

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Mechanisms in Policymaking

Youth Participation Mechanisms in Policymaking

A policy brief by RYLMP on strengthening youth participation and institutional responsiveness in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia

This Policy Paper is prepared by the Youth Participation team of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme 2025/2026 (RYLMP).

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Executive Summary

In Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, young people are formally invited to take part in policymaking through public consultation processes, youth councils, and online platforms. Yet they rarely see how their contributions shape decisions. The main problem is not the absence of participation mechanisms, but the broken link between young people's input and institutional responses. Participation usually stops at the consultation phase, and such participation does not turn into real influence. Participation is important because young people are directly affected by decisions on education, jobs, local development, mobility and civic space. When institutions seek their views but fail to explain how those views were considered, trust erodes and participation becomes a procedural exercise rather than a meaningful opportunity for engagement. The issue is particularly acute for young people outside capital cities, student' and NGO networks, and from marginalized communities.

Drawing on desk research, a regional survey, focus groups and expert interviews across the three countries, the brief identifies four recurring problems: formal frameworks exists but are ineffective; feedback is the missing link between consultation and trust; participation opportunities mainly reach young people already connected to civic, student or NGO networks; and tokenism and fear reduce participation even where channels exist. Survey data show this pattern, with most respondents rating institutional trust at the bottom of the scale and a clear majority describing youth participation as mostly symbolic rather than influential.

The brief recommends a mandatory youth participation accountability model that links outreach, safe participation and public institutional feedback into one process. Its central instrument is a "You proposed/Institution responded" mechanism requiring institutions to publish, after each youth consultation, what was proposed, what was accepted or rejected and why. National bodies would set the rules and reporting duties, municipalities and youth offices would apply them locally and reach underrepresented groups, youth organizations would act as bridges, digital teams would make platforms visible and usable, and independent monitors would track compliance. Jointly, these actions would move youth participation from symbolic inclusion to accountable, visible influence.

List of Acronyms

EC	European Commission
ENER	Unified National Electronic Register of Regulations (North Macedonia)
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
KOMS	Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (National Youth Council of Serbia)
NAPOR	Nacionalna asocijacija praktičara/ki omladinskog rada (National Association of Youth Work Practitioners, Serbia)
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organization(s)
NYCM	National Youth Council of Macedonia
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
RYLMP	Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme
SKONUS	Studentska konferencija univerziteta Srbije (Student Conference of Serbian Universities)
ZELS	Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

Introduction

This policy brief looks at how young people take part in public decision-making in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. Throughout this brief, youth participation will be understood to mean young people being involved in the different stages of making policy: setting the agenda, drafting, implementing, and checking the results. It will particularly focus on the drafting and consultation stages, when draft-laws, strategies and action plans are written and opened for public input. When it comes to youth participation the main problem is not the lack of opportunities for participation, but rather that consultation does not lead to real influence. In all three countries young people are invited to join councils, consultations, online platforms, surveys and public debates, but they rarely get a clear answer about how their input was used. Over time, this makes participation feel like a formality rather than real democracy. This matters because young people are directly affected by decisions on education, jobs, local development, mobility, culture and civic space. When institutions ask for their views but do not act upon this input, trust erodes, and young people look for other ways to be heard.

Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia all have legal and institutional frameworks for youth participation. Albania has adopted the Law No. 75/2019 on Youth, the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, established youth councils and public consultation mechanisms. North Macedonia has adopted the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies on 14 January 2020. Published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 10/2020 on 16 January 2020, the Law provides for local youth councils, youth offices and youth officers. Serbia has adopted the Law No. 50/2011 & 116/2022 on Youth, the Youth Strategy 2023–2030, local youth offices, youth councils, KOMS, NAPOR and the eConsultations portal. Existing initiatives therefore provide a useful starting point, but the same weakness appears across all three cases: institutions and mechanisms are established, but their practical influence remains uneven, weakly communicated and often difficult for young people to follow.

The relevant stakeholders include national ministries, municipalities, youth offices, youth councils, schools, universities, civil society organizations, student bodies, digital platform teams and independent monitors. Their shared task is not only to create more participation spaces, but to make existing ones more visible, safe and accountable. Therefore, this brief argues for a youth participation accountability model based on outreach, safe participation and public institutional feedback. The key idea is simple: youth participation should not end when young people speak; it becomes meaningful only when institutions respond.

Methodology

The research employs a mixed methods approach. Desk research was complemented with quantitative data from a survey, as well as qualitative data from focus group discussions (one per country) and a total of seven expert interviews. The experts were intentionally selected based on their knowledge and practical experience in three areas relevant to the research: youth policy development and implementation; the functioning of formal youth participation mechanisms at local and national levels; and direct work with young people, including those who are not members of organizations.

The first phase focused on secondary data collection, reviewing existing literature, legal frameworks, policy documents, instrument reports and monitoring materials related to youth participation in the

three countries. Building on this, data from previous studies, survey data and monitoring reports were used to assess how participation mechanisms function in practice and to identify gaps between formal participation opportunities and actual youth influence. Finally, focus groups and interviews offered deeper insight into how young people and youth policy actors perceive the functioning of existing participation mechanisms in their day-to-day reality.

The quantitative survey targeted postgraduates and master's students aged 21-24 from universities across the three countries. Questions were structured around four themes: access and experience; influence, trust and tokenism; barriers and actual engagement; what would make participation feel real. A total of 263 responses were collected, only 205 of which were complete, thus forming the final sample. The number of responses was highest in Serbia (95), and lowest in North Macedonia (48), with 62 respondents from Albania. Of the sample, 72.5% identified as female, 26.5% as male, and 1% as other. Most respondents were based in their capital cities.

Focus group participants were recruited primarily through the survey itself, where respondents could express interest in joining a follow-up discussion. In Albania, the focus group consisted of 10 participants, including students from the capital city, Tirana, as well as other local areas across the country, ensuring a mix of perspectives from different geographic contexts. The focus group conducted in North Macedonia was an online discussion with eight people aged 21 to 24. The group included students, master's students, young people working or studying abroad, and young people who had moved to Skopje from smaller places. The discussion focused on how young people understand youth participation, how much they recognize formal mechanisms, and what prevents them from getting involved. The discussion focused on how young people understand youth participation, how much they recognize formal mechanisms, and what prevents them from getting involved. In Serbia, 18 young people participated across four focus groups, including 11 women and seven men. Participants came from Belgrade as well as a range of smaller cities and towns across the country, including Niš, Čačak, Jagodina, Vrnjačka Banja, Topola, Pirot, Raška, and Velika Plana.

The focus group questions were designed to explore the depth of the students' experiences with the policy making process, their reasons for participation (or lack thereof), and their ideas on how to make participation feel more genuine and accessible.

Merits and Limits

This research has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings and their translation into policy recommendations. The survey sample is limited in size and should therefore be understood as providing indicative evidence rather than statistically representative conclusions. In addition, part of the analysis depends on what institutions have disclosed publicly. When reports, minutes or feedback from consultations are not available, this is noted as a problem with the transparency of the process. The qualitative component is also limited by its design, as it included one focus group per country and focused on a narrow age group of young people aged 21–24.

However, the combination of desk research, survey data, focus group discussions and interviews strengthens the analysis by allowing the study to identify recurring patterns across the three countries. These limitations should not be understood as weakening the relevance of the findings, but as clarifying their scope.

Problem statement

Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia have laws, strategies and institutions for youth participation. However, in practice, these mechanisms typically stop at asking young people for their views. That input rarely translates into visible influence on the decisions that are being made.

The main issue is not that there are insufficient avenues or opportunities for participation. Rather, it is that there is no reliable mechanism linking what young people say to what institutions do in response. Formal opportunities for participation include consultations, surveys, online platforms, advisory bodies and public debates. Yet young people rarely get clear feedback about how their input was used. This weakens trust and makes participation feel like a tick-the-box exercise, rather than a real way to shape policy.

Closing this gap requires more than a promise to listen. It requires procedures and regulations that institutions must follow, as well as monitoring and transparency about how inputs are taken up.

Albania

Albania has built a relatively comprehensive legal and institutional framework for youth participation but struggles to implement it. Over the past decade, the country has adopted several EU-aligned measures, including Law No. 75/2019 “On Youth”, the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029, the establishment of the National Youth Agency and National Youth Council, Local Youth Councils in every municipality, and the Law No. 146/2014 on Public Consultation with supporting digital platforms.

In practice, however, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is limited. According to the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), participation in public consultations is low, and many Albanians, including young people, feel these consultations have little or no influence on final decisions (IDM, 2024).

The main weaknesses include inadequate (or complete lack of) feedback and follow-up, as well as insufficient resources. While young people are invited to participate in consultations, they are rarely told how their input was used, thus undermining trust in participatory processes. Meaningful inclusion is particularly difficult for vulnerable groups, such as youth with disabilities, rural youth and Roma and Egyptian youth.

At the local level, many municipalities lack the staff, funding and monitoring tools to sustain youth engagement well. At the same time, cooperation between local and central bodies is weak. Therefore, Albania’s problem is less the rules than the follow-up, enforcement and resources needed to make participation count (European Commission [EC], 2024).

North Macedonia

North Macedonia presents a similar situation: a relatively robust legal framework for youth participation, but persistent shortcomings in implementation. The 2020 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, which covers youth aged 15 to 29, establishes a comprehensive governance framework, including the National Youth Assembly, the National Advisory Body, local youth councils, youth offices, centers and officers. It also provides for the earmarking of at least 0.3% of the national budget and 0.1% of municipal budgets for youth-related policies and programmes (Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020).

Implementation shortcomings become evident when looking at the measures outlined in the Action Plan for the policy: several commitments included in the 2026–2027 Action Plan were carried over from the previous implementation period, indicating that earlier objectives had not been completed. Of the 205 activities in the 2023–2025 Action Plan, only 23% were fully implemented, while progress on another quarter could not be assessed due to the lack of information. Reporting on the National Youth Strategy 2023–2027 and the Action Plan 2023–2025 is not readily available (EC, 2025).

At the same time, while the online portal for public consultation, ENER, exists, institutions do not always publish draft laws or respond to comments in a timely manner. For example, as of April 2026, the Draft Law on Youth Allowance had not yet been opened for consultation (Citizen Resource Center, 2026).

Significant institutional gaps also remain. The National Youth Assembly and National Advisory Body that were envisaged in the law have not yet been established. The delayed adoption of the 2026–2027 Action Plan itself and its weak alignment with the 2026 budget cycle further point to shortcomings in planning and accountability (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023a, 2023b, 2026; National Youth Council of Macedonia, 2026). In addition, in 2025 only 11 of North Macedonia's 80 municipalities met the requirement to allocate at least 0.1% of their municipal budgets to youth (National Youth Council of Macedonia, 2026).

These findings suggest that the primary challenge is not the absence of legal provisions but weak implementation, limited transparency, and insufficient institutional accountability, making it difficult for young people to understand or influence policies that affect them. Previous research further indicates low satisfaction with current youth policies and limited public awareness of both the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies and the National Strategy (Georgievska, 2022).

Serbia

Serbia has established a relatively comprehensive institutional framework for youth participation, yet public trust in these mechanisms is low. Although formal opportunities for participation exist, many young people perceive them as offering limited influence over decision-making (KOMS, 2019; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [FES], 2024). The 2011 Law on Youth, which applies to people aged 15–30, defines youth policy as a matter of public interest and provides the basis for a governance system that includes the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, the Youth Council, local youth offices, and umbrella bodies such as KOMS, NAPOR and SKONUS. In practice, however, young people find these institutions distant and unable to produce visible change.

The Youth Council serves as a consultative body for discussing policy but does not position young people as the main decision-shapers. This shortcoming became evident in the student protests after the Novi Sad railway station tragedy in November 2024: because formal channels felt closed, young people turned to protests, blockades and online mobilization instead (European Parliamentary Research Service [EPRS], 2025).

Youth policy is guided by the Youth Strategy 2023–2030 and implemented through successive three-year action plans that specify the measures, budgets and implementation deadlines. With the 2023–2025 plan having expired, the new 2026–2028 plan presents a real opportunity to strengthen accountability by improving feedback mechanisms, monitoring, and the responsiveness of participatory processes. Similarly, the eConsultations portal, introduced in 2021, offers a digital space for consultation, but its effectiveness depends on young people's awareness of the platform,

their ability to use it, and, crucially, whether institutions respond meaningfully to the comments received.

Available data highlights a gap between institutional design and young people's lived experience with participation. According to KOMS, in 2015, only 14% of young people were familiar with the role of the Youth Council and 21% with local youth offices. By 2019, nearly half of respondents were still unaware of whether such an office existed in their municipality. Among those who knew that such an office existed, only 14% had used its services (KOMS, 2015; KOMS, 2019).

These findings suggest that strengthening youth participation in Serbia requires not only maintaining formal structures but also increasing their visibility, accessibility, and capacity to influence public decision-making.

Findings

The qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the three countries points to a common pattern. Young people do not reject participation in principle. What hinders their participation is a system that seeks input without following through. Data from focus groups, expert interviews and survey across all three countries reveal four interrelated problems:

Formal frameworks exist, but their effect does not materialize

Across Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, youth participation frameworks are formally established and relatively comprehensive, but function poorly. All three countries have laws, strategies, councils, youth offices or consultation mechanisms, yet these structures often fail to create genuine influence. In Albania, local youth councils remain weak, and consultation quality is limited; in North Macedonia, key national bodies have not yet been established, and many municipalities do not meet legal obligations; in Serbia, many young people are not familiar with youth institutions or do not use them.

This shows that the problem is not the lack of formal mechanisms, but their poor implementation, low outreach and awareness, limited resources and weak trust among young people. This was echoed in the interviews conducted in North Macedonia: Anja Bebekovska, RYCO, highlighted poor institutional coordination as a key factor contributing to the challenges of implementing youth laws and strategies, whereas Filip Ivkovski, NYCM, emphasized that stronger legal frameworks cannot replace political will or the readiness of decision-makers to share influence with young people. He also noted that participation must be connected to daily issues such as education, employment, housing, financial security and wellbeing.

This finding confirms that youth participation in the three countries is not a matter of legal vacuum, but one of implementation failures. Governments have already provided for the creation of institutions and procedures; as such, the policy solution should not simply propose more councils, strategies or platforms. Instead, it should focus on how to make existing mechanisms visible, accessible, properly funded and connected to real decision-making. This supports the argument that participation must move from symbolic inclusion to practical influence. Young people should be able to understand where and how to participate, how their input is used, and what concrete results come from their involvement.

Feedback is the missing link between consultation and trust

The strongest finding across the research is the absence of a reliable feedback loop. Young people may be invited to meetings, surveys, platforms or councils, but they rarely receive clear feedback explaining which of their inputs were accepted, which were rejected and why. Participation becomes symbolic when institutions collect youth input but do not explain if or how it was considered and/or acted upon.

Evidence from the three countries converges on the same underlying problem: the (causal) link between young people's input to consultations and institutional decision-making remains unclear. In Albania, participants described consultations and roundtables that did not lead to visible results, while expert material refers to an "illusion of inclusion", where young people are present but the path from proposal to decision, funding and implementation is not visible (Interview with Irena Topalli, 2026). In North Macedonia, the problem manifests through weak reporting: the evaluation of the 2023–2025 Action Plan showed that for 26% of activities no information was available, which makes it difficult to know whether youth participation had any effect (National Youth Council of Macedonia, 2026). Interviews with youth policy actors in North Macedonia pointed to the same need for a visible feedback loop through which young people can see what happened with their proposals and why. In Serbia, both focus groups and the KOMS interview showed that young people do not expect every proposal to be accepted, but they do expect institutions to explain decisions and show what can realistically be done (Interview with Maša Vračar, 2026).

The weakness lies less in access to consultations, but rather in what follows them. Participation thus becomes symbolic not because institutions reject proposals, but because they often fail to respond clearly and transparently. This breeds distrust because young people are left with the impression that participation is merely a formal requirement. As one participant from the Serbia focus group explained: *"It would be better to explain why something cannot be done, or to say: this part might be difficult, but this part of what you said could be developed."*

This finding underpins the central recommendation of this brief: enabling a mandatory **"You proposed/Institution responded"** model, requiring institutions to publicly show which youth proposals were accepted, which were rejected, why, and whether elements of rejected proposals can still be taken forward. In that way, participation would become a process with accountability, not just an event where young people are invited and then left without an answer.

Participation opportunities usually reach those who are "connected"¹

The research shows that youth participation is not equally accessible, because information still circulates mainly through civic and educational networks rather than through public institutions. Survey crosstabs confirm this pattern across all three countries: youth organizations, NGOs and student bodies are the strongest information channel in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, while municipality and government websites remain very weak sources of information. This suggests that formal participation mechanisms exist, but young people usually discover them through organizations, universities or personal networks, not directly through institutions. Serbia stands out

¹ In this section, the term "connected" refers to young people who are already close to civic, student, NGO or youth council networks, and therefore receive information more readily than those outside these circles.

slightly because schools, universities and professors are a stronger source of information there. In all three countries official channels remain underused.

Geography deepens this inequality. None of the rural respondents to the survey believed that information was easy to find; 45.5% of them even said they did not know where to look, compared to 16.3% in capital cities. Although the rural sample is small, the pattern supports qualitative findings: young people outside major urban centers face weaker access to information, fewer local structures and fewer people who can guide them through participation processes.

As a result, participation opportunities remain a privilege only for a small, “connected” circle, a point which was raised by focus group participants. In North Macedonia, the establishment of local youth bodies faces significant challenges due to weak municipal administrative capacities and a lack of youth organizations in some municipalities (Interviews with Ivona Kuzmanovska and Ardita Dema-Mehmeti, 2026). In Serbia, focus group participants described Belgrade as the center of opportunities and institutional attention, with one participant saying that *“the whole life of Serbia is in Belgrade.”* In Albania, exclusion is especially visible among rural youth, Roma and Egyptian youth, young people with disabilities and those without stable digital access or guidance, while one interviewee also noted that economic insecurity often pushes civic participation behind more urgent employment concerns.

The same problem appears in digital participation: awareness of official platforms remains low in all three countries, especially in Serbia and North Macedonia, showing that digital tools cannot increase participation if young people do not know they exist or do not understand how to use them. For example, although ENER is officially intended for public consultations, including those involving youth, focus group findings from North Macedonia reveal that only two out of eight participants were aware of the platform's existence. This raises serious questions about the platform's visibility and its current effectiveness as a tool for youth participation. A smaller student-led example is Digital Student Voice by Studentarija, which functions more as a channel for flagging student-life issues than as a public consultation platform (Studentarija, 2026).

Unequal participation is therefore not simply a matter of lack of interest among young people; it is also produced by the way institutions communicate. Young people who are already involved with NGOs, student organizations, youth councils or university circles are more likely to receive information, while those outside these networks remain much harder to reach. Survey data shows that this holds true in all three countries: NGO and student networks are strong information channels in all three countries, while municipal and government websites are consistently weak. Participation, in short, is not equally public; it often depends on being socially connected to the right spaces.

Tokenism and fear reduce participation even when channels exist

The research shows that youth participation is weakened not only by poor implementation or unequal access, but also by the way young people experience participation itself. Across Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, many respondents and focus group participants described participation as symbolic when young people are invited to be present but not treated as real contributors to decisions. 72% of survey respondents gave institutional trust a score of 2 or less out of 5, while 76% agreed that youth participation is mostly symbolic rather than influential. This suggests that the problem is not simply whether participation channels exist, but whether young people believe those channels are safe, serious and capable of producing change.

This pattern appears across the three countries in slightly different ways. In Albania, focus group participants described being dismissed because of age or presumed inexperience, including an example where a teacher influenced school elections despite student opposition. This shows that hierarchy can limit participation even before young people reach formal institutions, because they are often expected to listen rather than shape decisions. In Serbia, participants described participation as a “facade”, a “sticker” or “polished pictures and representation”, meaning that youth presence is sometimes used to improve the image of institutions rather than influence policy. One participant explained: *“My first reaction is skepticism. I often see youth participation used only pro forma, so organizations can say that young people participate, even though young people are not really asked”*.

In North Macedonia, the focus group showed that participation is also limited by fear. Participants felt that expressing a different opinion publicly may lead to pressure, exclusion or being sidelined by people in positions of power.

Participation fails when young people feel that their role is decorative or risky. Even if councils, consultations, platforms or meetings exist, young people may avoid them if they believe the process is already decided, if their opinion will not matter, or if speaking openly could create problems for them later. The implication is that the solution cannot consist of only “more consultations” or “more digital platforms”. What should matter is the quality and safety of participation itself. Institutions should use simple language, protect young people from public exposure when needed, allow anonymous or semi-anonymous input, train public officials to work with young people respectfully, and create a written obligation to respond to youth proposals. Digital tools can help, but only if they are visible, safe and connected to a responsible institution. Otherwise, they become just another form that young people fill in without ever seeing whether their voice mattered.

Policy Solution

The three countries covered by this brief at different levels from a regulation point of view provide for the feedback cycles, albeit such provisions are not always implemented. / In all three countries, there are mechanisms through which young people can participate in consultations and make suggestions. The problem is that the process often ends there, with their opinions being collected. Although the rules for public consultations foresee some feedback, in practice young people rarely get to see what happened to their suggestions. The proposed solution is to enable a mandatory youth participation accountability model that connects outreach, safe participation and public institutional feedback into one clear process. This solution is important because it changes the logic of youth participation from a tick the box gesture by institutions into a measurable public obligation. Instead of treating youth input as something that can be collected and then quietly ignored, the model would require institutions to prove that participation had a clear path: who was informed, who was able to take part, what was proposed, how the proposal was assessed and what institutional response followed. This gives the recommendation a practical enforcement point. It does not depend only on political will or general promises of inclusion but creates a standard that can be monitored across Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. In that sense, the solution is not just about making participation “better”, but about making institutions answerable for the consultation process they organize.

In practice, the model includes three connected elements. First, **outreach**: every youth-related consultation is announced in plain language, on time, through the channels young people actually

use, and reaches beyond the capitals and the usual NGO and student circles. Second, **safe participation**: young people can take part without fear, with the option of anonymous or semi-anonymous input and officials trained to engage respectfully. Third, **public feedback**: within a set deadline (for example 30 days) the institution publishes a short “You proposed/Institution responded” note saying what was proposed, what was accepted or rejected, and why.

For the model to be more than a promise, it needs a clear owner and a clear consequence. The duty to respond should be written into the youth law or the next action plan, not left to good will. An independent body, such as the national youth council or ombudsperson, should monitor whether institutions publish their responses on time and report the results once a year. Compliance should carry weight: meeting the feedback duty can be made a condition for signing off annual youth reports or for releasing the earmarked youth budget lines, so that institutions which ignore young people face a visible cost. A simple public scoreboard showing which institutions responded, and which did not, would make performance easy to compare across the three countries and hard to quietly avoid.

Stakeholders and their roles

The accountability model should be implemented through cooperation between national institutions, local authorities, youth organizations, educational institutions, digital platform teams and independent monitors. The aim is not to create a new system, but to make existing youth participation mechanisms more visible, inclusive and accountable.

National ministries and government bodies responsible for youth policy should set the rules. Their role is to make outreach, accessibility, deadlines, feedback and public reporting mandatory parts of every youth-related consultation. They should also require institutions to publish a short “You proposed/Institution responded” report after consultations, so that youth input cannot disappear without explanation.

Municipalities and local youth offices should apply the model locally. They are responsible for reaching young people in smaller towns, rural areas and vulnerable communities, organizing accessible consultations and publishing clear responses to youth proposals. This is important because many participation barriers are local: weak information, limited youth infrastructure and low trust.

Youth councils, NGOs, youth organizations and student organizations should act as bridges between institutions and young people. They can help design youth-friendly consultations, spread information through channels young people actually use, reach less visible groups and monitor whether institutions respond properly. However, they should support the process, not replace the responsibility of public institutions.

Digital platform teams and public communication offices should make online participation simple, visible and accessible. They should ensure that every platform or online form has clear language, deadlines, instructions, responsible institutions and a visible feedback section. This is also in line with the input from Metamorphosis Foundation, which pointed to the need to connect youth participation with wider open government practices, including public consultations, budget transparency, policy development and digital public services (Interview with Danche Danilovska-Bajdevska & Marijana Jancheska-Ugarkovikj, 2026).

Independent monitoring bodies, researchers and donors should track whether the model works in practice. They can monitor how many consultations were organized, who was reached, whether proposals received responses and whether institutions respected the feedback obligation.

Potential risks

The main risk is that the proposed model could become another formal procedure if institutions give vague answers and collect youth opinions without influencing decisions, which would repeat the same problem in digital form and could further decrease trust. It may also be difficult to apply in municipalities with weak staff, funding and youth infrastructure. Therefore, safe participation and institutional response should be treated as one connected process, not as separate symbolic activities.

Additionally, to mitigate such risk, civil society organizations and youth councils must take upon a more proactive role in monitoring such participation processes, and hold accountable institutions when shortcomings are noticed. Youth groups should take a watchdog role, with accountability requests standing at the foundation for proper participation processes.

Recommendations

Albania

National Youth Agency

- Include a mandatory “You proposed/Institution responded” mechanism in the Action Plan 2026-2028, requiring institutions to publish what young people proposed, what was accepted, what was rejected and why.
- Strengthen Local Youth Councils. Members should be engaged not only politically but also civically. Create standard operating procedures, allocate funds specifically for Local Youth Councils, and set minimum yearly activity criteria.

Digital Platforms and Public Communication Offices

- Create a youth-friendly section on the Konsultimi Publik portal with simple language, short explanations, clear deadlines and examples of how to submit comments.
- Add a visible feedback section to every youth-related online consultation, so young people can see what happened after they participated.
- Involve young people in testing institutional communication, because participation cannot be inclusive if calls, strategies and action plans are written only in administrative language.

Municipalities

- Improve rural and marginalized youth inclusion. Local governments should carry out focused outreach programs for young people with disabilities, rural youth, Roma and Egyptian populations, and economically disadvantaged youth through community centers, schools, and other community venues.

North Macedonia

Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth and Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

- Establish and operationalize the National Youth Assembly and the National Advisory Body for Youth Policies, as key mechanisms without which the national youth participation system remains incomplete.
- Introduce a regular practice of “You proposed/Institution responded” for youth-related consultations, requiring institutions to publish which proposals were accepted, which were rejected and why.
- Strengthen public reporting on the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and action plans, with clear information on implemented, partially implemented, postponed and unimplemented activities.
- Explain youth policies through short, accessible materials that show how young people can influence specific decisions, rather than merely stating that they “have the right to participate”.

Municipalities and local youth bodies

- Strengthen the practical work of local youth councils through regular sessions, publicly available agendas and minutes, as well as information on how the municipality has acted on youth proposals.
- Bring local youth councils closer to young people through schools, faculties, youth spaces and local events, so that young people understand where they can turn and how they can get involved in local decision-making.
- Strengthen the monitoring of municipal funds for youth, with a focus on whether legally provided funds are clearly planned, visible in the budget and directed towards youth programs, youth centers, consultations and youth initiatives.
- Encourage regular local consultations with young people on specific issues that affect them in everyday life, such as public transport, public space, cultural offer, mental health, student conditions and local services.
- Strengthen the practical role of youth officers as an accessible link between young people and the municipality, through clearer communication, regular contact with young people and brief information on received proposals, forwarded requests and institutional responses.
- Support youth officers with practical training on communicating with young people, using digital tools, organizing consultations and working with young people who are not part of youth organizations or student bodies.

Digital platforms and public communication

- Improve existing digital channels, such as ENER, institutional websites and municipal pages, so that youth proposals can be tracked from submission to institutional response.
- Enable a clearer digital trail for youth proposals, with information on whether the proposal has been received, reviewed, accepted, rejected or forwarded to another institution.
- Actively promote laws, strategies, programs and public calls that affect young people through targeted campaigns on social networks, including paid promotion when necessary,

as well as through schools, faculties, student assemblies, youth centers, local media and youth officers.

- Prepare short and understandable explanations for public calls and consultations, related to topics that young people recognize as important, such as education, work, housing, public transport, culture, mental health and local services.

Youth organizations, student bodies and educational institutions

- Involve youth organizations, student bodies and educational institutions as bridges between young people and institutions, especially through practical info-sessions.
- Involve organizations and youth groups from rural areas in the preparation and monitoring of youth policies, so that consultations do not remain limited only to already active organizations from larger cities.
- Developing a peer-to-peer approach in which young people with previous experience in consultations will help pupils, students and young people from rural and urban areas understand how to get involved and how to monitor the response from institutions.

Serbia

Ministry of Tourism and Youth

- Include a mandatory “You proposed/Institution responded” mechanism in the Action Plan 2026–2028, requiring institutions to publish what young people proposed, what was accepted, what was rejected and why.
- Redesign youth-related consultations so they do not end with collecting opinions, but with visible follow-up, clear deadlines, responsible institutions and simple public summaries. (long-term)
- Strengthen the role of the Youth Council by ensuring stronger youth representation, regional diversity and clearer links between its proposals and government decisions.
- Treat the student protest wave as evidence of youth political agency, not only as a crisis, and use it to improve formal channels so that youth energy can also enter institutional processes.

Municipalities and Local Youth Offices

- Make local youth offices more visible by publishing clear information on contacts, activities, open consultations, deadlines and results.
- Organize small annual local youth projects where young people identify one concrete problem, propose solutions and see at least one visible result.
- Use direct outreach through schools, faculties, local events, youth centers, social media and community spaces instead of expecting young people to search municipal websites.

KOMS, NAPOR and Civil Society Organizations

- Support local youth councils, youth offices and informal youth groups through training on advocacy, communication, consultation design and institutional follow-up.
- Monitor whether institutions respond to youth proposals and publish accessible reports on the quality of youth participation.

- Develop mentoring programmes where young people with previous participation experience support younger people, especially in schools and smaller municipalities.

Digital Platforms and Public Communication Offices

- Create a youth-friendly section on the eConsultations portal with simple language, short explanations, clear deadlines and examples of how to submit comments.
- Add a visible feedback section to every youth-related online consultation, so young people can see what happened after they participated.
- Involve young people in testing institutional communication, because participation cannot be inclusive if calls, strategies and action plans are written only in administrative language.

Conclusion

Across Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, the picture is strikingly similar. All three countries have established legal frameworks, strategies, councils and online platforms intended to support youth participation. What they lack is the mechanism that translates young people's input into visible institutional responses. Participation usually stops at being consulted, while young people rarely (if ever) receive any feedback on how their ideas were considered or whether they influenced decisions. The survey and focus groups findings show the cost of this: trust in institutions is low, and most young people see participation as symbolic rather than influential. They do not reject participation itself; they reject taking part in processes that fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

This is why the brief argues for a mandatory accountability model built on three connected elements: reaching young people, enabling them to participate safely, and providing a clear public response to their contributions. Its central instrument, a “You proposed/Institution responded” note, is deliberately simple, but it only works if institutional ownership and consequences are enforced. The duty to respond should be written into the youth law or the next youth action plan; checked by an independent body, such as a national youth council or ombudsperson; and tied to something institutions care about, such as sign-off on annual reports or release of the earmarked youth budget. Without these safeguards, “mandatory” accountability risks becoming another formality.

The timing is favorable. All three countries are preparing new action plans for their youth strategies for the 2026–2028 period; they are the natural place to embed the duties proposed here.

These findings should be read with care, since the survey sample is modest in size and the qualitative work covered a narrow age group, making the evidence indicative rather than fully representative. Even so, the consistency of the findings across three different national contexts strengthens their credibility. If policymakers act on this evidence, the reward is tangible: youth participation can evolve from a box-ticking exercise to a relationship of trust, where young people can see that their voices contribute to real policy outcomes.

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