

Policy Brief



**STRENGTHENING LOCAL YOUTH
COUNCILS IN ALBANIA**

**TOWARD MEANINGFUL YOUTH
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING**

**Beyond Barriers
2025**

Table of Contents:

Preface	3
1. Introduction: Youth participation and current challenges in Albania	4
2. Legal framework for youth participation in Albania: Law no. 75/2019 and representative structures	6
2.1 Structures defined by law: from local to central level.....	7
2.2 Expected functionality of structures.....	8
2.3 The role of municipalities and the Ministry for Youth.....	8
2.4 The path from law to public policy: challenges in implementation....	9
3. From legal framework to practice: the need to strengthen the implementation of youth structures.....	10
4. Why now is the crucial time to act?.....	11
5. Recommendations for the activation and sustainability of youth structures in Albania	12
Voices from local youth councils: what did they tell us?.....	13
6. Conclusion: youth structures as a basis for democratic participation and political legitimacy	14

List of Abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Full Term
NYA	National Youth Agency
NYC	National Youth Council
LYC	Local Youth Council
CSO	Civil Society Organization
YPI	Youth Participation Index
YHWBT	Youth Hub for the Western Balkans and Turkey
NYS	National Youth Strategy
BE	European Union
INSTAT	The institute of Statistics

Preface

This policy document has been prepared within the framework of the regional project "Stronger Voices for Better Choices – Youth Hub for the Western Balkans and Turkey (YHWBT)", with the aim of addressing key challenges related to the political participation of young people in Albania.

It is based on the findings of the Youth Participation Index (YPI) for Albania 2023, developed by Partners Albania for Change and Development in collaboration with local and national stakeholders. The index provides an in-depth overview of the current state of youth participation in decision-making processes, highlighting key gaps and offering strategic recommendations for improvement.

Among the YPI recommendations, this policy brief focuses on one specific area under the political participation dimension: the activation and functionalization of youth representative structures, especially Local Youth Councils (LYCs), with the goal of enhancing the meaningful engagement of young people in public life, in line with the national legal framework.

To further substantiate the findings and guide the recommendations, a comprehensive consultative meeting was held in March 2025 with 20 participants from civil society organizations, youth structures, municipalities, the business sector, and public institutions. The National Youth Agency (NYA) and INSTAT were involved as supporting partners of the project, contributing data and institutional insight.

Moreover, to enrich the document with direct input from the ground, a targeted survey was shared with four Local Youth Councils (LYCs) – Shkodër, Malësi e Madhe, Sarandë, and Has. Their responses helped validate the challenges discussed in this paper and added practical perspectives to the recommendations section.

This document is addressed to decision-makers at the local and national levels, youth policy stakeholders, CSOs, and international partners engaged in strengthening democratic governance. It advocates for reforming youth participation mechanisms not only as a youth sector issue, but as a broader democratic and institutional priority.

1. Introduction: youth participation and current challenges in Albania

The meaningful participation of young people in decision-making is an essential element for the functioning of a fair, inclusive and sustainable democratic system. In Albania, although a legal framework has been created that promotes the inclusion of young people in public and institutional life, their real participation remains limited, fragmented and often formal. This discrepancy between legal will and the reality of implementation continues to be one of the greatest challenges of youth policy in the country.

According to the Youth Participation Index for Albania 2023¹, Albania has made progress in establishing youth structures as part of institutional reform, but the representation of young people in leadership positions and their influence in decision-making remains minimal. Only 1.4% of members of parliament are aged 15–29, and in 2023 no ministers, deputy ministers or mayors from this age group were registered. This lack of representation weakens the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the younger generation, deepening the gap between institutions and young citizens.

Indicators	Total	Female	Male	Year
Young ministers in Government	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2023 ¹
Young deputy ministers in Government	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2023 ¹
Young MPs in the Parliament	1.4%	2%	1.1%	2023 ¹
Young Mayors	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2023 ¹
Online tools for information and participation in decision-making of Government and Parliament	94.0%			2023 ¹
Online tools for information and participation in decision-making of Municipalities	75%		Not Applicable	2023 ¹
Existence of youth structure (councils/parliaments/unions) on national level	YES			2023
Existence of youth structure (councils/parliaments/unions) on local level	98%			2023 ²

Table 1. Data on Youth Political Participation

¹ Partners Albania for Change and Development. (2024). *Raporti kombëtar i monitorimit të pjesëmarrjes politike, sociale dhe ekonomike të të rinjve në Shqipëri 2023*. <https://beyondbarriers.org/2024/12/20/raporti-kombetar-i-monitorimit-te-pjesemarrjes-politike-sociale-dhe-ekonomike-te-te-rinjve/>

Moreover, although most municipalities have established Local Youth Councils (LYCs) in accordance with Law No. 75/2019 “On Youth”, in many cases these structures operate without a work plan, without sustainable financial support and without clear links to the policy-making process at the local level. The data collected shows that equal representation, diversity and rotation are often lacking, turning participation into a closed process, involving only certain groups or individuals with privileged access.

The fundamental challenges of youth participation in Albania are not limited to the lack of institutional space, but are closely related to the discrepancy between formal representation and real impact. Youth activism is often present in community-based, informal or linked to civil society initiatives, but it does not translate into direct influence in the design or oversight of public policies. This gap jeopardizes the function of youth structures as bridges between the community and local government.

In a significant part of the territory, youth involvement continues to depend on temporary projects, donor support or isolated initiatives, reflecting a lack of institutional sustainability and coordination. This situation is particularly evident in smaller municipalities and rural areas, where capacities for managing youth structures are more limited, while access to information and participation is more unequal.

In this context, strengthening existing mechanisms is not just a matter of local good governance, but a political requirement related to the very nature of representative democracy. Young people cannot be just the object of policies, they must be their co-authors. Making youth structures fully functional and integrating them into all stages of decision-making is essential for ensuring meaningful representation and fostering a lasting relationship of trust between young people and institutions.

2. Legal framework for youth participation in Albania: Law no. 75/2019 and representative structures

In 2019, Albania took an important step towards institutionalizing youth participation in decision-making processes through the adoption of Law No. 75/2019 “On Youth”. This law marked the establishment of a legal and institutional framework dedicated to young people, with the aim of increasing their active involvement in public life, promoting personal and professional development, and strengthening their civic capacities².

The law is based on several fundamental principles such as: active participation, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, gender equality, inter-institutional partnership and sustainable development. At its core lies the idea that young people are not simply beneficiaries of public policies, but equal and indispensable actors in decision-making, who should be structurally involved in any process that directly affects their lives and future.

² Kuvendi i Republikës së Shqipërisë. (2019, November 4). *Ligji Nr. 75/2019 për rininë*. <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Ligji-Nr.75.Date-4.11.2019-Per-Rinine.pdf>

In March 2025, the law was amended with the aim of further strengthening the role of young people in the political, social, and economic development of the country. The recent changes also seek to build a more sustainable and supportive institutional infrastructure for youth, through concrete mechanisms that ensure their inclusion and empowerment at both local and national levels³. This moment represents a significant phase of development, as youth have increasingly been placed at the center of development policies on a global scale. In Albania, the establishment of a dedicated Ministry for Youth Affairs marks a meaningful step, demonstrating political will to drive real change and improve the conditions of young people in the country.

In this context, NYA and the Ministry of Youth and Children are currently engaged in the process of opening, reconstructing and strengthening youth centers at the local level. These centers aim to create spaces dedicated to personal development, non-formal education and community cooperation, where young people have the opportunity to express themselves, engage and undertake initiatives with social and institutional impact. These investments represent more than infrastructural improvements, they are instruments for building an active youth culture and strengthening the relationship between young people and the state.

2.1. Structures defined by law: from local to central level

The law clearly defines the construction of youth representative structures at two levels: local and national.

⇒ Local Youth Councils (LYC):

As outlined in Article 7 of the law, LYCs are consultative structures established by municipalities to ensure youth participation in the design and monitoring of local youth policies. They are expected to represent the broad spectrum of youth, including individuals, youth organizations, informal groups, school representatives, and other local community actors.

⇒ National Youth Council (NYC):

According to Article 8, this council has an advisory role to the Ministry responsible for youth and aims to mediate the interests of young people at the central level. Its composition should reflect representatives of youth organizations, representatives of local structures and public institutions, with a key role in the development and follow-up of the National Youth Strategy.

The law also provides for the establishment of Youth Centers at the local level as spaces for development, activism and civic interaction between young people and institutions. In a complementary manner, it assigns municipalities the responsibility for drafting Local Youth Plans, as strategic documents approved by municipal councils, with the participation of relevant youth structures.

³ Ministria e Shtetit për Rininë dhe Fëmijët. (2025, March 17). *Projekligji për disa shtesa dhe ndryshime në Ligjin "Për Rininë" në Kuvend. Muzhaqi: "I harmonizuar me standardet e BE-së"*. <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/en/projekligji-per-disa-shtesa-dhe-ndryshime-ne-ligjin-per-rinine-ne-kuvend-muzhaqi-ligji-per-rinine-i-harmonizuar-me-standardet-e-be-se/>

2.2. Expected functionality of structures

The law is not limited to the establishment of structures, but requires them to have a proactive and functional role in every phase of the policy-making cycle: consultation, drafting, implementation and monitoring of public policies affecting young people. It also emphasizes the principle of informal participation, including young people outside organized structures. The approach of the Youth Law is in line with European documents on youth participation, including the Council of Europe Resolution on the involvement of young people in democratic life, as well as with the requirements of chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis communautaire* for countries aiming for EU membership.

2.3. The role of municipalities and the Ministry for Youth

Law No. 75/2019 defines the division of responsibilities between local and central government in order to guarantee the participation of young people in decision-making. In this institutional architecture, municipalities play a key role as responsible for the creation, functioning and support of youth structures at the local level.

More specifically, municipalities are obliged to establish LYCs, provide them with technical and financial support, and guarantee their participation in the process of drafting and implementing local public policies. Beyond the formal establishment, the law assigns municipalities the responsibility to include these structures in a continuous and meaningful manner in the policy-making cycle. This includes, among other things, involvement in the drafting of Local Youth Plans, in supervising their implementation, as well as in monitoring services and initiatives for young people.

On the other hand, the ministry responsible for youth holds the mandate to ensure national coordination of youth policies. It is tasked with drafting and overseeing the implementation of the National Youth Strategy, facilitating the functioning of the National Youth Council (NYC), and monitoring the enforcement of the law and its accompanying by-laws. The ministry's role is not solely political, but also operational, as it must act as a connecting node between local structures, other public agencies, and young people themselves.

If this architecture functions according to legal provisions, youth participation can be structured on several levels and decentralized, enabling the voice of young people to be effectively articulated from the local community to the national decision-making level. This requires not only the formal fulfillment of institutional obligations, but also a culture of inter-institutional cooperation and sustained political commitment, which guarantees that participation does not remain symbolic, but becomes real and with measurable impact.

2.4. The path from law to public policy: challenges in implementation

Law No. 75/2019 has created an important basis for the institutionalization of youth participation, providing a clear legal framework and a functional architecture that, in theory, enables the inclusion of young people at several levels in decision-making processes. However, in practice, the implementation of the law remains fragmented, often formal and dependent on the local context, institutional capacities and political will.

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of operational standardization. The law does not define detailed mechanisms for the functioning of the LYCs and NYC, for the selection of members, the organization of meetings, reporting and following up on their recommendations. This has led to different practices between municipalities, producing a large discrepancy in the quality and functionality of youth structures, as well as a lack of transparency in representation.

There is also no unified monitoring and evaluation system that would enable tracking of the performance of the LYCs or the implementation of the LY PLs themselves. This makes it impossible to measure the real impact that these structures have on local decision-making and on improving public policies for youth. The lack of clear, comparable, and reportable indicators at the national level leaves a significant gap in accountability and continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the law does not provide for clear institutional accountability mechanisms for representative structures. The lack of an obligation to publish regular annual reports, to conduct open and documented consultations with young people, or to make selection and rotation procedures transparent makes the participation process vulnerable and not always legitimate in the perception of young people.

Another critical factor is the lack of sustainable financial and technical support, especially at the local level. The LYCs in many municipalities operate without a dedicated budget, without trained staff, and without sustainable coordination with other municipal sectors. This directly affects their ability to be active, to organize activities, to contribute to strategic plans, or to act as a real voice of the youth community.

Finally, the lack of a national platform for the exchange of good practices, for inter-structural networking and for inter-institutional cooperation weakens the coherence of youth policies and reduces the impact that the LYCs and the NYC can have in the development of common, measurable and inclusive policies. These challenges, if not addressed in a structured and coordinated manner, risk that youth participation will remain limited to a symbolic level. The Youth Law, although progressive in content, needs to be supported by concrete implementation instruments, such as detailed guidelines, training for local administration, sustainable financing for structures and clear mechanisms for measuring and evaluating progress.

To turn the law from a normative act into a functional tool for effective youth inclusion, a new approach is needed that combines standardization, financing, transparency, and institutional coordination, involving young people themselves in every step of this process.

3. From legal framework to practice: the need to strengthen the implementation of youth structures

The establishment of a legal framework for youth participation in Albania constitutes an important step towards institutionalizing the role of young people in decision-making processes. However, the implementation of this framework has been uneven and often limited to formal actions, which have not been accompanied by sustainable functionality. Structures such as the LYCs and NYC exist in all municipalities and at the national level, but are not equipped with the necessary resources, definitions and tools to actually exercise the function assigned to them by law.

One of the most obvious shortcomings is the lack of clarity about the role of these structures in the policy-making cycle. The law recognizes them as consultative structures, but in practice, their participation in policy design, implementation and monitoring remains superficial, often based on informal invitations or non-standardized processes. This has created a gap between the legal aspiration for inclusion and the reality of limited institutional action.

Another critical issue is the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for cooperation between the LYCs and the administrative units of the municipalities. In most cases, these structures do not have direct access to information, are not involved in the budgeting of youth policies, and there is no formal system for following up on the recommendations they produce. This turns participation into a symbolic process, perceived more as a formal procedure than as a real channel of political influence.

Moreover, institutional and financial support for youth structures is unstable and often dependent on short-term projects or temporary priorities of local government. This situation is even more pronounced in small municipalities and rural areas, where not only financial resources are lacking, but also the human capacities and infrastructure necessary to support youth activism. In these cases, LYCs exist only in name, while they do not develop activities, have no communication platform with young people and do not exercise visible functions.

The lack of a standardized approach, combined with fragmented implementation and lack of inter-institutional coordination, has created an unclear functional climate for youth participation at the local and national levels. This not only reduces the effectiveness of existing structures, but also creates frustration and apathy among young people, who fail to see tangible results from their involvement.

To turn this legal framework into a real mechanism for political influence and youth representation, it is necessary to strengthen its implementation at the practical level, by clarifying mandates, ensuring sustainable support, and establishing measurable monitoring and accountability mechanisms. These steps are not just administrative matters, they are essential to ensure that youth participation does not remain just a legal aspiration, but becomes a sustainable part of the democratic culture in the country.

4. Why now is the crucial time to act?

At a time when Albania aims to strengthen democratic institutions and accelerate the European integration process, the functionalization of youth representation mechanisms is no longer an alternative, but a political and institutional necessity. A clear and proactive approach is needed to move from formal participation to a real and influential engagement of young people in the design and implementation of public policies. Today, the country is facing a turning point where it must decide whether youth structures will remain as symbolic instruments on paper, or will they be transformed into living mechanisms of representative democracy at the local and national levels.

Law No. 75/2019 is in place and representative structures have been established in all 61 municipalities of the country. However, their implementation is still fragmented and often dependent on the will and priorities of local leaders, without unified standards for functioning, composition and institutional interaction. If immediate measures are not taken to standardize the functioning of the LYCs, to ensure sustainable financial support and to integrate young people into the real cycle of policy-making, there is a risk of deepening the loss of trust of the younger generation in institutions. Such a violation not only affects youth representation, but directly affects the legitimacy of democratic institutions themselves.

Another important reason that makes this period so critical is the European integration process, which places civic participation, including youth participation, at the centre of state reforms. Chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis communautaire* require high standards of inclusion, transparency and accountability. In this context, youth structures are not just an internal youth issue, they are a concrete indicator of institutional and political readiness to meet European criteria.

In parallel, Albania is at a unique political and institutional moment: the creation of the Ministry of Youth and Children, the increased engagement of the National Youth Agency, represent real steps towards raising the profile of youth policies on the national agenda. These institutions are now engaged not only in supporting youth organizations through grants and resources, but also in the process of opening and strengthening youth centers, which can play a key role in building a sustainable and inclusive culture of participation.

In this new climate, where youth are being placed at the center of national and international development policies, institutional inaction reinforces passivity and apathy. On the contrary, this is the right momentum to build a new political culture where young people are not only heard, but are included as co-creators of the policies that affect them. Coordinated inter-institutional action at this stage is not only a legal obligation, it is a political investment in the democratic future of the country.

5. Recommendations for the activation and sustainability of youth structures in Albania

To fully meet the objectives of the Youth Law and to make meaningful participation of young people in public life and policy-making a reality, a strategic approach is needed that moves from the formal fulfillment of legal obligations to the proper functioning of youth mechanisms. Below are key recommendations, structured according to areas of intervention:

⇒ **Standardization of the composition and functioning of youth structures**

It is essential that the NYA and the Ministry of Youth and Sports develop a national operational guide for youth structures, which includes clear criteria for the selection of members of the Youth Councils, their mandate, organizational structure and mode of operation. This will ensure a common standard across the country and reduce the inconsistent practices that currently vary from one municipality to another. The guide should be practical, flexible and adaptable to local realities, but with a unified core that guarantees fair, inclusive and transparent representation.

⇒ **Strengthening human and institutional capacities**

Youth structures should be supported through a national training program, developed in partnership with civil society organizations and academic institutions. This program should focus not only on the organizational and managerial skills of youth LYCs and coordinators, but also on the development of civic competences, such as advocacy, policy monitoring and budgetary participation. In parallel, municipalities should appoint specific staff with a clear mandate and role, who will serve as a bridge between youth structures and local administration.

⇒ **Sustainable budgeting and logistical support**

Each municipality should plan a dedicated budget for youth, which should include a specific line for the functioning of the LYCs. This support should cover basic needs such as: meeting space, materials, expenses for activities, and training. Beyond financial support, it is important to create a sustainable model that also encourages co-financing through projects with CSOs, to involve additional resources and to promote strategic partnerships.

⇒ **Establishing measurement and accountability mechanisms**

The functionality of youth structures cannot be assessed without measurable performance indicators and a standardized reporting system. NYA in cooperation with responsible institutions and youth networks should develop a framework for measuring the impact of LYCs, including: participation in decision-making, engagement in policy-making processes, organized activities, and the perception of young people in the community about the functioning of these structures. Each LYC should report annually in a public and transparent manner, creating clear bases for continuous improvement.

⇒ **Civic education and inclusion of the education system**

Schools and educational institutions should become part of the approach to increasing youth participation. It is recommended to draft an inter-institutional memorandum between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Children to facilitate the access of youth structures and CSOs to schools. This would enable interaction with young people who are not yet active and would help build an early culture of civic participation.

⇒ **Strengthening the role of NYA as coordinator and technical support**

The National Youth Agency has a unique role as an intermediary institution between central government and the reality of participation on the ground. To fulfill this role, the NYA should be equipped with more technical capacities and resources to provide direct support to local youth structures, develop evaluation mechanisms, disseminate best practices, and monitor the implementation of youth policies in a comprehensive manner. Networking youth structures at national and international level is another function that the NYA could further develop, to increase the voice of young people at regional and European level.

Voices from local youth councils: what did they tell us?

To ensure that this policy document reflects not only institutional analysis but also the practical reality on the ground, a short questionnaire was shared with four Local Youth Councils (LYCs) – Shkodër, Has, Malësi e Madhe, and Sarandë. The aim was to better understand the operational challenges faced by youth structures in their daily work and to gather concrete suggestions for improvement. Below is a summary of some of the key issues raised in their responses:

Lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities: Most councils reported that they do not have clear guidelines on their mandate or expected functions. In some cases, the connection with municipal youth offices or local administrative structures is missing or weak.

Need for training and capacity building: Youth representatives expressed feeling unprepared to lead decision-making processes or implement concrete initiatives. They emphasized the need for support in soft skills development, advocacy, and project management.

Limited representation and inclusiveness: In certain municipalities, the selection process for LYC members was reported as non-transparent, and the composition often fails to reflect the diversity of the youth population – including rural areas, schools, or marginalized groups.

Lack of financial and logistical support: Respondents noted the absence of dedicated spaces for meetings or activities, as well as insufficient funding to initiate or carry out youth-led projects.

Calls for more autonomy and institutional cooperation: Several LYCs highlighted the need for more decision-making autonomy and the creation of clear, formal mechanisms for collaboration with local authorities.

These insights from the field reinforce the analysis presented in this document and lend legitimacy to the proposed recommendations. Young people are not asking to be included symbolically – they are calling for structures that function, listen, and provide real, sustainable support to their engagement and development.

6. Conclusion: youth structures as a basis for democratic participation and political legitimacy

The path to a functional and inclusive democracy lies in the real involvement of young people in policy-making. In Albania, considerable progress has been made in the normative and institutional aspects: there is a modern law on youth, representative structures have been established at local and national levels, and a strategic framework has been built that recognizes young people as important actors in society. But this architecture will remain formal if it is not accompanied by real functionality, political influence and representative legitimacy.

Youth participation is not just a social or educational requirement; it is a fundamental political issue. It is part of the indicators that measure the health of democracy at the local and national levels. As the Youth Participation Index 2023 shows, the participation of young people in decision-making institutions and leadership positions is at the lowest level compared to other indicators. Young people are present in youth structures, but very little represented in real politics. This creates a dangerous gap between formal representation and real influence, which damages the trust of young people in democratic processes and weakens the capacity of institutions to reflect the needs of the younger generation.

This document aims to help reformat the role of youth structures from closed and unclear instruments, to open, functional and influential mechanisms. For this to happen, sincere political commitment from institutions is required, but also a strategic refocus: youth participation is not only part of the youth agenda, it is part of the reform of democracy itself. If young people are excluded from real representation, democracy loses the energy, critical thinking and representative legitimacy that only the younger generations can bring. Therefore, strengthening youth structures is not a priority of the youth sector, it is a priority of the state itself, related to meeting European standards, sustainability of reforms, and maintaining citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

Today, more than ever, there is a need for concrete steps that give meaning to youth participation, not as an ideal, but as a tangible and measured political reality.

For more details on the project, visit:



youthwbt.eu

This publication was funded by the European Union. The content is the sole responsibility of the Beyond Barriers and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.