvement of youth groups in politics and decision-making processes. The purpose of Templates of good working practices was the sharing of experience of those organisations that have made a change for the better in a field or a subject matter that affects the youth. Answers to questions and in these templates have identified and simplified the successful action undertaken by these organisations and these practices have been portrayed as examples to be followed by other youth organisations. These templates were distributed to youth organisations of the civil society throughout Albania, and their completion was left at the discretion of the organisation. The template was compiled in the form of a questionnaire that included open-ended and closed-ended questions *(see appendix 4)*. The templates of good working practices were distributed electronically to the targeted organisations and some of them were filled electronically, and were then handed over to the team of researchers for further analysis and use for this study.

**The review of statutes of political parties in Albania** was carried out to be better acquainted with the “constitution” of each of the parliamentary political parties in Albania, to see from up close duties and responsibilities of these organisations / youth forums, and what rights and functions they have within their own party. This review included a legal examination to identify ways and methods in the party statutes to further support and empower political youth organisations and individual young people that chose to adhere to a political party. The research team managed to secure copies of statutes of all of the parliamentary political parties in Albania, and based on the information collected they put together a comparative matrix of participation, role and responsibilities of the young and youth organisations within political parties.

### 3.3 Research population

The research population for the purpose of this study were Albanian youngsters until the age of 35, militants in political parties, their youth forums and members of the civil society that work with the young. Listed below is a breakdown of the research population according to research tools and research methods that were used.

**Secondary analysis of the data**: the sample for this component of the study, were all the young people included in the lists of political parties (elected from lists of candidates in the 2013 parliamentary elections and local officials after the 2011 and 2015 local elections).
The research on local government officials for year 2011 focused only on 65 municipalities and 11 Tirana borough administrations, anticipating changes after the reshuffle of the local government in the framework of the Reform of Territory Administration. After the elections of 2015, a new territorial reform in Albania divided the country in 61 municipalities, while the communes are no longer local power entities. Therefore, 308 communes of pre-June 2015 local administration were not included in this study. The research focused on those elected officials who were younger than 35 on election day (parliamentary or local). The identification of this pool of people facilitated the analysis of the data to ascertain the percentage of young people elected to parliament or local administrations (mayors and members of municipal councils).

Focus groups (FGD): The sample for focus groups were members (both in leadership and rank-and-file) of youth organisations of political parties (FRPP) and civil society. Two focus groups were conducted with representatives of FRPPs and two more meetings took place with representatives from civil society organisations. The participants were young people aged 18-35 in leadership positions and rank-and-file members of FRPPs engaged in politics and actively involved within the workings of party structures (FGDs with FRPPs), as well as leaders and activists of civil society organisations (FGDs with OSHCs). As many as 27 young people (9 females, 18 males) took part in these FGDs.

Profile of interviewees: Persons selected to portray success stories of youth involvement in politics, and who consented to our call for cooperation, were members of parliament or chairpersons in local government institutions. They are aged 20-35. Only three MPs and one local administration official accepted our invitation for an interview. We had previously shortlisted seven young people to tell their success stories but we received several negative answers, and not for lack of trying.

Templates of good working practices: The templates of good working practices were distributed by email to more than 50 civil society organisations that work for/with the young and cover the whole of the country. As many as ten organisations completed these questionnaires, and the research team selected seven good working practices to be reported in this study.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Researchers never applied any sort of pressure during the process of recruiting and inclusion in this study, fully respecting ethical principles and personal decisions. Potential subjects of research were asked if they were interested to take part in the study and were informed regarding their contribution and potential risks from participating in this study. In

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some cases, individuals that were selected to be included in this study opted out. These subjects were replaced by other youngsters that suited the purpose of this study.

It was made clear to research subjects that their participation was not compulsory and they had the right to decide not to be a part of study or to pull out at any time, as well as the right not to answer any questions they deemed too sensitive.

The subjects were notified that they were selected to be included in the study, the purpose of this research and the length of time needed to conduct interviews, and then they were asked to give their consent to be involved in this study or not. Not a single interview was cut short.

*Researchers were very careful to respect ethical considerations*, such as:

- **Confidentiality and full discretion** – the data that were collected for the purpose of this study were processed in full confidentiality and discretion by the researcher-interviewer only, and were not used for any purpose other than those specified in the study.
- **Anonymity** – all FGDs with the young were conducted while respecting the right of participants to anonymity. Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, subjects were assured that the information they would provide would be processed in broad general terms, and that their personal beliefs or points of view would not be associated to those of other participants on discussions. In instances of interviews used to portray profiles of success stories of young people in politics, all of the interviewees were informed beforehand that some of the information would be disseminated and they gave their consent regarding the publication of the information they shared for this study.
- **Non-judgementalism** – FGDs and interviews were conducted by the researchers themselves. They were careful that participants not be judged based on their lifestyles, political affiliations, values or decisions that had taken during the course of their careers.

### 3.5 Study limitations

This research does not intend to generalise its findings beyond the pool of people it studied. All of the opinions shared by the subjects of this study are preserved in their original form and cannot be generalised beyond the cases under scrutiny. Study’s target group are young people under 35 years old in political parties or civil society, elected to parliament in the 2013 polls and winners of 2011 and 2015 local elections. This study was conceived and implemented to answer specific questions and was based on data that did not aim to rationalise youth participation (such as data published by KQZ). This study represents the first attempt to analyse participation in politics from the point of view of the young. The authors are aware of the limitations of this study, due to difficulties in collecting data and statistics, their lack of, and the size of the sample of FGDs and interviews.
4. Albanian youth: limited participation and representation in politics and decision-making

“Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn’t mean politics won’t take an interest in you.” Pericles

The ever-growing importance and specific weight of issues related to the young in the agenda of international development, has encouraged many countries to see it as a priority the involvement of the young in decision-making. There is a significant increase in awareness at the global level regarding the young and their right not only to decide on how to allocate resources, but that they have all the know-how and the political expertise to be introduced into decision-making institutions. Theoretically, there are several ways and levels for the youth to get involved in decision-making, regarding instruments, processes, and structures available. The degree, to which the young may benefit from these opportunities in everyday life, depends mainly on the importance assigned to these structures and the openness of decision-making institutions, as well as the ability and willingness of the young to be pro-actively involved in these structures.

“The crisis of representation in democracy” has at its epicentre the young. Some of the more alarming issues, raised by scholars supporting the theory of ‘a crisis in democracy’, deal with the downfall of political systems, institutions and social elites in many countries of western and south-eastern Europe (Newton, 2001; et al, 1997). Social scientists have tried to document what they unanimously define as an increase in the level of “dissatisfaction” of European citizens and mistrust towards institutions of democratic representation (Norris, 1999; Torcal and Montero, 2006). Low numbers of young voters in European Parliament elections in western Europe or in local elections in central and eastern Europe; dwindling numbers of youth in traditional organisations such as political parties, trade unions or even youth organisations in western and south-eastern Europe as compared to late 80s and early 90s; these are all signs of accumulation of problems linked to the participation of youth in politics. These developments have been labelled as “disenfranchisement” (Adsett, 2003), “depoliticalisation of the young” (Vrcan 2002), “social vulnerability” (Tivadar and Mrvar, 2002), etc.

The plunge in youth involvement is a major focus of attention for scholars and policymakers and is considered an indication of a crisis of action in the citizenry (Macedo, Alex-Assensoh, & Berry, 2005; Stoker, 2006). Social scientists have attributed this alleged crisis to several factors, including a drop in civic participation (Putnam, 2000), low levels of
confidence in political institutions (Maier, 2000; et al, 2007), hyper-individualism lifestyle, values and risks (Beck, 1992; et al, 2005), de-politicisation of public policies (Hay, 2007) and a surge in cynicism regarding the politicisation of the media (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Stoker, 2006).

It is clear that the industrialised developed countries have witnessed a fall in the number of voters (Franklin, 2004; et al., 2002, 2007) and an aging of the membership of political parties (van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). These trends are more obvious among the young (aged 15-24), who are alienated from politics (Dionne, 1999; et al. 2003). According to Pippa Norris (2003), “political disengaging” is believed to concern the whole population, but the youth are widely believed to be especially disappointed with the institutions of democratic representation, making them apathetic (in the best-case scenario), or even disconnected (the worst-case scenario).

A wide range of studies and research, have analysed these changes in the political behaviour of the citizenry in developing countries, by focusing in the usual trend of political and civic commitment and exploring reasons at the core of these tendencies (Dalton, 2008; et al., 2004, 2011). Other studies focused on the young have analysed the nature and specifics of youth participation in individual countries (Dalton, 2009; et al., 2012) and at an international level (Norris, 2003; et al., 2010).

In this context, the young are diversifying civic and political commitments (Norris, 2002); from consumerism policies, to community campaigns and online networking; from local community back-roads to the internet; from political parties and social movements to social networks. Furthermore, the data collected from numerous studies, clearly show that the young are not apathetic as far as politics is concerned. They have their own points of view and get involved in “politics” in many diverse ways that fit their schedules and rhythm of everyday lives (Dalton, et al., 2009, 2007).

In more stabilised and mature democracies, the young are more inclined to partake in politics as an outlet of protest to express their opinions and views, they are even more eager than older generations to sign petitions, join movements and take part in protest rallies (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). These forms of engagements appear to bridge somewhat the participation gap between age groups, but they also point out at the socio-economic differences (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010; Sander & Putnam, 2010).

The representative ability of mainstream politicians and traditional political institutions has weakened recently. Social, economic and technological catalysts have made a dent in the political culture – by blurring the division between traditional social classes thanks to a fluid work market (Beck, 1992; Roberts, Clark, & Wallace, 1994), by redefining communities with the emergence of social networks (Castells, 2000; McClurg, 2003) and the internet revolution (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010).

Politicians and political parties have fought hard to adapt to these changes. Even though
citizens are more concerned with policies and strategies rather than politics per se (Bang & Esmark, 2009; Norris, 2003), the leadership ability of politicians has been devalued and eroded by the influence of interest groups and the transfer of power to group of experts (such as government boards and committees), the international economy (such as multinational and international banks) and international organisations (such as the European Union). All these mechanisms and institutions have reduced the power and the ability of politics to distribute goods and wealth to the community.

In addition, the young in developed countries are faced with a more competitive environment, budget cuts for public services and programs (the young may depend on these services), and a ferocious labour market to the young (high rates of unemployment in most western and Southeastern European countries). The chaos that resulted from the international financial crisis has revealed a lack of inter-generational solidarity (a natural cycle of change that was supposed to keep going no matter what).

The young have also been hit from a decrease in welfare checks, expenditure and budget cuts for services and education, soaring university fees, etc. For these reasons, it is fair to say that policies implemented in the aftermath of the international financial crisis have made things worse for the young. Even though these developments may encourage some youngsters to get involved in alternative forms of politics (protesting against public policies), they’re still disappointed with politics, such as London protest rallies (December 2010), or the young elsewhere in Europe (the so-called “indignados” – protesting at the high rates of unemployment, 2011) and the “occupy” movement in the US (from 2011 onwards).

There has been very little research concerning the involvement of the young in politics and decision-making in Albania, and a review or comparison of data on youth participation proved difficult due to lack of such studies. However, there are some interesting finds from the literature relating to social factors that affect the level and the quality of youth participation in decision-making, revealing the important role of a country’s culture, by discouraging or encouraging the participation of the young in decision-making.

Fortunately, the literature at our disposal is useful in other ways. It offers more insight on conditions and circumstances that affect the development of adults and organisational changes. This literature also provides a strong socio-historical context that helps to understand fluctuations of youth involvement in decision-making, with clear implications on challenges and opportunities that the future may hold in the evolution of youth participation in politics. In addition, these data offer a picture on the development of teenagers and the young with a view at their contribution to improve organisational developments, keeping in mind what Benjamin Disraeli8 said: “The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity.”

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8 UK politician
One research study (FES, 2002) regarding the participation of the young in decision-making reveals and identifies several reasons why we need to improve youth involvement in politics:

a. First of all, it is a question of numbers because the young amount for one fourth of the total of the population. According to a 2011 census, the average age of the resident population in Albania is 35.3 year-old, while some 45 per cent of the population if under the age of 30;

b. There is a need to bring a breath of fresh air to politics, an influx of modernity, to break free the close circles of traditional politics. For example, during the last 20 years the political circles were opened only to insiders, without taking into consideration abilities and contributions that newcomers or outsiders could offer to politics;

c. The society needs to bring into play a new class of politicians based on abilities and individuals merits, not based on one-sided selections or invitations by senior politicians or leaders of political parties;

d. We need to address apathy, starting from the low percentage of voters in elections (regardless of reasons), to involvement in voluntarism and community work, involvement in the drafting of local development policies, to running for office in local institutions, borough administrations, etc;

e. We need to change the social environment that is presently extremely polarised. Politics is ever-present in any discussions, because it is closely related to living conditions and quality of life, but there needs to be more interaction of people with politics and the young should facilitate that, and improve the political climate.

The disconnection of the young from political involvement is more noticeable than in other age groups. However, low levels of youth participation may be related to a lower involvement in politics of the population at large in post-communist societies over the years. Voter turnouts are generally lower when compared to numbers in the first few years after the regime change in early 90s.

On-going research on youth participation in various levels of decision-making suggest that political commitment is related to how robust and well developed a democracy is in a country, based on the level of confidence that people have in a functioning democracy. On the other hand, transitional societies have a lower standard of living, a seesaw of values and anti-values, a lack of an inherited democratic culture, and all that exacerbate the wide range of problems such a country faces. Everyone is stuck between yesterday and today, morality and immorality, perdition and power, and votes in a pragmatic way for whoever may provide him survival or empowerment.

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Interestingly, some local studies have discovered that there is a direct connection between political inclinations of the young and their families. There are much more young people involved in politics when compared to several years ago, but many youngsters get involved in politics to find jobs. The political struggle and the fight for power are the main leitmotivs of the Albanian society, so many young people consider adhering to a political party the only way to find a job and secure a future. This is the main reason why they do not get involved voluntarily in non-partisan youth organisations, youth clubs, etc, because they pledge their loyalty to a political party in exchange of a job. Militant circles, political strongholds, and families still exert a powerful sway on political positions and choices of the young, because votes are not cast based on ideas, programs or political platforms but rather small-minded interests and short-term gains.

However, the situation appears less dramatic as more and more youngsters decide to get involved in politics. Studies and research have found out in these last few years that the Albanian young are much more involved in initiatives and events organised by the main political parties than those organised by the community of the civil society. Regardless of different forms of political contributions and reasons for getting involved in politics, the involvement of youth brings to politics a breath of fresh air, the necessity, and the opportunity to improve policies regarding the young. Youth involvement in politics, even if it were just window dressing for electoral meetings, indirectly imposes on politicians to turn their attention to the youth and pay their dues in exchange for their votes. On the other hand, supporting a political force and getting involved in the party, improves to some extent the political development of the young, but in some cases it may cause a complete disconnect from politics.

One of the reasons that discourages the young from politics and keeps them away is the unfriendly environment within a political party. In addition, the fierce struggle for power, even within one’s party, affects negatively the perception of the young to see politics as a tool to serve the public interest. Blatant abuses of principles and values for the sake of personal gains, easy switches back and forth from a political party to the other, abnormal inceptions of ruling coalitions, and lack of political maturity kill off any confidence the young may have in fair politics. To make matters worse, the belligerent political debate and discourse instead of establishing an environment of cooperation and compromise perpetuates discord and hate. (FES, 2012. p. 36)

Below we have listed some interesting finds from research studies on the Albanian youth:

- Rural or urban origin and regional provenance are two main factors of discrimination among the young;
- The young are more tolerant and open-minded to a variety of social groups, but they strongly prejudiced towards homosexuals;
- Only 16 per cent of the young has participated in volunteering activities;
- The most important values to the young are personal dignity, tolerance, and correctness;
- Most of the Albanian young, some 80 per cent of them, profess themselves religious, and only one fifth declare to being atheists;
- The majority of university students are girls, and their dominance increases proportionally in higher levels of the education system;
- The Albanian youth spend in average two to three hours a day for studying, but boys devote less time to this process;
- The young in Albania are not very interested in domestic political developments; because they believe their votes or their participation in polls have no effect on the way the country is governed. Only a very small portion of the young displays any interest to politics.

Alongside reporting of objectives and findings of this study, we completed a short analysis that aims at presenting a clearer picture and a wider range of information to ease and maximise access to data and information for future use by researchers.
5. From tokenism to participation? Legal and statutory framework on youth participation in decision-making and politics in Albania.

"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born in democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

— Kofi Annan, former UN secretary General

5.1 Levels of participation in decision-making

The participation of young people in politics and decision-making is both a public and private matter. It is an issue of public importance because it affects the approach of the government, public institutions, political parties and the society to youth in general. It also has a major influence on the freedom of action the young might enjoy, and the ability to participate and be represented.

It is also a private matter, because the young interact with the society around them since early childhood, and experiences or lessons learned during this time guide them or steer them away from civic or political participation, involvement in social activities and aspirations to represent other youngsters in politics or decision-making. Real-life observations and research paint a bleak picture on participation and representation of the young in all levels worldwide.

Youth participation is a contemporary and on-going problem. In many countries and societies, including Albania, the involvement of the young in politics is considered as a matter of charity and hand-outs rather than an important step in building a sustainable democracy, and a healthy upbringing of future leaders. This issue is still a novelty to researchers and scholars. Studies on legal and social domains are limited and incomplete, and there is a lack of meta-analysis on positive effects of participation and representation of the young in politics and decision-making.

"A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must be gradually acquired through practice. It is for this reason that there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children to participate in any aspiring democracy, and particularly in those nations already convinced that they are democratic." ¹⁰

Roger Hart, one of the authors of this research ¹¹, has analysed at length the concept of participation in decision-making of children and the young. In his essay “From tokenism to citizenship,” Hart goes beyond concepts of involvement, and has developed a model in levels of participation, in what he describes as the ascension “from tokenism to real participation.”

This ladder representations of eight steps, split in two main levels: “non participation” (or tokenism: steps 1-3) and “degree of participation” (steps 4-8), depicts how the degree of participation is higher when young and adults are equals in decision-making, while non-participation characterised by: manipulation (1), decoration (2), and tokenism (3).

The Hart ladder is one of most widely used methods to measure participation of children, young, and citizens in decision-making.

“Manipulation is the title of the lowest rung of the ladder of participation. Sometimes adults feel that the end justifies the means. One example is that of pre-school children carrying political placards concerning the impact of social policies on children. If children have no understanding of the issues and hence do not understand their actions, then this is manipulation. Such manipulation under the guise of participation is hardly an appropriate way to introduce children into democratic political processes. Sometimes such actions stem from adults’ unawareness of children’s abilities.”¹²

¹² Idem
5.2 National and international legislation on participation of youth in decision-making

Even though the young under the age of 25 make up half of the population in many developing countries and one-fifth of the global population, the access of the young in politics and decision-making is at very poor levels. This situation challenges the very nature of representation in the political system and may lead to a rift or marginalisation of our young citizens. Furthermore, this causes an enforcement of stereotypes that label youngsters as people uninterested in politics, or just as mere subjects of social policies, or even worse as criminals.\(^\text{13}\)

Global data show that only 1.65% of MPs of all the countries are under the age of 20 and only 11.87% are aged 30 or younger.\(^\text{14}\) In the meantime, the average age for members of parliaments in the whole world is 53 for men and 50 for women.

The UN has adopted a series of international standards regarding “participation” as a fundamental political right. The first step was the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949), followed the International Treaty on Civil and Political Rights (1996), the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of Children (1992), and a number of protocols, bylaws and guidelines, but some of them are non-binding agreements with no obligations on signatory countries.

At the national domain, the situation is even more disturbing. Albania has achieved progress towards democratisation of its political environment after the collapse of the communist regime, but this progress has not been matched by legislation initiatives in support of youth participation. Even though the Constitution of Albania recognises the right to organise, to vote, to association, and the right to free speech as constitutional rights, but there is still room for improvement in the legislation.

The electoral code of the Republic of Albania has set a minimum entering quota for women at 30 per cent of candidates in parliamentary elections and 50 per cent for municipal councils, but there is no positive discrimination on participation of the young in decision-making. At the same time, the law “On Political Parties in Albania” makes no reference at all on such a topic.\(^\text{15}\) In recent years, there have been some attempts to improve legislation such as the drafting of two laws: “On the Youth” and “On Volunteering,” however these draft laws were not adopted by the parliament at the time of completion of this study.

Despite all these new developments, there are still no legal standards regarding youth participation as a distinct social group in politics and decision-making. There is no official explanation on the matter, but it is widely believed that the young are dismissed and

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\(^{13}\) UNDP (2012). Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle.

\(^{14}\) UNDP and IPU (2012). Global Parliamentary Report

\(^{15}\) Law No. 8580, date 17.2.2000, “On Political Parties"
considered as a mere transitory social group between children (Under 18) and adults (over 18), and for this reason no legal framework is deemed necessary.

However, data and statistics on youth participation show that it is very important to draft and adopt new standards on promotion of youth participation in all levels of politics and decision-making.

The Council of Europe has a more positive regarding youth participation in decision-making. The CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, in 1992\(^{16}\) and later in 2003 adopted the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life\(^ {17}\). This charter is one of the main European standards on fostering and encouraging youth participation in national and European level, with a special focus on participation of the young in local governments’ decision-making.

The European charter takes into consideration all aspects of participation and empowering of the young, including organisations of the civil society and political parties. This charter is non-binding on member countries, including Albania; however, it should serve as a road map for the local administration concerning measures that should be adopted to improve youth participation.

We have selected some paragraphs from the Charter, section II.8, points 54-56, that refer specifically with the participation of young people in NGOs and political parties:

| 54. | A vibrant, independent, and active non-governmental sector is an essential element of any truly democratic society. It is also important that other sectors of civil society such as political parties are strong and active at a local and regional level. Participation in the democratic life of any country, region, or locality is about more than voting every few years. That is why participation in NGOs and political parties is so important, because they help citizens to be involved in, and influence, decisions and actions on an ongoing basis. Therefore, it is crucial that young people are encouraged and supported to participate in associative life in their communities. |
| 55. | Local and regional authorities should provide financial and other resources to NGOs that actively promote the participation of young people in their activities and democratic decision-making structures and procedures. |
| 56. | Local and regional authorities, in partnership with political parties and in a non-partisan manner, should promote the involvement of young people in the party political system in general, and support specific actions, such as training. |

\(^{16}\) The resolution 237 of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of 1992 brought into life the Youth Charter, that was revised and amended in 2002. The revised Charter was ratified by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 2003.

\(^{17}\) A copy of the Charter on the Participation of Young People can be read in English at: [http://pjp.eu.coe.int/documents/1017993/1380082/COE_charter_participation_en.pdf/520b9cb4-73a8-4556-913a-c77ee6596c7e](http://pjp.eu.coe.int/documents/1017993/1380082/COE_charter_participation_en.pdf/520b9cb4-73a8-4556-913a-c77ee6596c7e) (this document was accessed on April 25, 2015). A copy of the charter in Albanian: [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Coe_youth/Participation/COE_charter_participation_al.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Coe_youth/Participation/COE_charter_participation_al.pdf)
5.3 National policy and institutional framework on promoting youth participation in politics and decision-making

Albania presents to some extent a positive image regarding the drafting of national policies for the youth, including their participation in politics and decision-making. Since 2005, the country has adopted the National Strategy for the Young and the National Action Plan for the Youth. It is difficult to analyse the impact of these National Strategies for the Young for the period 2005-2015, because there has never been any detailed analysis of their implementation, budgets, and achievements over the years.

Olof Palme International Centre in 2012 supported the carrying out of an analysis on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Young (2007-2013). Three main indicators regarding the participation of the young in politics and decision-making came under scrutiny, and the study reported that none of the goals were met. 18

The new government that came into power after the 2013 parliamentary elections, followed on the footsteps of preceding government, by drafting and adopting a National Action Plan for the Young for the next five years. 19 At the institutional level, the government decided to remove the Department of Youth Policies, a nationwide policy-shaping entity, from the Ministry of Culture, where it was attached since 1995, to the newly established Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MMSR).

The National Action Plan for the Young (PKVR) is a serious inter-institutional effort to establish a new policy in supporting the young in Albania. This Plan was drafted after a lengthy process of consultations with young people from all over the country and should cover a five-year period.

The Plan aims at achieving six strategic objectives, and objective number one is the encouragement of youth participation in democratic decision-making processes. Right off the bat, there were some positive developments with the new plan, including the introduction of measurable indicators to assess fail or success, and detailed budgets to achieve these goals. This did not happen with previous strategies and action plans, and probably that contributed to their failure in achieving results.

The National Plan aims at conducting an analysis of elements that may cause the low degree of youth participation in decision-making:

“The degree of participation of the young in politics, and especially in local government institutions, continues to be too low. Their representation in these structures is not done based on any legal framework or adopted

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Strategic objective number one is broken down to four specific goals and 17 supporting actions, which correspond to 38 indicators to measure fail or success. The total cost of work and activities for this objective is estimated at Lek 1.048.928 (Euro 7,500); the state budget should cover 52 per cent of this amount, while the remaining 48 per cent of the funds are yet to be collected and earmarked for this purpose. Fundraising could be a potential problem for the financing of this particular objective or the whole Plan, but ministry officials have stated that the missing funds can be “obtained in cooperation with donor institutions or interest groups.”

Among other things, PKVR will support the establishment of the National Youth Agency (a unit that is already up and running), Youth Corps (a kind of national volunteering service) and pledges support to other youth organisation, and student governments. The Albanian government and MMSR have scheduled and pledged support to several activities to promote youth participation in decision-making (Objective 1.2 in PKVR):

- Advocacy meetings with political groupings to foster youth representation in local government institutions up to a quota of 20 per cent.
- The establishment of a Youth Advisory Board attached to MMSR and local government institutions, as an advisory body of the young to pitch in all stages of decision-making, in drafting and monitoring of policies on the young.
- Awareness campaigns to fight back, and reduce stereotypes and gender discrimination, as well as involvement of young women in public life and decision-making processes.

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20 Ibid
In general terms, it can be said that PKVR is a sound and serious effort to establish and implement public policies for and with the young, including the identification of strategic goals to encourage youth participation in politics and decision-making.

However, the positive traits of this plan may fade away because of failures to clearly define certain goals and plan events to draw public support; lack of dialogue with political parties; failure to change the electoral code to introduce the 20 per cent quota at the national level; lack of funds to support the establishment of a civic-political youth platform; and the non-existence of an independent national youth formation to periodically monitor the implementation of the Plan.

5.4 Political parties statutes and participation of youth political forums in decision-making

The research also focused on getting to know statutes of parliamentary political parties in Albania and the roles that they assign to their youth organisations. This analysis revealed that statutes and regulations of all political parties clearly define specific duties and responsibilities for their youth forums, even though some of these functions are restricted, or in some cases, participation is achieved through the implementation of quotas.

A study of these functions should show us how dedicated political parties are to guarantee the participation of the young in decision-making within the party itself, as an opportunity to develop a new political cadre and future leaders of the party and the country. From this point of view, advancement opportunities and for the young, both big and small, to participate in political parties and youth forums, are indicators of the degree of internal democracy in a party. It also shows us how much importance political parties assign to the young and their advancement, and what the future has in store for these parties, according to the degree of participation and representation of the young.

“"Youth party organisations serve as an important recruitment channel for party members, but scattered evidence suggests that the membership base of youth organisations is in decline, even more so than party membership in general. For example, figures for Belgium suggest a comparable magnitude of membership loss to what has happened in Germany and Sweden. If youth organisations are less successful with regard to their recruitment function, this most probably implies that parties will continue to attract fewer members in the future. This confirms the thesis of Katz and Mair that political parties are rooted less firmly in society than traditional mass parties, while they tend to approach state institutions and power more closely. Nowadays, political parties need media figures, spin doctors, and securing power.""\[21\]

a) Age of members in a political party and youth political forums

Age is an important factor in promoting or discouraging the participation of the young in internal decision-making processes in political parties and their youth organisations. Most of the statutes and regulations of political parties set a minimum age of 16 for membership in the party and their youth organisation. Only two parties have a different minimum age of entry: Democratic Party’s threshold is 15 years of age, while you need to be 17 to join The Union for Human Rights (PBDNJ).

An important issue that deserves our attention is the election and involvement of the young in decision-making institutions within political parties. Most parties set the bar at the age of 16 (with the exception of the Republican Party (PR) at 18, and PBDNJ at 17), despite the fact that one must be 18 to vote both in parliamentary or local elections.

b) Roles and responsibilities of Youth Forums in Political Parties in Albania

Youth organisations play different roles within their own parties. Most party statutes assign limited or restricted roles and functions to youth organisations and their involvement in decision-making structures and processes, while a small number of parties allow for youth participation in all degrees of decision-making. The table below, the Matrix of Participation of the Young and Youth Organisations in Political Parties in Albania paints a picture of youth organisations and their involvement in politics.

We established a system of allocation of points regarding duties and responsibilities that youth organisations have within institutions of political parties. For every task, responsibility and access to decision-making youth organisations are awarded points. Zero points are awarded to youth organisations that have no duties and responsibilities recognised in the statutes of their party; one point is awarded for every role assigned to them, and three points are given to those youth organisations whose participation and representation in guaranteed by quotas

Table number 1 (see below) tries to explain visually roles, duties and responsibilities, assigned to youth organisations within political parties in Albania, in all degrees of youth participation and representation.
The graphic representation in the Chart 1 clearly shows that almost all of the youth organisations have the same degree of representation in political parties’ Leading Committees, except for LRI that regulates its participation by quotas, which means that they may play a more important role in their party.

We can also notice that the role and importance of youth organisations diminishes when it comes to inclusion of the young in the list of candidates, steering committees or allocation of financial resources that should guarantee the functioning of youth political organisations.

The following chart represents a ranking of political parties according to the importance assigned to their youth organisations. Chart number 2 shows that the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) is at the top of the rankings, followed by the Socialist Party (PS) and the Democratic Party (PD). These three parties have higher degrees of youth participation in party leadership when compared to other political parties in Albania; however, this does not mean that the participation of the young in LSI, PS, and PD are at satisfactory levels.

No youth organisations have any guarantees of participation and representation in the lists of candidates for parliament. The data show that the PS youth organisation (FRESSH) produced no MPs after the 2013 parliamentary elections, PD youth forum (FRPD) had only one (the chairman of the organisation), while the youth forum of LSI (LRI) managed to send one of their members to parliament, but only after several MPs resigned their mandates to become ministers in the new government led by prime minister Rama.
c) Participation and representation in local level decision-making bodies of parties

Political parties in Albania have adopted a vertical structure of organisation, where the body at the top of the pyramid plays a much more important role than local organizations. Youth organisations are also structured based on the same model, and must adapt to the workings of their party. The smallest unit for a party is a borough’s grassroots organisation, depending on the number of members and support. None of the statutes has defined any specific roles for youth organisations in these local units, besides an implied right of young people to become members of these groups. Large political parties, obviously, have more local organisations and they play a bigger role in the administration of the party.

The Socialist Party considers its youth organisation, FRESSH, as a partner organisation, while in all other parties youth organisations are integral parts of the political force. From a statutory point of view, this distinction matters a great deal, because it is much easier for young people without previous political experience to be elected to party positions when the youth forum is a branch of the party organisation, while this is more difficult in the case of FRESSH.

The research shows that the functions of youth organisation at the local level are very limited and usually the apex of their operations is the representation at party local steering committees, with the exception of LRI that is a 30 per cent representation quota in all levels.
off party institutions. In some cases, party statutes make no mention of any roles, duties, and responsibilities of their youth forums in local party organisations, such as the case of PBDNJ, FRD, etc.

**d) Participation and representation in national-level decision-making bodies of parties**

Almost all of the political youth organisations have well defined duties and responsibilities in national-level decision-making institutions. Some youth organisations are still confused about their representation at the party general conferences or conventions, but their representations at the National Assembly or party Leading Committee are guaranteed with at least one delegate. The exception to the rule is the youth organisation of the Republican Party (PR), as it statute does not recognise them this right.

**e) Youth forums and their representation in the lists of candidates for MP or members of municipal councils**

The participation and representation of the young in the list of candidates for parliament and municipality councils is particularly important, not only to the young, but also to the democratisation of public institutions and to convey the needs of the young in institutions that decide on their future. However, it is no surprise that none of the youth organisations have a guaranteed representation where it really matters, at the Parliament: where laws and funds for the youth are approved and adopted and; in municipal councils: where local programs and services are launched, and those directly affect the quality of life of the young.

None of the statutes that were reviewed makes any references to guaranteeing a minimum of representation of the young, in chapters that deal with elections, parliamentary groups, and representation in the local government, etc. Even though, these omissions appear not to be on purpose, considering that youth organisations are part of the decision-making in parties when these issues are discussed and adopted, the impact of such a shortcoming in youth representation and participation is negative.

The young in political parties, because of political machinations and alliances, have less opportunity to play an active role in politics and influence legislation, policies, and new programs, both at local and national level. This restricted access to decision-making may hamper their political upbringing and their future participation in politics and legislative
matters. On the other hand, young people that militate in civil society organisations MAY have more opportunities to hone their political skills.

f) Financing and regulations of Youth Forums

The final two topics of this research study focused on the financing of youth organisations and their own statutes or internal regulations. All youth organisations of political parties have their own statutes and regulations, regardless of the role they play within party structures. It is a positive development, because in principle the adoption of their own statutes and internal regulations promotes their autonomy and decision-making within these organisations. However, interviews with the young in the course of study, revealed that there have been cases when party leaders have intervened in the decision-making process of internal matters of youth organisations to elect certain individuals in senior positions.

An immensely negative influence on youth organisation is the lack of financial independence and the necessary funds to carry on with basic events and activities. Regardless of the role, influence, access to funds or the size of the party, no one of the youth organisations have a budget of their own and funds devoted to them. None of the statutes of political parties makes any mention on sources of funds for youth organisations or how they should be sponsored from the budget of the party. This is important as most youth organisations, with the exception of youth forums of PS and PDU, are considered as sections of a party. In this sense, parties have obligations and responsibilities in earmarking and distributing of funds to support the functioning of youth organisations and fund events they organise.

The lack of a dedicated budget is a major obstacle in improving participation and representation of the young in the decision-making of party internal affairs. Youth forums do not have the necessary resources to support their members with training, or to organise events and activities in their community. A shortage of funds for youth organisations stem not only from limited financial resources at the disposal of political parties, but also due to a tendency on behalf of the party leadership to keep under control every element and every event organised by these youth forums.
### 5.5 The matrix of participation and representation in decision-making of the young and their organisations in political parties in Albania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>FRD</th>
<th>PD</th>
<th>LSI</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>PBDNJ</th>
<th>PDIU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership age</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15/16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The right to be elected in party decision-making institutions</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is integral part of party organisation</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is partner organisation of party</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is represented at party conventions</strong></td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (30%)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is part of National Assembly</strong></td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (30%)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is part of executive committee</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (30%)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is part of local steering committee</strong></td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (30%)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is part of local executive committee</strong></td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>Yes (30%)</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is part of smallest party grassroots organisations</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum is automatically represented in parliamentary group</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum has access to representation quota</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum has access to dedicated financial resources, by statute</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth forum has own statute / regulation</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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22 The SP statute mentions two minimum ages for party membership: 15 years of age to join FRESSH and 16 to join the Socialist Party.

23 With the exception of the Republican Party and the Party for Justice, Unity and Integrity, no other party specifies whether the young aged 15-18 may be elected to party leadership and steering committees. The lack of the “age” criteria in the statutes of these parties, creates opportunities for any members over the age 15-16 to run for party leadership positions.

24 Some statutes make no reference or mention of youth forums or their role in certain party institutions, both at local and national level. For this reason it is left blank. This is also reveals the need for improvements and amendments in respective statutes, to better define roles, degrees and levels, duties and responsibilities of youth organizations within a party.

25 The statute does not specify the number or percentage of young that can attend convention.

26 National Assembly is used as a general term. Different parties use different terminology for this decision-making party institution.
6. Analysing the data: Youth in decision-making and politics in Albania

6.1 Statistical data on participation of youth in decision-making and politics

6.1.1 Participation of youth in decision-making and politics at national level in Albania

Albania’s population is relatively young when compared to other countries in the region. A 2011 census showed that the average age of the resident population was around 35. This chapter includes an analysis of main indicators selected to measure youth participation in several levels of decision-making.

a) Youth in the Parliament of Albania

All 140 members of parliament in the Assembly of Albania are elected in 12 electoral districts, which correspond with 12 prefectures. In these electoral districts, MPs are elected through proportional representation, with an electoral threshold of three per cent for individual parties and five per cent for coalitions.

In the June 2013 parliamentary elections, the Socialist Party, that won the largest number of representatives to parliament (61 MPs), included in its list only four young MPs (6.5 per cent), the Democratic Party with 46 MPs, also had only four young parliamentarians (8.6 per cent).

By comparison, the Socialist Movement for Integration has a larger percentage of young MPs in its parliamentary group (two out of 17 MPs, or 11.7 per cent). Other parties have no young MPs at all (Chart 3). In conclusion, young people sitting in the Albanian parliament make up only 7.1 per cent of MPs.

---

27 Young MPs in parliament after June 23, 2013 elections, updated after changes in the Assembly of Albania as of March 2015
Chart 3: Young MPs in the Assembly of Albania

Chart 4 (see below) presents an overview of young MPs according to gender and political party. There are 10 young MPs in the parliament (7.1% of the total number of MPs), six of them are female (60 per cent of young MPs) and 4 are male (40 per cent of young MPs).

PS has the largest number of young female MPs, three out of four (75 per cent). LSI totally ignores gender equality, but this time males are the ones being persecuted; two of its young MPs are female (100 per cent). On the other hand, PD has the lowest representation of young girls/women in parliament, one out of four (25 per cent).
b) Youth in the government of Albania

The new government, established in September 2013, has 21 ministers, and only three of them were younger than 35\textsuperscript{28} years old, at the time of their appointments. This is a relatively low percentage, considering that almost half of the population of the country (45 per cent) is younger than 30.

The data shows that 14\% of the Ministers of the Albanian Government are young people below 35 years old, while only 5\% are females (1 female Minister below 35 years old). Chart 5 provides more details on the present involvement of the young at senior government level, with three young ministers in a 21-person Council of Ministers\textsuperscript{29}.

When compared to the previous government, there has been an improvement in the participation of the young at the top level of governance. The preceding government had no young people at all in ministerial positions, and only one woman, as Minister of Integration.

![Chart 5. The young in the Albanian government – as of March 2015](image)

\textsuperscript{28} Sajmir Tahiri, Minister of Interior Affairs (PS); Klajda Gjosha, Minister e Integration (LSI); Erjon Veliaj, Minister of Social Welfare and Youth (PS).

\textsuperscript{29} With the resignation of Erjon Veliaj as a Minister of Social Welfare and Youth in Albania and his replacement with Blendi Klosi, the Albanian Government has one less young person as a minister.
The data presented in a chart on Table 6, shows that, out of 30 deputy ministers, presently (March 2015) six of them are young people (20 per cent)\textsuperscript{30}, with perfect gender equality (3 males, and three females appointed as deputy ministers).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Total & Below 35 & Male & Female \\
\hline
Vice-Ministers & 30 & 7 & 4 & 3 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Deputy ministers, March 2015}
\end{table}

6.1.1 Participation of youth in decision-making and politics at local level in Albania

a) Young people as mayors in Albania

The Republic of Albania at the start of this study (December 2014) was divided in 65 municipalities, while the Tirana municipality was divided into 11 borough administrations (mini town halls).

By the time of finalisation of this study, Albania had applied for the first time a new system of administrative division, where smaller units of administrative organisations (communies) were all eliminated and the country was divided into 61 new municipalities. The results of the local elections of 2011 and 2015 are analysed below in Chart no. 7, outlining how the representation of young people has changed in charge of municipalities in Albania.

\textsuperscript{30} Erisa Xhixho, Deputy-Minister of European Integration; Gentian Elezi, Deputy-Minister of European Integration; Odeta Barbullushi, Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs; Arbjan Mazniku, Deputy-Minister of Education and Sports; Dorian Ducja Deputy-Minister for Energy and Industry, Oliana Ifti, Deputy-Minister for the Environment.
When we look into the data for Mayors, when we consider the local elections of 2011 we observe that there is a total of 76 mayors, out of which only 4 were under 35 years old. None of those elected under the age of 35 was a woman. Three mayors represented the Socialist Party and one was from the Democratic Party.

While in the 2015 local elections, we see a minor increase of 3% of Municipalities led by young people under the age of 35, while 92% of municipalities across the country continue to be headed by people over this age. The data are provided in Chart 7.

Results of the local elections of 2015 also show that men under the age of 35 make up the majority of the 5 new mayors with only one female leading the Municipality of Prenjas. Data shows that the left wing parties have 4 young Mayors, while the right only 1 in Devoll municipality.

b) Youth representation in municipal councils across Albania

Data on City Councils in Albania (Chart 8), based on the results of the elections of year 2011, it shows that about 85% of City Councils members’ were over 35 years old, while only 10% of them belonged to under 35’s. Information on the age is missing on about 4.6% of city council members. When compared with the mayors, this is a somewhat higher figure, but again in absolute values the representation of youth across City Councils in Albania remains very low.

While the results of the elections of 2015, bringing an almost entirely different picture where we note almost a tripling of youth representation across Municipal Councils. From 10% youth representation in 2011 at the end of elections of June 2015, young people make
up 26.4% of all the members of City Councils, reducing quite substantially the representation of over 35s in municipal councils.

Although there hasn’t been yet a detailed analysis of all the factors that led to this significant increase in the number of young people in City Councils, the researchers believe that the establishment of the equal gender quota for candidates, combined with an increased pressure towards politicians for the renewal of the political class in Albania, are among the main contributing factors.

Chart 8. Age of members of municipal councils in Albania for years 2011 and 2015

Regarding female councillors in City Councils across the country during 2011, we observed that female councillors under the age of 35 represented 17% of all female councillors, while above 35s represented around 83% (Figure 9). Meanwhile, the results of local elections of 2015 provide quite a different picture for women participating in politics in general and especially for young women. In total females below 35 years old, constitute 43% of the total number of female members of the current City Councils, while those over 35 make up about 57%. In what is seen as a broad reconfiguration of City Councils across Albania, the representation of young women is almost 3 times higher compared to the results of previous local elections.
**Chart 9. % of young female council members among same gender local representatives**

Despite the fact that the Albanian Parliament in April 2015 approved the establishment of an equal gender quota (50-50) among men and women, only for their representation in the lists of candidates for members of municipal councils, election results of June 2015 show that this measure was not enough to ensure equal representation.

As we can see in the chart below (Chart 10) girls and women account for only 34% of the members of the Councils in Albania, while men make up about 66% of them. However, as we can observe at Chart no. 10, the increase in the representation of women and girls in City Councils has brought a reduction of about 17% of men or an increase of 19% of women in overall.

**Chart 10. No. of girls and women as members of City Councils in Albania versus male members**
Chart 11. % of girls and women as members of City Councils in Albania versus male members

On the other hand, when we see how men under 35 years old are represented, compared with those over this age, we observe some interesting trends on how decision-making processes within political parties impacts the preparation of candidates lists’ for members of municipal councils, when there is no quota set for male youth participation in local decision-making.

Chart 12. Age of male Councillors in City Councils in Albania 2011-2015 (in %)

As seen from Chart no. 12, regardless of the election results of 2015 doubling the number and percentage of men under the age of 35 as members of the City Councils in Albania, yet their number is at least two times lower than that of girls and women of the same age. There is a significant difference between the percentages of men under 35 years old, whose representation in City Councils in 4 years grew from 9% to 18%, compared with the men
over 35, who in 2011 accounted for 91% of all men in City Councils, while in 2015 they count around 82%. In short, we can say that the biggest losers of the Local Elections 2015 were men under the age of 35, which are largely under-represented in City Councils across Albania.

c) Political affiliation of young people members of City Councils in Albania

The data depicted in the table below (see chart 13) show that the Socialist Party has the highest number of young members of municipal councils under the age of 35, as many as 64; the Democratic Party is ranked second with 28 young council members, followed by PDIU with 18 young councilmen/women. Lower ranks include LSI with council members under the age of 35, G99 with seven, and PDS with six. Other smaller parties have four young council members or less.

![Chart 13. Political affiliations of City Council members under the age of 35](image)

Local elections of June 2015 in overall produced positive results for youth participation in local decision-making, compared with the results of 2011. However, as shown in Graph no. 13, the main political parties continue to bear the brunt in this regard. In overall the results of Local Elections 2015, confirm that Socialist Party continues to top the list of Councillors under the age of 35, the Socialist Party with 68 council candidates nationally, followed by the DP with 30, 21 and PJIU LSI 19. Overall it can be said that every political force lists of what has come to promote youth, but larger parties have made the difference in having a higher number of members elected to municipal councils under the age of 35.
d) Political affiliation of male council members under 35 years old

The results of local elections of 2011 and 2015 did not produce any major changes in the representation of men under 35 for any of the political forces in Albania (Chart 14). As seen in the graph, the representation of young men from party to party, is almost negligible in percentages as well as in numbers. The data tells us that Socialist Party has the highest number of men counsellors under 35, followed by the DP, SMI, PJIU, G99, PR etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>PD</th>
<th>LSI</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>PDIU</th>
<th>PDS</th>
<th>Partia G99</th>
<th>PSV91</th>
<th>PDK</th>
<th>PBDNJ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. Political affiliation of male council members under 35

e) Political affiliations of female council members under 35

As seen from the chart and 15, the number of female councillors is lower than the number of men based on the results of local elections of 2011. The trend continued to be the same in 2015. Despite this fact, it is interesting to see the impact that had the establishment of a gender quota of 50% for both genders in increasing the representation of women and girls under 35 in city councils in 2015. The largest difference came again from the major parliamentary parties, such as SP, DP, SMI and PJIU. While it is evident that small political parties continue to have issues with the representation of women and girls in the Municipal Council in Albania.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>PD</th>
<th>LSI</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>PDIU</th>
<th>PDS</th>
<th>G99</th>
<th>PSV91</th>
<th>PDK</th>
<th>AD</th>
<th>PSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2 Analysis of qualitative data

6.2.1 Success stories of young people in decision-making at local and national level

We have composed some profiles of young people in decision-making positions as members of parliament or senior officials of local administrations, representing three main political parties, to illustrate some of the best examples of youth participation in decision-making.

These profiles were drafted after interviews conducted for the purpose of this study, to have a better understanding of what some of the most successful young politicians have experienced in Albanian politics at local and national level.

All of the interviewees – regardless of gender, party affiliation, position, level of representation (local or national level) or the age that ranges from 21 to 35 (at the moment of election at the present position) – say that their path to success in politics and decision-making was full of hurdles and obstacle, and it required a great deal of labour and sacrifice. They also say that this arduous journey is made proportionally easier with an increase is social and political support to the young.

Personal experiences that they shared with us are at the same time similar and different with each other, but there is one leitmotiv that unifies their messages into one, which goes like this:

No one can protect the interests of the young better than the young can. The world of Albanian politics if complicated and very problematic, but with the right training, faith in one’s abilities, a strong will and lots of work, the young can climb the highest peaks of politics and decision-making.

For more information on the political journey of the young people we interviewed you can read below a summary of the information they decided to share with us.
Profile 1: Esmeralda Shkjau

Esmeralda Shkjau
MP for Durrës district
Age: 32
Political party: PS

Esmeralda Shkjau is one of the youngest MPs of the Socialist Party. After completing her studies in Germany, she decided to get involved in youth organisations in the city of Durres. At the beginning she was a youth coordinator in several constituencies in Durrës, and later she was included in the list of candidates for parliament as the chairwoman of FRESSH for the port city. She faced with many hardships, especially with a ferocious competition within her own youth organisation that resulted in several fierce debates and clashes, but due to her determination and the support of her family, she managed to pull through and succeed. According to her, engaging in politics brings many hardships and aggressive reactions from the outside, and one needs to be strong and determined to reach set goals and ideals.

One of the reasons that convinced her to get involved in politics was her desire to succeed in such a wonderful but very difficult domain. In this journey, she always had the full support of her family, and she says that she could not have done it without it.

Esmeralda advises the young who would want to follow on her footsteps, never to give up if they want to make it in politics, because it requires lots of work. It may take very long hours, you may spend days and nights away from your loved ones due to political engagements, so getting into politics requires commitment, preparation and a strong will to succeed.

She says that the Albanian youth face huge difficulties because often they are not well informed on what they are getting themselves into and to what ideology they are providing their contributions. For this reason, she believes that there needs to be a change in the way youth organisations function, be becoming more united and more active, to proclaim their programs for youth advancement and to be proactive all the time, not only during electoral campaigns. She also believes that the path to success, gender does not matter, but rather an individual’s preparation and determination.

She says there should be more young people in politics and decision-making and they should be given priority since Albania is young and the youth make up a large percentage of the population, and for this reason, their issues and their rights should be given priority.

She had a few closing words regarding success in a political journey: “Trust in politics, the same way I did, because change comes from our contribution. The more efforts and sacrifice you put into building your political profile, the more valuable, and important your contribution will be in politics. Through hard work, determination and patience you will realise that politics demands commitment, toil and sacrifice, but riches wait at the end of the journey.”
Profile 2: Kejdi Mehmetaj

Kejdi Mehmetaj
MP of Tirana district
Age: 21
Political affiliation: LSI

Kejdi Mehmetaj is the youngest MP in the history of the Assembly of Albania and represents the Socialist Movement for Integration. She received her parliamentary mandate at the age of 21, while she had joined the LSI youth organisation at the age of 15. She has always been interested in decision-making since her early school years and was actively involved in her school decision-making structures. Her family was her main supporter and her main provider of counsel and critique in her youthful and impetuous journey into politics.

At the beginning, when she had just joined the youth organisation of LSI she coordinated events at her high school and she later coordinated events for all the high schools in Tirana. During this period, she started to work closely with a local Tirana party unit and with time, she started to establish more ties with several local party organisations. The organising of events introduced her to all the LSI local organisations in Tirana, and she was elected deputy-chair of LRI and catapulted to the party leadership. The involvement with the LSI youth forum caused her to spend every day of the week in organising various events for the organisation. From the very first day she decided to join LRI she has continuously been engaged with this organisation.

The process that selected candidates, and her candidacy, for party MP was transparent and democratic. The chairperson of the party had requested that there should be two young people in a list of seven candidates for the district of Tirana. Following this proposal, the party leadership convened and decided on the composition of the list; her name was ranked seventh. She says that she did not think she would make it into the parliament, but gender quotas made it possible.

Kejdi says that her parliament colleagues treated her like a little girl and everyone too cordial and sweet, but a bit condescending. Now she is working really hard to be taken seriously by her colleagues. She considers her young age as an advantage and an excellent opportunity to represent two very important social groups: the young and females.

Kejdi is convinced that the young in LSI have access to decision-making, and the party leadership. If you are prepared, willing, and passionate to grow in politics, you will get the recognition you deserve and the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

The youngest MP in the parliament’s history follows intently every session and every committee meeting she takes part. As expected from a representative of the young, most of the cases she sponsored focused on youth issues. Even though such topics are not a focal point of parliament sessions she continues to advocate youth issues, especially those topics the LSI youth organisation considers as priority.
Profile 3: Krenar Cenollari

Krenar Cenollari
Chairperson of Administration of Borough no. 6, Tirana
Age: 33
Political affiliation: PS

Krenar Cenollari says he decided to join in the political activities of his borough to provide his contribution in changing and improving the old politics, and bring about real change in administration, after he became concerned of the state of politics and the socio-economic situation in his borough. At the same time, he wanted to use this opportunity to devote his abilities at the support of his political party. He believes that the young have the willpower, energy and the right mentality to change Albanian politics.

Krenar has been a member of the Socialist Party for many years. He says that it has not been easy to challenge old mentalities and stereotypes within his own party regarding the participation of the young in decision-making. The door was shut closed to the young, and they did not have any opportunities to contribute ideas, proposals, and suggestions. He believed it was time to radically change the old mentality that had taken hold of his party over the years. The internal struggle was very tough and fierce, but the self-confidence, faith in his abilities and expertise, encouraged him to continue his efforts to change at the best of his abilities the situation in his borough.

He says that a huge positive influence on his political journey was the MP for his borough, a young person who supported youth and gave priority to youth-related problems. Thanks to his support, Krenar was elected by the party to run as a candidate for chairman of the borough administration. In his run for office, he involved scores of young people who introduced a new spirit of campaigning and a new image to the party. In his opinion, one of his candidacies strongest points was the involvement of the young. Many of the youngsters that participated in campaigning are now part of the decision-making structures of the borough administration he manages.

He believes that the future of every European and democratic society depends on their youth; therefore, he believes that the young should be actively involved in politics. There are many obstacles and difficulties facing the young that want to participate in decision-making. The main obstacles to the young are often old politicians who consider the young as threats to their jobs. His advice to the young is to become a party in discussions that deal with politics and decision-making and affect their future.

Nearing the end of the interview Krenar says that the most important role in youth participation should be played by party institutions. They should have programs that involve the young in decision-making and enabling them to become part of these institutions, where they can provide ideas and share their thoughts on reforms on issues that really affect the young.
Profile 4: Jorida Tabaku

Jorida Tabaku
MP for Tirana district
Age: 35
Political affiliation: PD

Jorida Tabaku if one six young female MPs in parliament. At the beginning, when she was a supporter of the Democratic Party and became a member she did not seriously think of a career in politics. It just happened that during a presentation she made the then prime minister was present at the event, and he offered her a deputy-minister position and assigned her as a future MP candidate in one of Tirana’s constituencies.

She confesses that it was an uphill start and entirely political. In 2009, Jorida was appointed deputy-minister of European Integration, a position she held until mid-2011. That same year Jorida was at the top of the list of members of municipal council of Tirana and in July 2011, she was appointed deputy-mayor. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, she was elected MP for the Democratic Party in the Tirana district and presently she is the spokesperson of DP parliamentary group and a member of the Committee on Economy and Finance, and the Committee on European Integration.

As seldom happens in any new profession, she made mistakes that turned into valuable lessons that have served her well during these years of active politics. She says her main pillar of support was her family that stood beside her in every step she took in politics. One of her points of strength is her willingness to work hard to achieve goals she sets for herself. Someone who wants to become a politician must strive to achieve and preserve that position, but one should be careful not to turn into a cynical or callous person.

She says she prefers to listen and share opinion sand thoughts to be as cooperative as possible with members of the youth organisation and her constituency. Jorida says that one of her main goals, when she started to participate in politics and decision-making, was addressing issues that matter to the young, since she had a rich experience working with the young.

In a country like Albania, where the communist past has transformed politics in a party-only club, Jorida believes that the young are not to blame for scepticism to politics, while some believe that they may gain from politics what may be denied to them unfairly. Jorida believes that is important to provide opportunities to the young to be represented at every level of politics, not only in party grassroots organisations but also at senior levels, from local government and municipal councils to parliament, enabling the young to have their saying in politics and policies. She also believes that the young should fight for their rights, including representation quotas in political parties. They should be proactive and not wait to be handed over gifts, for they have the will, the passion, and energies to meet challenges.
6.2.2. Youth in politics, membership in youth political organizations and civil society

a) Points of view of members of youth political forum of political parties regarding involvement of youth in politics and decision-making

- *Real-life opportunities to participate in party institutions or local and national level decision-making*

The data collected for the purpose of this study (December 2014 – March 2015) showed that the participation of the young in politics and decision-making is at very low levels, but leaders of FRPPs said they were optimistic the young would move on to senior positions in their party, such as MPs, members of municipal councils especially in constituencies where the party has a lot of support and particular interest to run for office (some small political parties focus on particular areas and groups of population). The young politicians said that experience over the years shows that working harder in FRPPs and the party, it may be within reach to be included in the lists of candidates for the next parliamentary elections. They do not see major hurdles, especially in youth organizations of smaller parties, where competition is weaker and the relationship with the party leadership is closer, warmer, and more direct.

In some cases, leaders of FRPPs are full time politicians and are assigned to important positions in party decision-making structures, but also at local administration institutions and the government. They believe that they succeeded because they worked hard and deserved it, and they see their rise in status and position within a party, as quite within reach because at this point they believe they do not lack the support of party structures. In addition, they do not believe that their party looks down on them or is biased against them because of their young age. On the other hand, in some instances young FRPP leaders say that despite the urge to become full time politicians they would prefer to get to know better the administrative and management side of politics and governing before they fully participate in decision-making structures, regardless of the time such an expertise-gaining process might require.

- *Youth representation in politics and decision-making*

The young people that we talked to believe that lobbying and determination can improve the inclusion of youngsters and their starting positions in the list of candidates put forth by political parties ahead of elections. The best option would be the establishment of a system
to ensure more young people are added to the lists of candidates. A youth quota fashioned according to the gender model (suggestions vary from 10 to 20 per cent) should facilitate this process.

They also believe that there is a need for legal initiatives to protect FRPPs, and ensure that stipulations of statutes and regulations are respected and enforced. An increased representation at party steering committees is also considered very important. They propose that the young constitute at least 15 per cent of party assemblies. They believe this would be a good start.

Regardless of their determination to improve youth participation in senior party structures and decision-making processes, the young people are disappointed and frustrated that decision makers constantly find methods and ways to relegate the young at the bottom of the lists, and the same thing happens to women.

- **Channels of transmission of youth interests and FRPP operational autonomy**

Most youth organisations of political parties in Albania have similar decision-making configurations. Every youth group (size and number of members vary according to the size and influence of the political party) is organised in a hierarchical structure, with the group leader at the top representing his team at the steering committee of the youth organisation. This committee deals and finds solutions to problems or ideas brought forth by group leaders, and then the chairperson of the FRPP conveys this message to the party leadership for a decision or ratification.

Main political parties are more rigorous in respecting internal hierarchy because of large numbers of membership. The exchange of information between the young politicians revelled that the smaller the political party, the more flexible is the hierarchy within a party and the easier it is for youth organisation members to communicate directly with senior party leaders.

FRPP members say that they may take into consideration or spring into action on topics or ideas that may come from outside of their political organisation on a non-partisan basis. If the addressing of a particular issue may appear to appeal to a large number of youth organisation members, then the members of the group may ‘adopt’ it and organise events to support such a cause.

The young say that forum members may also get together to discuss, or work together on different projects or initiatives, without waiting for approval by the senior leadership of the
youth organisation. However, they admit that lack of knowledge on behalf of the leadership of the organisation may prove a big problem when they need to organise events in support of such initiatives, even though, in general, support is not withheld by the leadership.

- *Addressing youth concerns to decision-making structures of youth organisations and political parties*

Grassroots youth organisations discuss over many issues and problems raised by forum members, and some of this issues that are may be considered as priority are reported by group leaders in meeting of FRPP steering committees. Topics and issues of particular interest or importance that do not clash with party policies are conveyed to the party leadership for further discussion or approval. Youth organisations of smaller parties have fewer links in the decision-making chain and have a more direct access to the party leaders.

Members of FRPPs said that there have been some success stories regarding issues and problems identified by the young that have been addressed by the party senior leadership, but in some other cases, they did not make it past political statements and photo-ops.

Issues that matter to the young not always receive the attention they deserve from policy-shaping and decision-making structures in party leaderships, parliament, government, and municipal councils. Unanimously, the young members of FRs state that *very few issues and problems related to the young are discussed and addressed at national and local levels of governing*. FR leaders believe that very few issues are properly addressed, because promoting the young in politics and solving youth problems are considered priority from elected leaders.

A source of concern to them is the fact that *the young themselves do not discuss on issues relevant to the youth*, and as a result, very little attention is devoted to youth-related issues further up the chain at the policy-shaping and decision-making levels. Attention is directed to the youth (usually by the media) only when something extraordinary happens. According to the young, poor levels of representation in all political and decision-making institutions at local and national stage affects the amount of attention these institutions pay to youth-related issues. They say that proper representation can make a difference, and mention cases when lobbying by the head of the organisation on youth-related issues, succeeded in attracting the necessary attention, and reach a satisfactory conclusion or solution.
**Political parties approach to youth organisations**

Youth organisations are well-aware of the very important roles they play in support of their parties, especially in electoral campaigns. In some parties (such as LSI) the youth organisation is even more influential, since FR members as young as 16 years of age are eligible to vote for the party leadership, and that makes the standing of FR in the party much stronger. Representatives of youth organisations say that parties need FRs not only in the heat of the electoral campaigns but all year round.

FRPP leaders concede that some party structures are more accessible to the young as political parties offer enough freedoms to voice concerns over youth-related issues. However, in general, “the old politicians” mindset it is still a major challenge regarding youth participation in politics and decision-making, and we need to crank up the pace of change.

**Intensity and nature of FRPP events according to party position**

FRPP members say that even though the party always needs them, the role they play changes according to whether the party is in government or opposition. When a party is in opposition the main focus of their activities are protest marches and events, while when the party is in government the focus shifts to problem solving. There seems to be no consensus on the pace of events and activities youth organisation are involved with in these two different situations. Some say that the pace is more hectic and wide-ranging when in opposition, because they are not conditioned by political activity and as a result there are more options available, and protests are justified. Other young people believe the pace is faster when they are in government because they need to push harder to find solutions to problems.

Staging of protest activities and rallies make up the bulk of events when a party is in opposition, but the young consider it a problem. FR members provide examples of instances when certain issues were met by protests when the party was in opposition, but all dissent is quelled when the party comes to power even when such issues and problems continue to persist. Apparently protesting by its youth organisation is considered inappropriate by the party in government, even though there might be no other avenues left open to push for change. However, FR members recall that a protest against a government decision was joined by members of the government party youth organisation, and that caused no problems.
The financing of youth organisations is riddled with problems, and needs changes and overhauls. The young members we interviewed argue for a regular and constant funding of youth forums, such as the allocation of special funds by the Central Election Commission (KQZ), in the same way it operates with political parties. Ideally, a solution could be the earmarking of precise funds for election campaigns, so that young organisations could be assigned special funds.

Cooperation between FRPPs

To-date, the cooperation between FRPPs is inexisten, but the young are aware this is a serious problem they need to tackle. FRPP leaders believe that they must find avenues of cooperation to join voices in protest and unite in asking solutions to youth-related issues and problems. This ‘organism’ should serve a means of protest to bring youth-related issues to the fore on the policy-shaping agenda and to institutionalise the cause of the youth. They say that to avoid any misunderstanding and qualms of any kind, this initiative should originate from the civil society and could be formalised at a later stage with a memorandum of cooperation between youth organisation of political parties.

However, over the years there have been such attempts by civil society organisations to bring together youth forums of political parties, but FRPPs have not looked favourable upon such an initiative. There have been other attempts to bring together youth at a regional level from all Albanian-inhabited territories, but this process halted and crashed down when this idea failed to get the support of all FRPPs.

At the same time FRPP members are optimistic and refer to instances of successful cooperation between FRPPs (from one side of the political spectrum), but they don’t hide their scepticism on cooperating with some other FRPP (mainly from the other side of the political spectrum) that has showed no sign of willingness to work with them. In some cases representatives of all youth organisations have been brought together to discuss on major issues such as the student card, the establishment of a multi-functional youth centre, or the new reform of the education system, but there’s been no tangible results as yet. They believe that these efforts are indicators that the young people’s approach to politics is changing, even though the cooperation has yet to produce any positive outcomes concerning youth-related issues or initiation of dialogue.
Leaders of FRPPs agree that a well-organised coordination of efforts of youth forums is a great idea because it is an excellent chance to present a united front on youth-related issues, at that may be a game-changer. Media attention and coverage on such a coordination of efforts may accentuate the impact of such an initiative. They also believe that bringing together of all FRPPs would serve as a positive example of unity among young people, doing away with hate speech and language of conflict. The young have come to appreciate the need for dialogue and cooperation, and ethical political discourse.

- **FRPPs and relations with the media**

The time or attention the media devote to politics is often occupied mainly by MPs and senior politicians, and there is no system to share media interest with the young, women, etc. Some of the FRPP leaders say that youth organisations now understand that they should identify topics and issues and lobby themselves the media for airtime or attention. Even though youth leaders say that FRPPs may contact the media directly on specific initiatives or to distribute press releases, the youth organisations should first receive the approval of the party to ensure that the organisation is walking the party line. However, some FRPPs have no clear-cut policies regarding this issue, as they can contact the media without prior consultations with the party without any negative consequences to the youth organisation.

Members of FRPPs believe that it is in the interest of these organisations to be active in the media with press statements, events and media-friendly topics, and there have been cases when parties have pressured FRs to be pro-active with the media to report on their activities and discuss issues of importance to the party.

- **Reasons for participation in politics through FRPPs**

There are many reasons why young people get involved with political parties’ youth organisations. The young have reported on some of the main reasons why they have joined youth organisation of political parties. Below is a list of main incentives:

- Desire to improve the situation in the country regarding youth participation in politics;
- Peer pressure from friends members of FRPPs;
- Passion for politics and the desire to move ahead in politics;
- Pressure from family members to get involved with a particular political force;
- Opportunities to learn and improve organisational and leading skills. Forums are considered as place where the young can contribute and benefit;
- Desire to contribute in implementing a political program they like, and work with a politician they like or believe in;
- Being part of a certain social group, and joining a party that focuses and specialises on protecting their rights.

**Forms of youth engagement in FRPPs**

Involvement in youth organizations mainly consists of organizing and participating in events at local and national level. Such activities usually focus on empowering the youth (training sessions, informative events) regarding the organisation and functioning of policy-shaping and decision-making structures at local and national levels. Events may include drives to recruit young people into party FRs, volunteering activities, or youth festivities of a political or apolitical nature. There have been cases when the young have been involved in addressing a certain issue of concern by joining protest activities of a political or apolitical nature.

The awareness and understanding by the young of decision-making processes is a very important issue to FRPPs of parliamentary parties that we consulted for the purpose of this study. All participating FRPPs confirm that they have paid special attention to improve the level of awareness on policy-shaping and decision-making processes at local and national stages. They have developed over the years a wealth of methods and systems, including training sessions with the young of no political affiliations on the inner workings of the political system at local and national levels, informative events by simulating the process of making a decision by a municipal council so that the young may witness first hand and understand how the system works. They say that politics becomes more transparent this way, and the young are made aware of the decision-making processes and the importance of having their say on relevant issues.

**FRPP: an integral part of a party, island or peninsula?**

The general perception of the young of all youth organisations is that FRs and respective parties are partner organizations that consult each-other continuously on different issues and support each-other every step of the way. They consider their organization as a peninsula connected to the party mainland, and they all want to cross over and become politicians, using the membership in the youth organisation as a springboard into a political career.
b) Points of view of youth in civil society regarding involvement of youth in politics and decision-making

- Reasons of youth participation in the civil society

There are many youth organisations operating in the country. There is a large concentration of these organizations in the capital city, but there are scores of youth organizations that work in districts, mainly in large cities. As can be expected, youth involved in civil society in Tirana are much more numerous than in districts, especially small towns.

The data show that the young start to get involved with the civil society - in existing organisations or they start new ones - while at university or soon after graduation. Around that age, the young develop awareness on issues and problems that concern the youth, and they start preparing for life after school.

Why do young people choose to become part of these civic initiatives? Some of the main reasons provided by youth members of the civil society organisations in focus group discussions are listed below:

- To fill leisure time;
- To be engaged / involved in social activities;
- To defeat social apathy, people don’t get involved in finding solutions to problems;
- To bring change to youth-related issues from a young person’s point of view;
- To test personal skills and abilities;
- To come together, change is easier that way;
- To gain experience in addressing youth-related issues on certain matters;
- To address youth-related issues, to help others in need;
- To work on something one enjoys doing, for example with children, etc;
- To distance oneself from political divides that characterise employment / involvement with state institutions;
- To address and make up for the huge shortcomings in university career guidance offices;
- Prior involvement with youth parliaments in high school;
- To grow professionally;
- To establish contacts, and know other young activists;
- To do something that can help change;
- To support a cause one believes in.
Opportunities and capabilities of youth in civil society to bring change

Youth organisations that are active and work hard know who to raise funds and organise to advocate and lobby on youth-related issues and interests, and often achieve results with their mediation and intervention, especially when they network. Their efforts have led to several success stories for the young, such as the inclusion of young people in the municipal council of Tirana, and increase in funds for the employment of the youth\textsuperscript{31}, more funds for the youth at local level\textsuperscript{32}, more resources devoted to vocational training \textsuperscript{33}, the opening of a Youth Centre in Tirana, the introduction of the Student Card in the agenda of discussions of the Tirana municipal council, etc.

On the other hand, experience has shown that pressure or lobbying on youth-related issues not always yield the desired results. There have cases when youth requests have been denied regardless of massive youth participation, including a petition signed by 11,000 youngsters. Young activists say that such cases often come due to a lack of continuity and perseverance in pursuing a particular issue by the young and not necessarily because of ignoring of the young by the decision makers.

Young members of the civil society also say that discussions and consultations with the local power or government institutions often don’t work or come to no fruition, such as the case of the education system reform, identification and itemisation of budgets on youth, etc. Young activists are convinced that the young should be the first to be consulted on youth-related issues, because they know better than anyone else does what is best for them since they are the main beneficiaries.

* The young activists we talked to believe that student councils should be the voice of the young on matters relating to the education system, but it appears that they do not serve the young at all, and experience has shown that they are exploited by politics and special interests.

\textsuperscript{31} An initiative of the Youth Network “Tirana Youth Leadership” – the national Fund for Promoting Youth Employment (MMSR) was increased from USD 800,000 for the year 2013, to USD 1.7 million in 2014 and 4.5 million dollars for 2015

\textsuperscript{32} An initiative of the Youth Network “Tirana Youth Leadership” – at the local level (Tirana city hall), after several years of advocacy the budget for the youth at the Tirana municipality was increased from two percent to five percent

\textsuperscript{33} An initiative of the Youth Network “Tirana Youth Leadership” – after extensive lobbying with MMSR, there was an increase in funds for Regional Vocational Training Regional Departments 1 and 4 for the year 2015. Also, these two departments started to offer more free classes (aside from foreign languages and computer classes) for all the young in need.
Involvement in civil society as a launch pad for career in politics and decision-making

Is involvement in civil society organisations being used as a launch pad to politics and decision-making? Is this journey a formula for quick success? Young members of the civil society present two different views on the subject. Some of the young say this move from an apolitical civil society to politics is problematic, because the reputation and credibility of an individual may suffer a great deal. Former activists of the civil society may lose their standing in the community and the respect of the people if they align themselves politically.

There are several reasons why this jump is not looked on favourably: previous experience has shown that when activists of civil society enter politics, they lose passion and intensity to fight for the little guy; there is little trust on politicians; civil society is sometimes underestimated by the community, etc. For these reasons, the young believe it may be better to avoid mistrust and prejudices from both sides, and stay on their side of the court, regardless of the politics’ loss of potential new members.

It may be safe to say that young activists of the civil society are not enthusiastic to switch to politics. They also believe that the public grossly underestimates participation in organisations of civil society, and as a result, it does not build any strong premises to get involved later in politics and decision-making. However, a move to politics can be successful when an activist is fully committed to this goal from the get-go, uses the civil society to network, represents a large number of members and supporters, and is someone who has shown that he or she is capable of great things and manages to secure the necessary support and endorsement. Many politicians used to be activists in the civil society and that may be an encouraging and heartening message to young members of the civil society that want to participate in politics and decision-making in the future without joining a political party.

Young activists of the civil society say they value the independence and spirit of cooperation that characterises then civil society. They claim things function differently in political parties’ youth organisations, that by accident or by design are limited and trapped by party interests, and the young are exploited by their parties to meet electoral goals. Even though they love and appreciate the role of the civil society, they would like to see more young people involved in politics, FRPP should be more open to the young, and they should be a functioning and important part of politics. They also share the same opinion of FRPP members that the establishment of a youth quota at local and national levels would help to improve youth representation in politics and decision-making.
Perceived obstacles to youth participation in politics and decision-making structures and processes

Youth is a social group that carries a fair share of the burden to build the future of the country, but it is difficult for them to participate, to enjoy their rights, or to become part of politics and decision-making.

Obstacles on youth participation often come wrapped up in prejudices and misconceptions that the young are still learning their way through life and cannot be assigned important tasks or positions in politics and decision-making. However, young activists believe this should no longer constitute a major hurdle, because the maturity of the young and their ability to engage in decision-making should be evaluated based on individual basis and the position or task on offer.

Certain positions could be easily filled by well-educated and capable youth, ready and willing, and mature enough to take up challenging tasks. In their opinion, the youth should have a saying in the level and pace of their involvement in decision-making, based on individual desires, willingness, and capabilities. Some young people may prefer to grow up professionally at a slower pace, some others may be eager and ready to participate in earnest in politics and take up important tasks or positions.

To summarise, the young have identified a series of obstacles and problems that impede or slow down youth participation:

- Prejudices regarding their age and lack of experience keep the opinions of the young from being heard with the attention they deserve, and as a result they are not considered as suitable for decision-making positions;
- Lack of information, is one of the biggest problems that affect youth participation in decision-making structures, especially in rural and informal areas, where youth participation is translated and understood just as casting of ballots at election time, and that indicates a misinterpretation of the concept of participation;
- Dissemination of information is deficient and tardy, because the young should start their proper formation and engagement in decision-making (student councils, advisory boards) since early years at the university;
- Lack of desire and grit among the young to participate in politics and decision-making, a product of conformist passivity and apathy gripping the young on matters that directly affect them, by deciding not to leave their personal comfort zone;
- Lack of solidarity and willingness from older generations to support and encourage the young who want to participate and get involved in politics and decision-making;
- Not being affiliated with any political party;
- **Shortcomings in capacity building in civil society organisations regarding the young**, to properly inform and assist the young in their efforts to participate in politics and decision-making;
- **Previous disheartening experiences and unsuccessful efforts** related to failed youth initiatives on decision-making, often discourage projects and drives to improve participation in decision-making positions;
- **Poor organisation and coordination between youth groups and collaboration between youth organisations of political parties to support the young people that want to engage in decision-making**;
- **Lack of hope among the young to bring about meaningful change**;
- **Individualisation of wins by young people, that succeed in becoming part of decision-making institutions**, obscures the important role of the support organisation.

Therefore, involvement in decision-making processes or structures is not an easy journey, according to the young activists we talked to. These issues and problems that we mentioned above, are not only obstacles to involvement of more youth in politics and decision-making, but also cause serious harm to democracy.

- **Major issues and problems as perceived by youth**

The young people of Albania are living and growing up in a very problematic and crippled social, political, and economic environment. The young people that we interviewed for the purpose of this study have identified some of the main socio-economic problems that affect youth participation in decision-making:

- **Very few job opportunities**: a lack of dignified job opportunities befitting their education is a smothering factor to any aspiration of involvement in politics and is a continuous source of stress to the young. “In ancient times an animal would bite you and you’d die, today you’re bitten by the stress of joblessness and you die, even though you’ll still breathing,” said one of the youngsters we interviewed. However, it is ironic that lack of jobs is often the reason young people decide to join youth organisations of political parties hoping they will land a job when their party is in power. This approach is a clear indication of how politics is perceived by the young as a problematic establishment, based on partisanship and not meritocracy.

- **Mismatch of the education system and the job market**: lack of studies on the job market, market saturation for some professions, and a mismatch of market needs and available education system degrees reduce chances of employment for the young.

- **Family upbringing and school education**: the numerous challenges at social, political, and economical level are not made any easier by the approach family and schools take on these issues. Volunteering is still considered a taboo.
7. Good working practices of youth organisations on involvement of the young in politics and decision-making

Involvement in youth organisations of civil society is an alternative way of engagement that may lead to concrete results on youth-related issues at local and national level, thus becoming players in politics. Success is not always guaranteed, and it takes continuous support by donors on complex issues over a lengthy period of time. To present the best working practices of youth organisations of the civil society we invited all youth organisations in the country to share with us positive experiences on concrete results achieved through projects and initiatives.

Below we have shortlisted some of the most representative and meaningful practices of successful interventions that have influenced politics at local and national level. More detailed descriptions of these practices are included in the appendix 5 of this publication.

7.1 Youth Advisory Board, a novelty at the Tirana City-hall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the organisation:</th>
<th>CRCA Albania in cooperation with Youth Leadership of Tirana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of initiative:</td>
<td>Youth Advisory Board, 2014 – 2015 to-date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:</td>
<td>The establishment and functioning of a Youth Advisory Board to network with the Tirana municipal council, from the young to the youth. This informative and advisory body includes representatives of youth organisations, political youth forums, and student advisory councils, and it will be a determining factor in drafting, proposing, implementing, and monitoring of local policies that mirror the actual needs of the young.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The approach of the organisation - three dimensional:</td>
<td>youth as target group; youth as partners; youth as initiators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of impact:</td>
<td>youth in decision-making ; Capacity building; Information; Gender integration/Gender equality /Gender budgeting; Youth budgeting; Integration of marginalised youth /socially-challenged youth; Integration of diversely gifted youth; Artistic creativity; Leisure time; Space for the young; Environment protection; Youth Centre; Health care for the young;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More specifically the objectives of the Youth Advisory Board are:

a) Support to the participation of youth groups from various communities, represented in the Youth Advisory Board, to give voice and priority to youth-related issues on a local level;

b) Addressing and defending youth interests at the local government;

c) Empowering the young to hold elected officials accountable in exercising of their functions in relation to the youth;

d) Involving the young at a community level with proposing, and implementing joint actions and initiatives and drafting of policies that affect their lives;

e) Youth as main players in drafting, ideating, implementing and monitoring of local policies that mirror the actual needs of the young;

f) Empowering the young to become the future council members and local leaders.

**Phases and steps of the project:**

a) Consultation meeting with the chairman of Tirana municipal council, Mr. Aldrin Dalipi;

b) Consultation meeting with youth organisations and youth political forums on the establishment of the Youth Advisory Council;

c) Consultation meeting between CRCA Albania, organisations/forums members of the Leadership with the chairman of Tirana municipal council on the importance of establishing a Youth Advisory Council;

d) Open forum at the meeting room of the municipal council where the Youth Advisory Council was established and the act of foundation was signed between the council chairman and leaders of youth organizations that take part in the Youth Leadership of Tirana;

c) Activities and events of the Youth Advisory Council:
   - Lobbying and advocacy on introducing a reviewing process for Municipal Student Card;
   - Lobbying and advocacy with the municipal council, other players at the Tirana City hall, and the committee on economy to increase the budget for the youth for 2015-2017;
   - Lobbying and advocacy to reopen the Multifunctional Centre TEN.

**Results:**

1. Introduction of a process of review on the municipal Student Card, that had failed due to non-functional and inaccessible list of services and discounts it offered to students of the University of Tirana;

2. Increase of youth budget from 2% to 5% at the Tirana municipality.
## 7.2 Empowering initiatives for the young from the Tirana Youth Leadership

**Name of the organisation:** Youth network ‘Tirana’

**Name of initiatives:**

1. Youth Manifesto “Youth are the Solution, Not the Problem”;
2. Action plan “Youth - Service Providers”;

**Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:**

- **Initiative 1:** With the *Youth Manifesto*, youth organizations and youth political forums stated that Youth should be in charge of its own future, and not just a passive spectator of development processes in Albania by addressing their interests/priorities at the local administration and the government;

- **Initiative 2:** The Youth Leadership of Tirana drafted in 2013 the action plan ‘*Youth - Service Providers*’ in the framework of Community Evaluation Methodology on Governing. This should serve as a instrument to directly influence drafting and implementing of youth policies from local administration and government;

- **Initiative 3:** The *Social Contract* aimed at encouraging youth participation and engagement of the young during 2015 local elections, to address priority needs to candidates and local elected officials.

**The approach of the organisation:** two-dimensional: youth as partners; youth as initiators.

**Area of impact:** Education; Employment for the young; Youth decision-making; Capacity building; Information; Gender integration / Gender equality / Gender budgeting; Youth budgeting; Integration of marginalised youth /socially-challenged youth; Integration of diversely gifted youth; Artistic creativity; Leisure time; Space for the young; Environment protection; Minority youth; Social service for the young; Vocational training; Municipal Student Card; Support to youth organisations of the civil society; Road and Social Infrastructure; Multifunctional youth centre; Support to young businessmen.

**Phases and steps of the projects:**

**Youth Manifesto “Youth are the Solution, Not the Problem”:**

- a) Several focus group meetings were held between members of the Youth Leadership of Tirana and other youngsters leaving in the Capital City, to identify and prioritise problems and concerns;

- b) Drafting of the Youth Manifesto “Youth are the Solution, Not the Problem” comprised of five main areas of concern that addressed the most worrying issues and problems to the young of Tirana;
c) Meetings with chairmen of political parties to lobby/advocate that the Youth Manifesto be included in the programs of every political party running in the 2013 general elections;

d) Monitoring of implementation of the Youth Manifesto after the 2013 election;

**Action plan “Youth - Service Providers”:**

a) Focus groups meetings with members of the Leadership, to analyse every service offered to the young in Tirana;

b) In-depth interviews with service providers at a local level;

c) Open workshop with Tirana youth and service providers at a local level to draft together the Action plan “Youth - Service Providers”;

d) Monitoring by the Leadership of the implementation of the action plan by service providers in Tirana;

**Social Contract for the Young 2015:**

a) Three focus group meetings with youth organisations and political forums that take in the Youth Leadership of Tirana;

b) Open meeting with young people of Tirana to discuss on 10 issues that were identified in focus group meetings. These issues and problems were discussed at length, voted and then ranked from 1 – 10, depending on the necessity and gravity of the problem;

c) The signing of the Social Contract by leaders of the political youth organisations at an open meeting, the first such meeting in the history of democracy in Albania, where the young got together to promote their cause, regardless of their political affiliations;

d) The signing of the Social Contract by every candidate for Mayor of Tirana;

e) Monitoring of implementation of the Social Contract for the next four years of Tirana city-hall administration.

**Results:**

1. Increase in youth budget 2015 – 2017 for Tirana city hall;

2. Increase of budget on Encouraging Youth Employment from USD 800,000 in 2013, to 1.7 million in 2014, and USD 4.7 million in 2015;

3. The opening of the Tirana Youth Centre;

4. Elimination of fees for supplementary courses (except for foreign languages and computer classes) offered by two Vocational Training Regional Department, no. 1 and no. 4;

5. The establishment of the Youth Advisory Board at the Tirana municipal council, as an informative and advisory body, that includes representatives of youth organisations, youth forums, and student council members.

6. An increase in the number of young winners (a 30 per cent exit quota) in the lists of candidates for municipal councils in the June 21 local elections.
### 7.3 Access to comprehensive sexuality education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the organisation:</th>
<th>Albanian Centre for Population and Development (QSHPZH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of initiative:</strong></td>
<td>Introduction of a comprehensive sexuality education and life skills in academic curricula in pre-university education, 2010 – to-date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:</strong></td>
<td>Access to comprehensive sexuality education (based on respecting children’s rights and gender-sensitivity) for the young in Albania. All children and adolescents should be informed of their right of to receive sexual and reproductive health, to make informed decisions about their health and enable them to take action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The approach of the organisation</strong></td>
<td>three dimensional: youth as target group; youth as partners; youth as initiators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area of impact:</strong></td>
<td>Education; Capacity building; Information; Sexual and reproductive health; Integration of marginalised youth /socially-challenged youth; Integration of diversely gifted youth; Volunteering; Space for the young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phases and steps of the project:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Advocacy with the Ministry of Education to endorse comprehensive sexuality education classes in pre-university education;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>After approval in 2012, in cooperation with the Institute of Education Development (IZHA) cross-curricular activities were developed (interdisciplinary – including sexuality education in several classes such as health education, physical education, biology, etc.) for grades 4-5, 6-7, 8-9;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>In 2016 the development of cross-curricular activities should be completed for grades 10-11-12, as well as official approval of these programs and training of teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc. at the national level;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>Alongside these activities, QSHPZH has offered informal education on youth sexuality in schools and outside classrooms, by organizing training seminars, informative meetings, awareness campaigns to improve the level of appreciation and knowledge on this issue with parents, teachers, leaders of the community, the media, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results:</strong></td>
<td>The drafting of modules, their testing and training of professionals involved in youth education are under way at the present in cooperation with IZHA. This process is followed carefully and revised step by step, and the young will continue to be part of promoting, implementing, and monitoring of this initiative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.4 Representation of Durrës youth of at the local level

Name of the organisation: Centre for Development of Civil Society (CSDC) Durrës

Name of initiative: Institutionalisation of the Youth Advisory Committee and advocacy campaign on youth budget (September - December 2014)

Objectives of the initiative and desired impact: Improving representation of Durrës youth at local level in all degrees of decision-making and policy-shaping for the youth.

The approach of the organisation - three dimensional: youth as target group; youth as partners; youth as initiators.

Area of impact: Capacity building; Information; Volunteering; Space for the young.

Phases and steps of the project:

a) Planning of the advocacy campaign on addressing youth-related issues for the city of Durrës;
b) Meetings of Durrës Youth Group with representatives of service providers at the local level;
c) Formal request to the Durrës municipality to recognise the Youth Advisory Committee, the establishment of the Youth Resource Centre, a separate fund in the city budget earmarked especially to the youth, setting up info-points, etc;
d) Advocacy campaign with local broadcast and print media;
e) Open meeting with Durrës youth on December 8, 2014, Youth Day, to address youth-related problems;
f) Signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation by the Mayor of Durrës and the Youth Advisory Committee (KKR).

Results:

- They succeeded in signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation by the Mayor of Durrës and the Youth Advisory Committee. This agreement formalised the recognition of KKR, as a key consulting and advisory partner on youth-related issues;
- Durrës City Hall has pledged to provide accessible premises to the young to open a Youth Centre.
### 7.5 Improvement of life of youth in the town of Puka through participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the organisation:</th>
<th>Youth Movement for Democracy, Puka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of initiative:</td>
<td>Community Evaluation on Participatory Governance and Budgeting, 2013-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:</strong></td>
<td>More sensibility from service providers towards improving life for the youth of Puka. The young should know how to identify and address priority needs to improve their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The approach of the organisation</td>
<td>two dimensional: youth as target group; youth as partners;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of impact:</td>
<td>Education; Employment; Capacity building; Information; Gender integration/Gender equality /Gender budgeting; Youth budgeting; Leisure time; Volunteering; Space for the young;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases and steps of the project:</td>
<td>a) Informative meetings with the organizing staff, service providers, and youth; b) Evaluation of existing services by the young; c) Evaluation of services by providers themselves and cross-checking of evaluations; d) Drafting of an action plan by service providers and the young, and the monitoring of implementation of action plan for 2014; e) Several meeting were organised on participatory budgeting and several social groups were interviewed on their needs and issues concerning the community and their introduction in the budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results:</td>
<td>- Improvements in infrastructure, teaching, more updated information on decisions related to the youth; - The young are better informed and prepared to identify needs and capable to ask for the improvement of conditions at school classrooms and other facilities to improve their education experience; - Listing of youth needs in the priority plan of the municipality in budget forecasts for 2015, and for the period 2015 – 2017. - Attendance of municipal council meetings by the young has made decision makers more sensible to problems that affect the youth in the city of Puka, where youth employment in the biggest problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7.6 Setting up and monitoring of local legislation for the youth in the city of Vlora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the organisation:</th>
<th>Vlora Youth Centre, Vlora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:</td>
<td>Establishing local legislation and regulations on youth in the district of Vlora and monitoring of legislation through the Action Plan for Vlora municipality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The approach of the organisation</td>
<td>three dimensional: youth as target group; youth as partners; youth as initiators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of impact:</td>
<td>Education; Employment; Capacity building; Information; Sexual and reproductive health; Gender integration/Gender equality/Gender budgeting; Integration of marginalised youth/socially-challenged youth; Artistic creativity; Leisure time; Volunteering, Space for the young; Promoting of cultural heritage; Environment protection;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phases and steps of the project:**

- a) A local research study on youth-related issues in the city of Vlora;
- b) Formulating a local strategy and action plan;
- c) Drafting of the strategy and action plan, and lobbying with local authorities to adopt these documents;
- d) Approval by Vlora district council and members of the municipal council adopting these documents into local regulations;
- d) Monitoring of the Action Plan for Vlora municipality for 2014 and 2015, through several monitoring methods such as the Community Evaluation on Participatory Governance and Budgeting;
- e) Drafting of periodical reports on monitoring of the Action Plan and keeping the young up-to-date on findings of the monitoring process, and local authorities awareness on assigning more funds to youth activities.

**Results:**

- Establishing local legislation and regulations on youth in the district of Vlora and the municipality of Vlora. Establishing a monitoring system on youth policies at local level;
- Empowering youth groups to representation and demand more rights from the local power;
- Youth capacity building through training, networking and other activities held in Vlora.
7.7 Youth in informal neighbourhoods in Tirana, partners in decision-making

**Name of the organisation:** Association for Integration of Informal Areas (SHIZI)

**Name of initiative:** Community Evaluation on Governance, 2013 - 2014

**Objectives of the initiative and desired impact:** The aim of this initiative is to encourage the young to participate in decision-making at a local level.

**The approach of the organisation** - two dimensional: youth as target group; youth as partners;

**Area of impact:** Education; Capacity building; Information; Leisure time; Volunteering.

**Phases and steps of the project:**
- Establishment of a network of young people involved in this project;
- Training of youth on Community Governance Evaluation (VKQ);
- Meetings on identification of problems;
- Public meetings between representatives of local government and youth;
- Initiation of a process of monitoring and lobbying local authorities to keep pledges and promises.

**Results:**
- The young drafted a mutual action plan with local authorities in Bathore and Paskuqan on keeping with the main points of VKQ. The main elements of the action plan focused on participation and involvement of the young in local decision-making;

Some of the results of the action plan outlined by the young and the local authorities included:
- Several youngsters were included as members of citizen advisory board;
- The young were included in discussions on drafting of the budget for the commune and identified issues and problems that need addressing;
- The young were also consulted and included in discussions on the list of cultural activities to be funded by local authorities.
7 Conclusions

The aim of this research study was to offer a representation of youth-related issues in Albania with a special attention on youth participation in politics and decision-making. The data we collected and analysed for the purpose of this study showed that:

1. Despite the fact that Albania has achieved progress towards democratisation of its political environment, this progress has not been matched by legislation initiatives in support of youth participation. Even though the right to organise, to vote, to association, and the right to free speech are recognised as constitutional rights by the Constitution of Albania, there is still room to improve the legislation. The electoral code of the Republic of Albania has adopted a gender quota for girls and women, but makes no provisions on youth participation in decision-making. In the meantime, the law “On Political Parties in Albania” makes no reference to the young in this aspect. During these last few years there have been some attempts at introducing legislation such as the writing of two draft bills “On the Youth” and “On Volunteering”, even though at the time of completion of this study no such initiatives were adopted by the Assembly of Albania;

2. Albania presents to some extent a positive image regarding the drafting of national policies for the youth, including their participation in politics and decision-making. From 2005 onwards, Albania has adopted and implemented a National Strategy for the Young and a Nationwide Action Plan. However, it is difficult to measure and analyse the impact that these strategies have had in real life, because there has never been a detailed examination of their implementation, budgets assigned to such projects, and results achieved over the years. The Nationwide Action Plan for Youth 2015-2020 (PKVR) is a serious inter-institutional endeavour to develop a new policy on supporting youth in Albania. The Plan, among other things, also focuses on improving youth participation in democratic processes of decision-making. All in all, it can be said that PKVR is a positive and serious decent endeavour to develop public policies for-and-with the young, including the identification of strategic objectives to encourage youth participation in politics and public decision-making. Nonetheless, the positive traits of this plan may fade away because of failures to clearly define certain goals and plan events to draw public support; lack of dialogue with political parties; failure to change the electoral code to introduce the 20 per cent quota at the national level; lack of funds to support the establishment of a civic-political youth platform; and the non-existence of an independent national youth formation to periodically monitor the implementation of the Plan;
3. **Statutes and regulations of all political parties in Albania include specific roles, duties and responsibilities for their youth forums, even though some of these functions are limited or in some cases are decided based on certain quotas and proportions.** An analysis of these functions should show us how committed political parties are to guarantee youth participation in internal decision-making structures. From this point of view, the degree of a party’s internal democracy can be discerned by how much room and opportunities the young have to participate in youth organisations and parties. It is also an indication of how important youth and youth advancement are to political parties in Albania;

4. Youth organisations play different roles in their respective parties. **Statutes assign to most of the political youth organisations limited roles and duties and restricted access to decision-making processes and structures, but a few youth forums have a wide range of roles and duties and have full access in all levels of party decision-making.** *Almost all of them are included in their respective parties’ steering committees.* However, we noticed that the position of youth forums becomes weaker when it comes to including the young in list of candidates for MP, local leadership positions, or financial resources to guarantee a proper functioning of the political youth organisation. The role of local youth forums is limited and is generally restricted to ensuring the participation of a of young member to the party local leadership, and in some cases *party statutes and regulations do not specify any role or duties for youth forums in local party steering committees.* FRPP members are well aware of their indispensable role in support of their party, but they see this role as closely related to electoral campaigns or political rallies organised by their political party for any number of causes and reasons, so mainly restricted to events. On the other hand, young members of political parties often *feel they are left out from sharing the victory* with the rest of the party, and that comes also as a result of individualisation of achievements by those people that manage to join decision-making institutions, obscuring the important role of the support organisation;

5. **Youth participation and representation in the lists of MP candidates for the Assembly of Albania and members of municipal councils is of a particular importance, not only to the young, but also to the democratisation of elected public institutions** and conveying and advocating youth needs on any establishment where decision on them are made. However, it is no surprise that none of the youth organisations have a guaranteed representation where it really matters, at the Parliament and municipal councils. *No statute had any references to guarantee a minimum quota of youth representation in the parliament, government, or municipal councils.* The drafting of lists of candidates for local elections is a process that works
differently from one party to another. Occasions when lists for local elections on candidates for mayors and head of communes are decided in consultations with the youth forums, in a transparent and comprehensive process, are few and far between. Even though, it appears not to be on purpose, considering that youth organisations are part of the decision-making in parties when these issues are discussed and adopted, the impact of such a shortcoming in youth representation and participation is negative. In this sense, young members of political parties, because of political conjunctures, have much less opportunities to play a pro-active role and influence laws, policies and new programs at local and national level. Moreover, this restricted role allows even fewer opportunities to young people to train and prepare for future commitments to politics and law-making. By contrast, youngsters coming from civil society organizations have more opportunities to hone their political skills;

6. **The financial dependence and insufficient financial resources have an immeasurable negative impact on youth organisations.** Regardless of the role, influence, access to funds or size of the party, a source of concern is the lack of a dedicated budget for each youth forum. *No one of the party statutes* mentions neither sources of funding or the method of financing of youth organisations, nor the size of resources transferred from the party budget. The lack of a statute-sanctioned budget *is a crucial element in strengthening youth participation and representation in party decision-making*, as youth forums do not have the necessary resources to support their members with training, educational events, or even to support or organise community events. This shortage of funds for youth organisations stem not only from limited financial resources at the disposal of political parties, but also due to a tendency on behalf of the party leadership to keep under control every element and every event organised by these youth forums;

7. The young members of political parties are represented in party institutions through youth forums. There are cases when these youngsters are motivated by *positive instances of success* of young people involvement at senior levels of decision-making in government or parliament. **However, the number of young people with access to governance at local and national level is still small**, with sporadic success stories of youth appointed at relevant executive position or the legislative branch (parliament). The same situation can be found at the local levels of governance, where there is some youth representation, but it remains at very poor levels and does not take into consideration the young as a particular social group with specific interests and needs. It is clear that the journey of the young towards success in politics and decision-making faces many challenges and obstacles, requires
commitment, and is often not materialised in accordance to the expectations of youth. The data collected for the purpose of this study showed that the participation of the young in politics and decision-making is at very low levels, but leaders of FRPPs said they were optimistic the young would move on to senior positions in their party;

8. Members of youth organisations say that the biggest problem they face is the old-fashioned mind-set of traditional members of political parties. That often hampers their advancement and slows down their rise into politics and decision-making on all levels. Perceived obstacles on the path to advancement, are linked to stereotypes that the young are inexperienced and lack professional expertise, therefore they cannot be appointed on senior positions in politics and decision-making. Prejudices on young age and lack of experience drown out the voices of the young, their opinion are not respected and they are not considered for decision-making positions;

9. The dynamics within parties offer no major surprises. Large parties strictly abide by their internal hierarchy, which is necessary to properly manage their large number of members and supporters. This research study revealed that the smaller the party, the more flexible it hierarchical chain within the party, and the easier it is for members of the youth organisations to interact directly with leaders of the forum or the party. Youth organisations bring to the attention of its structures many issues to be discussed by its members and some of these issues are presented by group leaders at the top steering committee of the youth organisation. The most important issues that don’t clash with the party line are then conveyed by the chairperson of the youth organisation to the party leadership to reach a decision or ratification;

10. Youth-related issues not always receive the attention they deserve from policy-shaping and decision-making structures, such as party leadership, parliament, government, and municipal councils and this is very worrying. Very few issues and problems that concern the young are addressed by local administrations and the government. FR leaders believe that very few of their requests and calls for action have been considered, because the promotion of the young and youth-related issues are not priorities to our elected leaders;
11. To-date, cooperation between FRPPs of different political party to further the cause of the young, has been non-existent and is considered as a huge problem that needs addressing. The young suffer the absence of coordination between youth groups regardless of their political affiliations when it comes to supporting the young who want to engage in politics and decision-making. Supporting initiatives on the cause of the young are organised only by the civil society and have little impact on political parties;

12. Involvement in civil society organisations is considered by some young people as a launch pad to politics and decision-making. Quite often this switch is not looked on favourably and these prejudices often prevent them from jumping to politics. However, the introduction of respectable public figures of the civil society to the executive branch is a positive development;

13. Lack of willingness, conformist passivity and reluctance to go out of one’s way are some of the most common elements that keep the young from moving ahead in politics at all levels and undermine initiatives to further their interests. Previous disheartening experiences and unsuccessful efforts related to failed youth initiatives on decision-making often dampen their spirits and motivation to engage in politics or decision-making positions. At the same time, the non-networked dissemination of information makes it more difficult for the young to participate in councils, advisory boards, etc.
8 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, consultations with young members of youth organisations of political parties and young activists of civil society, and interviews with successful youngsters in politics and decision-making, we came up with a series of suggestions. Listed below is a series of recommendations to parliament, government, political and decision-making structures within parties, at local and national level, but also to the young in youth forums of political parties and youth organisations of the civil society.

PARLIAMENT

1. Youth participation and representation is of a primary importance to the wellbeing of the democracy in a country and to the grooming future politicians and leaders. In this aspect, the Assembly of Albania should consider with high priority to adopt the law “On Youth” and “On Volunteering.” At the same time, they should seriously consider that eventual changes in the electoral code in the future should include a youth minimum representation quota of 20 per cent in the lists of candidates for MP and members of municipal councils. The parliament should approve special laws with penalties to compel parties to respect youth quotas, to discourage manoeuvring and tricks to avoid placing the young at the bottom of the list, as happened with the gender quotas;

2. A concerted effort to introduce more youth-related issues and problems in the parliament agenda, with a special focus on youth education and employment. There should be a genuine interest to address youth-related issues and not dictated by short-term interests or collection of funds that are later allocated for other purposes;

3. The establishment of an Alliance of Young MPs aimed at setting up a well-organised group of young politicians to address youth-related issues at decision-making institutions such as parliament committees, government, etc. This Alliance should also cooperate closely with FRPP leadership to continually receive feedback on youth-related issues;

4. The improvement of the political environment and discourse, to encourage the young to join politics. At the moment, they are repelled by politics because of hate speech, and a culture of conflict. It is very important to establish an amicable environment within and between parties, emanating political maturity, and based on sound values and principles. The young should regain faith in politics and consider it an instrument in the service of the public;
GOVERNMENT

5. **The National Action Plan on Youth 2015-2020 (PKVR)** is a serious inter-institutional endeavour of the Albanian government and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MMSR) to develop a new policy on supporting and empowering youth in Albania. The government should give priority to the allocation of all necessary funds to ensure its implementation. On the other hand, the government and MMSR should give top priority to the implementation of this Plan by organisations of the civil society and political youth forums, and finance events and efforts to meet goals and objectives of the Plan;

POLITICAL PARTIES

6. To replenish the ranks of political parties with new members and to encourage youth participation and representation in political parties in Albania, a top priority should be given to the adoption of youth quotas on any decision-making and leadership structures within parties. The adoption of quotas, even though it may sound an artificial solution, has proven in the past that it can produce positive results for the youth, as well as parties and their political advancement. In this sense, the establishment of youth political academies within political parties can further encourage cooperation between older generations and the young, as a way to exchange experiences and to improve synergy between a party’s officials and structures;

7. Political party structures and elites need to think seriously on identifying and adopting new models of financing for their youth organisations. Political empowerment of the young cannot be achieved by weak youth forums that depend every step of the way on financing by the party leadership. To make up for these deficiencies we recommend the addition of a separate article in the yearly party budget on funding of the youth forum, a fund that should be managed by the young. The creation of real opportunities for financial independence of youth organisation, are indications of maturity not only of youth forums but also of political parties and their leaders. One way to do it would be the earmarking of a special fund by KQZ, similar to fund allocation for political parties. In the meantime, political youth organisations should consider registering with the courts as non profit organisations (OJF), while remaining still attached to their parties, as an opportunity to increase and expand their chances of financing from legitimate sources from the country and abroad;
8. **FRPPs should regulate their functioning with the adoption of formal statutes or internal regulations**, which should ensure a proper and efficient operation of FRs. These regulations would define procedures that should be followed in consultation and decision-making processes, the relationship of dependence/independence with the party, and every other criteria for the functioning of FRPPs;

9. **Support and encouraging of the young who wish to get involved in politics and decision-making** giving opportunities to the young to be represented at every political level, not only at grassroots levels but also at the top structures, starting with local governance such as municipal councils all the way to parliament. **Special attention should be paid to ensure access to minority youth** and the young from marginalised social groups, giving them an opportunity to have their saying in politics and their party’s political vision, thus presenting their issues and problems at all levels. Besides, **consultations within a party should be all-inclusive** and involve more young people, especially on youth-related issues and problems, because the young now better than anyone what’s best for them;

10. **We must address the problem of youth passivity and apathy in political engagement**, starting with improving participation of the young in voting and elections, increasing and improving youth participation in drafting of local and national level policies through involvement in advisory bodies, local councils, etc. It is also of fundamental importance to **raise the level of awareness of Albanian youth regarding their decisions and political choices.** They should distance themselves from petty self-interests, short-term gain, militantism, from excessive pressure by family or community. For as long as the vote of the young is perceived as influenced by the above-mentioned motives and not by party programs, youth will never be a group of any particular interest to political parties. That would seriously harm youth participation in politics and addressing of issues affecting their lives. Instead, they should get involved and vote on ideas, political programs, and platforms that address with consideration youth and community problems.

**YOUTH ORGANISATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

11. **The transformation of FRPPs into empowering and motivating institutions to all young people, including minorities and marginalised social groups**, turning them into capacity-building powerhouses. Youth organisation of political parties should be considered as much more than job-finding entities. **FRPPs should simplify and even scrap introductory procedures for new members**, abandoning all restrictions or
impeding formalities, and expanding the range of events and opportunities available to the young. Formal procedures of membership should come at a second stage, after the young have been properly introduced to the ideology and have had a chance to reflect on the FR and their membership;

12. Lobbying on adopting (where there is none) of an internal regulation / FR statute, drafted by the party in cooperation with the FR, and its approval. The next step should be the publication of the regulation to make it available to all the young who want to join the youth organisation. Terms and conditions of the regulation on elections of FR leaders should be meticulously respected, guaranteeing fair elections free from party pressure. Also, the rotation of leaders and steering committees should occur more rapidly, to engage more young politicians in decision-making and to stimulate a continuous participation in policy-shaping and decision-making party structures;

13. Youth Forums should crank up the pressure on young people in decision-making positions to raise their voice on youth-related issues, and present a united front in support of their representatives. The founding of an organisation to unite all FRPPs into a single voice on behalf of the youth would pressure politics to introduce youth-related issue into the policy agenda and to institutionalise the cause of the youth. The coming together of FRPPs would also be a positive example to all the young, and a symbol of unity regardless of political affiliations. Youth organisations of the civil society should facilitate this process and mediate between parties.

YOUTH ORGANISATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Youth organisations should address the lack of information and knowledge among the young, which is often seen as one of the biggest problems affecting youth participation in decision-making institutions, especially in rural and informal areas. Special importance should be given to dissemination of tailor-made information to the young. Youth in high schools and especially in universities should be targets of informative intervention to sway them towards involvement in politics and decision-making; Continues promotion of volunteering by FRPPs though motivating programs and events, and a stronger cooperation between youth organisations of the civil society;

2. Capacity building in youth organizations of civil society, to assist the young in participating in politics and decision-making.
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