



# ANALYTICAL REPORT

Based on the Results of the  
Study “Youth Involvement in  
Local Decision-Making”:

 Kaluska Community

# CONTENTS

<b>I. METHODOLOGY</b> .....	3
<b>II. KEY RESULTS</b> .....	4
2.1. Level of youth participation in decision-making at the local level .....	5
2.2. Methods and tools for involving young people in decision-making at the local level.....	8
2.3. Barriers and challenges to engaging young people in decision-making at the local level.....	9
2.4. Factors facilitating youth involvement in local decision-making .....	11
2.5. Stakeholder recommendations for policies and practices to improve youth engagement in local decision-making.....	12
<b>III. CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	15

The study was conducted within the framework of the Vidnova project implemented by the Charity Foundation “Stabilization Support Services” and the Public Union “Legal Development Network” in cooperation with the humanitarian organization “People in Need” and with the financial support of the Czech Development Agency.

# METHODOLOGY

## List of abbreviations:

FGD – focus group discussion;  
LSG – local self-government body;  
NGO – non-governmental organization;  
YC – youth council;  
TC – territorial community;

**The study “Involvement of youth in decision-making at the local level”** in the Kalush City Territorial Community was conducted from September 1 to October 20, 2024.

**The field phase of the study** was conducted from September 10 to 30, 2024.

## The purpose of the study:

- Assessment of the level of youth involvement in decision-making processes at the local level;
- Identification of challenges and barriers to youth involvement in decision-making at the local level;
- Identification of factors that facilitate youth involvement in decision-making at the local level;
- Identification of methods and tools for involving young people in decision-making at the local level;
- Development of recommendations for policies and practices to improve youth involvement in local decision-making.

**Target audience of the study:** representatives of community youth aged 16-25, government officials, social workers, youth leaders, members of youth councils, representatives of youth centers, spaces, members of youth NGOs, youth workers, parents and teachers of active youth.

**Research tools** are qualitative research methods (in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions).

The study conducted **6 in-depth interviews** based on a pre-planned framework with government officials, social workers, youth leaders, youth council leaders, and representatives of youth centers and spaces. The interviews were conducted online using the ZOOM video communication platform. The duration of one interview ranges from 50 to 90 minutes.

## **3 focus group discussions were held based on a pre-compiled guide as part of the study:**

- 1 FGD with representatives of active youth aged 16-19;
- 1 FGD with representatives of active youth aged 20-25;
- 1 FGD with parents and teachers of active youth.

All FGDs were conducted offline. The number of participants in one FGD ranged from 6 to 10 people. The duration of one FGD ranged from 110 to 140 minutes.

### **Coding of respondents' answers**

All research was conducted on a confidential basis. The quotes in the text of the report are coded according to the following criteria:

- **Respondent's gender:** M – man, W – woman;
- **Respondent's age;**
- **Respondent category:** Y16-19 – a youth representative aged 16-19; Y20-25 – a youth representative aged 20-25; P – a representative of parents of active youth; T – teacher of active youth; LSG – representative of a local self-government body; NGO – member of a youth NGO; YW – youth worker; YC – youth council member; SW – social worker; YCR – representative of a youth center.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study is not representative of the socio-demographic group of young people in the Kalush City Territorial Community; instead, it reflects the opinion of the active part of the youth environment of the TC, as well as other representatives of the environment who are stakeholders in the process of developing and implementing youth policy.

<sup>1</sup>*One person can fit into several categories at the same time.*

# KEY RESULTS

## 2.1. LEVEL OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

According to the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, youth participation and active citizenship entail having the rights, means, space and opportunities, and where necessary, support, to participate and influence decisions and to take part in actions and activities in order to contribute to building a better society. Youth participation is also defined as an ongoing dynamic process in which information is exchanged between children/youth and adults in order to make decisions that best serve the best interests of the child/youth. Young people exercise the right to freely express their views in matters relating to their care, protection or welfare in the areas of social services, health, education, safety, etc.

Ensuring effective youth participation means creating opportunities for young people to participate in the development of public policy and the development of services and programs. These opportunities are created through a range of formal and informal participation mechanisms: from youth advisory groups to focus groups, from ongoing consultations to support for youth-led projects.

Analyzing the respondents' answers to the question about the level of youth involvement in the Kalush city territorial community, we can see a polarization of opinions in the context of individual target groups of the study.

The youth representatives who participated in the study believe that the level of their involvement is high. Parents, teachers, and representatives of local authorities think otherwise. Certain categories of respondents indicate that the level of youth engagement is low.

Such a difference in assessments may be due to insufficient training and awareness, ignorance and inability to identify the real needs of modern youth beyond traditional perceptions<sup>2</sup>.

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*"I would rate it high and maybe even very high" (F\_16\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

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*"I want to talk to you about the fact that our young people are very passive and lazy." (F\_35\_P).*

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*"Only if you stimulate them, that is, set some goals for them, will they go for it." (F\_46\_T).*

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*"Not all young people in Kalush are active. Sometimes they listen and get acquainted with the opportunities. But often they are not aware of what can be done locally, what opportunities they have, and they need to be told about it as much as possible." (F\_25\_YW).*

<sup>2</sup> Kennan D. *Supporting Children's Participation in Decision Making :A Systematic Literature Review Exploring the Effectiveness of Participatory Processes* / D. Kennan, B. Brady, C. Forkan. // *British Journal of Social Work*. – 2018. – Pages 1–18.

The study found that youth representatives of Kaluska TC are actively interested in the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in the community. In particular, representatives of young people aged 16-19 and 20-25, as well as representatives of the community's public environment, claim that at the time of the study, there is a tendency to increase the level of youth interest in the social and political life of the community.

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*"Well, in general, you can spend your free time in NGOs, there are a lot of projects going on... I also know that the NGO Hub 93 has started working very hard, so there are so many activities there that you can relax, talk and spend time." (F\_16\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

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*"In about a year of its activity, the youth center reaches up to four thousand people among the youth of the community, which is quite a big indicator, because in general we do not have an exact figure of how many young people we have in the community, because this data is not recorded, but according to various data from different heads of the city's youth and sports department, we can conclude that the youth center now reaches almost half of the youth in the community, which is a very high figure." (F\_25\_Y20-25\_YCR).*

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*"Quite a few young people are organizing fundraisers to support the AFU. Many members of non-governmental organizations are doing interesting projects. Whether in youth policy, volunteering, or other areas of employment." (F\_36\_YW).*

Based on the analysis of the responses received from the survey respondents, it was found that **the key tools for involving young people in the socio-political and public life of the community are:**

- Participation in cultural, educational, artistic, and sporting events and activities;
- Participation in the work of the youth council at the city council;
- Volunteering;
- Involvement in non-governmental organizations, including project work.

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*"The main tool for engaging young people in the community, I believe, is the youth council, where they themselves discuss which way to go to implement some kind of development in our community. Another tool that we have managed to implement is the involvement of a young person in the executive committee." (F\_36\_YW).*

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In addition to joining the youth council, whose work was highly appreciated by the survey respondents, youth representatives interact with the Kalush City Council through **the following channels of entry:**

- Department for Youth and Sports;
- City Mayor;
- Advisor to the Mayor on Youth Policy.

The above-mentioned institutions and officials promote all public events and activities for young people on the official website of the city council, official pages in social networks, and are directly involved in communication with young people.

At the same time, youth respondents did not mention interaction with the community deputies in their answers. The absence of such mentions indicates that young people do not attend meetings of deputy committees and sessions of the city council.

Using this channel of youth input into the work of the city council will have a positive impact on building long-term cooperation and strengthening the voice of youth in the community in decision-making processes.

*"The Department of Youth and Sports also actively cooperates with young people in our community, organizing various joint events." (F\_30\_LSG).*

An important achievement of the community youth in their interaction with LSG is the inclusion of a member of the youth council in the executive committee, who is responsible for taking into account the needs of young people in the decision-making process.

*"A member of the youth council joined the executive committee of the city council" (F\_25\_YW).*

Respondents from among the community's youth also note that the level of interaction with the authorities has been increasing in recent years. In particular, young people have more opportunities to get involved in its work, lobby and defend certain decisions.

*"In recent years, the city council has been trying very hard to listen and create an action plan together." (F\_19\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

The civil society sector is also actively working to engage young people in social and political life. The respondents indicated that the community is experiencing an intensification of the youth social environment, including through the support of local authorities.

*"Well, in general, you can spend your free time in NGOs. There are a lot of different projects now. NGOs, especially youth organizations, are now very much supported by the city authorities." (F\_19\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

Among civic organizations, the majority of respondents named Hub 93 as the best known, most active, and most involved in lobbying for the needs of young people.

*"We go to Hub 93" (F\_17\_Y16-19).*

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*"What is popular is our Hub 93. They are great, they do their job" (F\_25\_Y20-25).*

Analyzing the responses of young people, we can conclude that they are actively willing to join interesting activities, events, and initiatives. However, representatives of the city council, parents, teachers, and educators in educational institutions do not always demonstrate an understanding of what activities are interesting to modern youth and how to motivate them.

*"The community does not fully understand the role of the youth council. Accordingly, some people think that it is just an event agency under the city council. These are recruited people who are delegated to organize certain events and do what they are told by the authorities." (M\_25\_Y20-25).*

It is also important to note that the respondents demonstrate their willingness to engage in decision-making processes and take responsibility, which are key prerequisites for a targeted and effective youth policy in the community aimed at creating opportunities for young people to be active members of society.

*"Of course, you need to be involved in community life in some way, because, in my opinion, a person should be active, both in social and political life." (M\_17\_Y16-19).*

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*"Young people need to be valued and young people need to be heard, their needs need to be heard." (F\_25\_Y20-25).*

Thus, based on the analysis of the responses received, we can state that the study participants are confident that taking into account the real needs of young people will have a significant impact on the decision-making of local self-government bodies and will affect the opportunities for young people to realize themselves, spend their free time in an interesting way, create a favorable and comfortable environment in the community and reduce the outflow of young people from the community to big cities and abroad.

## **2.2. METHODS AND TOOLS FOR INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

The interviewed respondents aged 16-25 said that the Kalush City Council mainly involves young people in decision-making through the use of the following tools:

- Participation in the youth council;
- Organization of internships in the structure of the city council;
- Organization of community events.

*"I know for sure that a representative of the youth council did an internship at the city council this year." (F16\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

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*"Some members of the youth council did internships, and they discovered what it was like... I need to ask these participants directly, because I don't have full knowledge of feedback." (F25\_Y20-25\_YC).*

At the same time, representatives of the Kalush City Council, in addition to the above, **also mentioned such tools as:**

- Public opinion polls;
- Submission of petitions.

On the other hand, young respondents aged 16-25 did not mention such tools as participation in discussions, roundtables, focus groups, public opinion polls, involvement in strategic groups, submitting petitions, attending meetings of sessions and executive committees. This may indicate low awareness of the youth of the Kalush City Territorial Community on this issue and/or incorrectly chosen channels/methods of communication with youth by LSG.

*"I believe that the main tool for engaging young people in the community is the youth council, where they themselves discuss which way to go to implement some kind of development in our community." (F\_25\_YW).*

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*"The Department of Youth and Sports also actively cooperates with young people in our community, organizing various joint events." (F\_30\_LSG).*

### **2.3. BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

**The surveyed respondents noted that the main barriers to their involvement in decision-making processes at the community level are:**

- Lack of resources for project implementation;
- Low awareness of procedures and tools for interaction;
- Complicated official procedures;
- Lack of experience;
- Stereotypical approaches of the city council to addressing youth issues;
- Fear of criticism;
- Receiving formal answers and replies instead of real actions;
- Possibility to be punished instead of supported;
- Prejudice of adults towards age (ageism);
- Mismatch between the ways of expression of modern youth and traditional stereotypes.

*"You don't know where to ask, who to tell. You want to take the initiative, but you don't know if it will be supported, you don't know if it's possible at all." (F\_16\_Y16-19).*

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*"Unfortunately, we have a problem with cooperation with local authorities. We are faced with the fact that people simply do not want to take responsibility. As a result, projects that are important to young people, projects that cost a lot of money, are jeopardized. We have seen this situation many times before." (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).*

*"When you write a direct complaint, even to the mayor, not even a complaint, but just a letter, a message, you get more problems instead of resolving this situation." (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).*

*"It can be such a barrier that there is no proper feedback from the authorities." (M\_25\_Y16-25\_YC).*

*"Fear is the main barrier" (F\_16\_Y16-19).*

LSG representatives partially notice problems with youth involvement, but need appropriate tools for diagnosing and/or improving the skills of youth workers.

*"In fact, we are working on it, and it is still difficult for me to track any dynamics... I see that the regulations of the youth council need to be finalized. There are gaps in the documents on youth policy." (F\_35\_YW).*

The surveyed youth aged 15-25 mentioned poor awareness of the events, which may indicate that the city council has chosen the wrong channels and methods of communication (modern youth are not interested in official information resources). According to the findings, young people mostly get information from social media, where well-known bloggers and their peers are the authorities.

*"It is necessary not to present information in a cookie-cutter way, such as these events, these dates. I think it will be incorrect, but it seems like it is forced, like it is coercive." (M\_25\_Y20-25).*

Despite the opportunity to join the work of the youth council, respondents complained about the uncertainty of the timeframe for reviewing applications for membership, which can take several months, which also negatively affects the motivation to join decision-making processes in the future.

Representatives of the surveyed youth aged 20-25, in particular, drew attention to the stereotypical and formalistic approaches to the formation of local youth policy, which only partially covers the interests and needs of modern youth.

At the same time, respondents aged 16-25 believe that the city council needs to simplify procedures and remove bureaucratic obstacles, and city council leaders need to communicate more with young people, be interested in and ready to hear opinions that differ from the traditional ones, help young people organize and achieve results by engaging qualified mentors and youth workers.

*"We've made a lot of comments about the fact that this youth-targeted program does not meet actual needs, according to a survey we conducted among young people. But, of course, no one is interested in this, because the authorities have their own vision of what this program should look like." (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).*

Young people emphasize the need for respect for their opinions, which from the LSG’s point of view may not be sufficiently clear or legally correct, and the need for a more inclusive approach to engaging young people in a broad sense.

*“We just need to show that the city council is the place where you can come with your thoughts, your views, and present them for consideration, and, in the future, perhaps, for a decision.”*  
(M\_17\_Y16-19).

Teachers and parents mentioned the heavy workload of school-age youth in preparing for the External Independent Testing (National Multisubject Test) and admission to higher education institutions as one of the barriers.

Another barrier is the frequent holding of events during working hours when young people are busy studying.

*“It’s the heavy workload that gets in the way. They all want to get into a good university. When you even ask them to come to this event, you hear, ‘I have classes, and I’m applying this year, I’m preparing for the English exam...’ Many children simply don’t have time until five o’clock.”*  
(F\_45\_NGO).

## 2.4. FACTORS FACILITATING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

**The study showed that the key factors that contribute to youth engagement (according to young respondents) are:**

- Interesting activities and their relevance to the real needs of young people;
- Genuine, not just declarative, ability to influence processes in the community;
- Respect for the opinion of young people and taking it into account in decision-making processes;
- Belief of adults in the capacity of young people;
- Focus on the results, not the process;
- Proper feedback.

*“What motivates me the most is probably the desire to be on a level playing field.”*  
(F\_19\_Y16-19\_NGO).

*“For young people, the main thing is to see their ability to influence a situation.”*  
(F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).

*“First of all, there must be motivation; strangely enough, our young people are used to asking, ‘What’s in it for me?’”* (F\_25\_YW).

*“Greater awareness, popularization of the youth sector and youth policy”* (F\_30\_LSG).

When assessing programs and practices that should motivate young people to engage in decision-making and social and political life in general, the responses of respondents from different target groups differed.

**Respondents from among young people aged 16-25 mentioned the following practices and programs:**

- Youth Council;
- Internship at LSG;
- Participation in interesting public events.

**In contrast, representatives of the city council highlighted the following practices and programs:**

- Youth Council;
- Program of national-patriotic education;
- Local youth policy;
- Various public events;
- International exchange and training programs.

The differences are minor, but they indicate a different perception of the youth environment.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is advisable to conduct more surveys and studies of the youth environment to better meet the needs and demands that are changing extremely quickly.

Another motivational factor worth mentioning is the support of others. The youth representatives who participated in the study noted that it is important for them to receive support. It is the support that indicates that they are trusted and ready to be guided to achieve their goals.

Young people do not want their ideas to be implemented by other target groups. Young people are ready to implement their ideas on their own – they just need support.

To summarize, we can say that city councils, parents, and teachers should provide support and act as mentors, i.e. advise on how to do things, not what to do.

*“Mandatory support for young people from teachers, parents and local authorities” (F\_36\_YW).*

*“Young people have the desire, and the grown-ups are there to see this potential and channel it.” (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).*

## **2.5. STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO IMPROVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING**

Among the successful practices of youth involvement in decision-making processes that work in the Kalush City Territorial Community, most respondents mentioned the creation of a youth council and internships in the city council. These effective tools and practices have demonstrated their efficiency.

*“My friends are members of the youth council. In recent years, the authorities have been listening to them” (F\_16\_Y16-10\_NGO).*

As a result, both young people and LSG representatives are interested in the further development of these tools and are ready to improve them together.

However, in the context of assessing the forms and methods of youth involvement, respondents' opinions were divided.

The LSG representatives mostly adhere to the position that it is necessary to manage the process and keep everything under control.

Young people expressed a desire to receive mentoring support in fulfilling their needs, pointing to the expansion of their freedom of action.

Such a conflict of views on the development of the youth environment creates risks for long-term cooperation, so it is necessary to ensure that consensus is reached by organizing and holding public discussions and debates.

Young people need horizontal communication and cooperation with LSG in the format of mentoring support instead of a **vertical format**:

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*"Of course, all non-governmental youth organizations have someone older to support them. Without it, we can't fill out all the documents... it has to be freedom, especially from the person assisting. It can't be something imposed that has to be this way and not otherwise."* (F\_16\_Y16-19\_NGO).

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*"Young people need to be valued and their needs need to be heard. That's exactly what we did when we developed the youth targeted program. And we received a lot of comments about the fact that this youth-targeted program does not meet the actual needs, according to the survey of young people that we conducted. But, of course, no one is interested in this, because the authorities have their own vision of what this program should look like."* (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).

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*"People can go to meetings for years and not cooperate at all, because there is no subject of cooperation, no motivation."* (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).

According to respondents from the civil society sector, to improve interaction with young people, LSGs should introduce more inclusive approaches and go beyond traditional stereotypes about the needs and interests of young people, taking their opinions into account when making decisions and simplifying bureaucratic procedures.

Similar recommendations were made by young respondents aged 20-25, who emphasized the need to simplify official procedures, make youth policy more inclusive, focus on results rather than processes, and reduce stereotypical approaches to identifying and addressing youth needs. Young people want to develop and are ready to make efforts to create the desired state of the youth environment in society.

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*"I would strongly recommend that our local authorities simply undergo training on inclusion to understand that inclusion is not only about people in wheelchairs... Not only about information and general barriers to communication between people, which the authorities themselves create."* (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).

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*"Young people are surprised that when we need some help from the city authorities, we need to write a letter, then check whether the letter has been registered, then go to find out if there are any decisions on that letter."* (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).

Respondents among parents and teachers emphasized the need for an analytical approach to identifying factors that can improve interaction with young people.

*"To make decisions, you need a preliminary analysis to weigh the risks and some qualitative characteristics." (F\_40\_P\_T).*

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*"Asking questions, offering them something in the form of discussions" (F\_42\_P).*

A separate recommendation concerns communication with young people. Classical channels such as an official website, Facebook page, or Viber group are irrelevant for today's youth. To ensure that young people are widely informed about opportunities in the community, it is necessary to develop youth communication channels such as Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok.

*"Involve influencers, opinion leaders whom young people consider to be their influencers and leaders" (M25\_Y20-25\_YC).*

To implement their projects and ideas, youth NGOs need financial support, as well as a clear and transparent procedure for obtaining it from LSG. Youth NGOs attract grants and actively write projects. Additional basic funding (a competition for youth projects at the expense of the local budget) can be another tool to support youth initiatives.

*"We made repairs on our own. Our mentor is a psychologist, she won grants and various projects, and she renovated the space on her own, even partially at her own expense." (F\_16\_Y16-19\_NGO).*

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*"Do not reduce budgets for youth" (F\_25\_Y20-25\_NGO).*

# CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study of youth involvement in local decision-making in the Kaluska Community, the following key conclusions **can be drawn**:

- While youth representatives consider their level of involvement to be quite high, other stakeholders (teachers, parents, local authorities) consider it insufficient. This indicates a difference in the perception of youth engagement by different groups. Instead, the general trend shows an increase in the interest of young people in the social and political life of the community. One of the main achievements is the work of the youth council and the growing number of young people involved through the initiatives of public organizations.
- According to LSG representatives, the most effective tools for engaging young people are the youth council, internships at the city council, and participation in community events. However, the respondents emphasize that the existing mechanisms need to be improved, in particular by expanding information and increasing the involvement of both youth and LSG representatives in the processes. Some tools (surveys, petitions) are unpopular due to lack of information among young people.
- The main barriers are the lack of resources, complex bureaucratic procedures and low level of awareness, as well as a certain prejudice among older generations, which manifests itself in a stereotypical perception of youth needs. Young people are often unsure whether their initiatives will be supported and feel a lack of feedback from the authorities.
- Important motivational factors can be the attractiveness of activities, a real opportunity to influence processes, and support from adults. Young people want not only to participate, but also to feel that they have an impact on decisions. Direct, informal communication between young people and government officials is also important, as it promotes interaction and trust.
- Youth and stakeholders advocate for simplifying interaction procedures, ensuring greater inclusiveness, and creating additional opportunities for participation in decision-making processes in the community. Respondents recommend expanding the tools for youth participation, improving communication channels, and organizing more events that take into account their interests. In addition, it is important to promote mentoring support for young people to help them implement their ideas on their own.

To summarize, we can say that LSG in the Kalush City Territorial Community has recently been actively paying attention to youth policy. A youth council was created, a youth policy was adopted, internships in the city council were introduced, and public events are organized.

However, the incomplete consideration of the needs and interests of modern youth in the community (both in the city and in villages) needs to be corrected, and modern, inclusive methods and approaches to youth engagement should be applied.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**To increase the level of youth involvement in decision-making processes in the Kalush City Territorial Community, we recommend that the Kalush City Council to:**

- Expand the list of communication channels, in particular, create a channel in the social network Telegram/WhatsApp, where current plans that young people can join are promptly reported;
- Hold a presentation of community youth organizations in all local educational institutions with the involvement of their representatives and opportunities to join;
- Develop infographics or other informational materials on the opportunities, mechanism and algorithm of cooperation between young people and local authorities, including a single communication window of entry, contact persons and a list of services;
- Hold regular informal meetings (“coffee”) with the city mayor, deputies and heads of departments; pay special attention to the interaction of youth with the deputy corps, consider the possibility of involving representatives of the authorities in informal activities and events in community educational institutions on a regular basis;
- Together with NGOs, periodically organize youth hackathons where young people can come up with their own ideas, develop youth projects that can then be submitted for grant funding; provide funds in the local budget for co-financing such projects (if necessary);
- Introduce a tool in the community to support youth projects at the expense of the local budget (for example, a project competition for youth NGOs or initiative groups);
- Expand the list of activities for youth based on requests and needs: organizing environmental clean-ups, creating a youth debate club, etc;
- Expand the list of tools for youth participation in decision-making, expand opportunities for young people to determine strategic vectors of community development by participating in the development of program and strategic documents;
- Refine local youth policies to ensure a higher level of inclusiveness and transparency, constantly monitor and take into account youth feedback on their effectiveness, relevance and transparency;
- Ensure ongoing research of youth opinion, and take the results into account when formulating programmatic and strategic documents of the community.

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