



YouthBankHub
WESTERN BALKAN AND TURKEY

POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN ALBANIA

Annual Report



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Implementing partners



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Acronyms

ASCS – AGENCY FOR THE SUPPORT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

CSO – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION

CSR – CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

EBRD – EUROPEAN BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

EC – EUROPEAN COMMISSION

EU – EUROPEAN UNION

GDP – GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

GNI – GROSS NATIONAL INCOME

ILO – INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION

INSTAT – ALBANIAN INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS

IPA – INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION

MDGS – MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

NATO – NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

NESS – NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY

NSDI – NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION

ODA – OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT AID

OECD – ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

SAA – STABILIZATION AND ACCESSION AGREEMENT

SDGS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

UN – UNITED NATIONS

UNDP – UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

UNFPA – UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

UNICEF – UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND

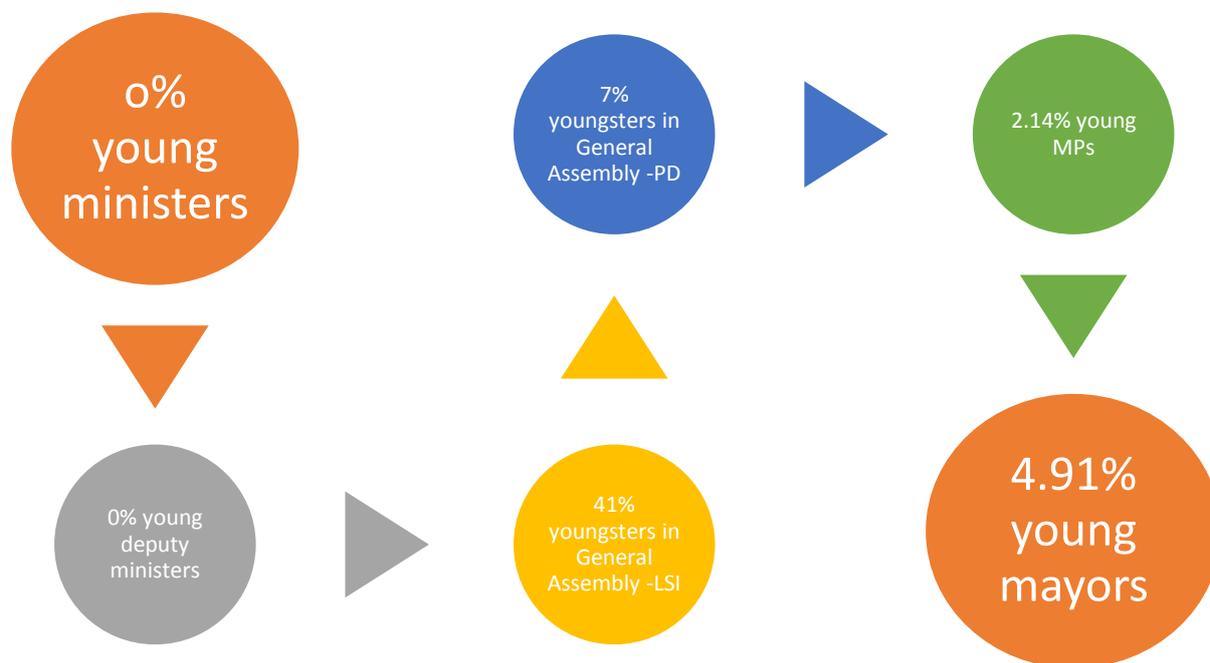
US – UNITED STATES

USAID – UNITED NATIONS AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

VET – VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

WB – WORLD BANK

Facts on Youth Political Participation



Youth structures

- 0 Ministries
- 11 municipalities (out of 28 responded)

Website

- 20 institutions at national level out of 21 (ministries, parliament)
- 37 municipalities out of 61

Facebook

- 20 institutions at national level out of 21 (ministries, parliament)
- 51 municipalities out of 61

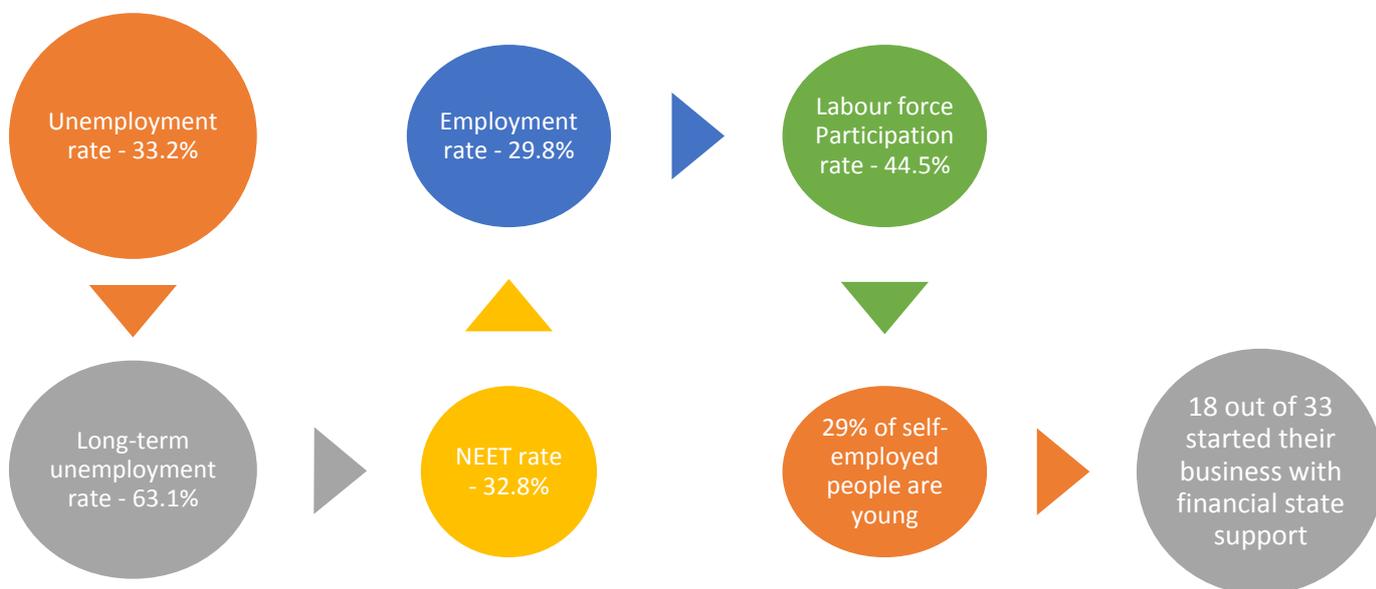
Twitter

- 20 institutions at national level out of 21 (ministries, parliament)
- 7 municipalities out of 61

Facts on Youth Social Participation



Facts on Youth Economic Participation



Executive Summary

Population under the age of 30 represents about 40% of the total population in Albania. Notwithstanding, youth participation in both social and political spheres remains low. Under the present circumstances, without interventions, young women and men in the Albania are likely to remain outsiders to policy-making, and therefore unable to influence own social and economic positions.

This report highlights the political, social and economic situation of young people accompanied with certain advocacy recommendations related to each field. The assessment of data on political, social and economic participation of youth focused to gather some important and particular data in each field, which could draw out an overview of the overall situation. Below each session of youth participation in aforementioned fields are listed several advocacy interventions and policy recommendations. Also in the three spheres of youth participation is illustrated the example of the municipality of Tirana, as a positive case which shows some ways how a public institution can create mechanisms and can involve youngsters. Each indicator on the assessment report is based on secondary data. Firstly, through desk research are collected official data from relevant national and international public institutions, data from reports conducted by reliable international institutions/foundations. Secondly, since for many indicators there is lack of data, Partners Albania has sent requests for information to the responsible institutions in Albania. Some data are not updated yet for 2016, because the responsible institutions have not carried out the official data.

Despite the progress during last 25 years, macroeconomic figures show that there are several challenges to overcome in the forthcoming years in each of the three areas. The average unemployment rate is 17,9%, while the youth unemployment rate is higher, respectively 33.2% (INSTAT, 2015). With regards to the economic status, 15% of young population is at risk of poverty (INSTAT, 2015). There are significant disparities from rural to urban settings regarding infrastructure, access to services, and income. About 32.8% of young people are neither in employment, education or training (INSTAT, 2015). The high percentage of NEET accompanied with a high percentage of young people in prisons (36.54%) should be an alarm for decision makers to develop mechanisms and tools with the aim of involving youngsters in the society such as in sports, arts and other activities and turn them from a contingent of crime into decent citizens of future. The percentage of young people in prisons differs according to

gender. 99% of youngsters in prisons are males and only 1% are females. Thus, the strategy should be adapted targeting youngsters in two different approaches based on this fact.

Referring to the literacy of young people in general, the 2011 census recorded 8.6 thousand young people aged 15-29 who cannot read and write. Another topic to be mentioned is the lack of social engagement in internships, volunteer activities etc. Regarding youth involvement in civil society organizations should be highlighted that there is a lack of capacity in terms of leadership, management, and funding for CSOs that consist of young people, which renders these organisations ill-equipped for surviving in an environment where they face several constraints. Even though in overall the educational level of the Albanian youth is increasing rapidly, but still there are many challenges to overcome. Lack of jobs exist not only for young people with secondary level of education but the problem deepens even more for those with high level of education, who do not have many job opportunities for their level and/or fields of expertise, because there is a mismatch of the education system and the job market. Informality and black market in the economy – estimated around 30% of GDP (Boka & Torluccio, 2013) – drags job creation and lowers the conditions of those already employed.

Furthermore regarding political participation, data show that there is a very low percentage of young people in executive positions such as ministers, deputy ministers in central government as well as in municipalities. There is lack of youth structures attached to ministries and municipalities, and as a consequence a reduced participation in decision making. Regarding interaction and accountability from public institutions side, Partners Albania monitored the online tools they use to communicate with the public. There is quite an obvious difference between ministries and municipalities. Therefore, institutions on national level take care much more about public relations than institutions on local level. Even those municipalities that have established tools such as website, facebook, twitter reflect no content and interactions with public in their pages.

There is a paragraph within the Youth Policy in Albania document by the Council of Europe that synthesizes some of the above mentioned challenges: *“Albania has a growing economy but, for at least three reasons, an unfavourable position for young people: the extensive informal and black market; the disproportionate number of graduates compared to the number of jobs requiring that level of qualification; and the fact that age, rather than qualification, remains a key factor in seniority”*. (Council of Europe, 2009; p.114).

In view of the fact that youth constitutes between *a third and a half* of Albania's population, youngsters are called to play a major role in its country's development. For this to happen, though, work is needed in several areas.

With regards to low political participation, there is a need to revise and strengthen the legal/institutional framework of the country at all levels, from national to local, as well as to re-think the governance mechanisms and processes at the core of these institutions in order to bring youngsters on board and to create youth structures attached to local and central government. The reform process of this framework should definitely involve youth. Reforms regarding political participation of youngsters, such as defining a quota in parties' lists through amendment of the Electoral Code, such as every fifth candidate should be a young person under 30 years old. Additionally, the respective institutions should be pushed to publish data and percentages of young people participation in election and young people elected at local and central government. The same should be done for CSOs, because there is lack of published data on CSOs led by youth and composed by youth.

In terms of social participation, there is a need to lower the ratio of young people in prisons through a long-term strategy. The increasement of extracurricular activities such as sports clubs, arts, where youngsters can share common interests and can be engaged in social life rather than crime and illegal activities. The creation of public spaces provided for cultural, sports activities especially for young people would be helpful. In order to raise the quality of education while making it more aligned to market needs, it is a must to undertake an exhaustive revision of curricula, enhance teachers' delivery standards, increase youth ratios of completion of education and vocational trainings.

Some steps forward should be undertaken also regarding economic participation. Firstly there is an undeniable need to strengthen the mechanisms for job search and job access, investing in occupational services and providing job search-skills building; on the other hand, to create an enabling environment for development of self-employment initiatives, building entrepreneurial skills as well as easing access to credit. It is important not only to establish more start-up funds for entrepreneurs, but also to make efforts in promoting these kind of schemes for all youngsters that live in the territory of Albania. VET appears as a promising opportunity to build skills and competences of youth according to labour market's needs. A country with skilled human resources is more prone to retain its factories as well as to receive

investment for further development. Thus, in turn would be accompanied by the creation of jobs.

Policies/Legal Framework

The legal framework regulating social inclusion, economic and political participation is wide and varied, as are policies in these fields. A review of them deems as essential the following regulations and policies.

Within the International level:

Albanian economic and social inclusion strategies are influenced by and benefit from European-level frameworks and policies, the most important ones being:

- *EU Youth Strategy* which strongly advocates for “youth work”, a holistic concept that goes beyond employment and covers different aspects of youth personal development. As defined in the EU Youth Strategy website, it is about “*empowerment, emancipation, responsibility and tolerance [...] is also defined by its broader more societal aims which are participation in democratic societies, prevention and social inclusion and cohesion*” (European Commission, 2014, p.54).
- *Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* – intends to lift 20 million people out of poverty, fight social exclusion, and foster employment. The flagship initiatives under this strategy are the Platform against Poverty and Social Inclusion and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs.
- *EU Social Inclusion Strategy 2015-2020* – is rooted on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016, which defines mechanisms and strategies for social inclusion throughout the life cycle of individuals: children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities, and communities. Moreover, it is supported by the PROGRESS programme, a financial instrument aiming at policy development in five strategic areas: employment, social inclusion and protection, working conditions, anti-discrimination, and gender equality.
- *EU Strategy for Sustainable Development* – renewed in 2006, fosters an overarching, inclusive development in pursuit of MDGs/SDGs. Amongst the different policies it includes, there is a particular focus on social inclusion.

- *Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)*, 2007, and *Stabilization and Accession Agreement (SAA)* signed in 2006, guide Albania's reforms in different policy areas aiming at achieving the country's EU membership.
- In November 2012, the Parliament ratified the *UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*, signed in 2009.

Within the Albanian framework:

- *National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020 (NSDI)* – defines an integrated approach for the socio-economic development of the country as well as for the integration in the EU. The impact the NSDI is seeking is threefold: firstly, a greater economic development through enhancing the job markets, strengthening education services – including vocational trainings and voluntarism- and minimizing the informal economy. Secondly, it aims at turning economic growth into social welfare, through investing in public services that further inclusion, cohesion, and quality of life. The third axis of the strategy is based on strengthening governance, democracy and rule of law parameters.
- *Employment and Skills Strategy 2013-2020* – is aimed at building a more educated and skilled workforce according to the job market needs, as well as to boost job creation capacity in the country. Priority policies are identified: a) foster decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies; b) offer quality vocational education and training to youth and adults; c) promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion; and d) strengthen the governance of the labour market and qualifications system.
- *Social Protection Strategy 2015-2020* – designs a plan for building a social protection system where individuals are empowered, vulnerable groups are provided with opportunities to become more autonomous, and mechanisms for prevention and reintegration into society are in place.
- *National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020* – is the plan within the NSDI that targets the specific social and economic needs for youth. Considering youth constitutes a third of total population and around 40% of the workforce of the country, the Action Plan aims at designing transversal policies for the full integration of youth in schemes of health care, education, social work, and political participation, in order for them to become active member of society in all its facets. These action plan is based on six

strategic objectives such as: Youth promotion and participation in democratic processes/decision making; Youth employment promotion through effective labor market policy; Health, Sport and Environment; Youth Education; Social Protection; Culture and Volunteerism.

- *National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians* (within NSDI) – builds on the National Action Plan 2010-2015 – The decade of Roma Inclusion. The plan is based on a comprehensive approach targeting minorities with the objective of their inclusion. Therefore, policies range from basic services such as health, education, employment, and housing; to more sophisticated ones such as the protection of their cultural heritage.
- *The Law "On gender equality in society"* (adopted in 2008) and its further development through the amendments introduced in 2012. They introduced a 30% representation quota for women in candidate lists for election, at both local and Parliament levels; increased the fines for political parties' lists not meeting the requirement; introduce requirement of this 30% quote to be respected within the first three positions of the list.

Main stakeholders

Social inclusion and political & economic participation are three fields that require a multi-level, multi-sectorial approach to be dealt with. Therefore, there are several stakeholders involved in policies and projects regarding these three fields, from public to private actors, from national to local level. The key players in these areas are:

National level:

- The Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare – it is the lead Ministry in developing legislation, as well as in executing policies related to employment, VET, social protection and youth.
 - The National Employment Service
 - The State Social Service
 - Youth Consultation Board
- The Ministry of Education and Sports
 - The National Agency for VET and Qualifications
 - The National Centre for Continuous Learning

- The Ministry of Finance
- The Ministry of Economy
 - Social Business Promotion Agency
- The Ministry of Health
- The Ministry of Culture
- The National Institute of Statistics
- National Youth Service and Regional Youth Services
- Albanian Agency for the support of Civil Society (ASCS)
- Political parties: The three largest political parties in Albania created their respective youth factions, even though their activity level remains pretty low or inexistent in some cases.
 - FRESSH – the Albanian Euro socialist Youth Forum,
 - LRI - Youth Movement for Integration is a political youth organization of the Socialist Movement for Integration.
 - FRPD - Youth Forum of Democratic Party
- Albanian Youth Council
- Albanian Youth Parliament
- Student Governments and Student Councils
- There are many organizations, foundations, associations, youth activist groups promoting youth decision making, such as :
 - Network Albanian Students Abroad (AS @ N)
 - Albanian Youth Council
 - Albanian Youth Parliament
 - Action Plus
 - Gender Alliance for Development
 - Center for the Rights of Children
 - Albanian Association of the United Nations
 - SIFE Albania
 - KRIIK – Albania etc.

International level

- UNDP, UNW, UNFPA WB. OECD, USAID, EC, IOM, ILO, Olof Palme Centre;
- Embassies and development agencies of the European Union, the US, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Italy, Greece, among others.

- Chambers of Commerce from foreign countries.

Local level

- The regional departments / representations of the above mentioned national-level institutions play a role in the implementation of socio-economic inclusion policies at the regional and local level. Therefore, they are included as actors in the respective areas where they have a presence.
- Local government institutions – Regional Councils, Municipalities and Communes – hold decentralized responsibilities regarding social inclusion.

Private stakeholders

- Business associations, foundations from corporations (CSR) or philanthropy from business sector, and media play a role that is worth mentioning, since they can influence policy- and/or decision-making while they finance projects regarding socio-economic inclusion.
- Civil society as a whole, but more specifically CSOs, CSO-CSOs, and donors are essential stakeholders in the development of socio-economic inclusion policies, programs and projects. Since the fall of the communist regime, foreign aid flown into the country, either as financial assistance, or as technical cooperation in institutional reform, legislation design, capacity building for project implementation, or advocacy efforts.

Funding

Social inclusion and economic & political participation is achieved through several means ranging from the provision of basic social services such as health and education, to the development of specific programs targeting cohesion, exclusion, and minorities.

In addition to national resources funding strategies (table 1) on social, economic and political inclusion of youth, there are international resources Albania is benefiting from. The most important one is the EU's IPA Programme, which includes among its targeted areas of intervention social inclusion, youth, cohesion, education, VET, and skills development for accessing the job market. Other funding specifically supporting youth is that of UNICEF, or that of CSOs like Save the Children.

Table 1: Funding Programmes on Social Inclusion of Youth

Policy / Programme	Timeline	Spending	Source
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Health as percentage of GDP	2013	5,9%	UNDP
Education as percentage of GDP	2013	3,3%	UNDP
Employment Promotion Fund	2015	490 M ALL	ALGov.
Official Development Aid ODA	2014	2.1%	WB
National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020			
Strategic Objective no 1: Youth promotion and participation in democratic processes/decision-making	2015 - 2020		
Strategic Objective no 2: Youth Employment Promotion Through Effective Labour Market Policy	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the foreseen activities is 6,166,247 ALL, of which 91% are covered by the State Budget and 9% are uncovered funds that could be sought from cooperation with donors or stakeholders.	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 3: Health, Sport, and Environment	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities foreseen in this objective is 47,062,470,000 ALL, 59% of which are covered by the State Budget, 1% by the UNFPA and 40% are uncovered costs that could be sought through cooperation with donors and stakeholders.	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 4: Youth Education	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities foreseen for this objective is 6,166,247 ALL, 91% of which is covered by the state budget and 9% uncovered costs that can be sought through cooperation with donors and stakeholders.	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 5: Social Protection	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the planned activities in this objective is 164,005,000 ALL, of which 40% is covered by the State Budget and 60% is uncovered costs that could be secured through cooperation with donors or stakeholders	NYAP
Strategic Objective no. 6: Culture and Voluntarism	2015 - 2020	The total cost of the activities planned in this objective is 343,410,000 ALL, 60% of which are covered by the state budget and 40% are uncovered funds that can be sought through cooperation with donors or stakeholders.	NYAP
National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020			
Strategic Objective A: Foster decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 15.770.000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective B: Offer quality vocational education and training for youth and adults	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 52.960.000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective C: Promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 18.000.000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
Strategic Objective D: Strengthen the governance of labour market and qualification systems	2014 - 2020	The total cost of the actions planned in this strategic objective is 6.900.000 USD throughout the period 2014 - 2020.	NESS
NOTE: Table created by Partners Albania with information retrieved from UNDP, NYAP, NESS, Albania's government website.			

Youth Political Participation and its impediments

Albania undergone a long path in order to enhance the democratic standards of the country. The process has been driven from within as well as influenced from the outside. The process to access the EU is a major driver for change in the democracy field – i.e. the Law "On gender equality in society". Furthermore, the European integration process is enhancing a trend for public institutions and political stakeholders to look at youth as a social group worth taking into account in the political sphere. However, Albania's political and social systems are still in transition from a past where political participation was not encouraged – some of these features remain present nowadays such as "A lack of democratic tradition, weak institutions and weak civil society [...] criminalization, corruption and the shadow economy" (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015; page 20).

Population under the age of 30 represents about one third of the total population in Albania. Notwithstanding, youth participation in both social and political spheres remains low. According to data from a study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in South Eastern Europe, 35,8% of youth participate in some way in politics and 27,7% are active in civil society (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015). Youth participation in youth forums of political parties might be considerable, but there is lack of participation in executive and decision making positions. The new government, established in September 2013, had 21 ministers (plus the deputy prime minister), but no one of them was younger than 30 years old. Also, no one from the deputy ministers were younger than 30 years old. The percentage of MPs under 30 was 2.14% (2 females, 1 male). Meanwhile, the percentage of nominated young people to the parliament was 34.64% (48% females; 52% males) (Central Election Commission, 2013). It is obvious that there is a high discrepancy between the nominated young people and elected ones. And this phenomena might happen because the young people are put in the end of nomination lists sent by parties to the Central Election Commission, which decreases the chances to be elected. Another fact that shows the low participation on decision making is the lack of youth structures attached to ministries.

In terms of decision making at local level, 4.91% (3 out of 61) of mayors were under 30 years old (Central Election Commission, 2015). Another indicator estimated as important was youth participation in general assemblies of big political parties. The general assembly of socialist movement for integration is composed by 41% youngsters under 30 years old, while the democratic party has only 7% young people in its general assembly. Socialist party did

not provide any data regarding their composition of general assemblies. In terms of data on youth structures attached to municipalities, the research team contacted 61 municipalities. From 61 municipalities, only 28 responded to the request. Only 11 municipalities declared that have youth structures established.

A positive case regarding youth structures and involving youth in decision making at local level is the municipality of Tirana. The structure is called “Youth board” and it is created in February 2016 by the municipality of Tirana. It is composed by high schools presidents, representatives of youth organizations operating in Tirana and students councils. Actually, youth board has 21 members from youth organizations, 16 members from high schools, and 6 members from students councils. The board has a consultative role and meets once in 3 months. In every meeting, the directorate of youth reports on the activities and consults all future objectives with the board.

Another important data which is not measured is the participation of young people in election. This is very indicative fact on political participation, that should be measured by Central Commission of Elections during next elections.

With regard to the openness of the central and local government to inform and communicate with the public and particularly with young people is conducted a desk research on the online communication tools possessed by public institutions. It is noticed that almost 20 out of 21 public institutions at central level (ministries/parliament) have a website and also a facebook and a twitter account at the same time. At local level, only 37 out of 61 municipalities have a website; 51 out of 61 have a facebook account and only 7 out of 61 have a twitter account. After navigating their accounts, in overall it is noticed that online pages of municipalities do not have enough content about their activities; in some cases the accounts are not updated; and there is a lack of interaction between them and their followers.

But there are lots of ideas that can bring youngsters and institutions closer to each-other. Specifically, “Tirana Shadow” is an initiative of municipality of Tirana, which aims to introduce youngsters closely with the daily work of the public administration in the municipality of Tirana. This is an example that can be adopted by other institutions, because gives to young people the opportunity to know more about public institutions.

In addition to political participation in terms of representation in governing institutions, there are other forms of participation in social and political matters that youth can engage with. Although youth organisations exist, not many youngsters are engaged in their activities. According to the official data until now 60 CSOs from 1442 (4.1%) are formed and consists of young people (General Directorate of Taxes, 2015), but there is lack of data about CSOs led by young people. Even for CSOs that consist of young people, there is a lack of capacity in terms of leadership, management, and funding that render these organisations ill-equipped for surviving in an environment where they face several constraints – i.e. public perception do not welcome much voluntarism activities since they remind the communist period forced volunteer activism; the lack of funding within the country increases dependency from foreign donors; the legal framework do not provide youth organizations with a place in society for them to engage youth in different forms of civic and political participation.

Priority areas for advocacy

The legal, institutional and governance structures regarding youth and youth participation in politics are not developed in Albania. There is a lack of mechanisms aiming at developing youth's interest in participating in the public sphere, neither through political involvement nor by other more socially-oriented means.

Therefore, there is a need to revise and strengthen the legal/ institutional framework of the country at all levels, from national to local, as well as to re-think the governance mechanisms and processes at the core of these institutions in order to bring youngsters on board and to create youth structures attached to local and central government. The reform process of this framework should definitely involve youth. Also, the role of the existing structures should be meaningful and important in the process of consultation and participation in decision making.

- Anticorruption, law enforcement, transparency policies have been approved in recent years, but once again, implementation falls short. More inclusive, participatory processes for decision and policy-making that involve all societal stakeholders is needed to achieving a co-responsibility culture, building a sense of ownership, and fostering positive attitudes toward a renewed governance style.
- Reforms regarding political participation of youngsters, such as defining a quota in parties' lists through amendment of the Electoral Code, such as every fifth candidate should be a young person under 30 years old.

- Preference for senior politicians is observed in the legal framework and should be addressed. The legal system establishes the minimum age for being elected president at 40 years old, which is high in comparison to other European countries – 18 years old is the minimum requirement to fill any position in Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, France or Spain. This fact discourages voters in seeing younger politicians as capable professionals.
- Additionally, the respective institutions should be pushed to publish data and percentages of young people participation in election and young people elected at local and central government. The same should be done for CSOs, because there is lack of published data on CSOs led by youth and composed by youth.
- Political parties are the core of the democratic system, therefore in order to increase youth participation in democracy and decision-making processes, it is a must to improve political parties approach to youth. So, young people should be much more part of high decision making bodies of political parties. Reforms range from the composition of the parties, internal rules, governing structures, electoral programs, mechanisms for taking stock about youth needs and include them in their agenda, or empowering the Youth Forums of Political Parties.

Youth Social Participation and its impediments

Unemployment is one of the main causes for social exclusion. According to INSTAT (2014) the unemployment rate for the age-group aged 15-29 years old is 33.2%. This is accompanied with a high percentage of young people in prisons (36.54%) out of all prisoners. Lack of opportunities increase the crime and the chances to engage in illegal activities. The percentage of young people in prisons differs according to gender. 99% of youngsters in prisons are males and only 1% are females. Thus, the strategy should be adapted targeting youngsters in two different approaches based on this fact.

There are though, other drivers for social exclusion that reinforce unemployment of certain groups such as discrimination based on gender, age, sexual orientation, and ethnic origin. This vicious cycle requires a holistic approach to be reversed. According to the Commissioner for protection from discrimination (2015) the number of reported young people at risk of discrimination during 2015 was 18, respectively (14) were subject of ethnic discrimination, (1) was subject of gender discrimination, (3) were subject of sexual

orientation discrimination. Meanwhile during 2016 the number of reported young people at risk of discrimination was 13 out of 113.

Youngsters with low levels of education are more likely to be unemployed, suffer discrimination and poverty. The difficult engagement of minorities in the labour market is partly caused/reinforced by high illiteracy rates characterizing these populations, respectively 40.3 % of Roma and 12.7 % of Egyptians (UNDP, 2012). While 96% of Albanian children completed primary education and 80% finished secondary education, these percentages drop to 43% and 21% respectively for Roma (EBRD, 2016).

Referring to the literacy of young people in general, the 2011 census recorded 8.6 thousand young people aged 15-29 who cannot read and write. Yet, those with high level of education do not have many job opportunities for their level and/or fields of expertise, because there is a 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 people (CRCA, 2015).

However, in overall the educational level of the Albanian youth is increasing rapidly. 35,254 young people are graduated from secondary level of education. The share of young people with only the compulsory level of education of lower secondary school dropped from around two thirds (64 percent) in 2001 to half (50 percent) in 2011 (INSTAT, 2015). There has been an increasing enrolment of youth in universities, from 122 thousand in the academic year 2009-10 to 146,756 in 2015-16. About 173,819 students have been enrolled during 2013-2014, which is the highest number during recent years. Also, the number of female students has been higher than that of males for the universities, which in 2013-14 amounted to 57 percent. The main upward shift occurred not so much towards upper secondary education (from 25 to 32 percent), but even to completed tertiary education, which increased from 4 to 14 percent. Humanities & Arts was the field of university studies that produced largest number of graduations, accounting for 41 percent of all graduations in 2014. Other major fields were Health & Welfare and Agriculture (each with 13 % of graduations), Education and Social sciences, Business & Law (both with 9 %) and Natural sciences (8 %) (INSTAT 2015). The last updated data show that the number of young people graduated during 2013-2014 was 29,137 (INSTAT, 2014). Basically, there is a high discrepancy between those enrolled in tertiary education and those who finally get graduated. It is important to reveal the reasons of

this gap in tertiary education. On the other hand, vocational training is emerging as an intermediate job niche for young people and as an alternative opportunity for education.

Poverty reduction is an essential component of social inclusion, and sometimes is considered the backbone of anti-exclusion policies. According to LSMS 2012 data¹, an estimated 15 percent of population aged 15 to 29 was poor and could not meet the basic standards of living (INSTAT, 2015). Nonetheless, poverty is a multi-faceted reality, which translates not only into economic terms but also in (lack of) access to public services and the existence of basic welfare safety nets. Even though Albania has a growing economy, wealth is not evenly distributed and inequalities are on the rise according to the rural/ urban divide, as well as to other social divides based in gender, age, literacy rates, and ethnic origin. Therefore, social cohesion and inclusion parameters are affected by all the above mentioned facets of poverty.

A response to this situation is well detailed in the National Strategy for Development and Integration as follows: “*reduce disparities in access to basic services between city centres and suburbs, between rural and urban areas, and between mountainous and flat areas; increase the efficiency of the economic aid scheme, switching from a passive to an active scheme; establish a fully operational and effective social care system based on the principle of decentralisation and de-institutionalisation, for the inclusion of vulnerable groups into social protection programmes*”. (NSDI, 2014; p.88).

Another apparent problem for youth in Albania is the lack of social engagement in internships, volunteer activities etc. 19.7% of youth have been part of internships, with a small difference between girls and boys with regard to their engagement in internships, with girls leading slightly. With regards to social engagement, it has been noted that only 16% of young people were involved in volunteer activities during last year in Albania (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012). Similar data has also been reported by the 2010 Civil Society Index, where 18% of the interviewees had contributed to volunteer work, and just as many are a part of various social profile organizations (IDM, 2010). With the approval of the law No. 45/2016 on “Volunteerism” is expected an increase of civic engagement and participation of individuals in social life.

The lack of opportunities for young people triggers internal and external displacements: first from the mountains to the plains, second from the rural to the urban settings, and third from

¹ For Albania, the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) provides information to assess the level of poverty in the country.

Albania to abroad. According to a survey carried by Friedrich Ebert Foundation “*two young Albanians out of three nurture hopes of migration*” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, IDRA, 2013; p.1). Among those who returned, economic considerations constituted the predominant reasons behind the initial migration of young Albanians: lack of employment, better job opportunities and better income prospects were the three main reasons to emigrate (INSTAT, 2015).

Some initiatives undertaken by the municipality of Tirana serve as different manners how an institution can engage young people in social life.

- *Use school’ public spaces as community centers for the implementation of different programmes with the strategic aim such as enhancing extracurricular and community activities.*
- *Tirana Art Fest – promotion and development of young talents, targeting youngsters from 14 to 19 years old. It’s a festival which contributes in cultural, artistic life through competition in 4 disciplines: song, dance, theatre, multimedia.*
- *“Youth Centers”- using public spaces in particular neighborhood libraries as youth centers in order to conduct several activities for youth and also to increase the book fund. This is a project in a tendering process, but estimated as very important for social participation of youngsters.*

Priority areas for advocacy

The legal and institutional framework do not enhance participation of youth in social sphere in Albania. There is a dominant culture among public institutions that youth is not going to become a main stakeholder in shaping the country’s future any time soon, which is in contrast with the demographic distribution of population in Albania – one of the youngest within Europe.

- Laws and regulations have been approved in recent years in frame of the country’s transition to democracy and because of its objective to grant EU membership. Yet, implementation of some laws is either lagging behind or it is not producing the intended results. As an example, the “Law on gender equality in society” falls short in guaranteeing a *de facto* gender equality in the job market or in political participation.

- The creation of networking structures, promoting intra-country and international cooperation among youth organizations would enable partnerships formation and enhance their visibility.
- Exposure to and coordination with other organizations contributes to building capacity of nascent CSOs and CSOs.
- The huge percentage of youngsters in prisons is an issue that should be addressed through a long-term strategy. This issue could be seen in multidisciplinary focus. Firstly, the enhancement of education in primary and secondary schools and the increase of extracurricular activities such as sports clubs, arts, where youngsters can share common interests and can be engaged in social life rather than crime and illegal activities. The creation of public spaces provided for cultural, sports activities especially for young people would be helpful.

Education is a major field of intervention for two reasons: on the one side, education's potential as a social leverage is widely documented, offering possibilities for both self-development and autonomy, as well as increasing own prospects in succeeding in job searching. On the other hand, the current situation offers room for improvement in several sides of the wide educational field, therefore major investment is required.

- In order to raise the quality of education while making it more aligned to market needs, it is a must to undertake an exhaustive revision of curricula, enhance teachers' delivery standards, and include practical training along the studies.
- Albanian policies should be more aligned to EU policies in order to benefit from student mobility through ERASMUS+ programme as well as to foster quality of higher education and degrees comparability through Bologna Plan application. Education services provision has to increase its accessibility as well as to improve its quality, in both pre-university level and university/ graduate level. (NSDI, 2013)
- Reforms in education laws will be required to adjust the Albanian framework to the European standards, policies, and programmes.
- Moreover, there is a need to promote Vocational Education and Training (VET). People with low levels of education find more difficult to land a job, but so do those with highest levels of education, since there are no job opportunities matching their level and expectations. In this context, VET emerges as a niche of opportunities for youngsters. A

notorious investment of resources is the cornerstone for boosting VET provision, maximizing its potential for employability of youngsters.

- Another issue to advocate for is the lack of data on young people at risk of continuous care.

Youth Economic Participation and its impediments

Moreover, the high rate of youth unemployment (33.2%), an alarming rate of 32.8% youngsters not engaged in employment, education, training (INSTAT, 2015) and a prevalent intend to leave the country among highly-educated youngsters depicts a grim perspective for the future of the country.

Albania's economy has been growing for the last 25 years, more than doubling the GNI per capita from the 1980s to nowadays. The global financial and economic crisis that started in 2008, has affected the pace of this growth in Albania. Even though the country is not highly inserted in the international financial markets, the severe effects of this crisis in Greece and Italy, Albania's two major business partners, have slowed down own economic growth. Neighbouring countries' ill economies are not only detrimental to Albania's economy in terms of trade, but also in relation to opportunities for Albanian migrant workers as well as for the remittances, which account for the 8,5% of the Albanian GDP (EBRD, 2016). However, the growth experienced during the decade prior to the financial crisis enabled Albania to achieving a middle-income status. According to the World Bank, extreme poverty halved between 2002 and 2008, from 25,4% to 12,4% of the population (World Bank, 2013).

There is an increase of unemployment rate among young people from 21.9 percent in 2011 to 33.2 percent in 2015 (INSTAT, 2015). The percentage of long-term unemployed among the total number of unemployed youth was 63.1 percent in 2011. This is higher than in any country in the EU in the same year and deserves appropriate attention from policy makers. There is a need to reveal data on the number of young people in general but also young people with disabilities employed in private and public sector, in order to comprehend more about the sector, which absorbs and employs the most part of young people.

For youth, the educational career is the main process competing with engagement in economic activities: almost two-thirds (65.9%) of the economically inactive persons in the age group 15-29 are inactive because of enrolment in education and training. For female

youth, family formation and household tasks are additional competing careers, as reflected in the share not working because of domestic tasks (18.5%). Also, discouraged workers (7.2%) and other unknown reasons affect the lack of participation in labor force (INSTAT, 2015).

General Directory of Taxes (2016) declared that 29% of self-employed people are youngsters. Meanwhile, 18 out of 33 young people started their start-up with the financial support of state (Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship, 2016). This kind of data collected through requests for information look quite interesting but definitely could not be described as encouraging for entrepreneurship without having a base for comparison.

An example of start-up funds is the initiative of the municipality of Tirana. The project StartUp aims supporting project-ideas (starting a business) coming from individuals from 18 to 35 by offering small grants in order to improve the infrastructure and to facilitate the life of an active citizen. The budget for 2016 was 10 million ALL. The representative of municipality declared that the objective for 2017 is to double the available budget. After launching the call for 2016, they had 78 applications. Among them were selected the best 37 applicants, who actually are undergoing in a process of training for the business plan. After the training is planned to give them one week to prepare and represent the business plan. Afterwards will be chosen 20 winners. The winners will be selected by collecting the evaluation of commission composed of 3 members (Directorate of Youth, Directorate of Budget, Directorate of Employment Promotion) and the evaluation of two external experts.

The analysis on employment is threefold: first, the primary sector accounts for majority of works but they account for a small share of GDP generation – therefore are jobs poorly paid and with conditions that are unattractive to youth. Secondly, the country undergone a process of deindustrialization that left large sectors of population unemployed. The third conclusion is that services industry, mainly tourism and construction, were severely affected by the financial crisis across Europe, which particularly touched the two main Albania's business partners, Italy and Greece. Several challenges emerge in this context: how to create jobs requiring high level of education matching the expectations of youngsters with strong academic background and retain their talent, cutting off the “brain-drain” process? How to boost a decreasingly profitable primary sector as to absorb part of the unemployment and reduce the migration process from rural to urban areas? What can be done to strengthen the

secondary sector of the economy, when factories re-locate and youth want have higher studies and aims at leaving the country either for studies or work? Can a service-oriented economy be developed in a context of financial crisis in neighbouring countries?

Priority Areas for Advocacy

Since one of the most challenges on youth economic participation is unemployment and a huge mismatch between education, qualification of young people and job market.

- In order to create more employment two actions should be undertaken: on the one hand, to strengthen the mechanisms for job search and job access, investing in occupational services and providing job search-skills building; on the other hand, to create an enabling environment for development of self-employment initiatives, building entrepreneurial skills as well as easing access to credit. There is a need not only to establish more start-up funds for entrepreneurs, but also to make efforts in promoting these kind of schemes for all youngsters that live in the territory of Albania. Also, social enterprises represent a niche of opportunity for both job creation and social inclusion, since they combine in their nature a profit-making strategy with a social aim. A recognition of their added-value to society should seek initiatives for a more appropriate fiscal, legal and tax treatment, as well as more opportunities for accessing to funding and in-kind resources.

There is a need to further gender equality in the job market. Despite laws being approved, appropriate implementation must follow through in order to achieve regulation's intended results.

- Complementary services should be provided to women in order to ensure a fairer distribution of jobs among genders. Guaranteeing equal treatment in regulations is the starting point but supplementary efforts must be considered. Affordable and accessible services of children and elder care as well as measures of flexibility in combining family responsibilities and work should be in place. Equal salary rates for equal jobs should be respected. A long and steady process of empowering women starting from school, should be undertaken in order to counterbalance the macho-dominant culture in the job market. Thus would certainly enhance accessibility of women to high rank positions. Access to credit is in theory guaranteed for both genders equally but in practice women lack the collateral in majority of the cases, since land is registered under the head of family -in

90% of the cases land is owned by men (EBRD, 2016) – reforms in this regard are advised too.

- Programs like “brain-gain” are producing positive effects but they can backlash if not properly implemented. Careful attention to and further development of this kind of initiatives should be considered.
- Even though the movement of cooperatives is not well-perceived after the communist era, strengthening and coordination of small producers in the rural regions should be given a thorough thought. The modernization of land exploitation would contribute to slow down the migration process from rural to urban areas, which at the same time influences the rising of poverty rates in urban settings.
- VET appears as a promising opportunity to build skills and competences of youth according to labour market’s needs. A country with skilled human resources is more prone to retain its factories as well as to receive investment for further development. Thus, in turn would be accompanied by the creation of jobs. Tourism and construction would benefit from this VET programs as well, as there would be professionals to cope with demand during the stationary touristy season, as well as more professionalized workers to meet the construction requirements when this sector boosts. A dialogue among labour market main players, designers of VET curricula, legislators and implementing institutions, should be promoted in order to adjust the offer of courses and the competences they provide to the market needs, thus enhancing employability of participants in VET programs.

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