Activity 1.3.1. Development of a training needs assessment report based on the functional roles of MoCTS, NYA, and LGUs

EU Benchmarking Summary

Subject	Preparation of the Training Needs Assessment Report
Identification Number	EC-NEAR/TIA/2024/EA-RP/0084
Dates	01 September 2026
Venue	Project Office AKR, Tirana, Albania
Activity code	1.3.1 Deliverable N° 1, EU Benchmarking Summary prepared with comparative insights from selected countries
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1. Rationale

The scope of this document is to be a shared resource hub for the staff of NYA, the LYC, and LYC members, to be inspired to strengthen their capacity for the preparation of new initiatives and projects to be implemented in local communities.

Young people's active citizenship and participation has many diverse forms – it can be conventional and unconventional, including activities such as voting, being members of political parties, serving on a local youth council, engaging through a youth organisation or taking part in online political activism, boycotts or a protest movement. Contemporary engagement of young people in civil processes is taking place within the context of a shrinking space for civil society, rapid digitalisation, increased social inequalities, and a rise of global youth movements.

Social, political and economic turmoil in South-East Europe over the last three decades have affected young people, youth work and youth policy implementation in the region.

The examples of policies and measures presented in this benchmarking document are fully aligned to the objective of this technical assistance to *support Albanian youth civic participation, community engagement, and volunteerism, through promoting inclusive, gender responsive, and structured dialogue and strengthening youth capacities at the central and local levels*.

Its purpose is to support positive approaches by analysing existing good practices and highlighting challenges. The hope is to increase the inspiration of youth policy makers, practitioners, and young people to contribute to strengthening the potential of youth to be involved in such processes.

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2. Latest findings from Eurobarometer about Youth

The Flash Eurobarometer was conducted between 11 and 20 February 2025 across the 27 Member States. 25,933 young EU citizens, aged 16-30 years, were interviewed online. Here are the summarised main findings[1].

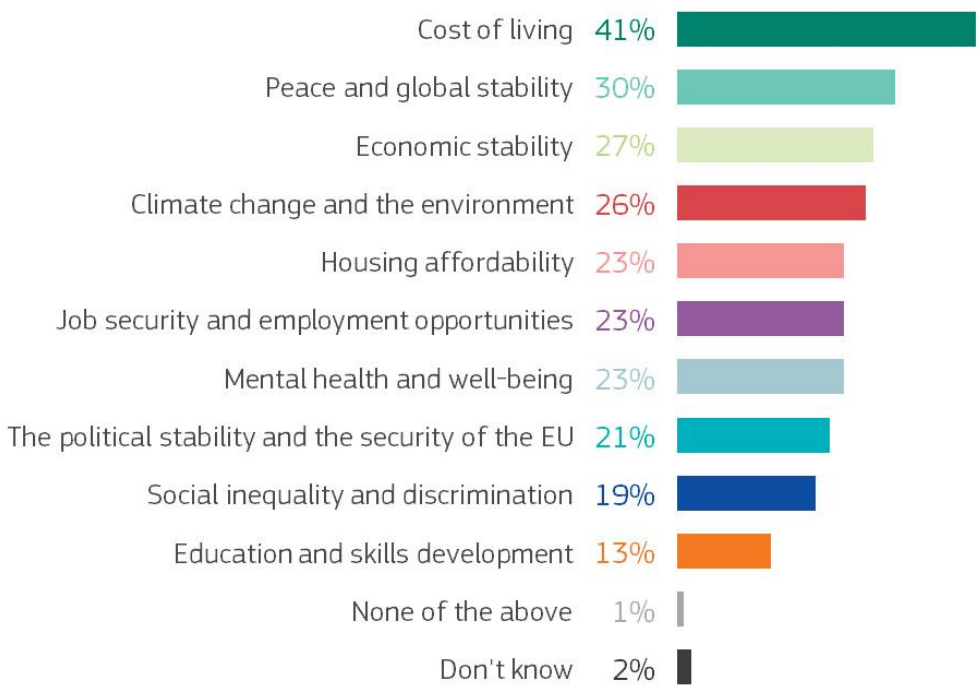
61% of young Europeans are optimistic about the future of the EU and 60% believe that the EU has a positive impact on society.

The EU's main strengths, according to young people, are the freedom of movement (32%) and strong relationships and solidarity between Member States (28%).

Young Europeans associate being part of the EU primarily with the freedom to travel and explore other countries (39%) and access to EU-funded programmes and support (30%).

The most pressing concerns for the future are presented in the figures below.

Young Europeans consider the cost of living as one of the EU's biggest challenges together with conflicts, instability, and the erosion of democratic values.



[1] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3373

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The top 3 perceived threats to democracy in the EU are: 1. False and/or misleading information in general circulating online and offline (34% of respondents). 2. Economic insecurity and inequality (32 % of respondents). 3. Decreased levels of tolerance and respect in societies (27 % of respondents).

The expectations of youth for 2030 are the following: 1. 34% ask for improved job opportunities and economic stability. 2. 28% ask for a stronger role for the EU in promoting global peace and security. 3. 26% ask for stronger climate action and environmental protection.

3. Comparative insights from selected international studies on youth policies and practices

3.1 Legal frameworks and strategies

The Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy in Geneva (AHCD) has published in January 2025 the results of a study mapping youth policies across 32 countries[2] to evaluate how different governments support their young populations. The research utilizes the Youth Governance Index (YGI) to rank countries based on their legal frameworks, ministerial structures, and national strategies regarding education and employment. By examining specific domains such as social inclusion and mental health, the authors identify significant disparities in policy implementation that do not always align with a nation's wealth or political regime. The study introduces *Youth Regulatory Impact Assessments* as a modern tool for ensuring new laws effectively address the needs of younger citizens. Ultimately, the document serves as a global benchmarking resource to highlight best practices and encourage evidence-based governance for future leadership demographics.

The Youth Governance Index (YGI) ranks countries based on the presence, extensiveness, and inclusivity of youth-focused institutional and legal frameworks.

The index evaluates seven key indicators. Albania is not included in the mapping study, but we now compare it in the table below as a benchmarking exercise.

Youth Governance Index (YGI) comparison between AHCD study and Albanian situation			
Key Indicator		Example of comparison with Germany (top-ranked country)	Albania
1	Having a dedicated Ministry	Dedicated Ministry (Score: 1.0): Youth affairs are governed by the federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)	YES (Score: 1.0)

[2] https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/sites/internet/files/2025-01/WP4_AHCD_Monti_Cioffi_Ghazi_Lutringerpdf_0.pdf

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2	Having youth provisions in the Constitution	Constitutional and Legal Frameworks (Score: 0.5 each, total 1). While the Constitution does not explicitly mention "youth" in a dedicated section, it includes several highly relevant provisions (such as the right to education and voting rights).	YES (Score: 1.0)
3	Having official Youth Strategies	Youth Strategy (Score: 1.0): Germany has established a comprehensive National Youth Strategy (Jugendstrategie)	YES (Score: 1.0)
4	Having age restrictions for candidacy and voting	Yes (Score: 1.0)	YES (Score: 1.0)
5	Having a dedicated Youth Law	Rather than a single "Youth Law," Germany protects youth rights through multiple overlapping laws.	YES (Score: 1.0)
6	The implementation of a Youth Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)	It is one of the few countries to have successfully implemented an RIA tool specifically for youth, known as the "Youth check" (Jugend-Check), to assess how new legislative drafts affect young people (Score: 1)	NO
	An overall policy score	Germany (Total Score: 5.0 / 6.0)	Albania (Total Score: 5.0 / 6.0)

3.2 Growing Youth Work in Europe: A Comprehensive Mapping of the European Youth Work Ecosystem

Over the last 15 years, youth work has undergone an unprecedented transition, maturing from a localized set of practices into a distinct, independent European field of action. This evolution, catalyzed by the 1st European Youth Work Convention (EYWC) in Ghent (2010), has reached a critical juncture with the

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current implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA), established by the EU Council resolution (2020/C 415/01)[3].

The European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) aims to boost youth work. Established as a strategic framework, it intends to strengthen and further develop youth work practice and policies in Europe. The Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work and the Youth Sector Strategy 2030 provide the impetus for strengthening, recognising and further developing youth work policies and practices, hence contributing to the development of the Agenda.

To strengthen the provision of youth work in Europe, European policies and local policy-making play an important role in supporting the further development of a quality local youth work offer. Youth work should be an integral part of youth policy, systematically incorporating the needs and measures regarding youth work into youth policies, both vertically and horizontally.

In 2024, the Council of Europe published the results of the study "GROWING YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE: Mapping European youth work ecosystems"[4]

Strengthening youth work relies heavily on national, regional, and local authorities taking a more active role in financing the field. Stakeholders argue that governments can improve funding for grassroots and local youth work projects through several key measures:

1. Establish Dedicated Funding Streams: National governments are expected to develop new, specific programs and funding streams directly targeted at activities supporting the thematic priority areas of the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA).

2. Fund Operational and Structural Costs: Governments should shift away from purely project-based grants, which can leave organizations vulnerable to collapsing during crises. Funding should also be directed toward the core structural and operational costs of youth organizations to build stable, sustainable, and resilient youth work systems.

3. Proactively Support and Outreach to Grassroots Actors: Grassroots youth workers and local organizations (especially those in rural or marginalized communities) are often completely detached from the high-level policy "bubble" and are unaware of the EYWA or its associated funding opportunities. Governments must take a proactive role in informing, involving, and financially supporting these actors.

4. Utilize Intermediaries to Bridge the Policy-Funding Gap: Governments can fund and empower intermediary actors—such as national youth worker associations—to act as "translators" that transfer

[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG
[4] https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth-in-europe/12102-growing-youth-work-in-europe-results-of-the-mapping-european-youth-work-ecosystems-study.html

high-level European opportunities and policy alignments down to the everyday work of grassroots practitioners.

5. Align and Leverage European Funding Instruments: Governments and their national agencies can better utilize existing EU and Council of Europe programs (like Erasmus+ and the European Youth Foundation). This includes aligning national agency strategies with the EYWA and simplifying access so that smaller, local civil society organizations can realistically participate.

4. Comparative insights from selected EU countries

Preliminary work was conducted on potential best practices from different countries during the preparation of the Technical Proposal.

Three exemplary countries that offer valuable models for Albania are Ireland, Finland, and Germany. These nations provide diverse yet complementary approaches to youth participation, from robust local engagement to influential national advocacy, directly addressing the current challenges faced by Albanian youth councils.

Ireland: Structured Local Participation and National Influence

Ireland's model is highly relevant for Albania due to its well-defined, nationwide structure for local youth participation (Comhairle na nÓg) and a clear pathway for local recommendations to influence national policy through the National Youth Assembly. This directly addresses Albania's need to strengthen its LYCs and ensure their input translates into tangible policy outcomes.

• Structure of Youth Councils:

o Comhairle na nÓg (Local Youth Councils):

These are statutory youth councils operating in all 31 local authority areas across Ireland. They provide a voice for young people aged 12-17 on the development of local policies and services. They are the recognized national structure for youth participation in local decision-making. Each Comhairle na nÓg is supported by its respective local council and often facilitated by local youth work organizations. Members are typically elected from schools and communities within the county.

o National Youth Assembly of Ireland:

This serves as an overarching consultative youth forum on topics of national interest. Delegates (aged 12-24) are nominated by local Comhairle na nÓg and established youth organizations, ensuring broad representation across geographical areas, age, and diverse backgrounds. The National Youth Assembly collaborates closely with relevant government departments to ensure recommendations inform public policy.

• Success Stories in Engagement and Decision-Making:

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o Local Impact:

Comhairle na nÓg has successfully influenced local policy by raising issues such as the need for safer indoor and outdoor spaces, school stress, mental health, and drug awareness. They directly engage with local officials, including mayors and chief executives, to present their concerns and proposals. For instance, Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg successfully ran a "Road Safety Event" and the "Use Your Brain, Not Your Fists" campaign, which gained national recognition and was adopted by schools and sporting organizations.

o National Policy Influence:

The National Youth Assembly directly shapes national policy recommendations on critical issues like climate action, gender equality, and rural development. Their input has directly influenced government departments in areas such as transport, education, and rural youth opportunities. This demonstrates a clear mechanism for youth voices to be heard and acted upon at the highest levels of government. https://comhairlenanog.ie/

Finland: Independent Advocacy and High-Level Policy

Finland's model offers valuable insights into how a strong, independent national youth council can effectively advocate for youth interests and integrate youth perspectives into central government policymaking. This is particularly relevant for strengthening Albania's National Youth Council (NYC), which has been described as "not very proactive" and in need of more support to address important topics like the budget.

• Structure of Youth Councils:

o Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi:

This is a politically and religiously independent national service and advocacy organization. It acts as an umbrella body for over 150 national youth work and educational organizations, providing services to its members and advocating for the well-being and inclusion of young people. Allianssi participates in various expert bodies and working groups of central authorities.

o Local Youth Councils:

These exist at the municipal level, with individual members forming the Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland.

o Political Youth Organizations:

These are significant political actors, often affiliated with "mother parties," and play a role in recruiting future decision-makers and influencing party platforms. Their chairpersons often have the right to participate in the main decision-making bodies of their respective parties.

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• Success Stories in Engagement and Decision-Making:

o Direct Influence on National Policy:

Allianssi actively promotes youth participation and ensures youth voices are heard within central authorities. For example, a representative of the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, Ms. Sara Nyman, served as the UN Youth Climate Delegate and a vice-chair of the national Climate Policy Round Table led by the Prime Minister. This process directly supports the preparation and implementation of climate policy at the national level.

o International Representation:

Since 1997, the Finnish National Youth Council has appointed Youth Delegates to participate in United Nations (UN) meetings, including the UN Youth Climate Delegates and the Agenda 2030 Youth Group, raising the voice of young people in international and national arenas on global issues like climate change and sustainable development.

o Youth in Political Structures:

Political youth organizations ensure that young people are nominated for key positions in elections and influence policy on issues such as student financial aid, equality, and development cooperation. They actively work to make youth issues part of public and decision-making discussions through various events and campaigns.

https://www.youthforum.org/members/allianssi-finnish-national-youth-council-2

Germany: Decentralized Empowerment and Evidence-Based Advocacy

Germany's approach emphasizes strong local youth work and the role of youth advisory boards in directly influencing policy and implementing projects. This model is particularly beneficial for Albania's Local Youth Councils (LYCs), which often function as "non-formal youth groups" and need to strengthen their capacity for evidence-based policy formulation and direct community impact.

• Structure of Youth Councils:

o Decentralized Youth Work:

Youth work in Germany is largely organized and financed at the local level, as part of the child and youth services system. This includes both "youth associations" (verbandliche Jugendarbeit) and "open youth work" (offene Jugendarbeit).

o Youth Advisory Boards (Jugendbeiräte):

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These exist at community and state levels (e.g., Regensburg, Baden-Württemberg). They are composed of young members who communicate the concerns of young people to relevant decision-makers. Some youth advisory boards have direct contact with representatives from politics, academia, business, and civil society.

o German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring, DBJR):

This is an umbrella organization formed by various youth associations at the federal level, representing the interests of children and young people in Germany.

o Youth Parliaments (Jugendparlamente):

While there is no single national government-run youth parliament, various state parliaments offer "Youth Parliaments" as education and dialogue formats, allowing young people to learn about parliamentary life and exchange ideas with political representatives.

• Success Stories in Engagement and Decision-Making:

o Direct Policy Influence:

Youth advisory boards actively lobby to make policies more youth-friendly. For example, the youth advisory board of the sustainability strategy Baden-Württemberg communicates youth concerns to decision-makers and participates in the state sustainability council, leading to real-life projects and campaigns that promote sustainable action in local communities.

o Grassroots Impact:

Youth associations serve as democratic forms of self-organization and lobbying, providing platforms for millions of young people to articulate their concerns and have their interests represented. They are instrumental in organizing initiatives and activities at the local level.

o Evidence-Based Advocacy:

The emphasis on youth advisory boards and their direct engagement with decision-makers, coupled with the broader focus on data-driven policy in EU contexts, provides a strong example for Albanian youth councils to move beyond anecdotal input towards well-supported policy recommendations.

https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/germany/53-youth-representation-bodies

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https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/guidelines/2024/Toolkit_Youth4Reviving_stagnating_EU territories.pdf

Study on Social Inclusion, Digitalisation and Young People, Council of Europe and European Commission, Youth Partnership, 2020

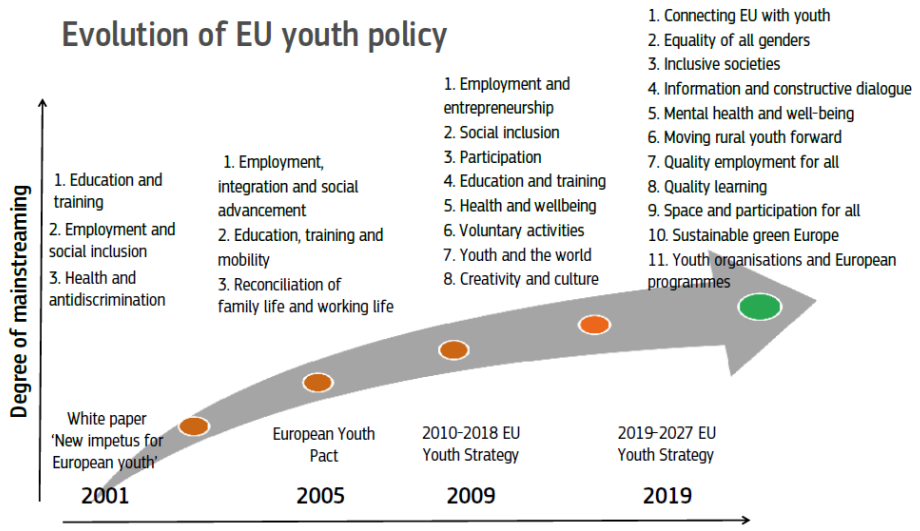
https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/053120+Study+on+SID+Web.pdf/0057379c-2180-dd3e-7537-71c468f3cf9d

Youth mainstreaming, youth impact assessment, and youth checks. European Commission / EACEA / Youth Wiki, 2024

https://youth.europa.eu/news/youth-mainstreaming-impact-assessment-and-youth-check_en

in the youth field. More than two decades later, mainstreaming youth and youth participation are them' (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Figure 1. Degree of youth mainstreaming during the evolution of EU youth policy



Against this background, the 2022 European Year of youth participation was the topic most often addressed

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