

ANALYTICAL REPORT

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

 Kolomyiska Community

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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” was conducted in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community 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.

¹One 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

Ukrainian legislation (the Law of Ukraine “On the Basic Principles of Youth Policy”) defines the state policy towards young people and the creation of conditions for their active participation in public and political life. The law obliges authorities to enable young people to participate in decision-making at the local and national levels. The National Youth Strategy until 2030 and the State Targeted Social Program “Youth of Ukraine” for 2021-2025 define the long-term priorities of youth policy in Ukraine, aimed at creating opportunities for youth participation in social and political life, developing civic awareness and active involvement in decision-making processes through youth organizations, dialogue platforms and other initiatives. Given that Ukraine is actively implementing the norms of European legislation on its way to EU membership, the work of local self-governments should take into account the norms of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (youth participation and active citizenship involve 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).

The Kolomyia City Territorial Community has many tools for involving young people in decision-making processes. The Kolomyia City Council has a youth policy sector and a youth worker.

The responses of young respondents (participants in interviews and focus group discussions) show that the interaction between youth and the local self-government in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community is facilitated by Inna Cherniavska, the chief specialist of the youth policy sector of the Kolomyia City Council.

The respondents highly appreciated the cooperation, emphasizing its equality and the value of the ideas expressed by young people.

*“This communication is the most comfortable and takes place on a peer-to-peer basis.”
(F_16_Y16-19_YC).*

Speaking about interaction with other structural units operating in the field of education, sports and culture, respondents indicated a much worse level of communication.

“We also communicated with the sports department because we participate in sports competitions.” (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

“The Department of Education gathered us for 15 minutes to write down the phone numbers of the heads of student self-government and create a group similar to the one that was created last year, but on Viber. That is, they seem to want to work, but they don’t ask for ideas. There are no meetings where we would sit down, discuss ideas, get set up for work, and be given an impetus to think.” (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"I have had experience working with the Department of Culture. They hear me. I had direct cases – buy games for the youth space, we don't have any board games – and I provided options and the amount. They didn't buy, but they turned to an NGO that had free funds, and it bought them. And I had a negative experience with the municipal services department. I asked them for twenty thousand for battery recycling. They didn't support this idea, nor did they any other." (M_25_Y20-25).

During the analysis of the youth environment of the Kolomyiska Community, it was found that the community leadership and representatives of the deputy corps do not meet with youth representatives. This indicates the potential lack of interest of the community's top management in the development of the youth environment, which creates long-term risks of not including the needs and ideas of young people in the process of determining community development priorities.

"We have never had a meeting with the head, except for participation in events." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"We met with the deputy once, and the next three times the meeting was scheduled and attended by deputy deputies or she canceled the meeting 10-15 minutes before it started." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

The study showed that the youth of the Kolomyiska Community have the potential to actively engage with their local self-government.

However, a more detailed analysis of the respondents' answers revealed that young people actively use only two participation tools: participation in the youth council and local petitions.

"Two years ago, we took part in a public hearing, we didn't speak, we didn't present, we just listened." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"A petition to create an environmental sector. It received the required number of votes, but the deputies did not vote at the session because it was not the right time." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"One day we were told that the Youth and Sports Department was closing and there would be only a sports department, and the youth would be left behind. We were merged into the culture department, and we are now the seventh sector there. We created a petition that we need a separate youth division or department, or sector. The petition received the required number of votes, and we have a sector for youth policy." (M_25_Y20-25).

Despite the successful examples of interaction, respondents also cite situations where the opinions of young people are ignored. As a result, the ideas and wishes of young people in the community are not implemented in the work of the local self-government.

"They do not listen to the opinion of young people. It is very difficult to lobby for the opinion of young people. This is an example of the youth space we are sitting in. The process lasted four years. It is a long and thorny path. It is difficult for young people to do this." (M_30_NGO).

"At executive committees and sessions, the opinion of young people is not important at all" (M_30_NGO).

"They don't trust young people in the slightest. They don't take us seriously" (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

In addition to being ignored, young respondents point to other situations where interaction with Kolomyia City Council is extremely unproductive. The reason for this is a kind of ageism – when the opinions of young people are not accepted only because their authors do not have the relevant experience. As a result, we are not dealing with peer-to-peer interaction, but with top-down interaction, which corresponds to the third or fourth level of engagement according to Hart's Ladder of Participation.

"I ended up with emotional burnout from this communication, and I don't know if I would want to try it again. It's very toxic and not cool." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"We are also a part of the city council, as a youth council, and we would like this communication to be on an equal footing, not top-down, and to be treated with respect and our opinion accepted." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"If there were more young people in the city council, there would be no internal ageism" (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

As a result, the level of youth involvement in the community remains quite low. This is evidenced by all the target groups of the study, including representatives of local authorities, NGOs, parents, teachers, and young people themselves. Young people often feel disconnected from decision-making processes. This leads to passivity and loss of interest in civic initiatives. Formal participation mechanisms do not ensure sufficient involvement due to the complexity of procedures, lack of support, and insufficient awareness.

"The level of youth involvement is low, but better than in other communities." (F_31_LSG).

"There is a certain category of young people who are involved. Most of them are members of the youth council, student councils, school self-government, those who are involved in the space. But I can't say that these are the majority of young people in the city or community." (F_21_YW).

"Young people are very active, but when it comes to youth participation in the city in terms of governance and influence, there is very little activity. Young people do not participate in serious issues of our community for various reasons." (M_30_NGO).

The more young people know about opportunities for influence, the more they will contribute to the effectiveness of local self-government decisions and develop the Kolomyia community, making it more inclusive and modern.

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

The degree of influence of youth on decision-making processes depends on two factors: the direct level of activity of the youth themselves and the willingness of local authorities to include youth representatives in governance processes.

The Kolomyia City Territorial Community has tools and mechanisms through which young people can participate in decision-making. These are:

- Participation in the work of the youth council;
- Participation in the work of the student government;
- Participation in public hearings;
- Participation in sessions of the city council;
- Participation in youth internships;
- Submission of electronic appeals;
- Submission of deputy appeals;
- Submission of local petitions;
- Youth support program;
- Youth project competition.

"We have a youth council, internships for young people in the city council, and recently we organized a youth camp where we wanted to develop a strategy, but in the end, most of it was developed by the department's employees." (F_21_YW).

"Student self-government in most schools is almost non-existent, that is, it exists, but because it is supposed to, and when young people reach the age of 14 and they have to engage in youth policy, they simply do not know what it is and how a youth council functions. It is the same self-government, but at the city level." (F_16_YC).

"As for those instruments, there are not so many of them that are legally influential, and the only thing that young people don't know about them is that they are not very well known. And secondly, who we mean by youth, if it is a youth council, student government, it is 14-20 years old, and they are not very interested in participating in decision-making at this age." (F_39_P)

"Those who know take advantage of it, write petitions, send simple appeals, and make appointments with the mayor. Few people know who their deputy is in the district, through whom they can also solve the problem, because each deputy has his or her own fund for the needs of the district. They don't know this." (F_31_LSG).

"We thought that the youth project competition was created to support NEW ideas of young people, not to give money to an established organization that has already done a lot, and this grant is nothing compared to what they have already done." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"I would not like to do an internship at the city council. I don't want to get involved anymore, what I do in the youth council is enough for me." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"No. I would not want to do an internship at the city council, I do not trust them. The distrust was formed because of the feedback" (F_20_Y20-25).

"We recently had an internship at our city council. Out of eight people, two dropped out, and only one got a job with LSG, although I think that an internship at the city council is cool for me, who is in the eleventh grade or first year of college." (F_32_LSG).

"Few young people registered for the internship. We advertised it so much, we did it during the period when young people were free, we did it for a month in July. But there were no applications at all. There were six interns who passed, and two left after the first day." (F_31_LSG).

We also consider it appropriate to highlight the work of the youth council, which should be directly involved in lobbying for the interests of young people and influencing the decisions of local self-government.

"I know what a youth council is for – it's an advisory body that is supposed to recommend decisions, to participate in decision-making, but in reality, it doesn't really happen." (F_31_LSG).

"The youth council does not perform its functions as an advisory body, it is not an event agency, but an advisory body that should provide recommendations to the city council, and the latter should take them into account." (M_25_Y20-25).

“Our updated regulation on the youth council has not been signed by the head for two years, and we are not acting very legitimately.” (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

“In an ideal world, a youth council is an association of student self-government leaders. We were told to join the meetings where you can voice your ideas. At these meetings, we said something and they changed their minds, we are kind of involved, but we don’t know what’s going on, and it seems like your opinion is not considered necessary and you just came, sat, listened and left.” (F_17_Y16-19_YC).

As we can see, young people often feel that their opinions are not always taken into account, and this can weaken their motivation to participate.

One such example is the adoption of the most important document that determines the trajectory of the community – the development strategy. The respondents’ opinions on the involvement of stakeholders in strategy development were divided.

According to the responses received from young respondents, youth representatives are aware that the community has a development strategy, but they have not been involved in any way in discussions or its development. The only known tool for involving young people in the strategy-making process is submitting proposals on behalf of the youth council to the list of local development projects.

Instead, representatives of the city council claim that all target groups of the territorial community were aware of the strategy process, but there were no volunteers to participate in it.

The above situation indicates that there is a problem with communication between the authorities and the youth environment at the community level, which needs to be addressed by developing tools and communication channels that will be popular among young people.

A similar situation occurred during the development of the youth development program. According to respondents, the document was created by representatives of the local self-government body. Young people were not involved in its creation.

Under such conditions, a situation arises when decisions for young people are made without their participation. This creates risks for the effectiveness of such a program in the future.

“I wrote the youth program ‘Youth of the Kolomyiska Community for 2021-2025’. After I was transferred to the culture department, all the programs were combined and the program was included in the general program of culture, youth and tourism of the Kolomyiska Community. Previously, we did not involve young people in writing these programs. This is five years ago. I have already written two programs during this time that I have been working. But I covered everything. We could make an annual plan with the youth.” (F_31_LSG).

“We gathered school youth. We wrote a strategy for the development of educational institutions. Our opinions were taken into account – for example, about recreation facilities or events.” (F_16_YC).

Although local self-government representatives declare active cooperation with young people and talk about holding various events and activities, the question arises as to whether such cooperation is effective and meets the needs of young people.

“A forum of student government leaders. The idea is great: to gather the student self-government, invite opinion leaders, and organize a panel discussion, but the implementation... We were just gathered, sat down, and told to prepare presentations. Ideally, a panel discussion should be about a topic that the presenter introduces to the participants and they discuss it... The way it was here: the presenter asks a question, and they all answer one by one and it repeats.” (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

“We are doing everything together, but without you. We gave them a list of people who would be interesting to young people, they did not involve them and ordered the school to ensure the [participation of] students.” (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

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

Based on the responses we received, we found that the key barriers and challenges to engaging young people in decision-making in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community are:

DISTRUST OF THE AUTHORITIES

Young people often do not believe that their opinions will have a real impact on decisions. This is due to past experiences of formalism, lack of response to initiatives, communication style, ageism, arrogance, and other negative factors.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Young people do not have sufficient knowledge about the mechanisms of participation in decision-making and feel insecure due to a lack of managerial experience.

THE STEREOTYPE THAT THE OPINIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE IRRELEVANT

Young people are often perceived as inexperienced and not competent enough to participate in important public affairs. Youth proposals are routinely ignored or rejected without explanation, reinforcing the stereotype that their opinions are unimportant. This lack of trust on the part of older generations and leaders can make young people feel that their ideas and suggestions do not matter.

LACK OF INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SETTLEMENTS THAT ARE PART OF THE COMMUNITY

The youth council consists of young people from Kolomyia or other neighboring communities who are studying at vocational schools.

YOUTH MIGRATION

There are only vocational schools in the community, and after completing their education there, young people leave for big cities to pursue higher education and find work.

“According to the surveys we have conducted, the most active are young people aged 16-19, older people are more focused on their careers, perhaps they have a family and other interests, and all their resources are focused on earning money.” (F_31_LSG).

"The local self-government body communicates with young people in a toxic way" (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"They listened to us. They said 'thank you'. And did nothing" (M_20_Y20-25).

"They are so green, what do they know?" (M_20_Y20-25).

"Low availability of information affects low youth engagement" (F_32_LSG).

"We were at the second project pitching session, Sasha was doing informal education, and we were doing general education, and it looked like an act of bullying because there were nine projects, three of which were ours. Some were asked three questions each, we were asked forty-five, and then the others were asked three questions again. And you're sitting there thinking: why did you come here, why did you decide to be an active youth if you could stay at home and not feel like a nobody, and thirdly, I feel like I'm doing something good. Then there was another session, which was more positive, because a little time passed and we talked to the commission that they were overdoing it." (F_17_Y16-19_YC).

"The implementation was cool until the last moment, they were told about project management as much as possible, then there were interesting events, paintball workshops, and on the last day, when LSG representatives came and started judging the projects, they judged them as if they were made by people who had already written ten projects. It was very strict for kids who were doing it for the first time. Everyone was very scared." (F_17_Y16-19_YC).

"Everyone prioritizes their own needs, basic, financial, security, and then they think about the general issues that concern the settlement, many are not interested, but many are incompetent." (F_31_LSG).

"To be honest, young people have this stereotype. Young people do. Young people always feel this way. They are not heard at home, their needs are not taken into account." (M_30_NGO).

"Many employees and city council leaders have a stereotype that the opinion of young people is not important. I see it, I feel it, and sometimes they have an incorrect attitude and don't believe it. Young people wanted to organize a charity concert at the Philharmonic, and they were told that they would not be able to do it, that they would not raise the money, but they raised and raised even more." (F_31_LSG).

"The community includes nine or ten other settlements, and the village of Sadzhavka has its own youth council, where young people are very active, but there is a person who developed this movement, and other villages are very passive. No matter how hard we tried to engage them. This summer we organized a six-day youth camp, a training camp. There were a lot of applications, but we had a condition to take young people from villages, and there were very few applications from villages. There were forty-five people in the camp, four from Rakivchyk, none from Sheparivka, and one from Kornych. There were very few people." (F_31_LSG).

Another barrier to youth engagement is the lack of funding for youth initiatives. Lack of resources for the implementation of youth initiatives and projects reduces the level of interest of young people and pushes them away from the social and political life of the community.

"Reduction of the budget for youth development. It is seventy thousand hryvnias a year" (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

Another barrier to youth involvement in community decision-making is the complexity of the bureaucracy involved. Confusing or non-transparent decision-making procedures discourage young people from active participation.

However, we believe that through effective communication and raising awareness of the mechanisms typical of public institutions, this factor can be mitigated.

"We need an intermediary like Inna in different areas: education, sports. We need to find a person who has good communication with the city council, the deputy corps, who can find a common language with us and promote our ideas, because I doubt that we can do it on our own."
(M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"Look for allies to make young people heard. It can be Maksym (a deputy)" (M_16_Y16-19YC).

As a result of all of the above factors at the community level, local youth are discouraged and demotivated, as their initiatives are not taken into account or lead to unclear results. The young population of the community does not want to participate in new projects because they no longer believe in their ability to be a source of change.

The long-term aggravation of these problems risks leading to the active emigration of young people from the community, which will have an extremely negative impact on the socio-economic development of the municipality.

2.4. FACTORS FACILITATING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

The respondents' opinions on the factors that will facilitate youth involvement in decision-making are similar. These are the factors that were mentioned by young people, representatives of local self-government bodies, the civil society sector, teachers, and parents:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOUTH AND THE AUTHORITIES. The youth policy sector works very closely with young people of all ages and advocates for their opinions in the city council, but this is not enough to make meaningful decisions. Regular meetings with local self-government representatives, deputies, and community leaders, as well as transparent and accessible channels for obtaining information about the work of local authorities and opportunities for participation would help to increase youth engagement.

TRANSPARENCY OF DECISION-MAKING. Youth should be provided with open access to information about decision-making, funding for youth projects, and information about the progress of community initiatives. Young people should see clear results of their participation.

RAISING AWARENESS OF PARTICIPATION TOOLS. Providing young people with detailed information about available tools for participation in community governance (public hearings, petitions, electronic appeals, internships, youth camps, involvement in city council and commission sessions) and successful examples of their use will help to make this participation more active.

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH INITIATIVES. Creating financial and organizational opportunities for the implementation of youth projects and programs and ensuring equal access to resources, regardless of social status or activity, will also help to activate young people.

GENUINE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING. Young people should not only participate in formal discussions but also influence the decision-making process. It is important to keep in mind the advisory role of the youth council and the possibility of lobbying for their own initiatives.

ESTABLISHING SUPPORT AND COOPERATION WITH EXPERIENCED LEADERS. Lobbyists or advocates for solutions at the local council level will help young people succeed in their initiatives.

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES AND AGEISM. We should not forget about the role of a positive attitude towards youth opinion and combating stereotypes that young people do not have sufficient experience or knowledge to participate in community governance.

"If LSG communicates more with young people, they will understand what their thoughts and very cool ideas are and will be more understanding." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"If we wanted to, we would find ways to communicate with the authorities, we need more initiative from among ourselves." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"Once a month, the head should come to the youth space and meet with young people." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"These meetings should be regular and systematic." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"It's important that these big officials, big directors, big bosses, big teachers, big people are ready to accept young people, to understand that [the youth] approaching them is not disrespectful, it's openness, it's the culture of the new young generation." (F_39_P).

"This is a great example of one effective leader who charges everyone else. The younger ones unite around such a student self-government leader, he unites them, we go there, we do that, everything comes from him." (F_39_P).

On the one hand, the community has created conditions for involving young people in decision-making, influencing community development, expanding knowledge and improving leadership skills, but on the other hand, there is a feeling that this is all done

"These grants were from the city council, and they were supposed to be involved, but they didn't take any part, except for — guess who? Inna. No one else communicated with me about this project. There were interesting projects, but not for twenty thousand hryvnias." (M_16_Y16-29_YC).

"The camp was great, the community was great, but I don't think it was about project management, all the teams won, and they had to give funding. One has already been implemented. But back to the camp. We were taught for two days about project management, the most general things that can be taught in two days: goal, objectives, and estimates. I don't know if everyone was motivated. The judges were very tough. Where did the money come from? Where did we get the numbers of animals if there was no phone or internet in the camp? How do you know how much it costs? And this was said to children who wrote a project for the first time." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"Not all schools have active student government. Here are representatives from the active ones" (M_30_NGO).

Both sides need to work together to increase the number of conscious young people in the community who would be involved in the processes of strategizing, targeted program development, political life, and problem solving.

"How I became a leader. I was forced to go to some forum, and there I met some interesting people and – wow – cool. We all became members of the youth council." (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"My parents saw the announcement and registered for the camp, someone saw it on the Internet. I think there will be more next year, because this year we held it for the first time and the participants will recommend it." (F_31_LSG).

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

One of the key obstacles to establishing effective interaction between young people and the authorities in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community was the lack of quality communication. Therefore, young respondents pointed out that it is necessary to change tools and approaches to communication at the community level, in particular by adopting the experience of other municipalities.

"We had an exchange of experience with the Dolyna Youth Council. We visited them, and although they are a smaller community, they have a youth space. Their youth is very involved. Representatives of the city council and the youth council communicate very well with each other, they have many meetings, agreements, and a very good connection." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"I was on the TV program dedicated to the Youth Day and was impressed by the support of youth by the heads of the communities. In the Pasichnianska community, which is so small, they allocate a lot of resources to talented youth. We also used to have scholarships for the External Independent Evaluation, for those who passed with 200 points, the best graduate of the year, but for the last year or two there has been no financial incentive for those who won the Olympiads. And they kept asking me for this incentive. When will there be a scholarship? Other communities have them." (F_31_LSG).

"In Dnipro, there are awards for civic activities, for the best youth leaders. Young people need to be motivated" (F_31_LSG).

Based on the respondents' answers, it was possible to determine the position of young people in the process of establishing communication: the initiator of cooperation in involving young people in decision-making should be the local self-government.

The youth representatives voiced the key changes that need to take place in the community in order for their involvement in social and political life to become more active. The first step is to establish communication on a peer-to-peer basis. Respondents noted that it is important for young people to feel like equal partners, rather than being taught what to do and how to do it.

"Communication is important to us, but not from a vertical position, but from a mentoring and coaching position. Because, like 'I'm on top and I know a little more' and 'I'll teach you' are different things." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

The next recommendation is to increase the level of openness of the city council. Young people are not interested in internships because they do not trust this institution, in part because of the stereotypes that have developed around it. Increasing transparency and creating a clearer picture of how the local self-government body functions can break down barriers to youth engagement and become catalysts for interaction.

"Regular meetings, regular internships not only to find employees, but also to familiarize themselves with the processes could help with this, to show how decisions are made from the inside." (M_30_NGO).

However, youth representatives realize that they also need to take a step forward and demonstrate to the municipality their readiness to take responsibility and implement serious and meaningful ideas for community development. According to young respondents, such a step would increase the authority of young people in the eyes of local authorities and raise their position in the communication process.

"Our motivation is to show our responsibility. Look, we can do this, so give us your help and we can do even more." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

Parents, teachers, public figures, and youth NGOs should play an equally important role in the process of establishing interaction.

According to the respondents, it is the above-mentioned target groups that set an example for their children and young people in general.

Parents and teachers should instill the understanding that conscious citizens should be interested in political life, the work of the city council, and the tools that can be used to ensure active participation of young people in the social and political life of the community.

The public sector, in its turn, should become a platform for cooperation and give young people the opportunity to fulfill themselves. The level of interaction between youth NGOs and the authorities also affects the overall ability of the youth environment to lobby for their own interests, address their needs and implement changes.

"Parents should be aware of what their children are doing. If they understand what the child is involved in, they will be able to help and support them." (F_16_Y16-19_YC).

"I have to go to an event, and the teacher says, 'Why are you going everywhere, you have to study,' but I am the best student in my grade. And she scolds me all the time: 'How often are you going to leave? Are you ever going to be in class?'" (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"Why not go to the city council, to public hearings, to a city council meeting during a civic education lesson?" (M_16_Y16-19_YC).

"Schools should explain how our political system works. Who is responsible for what. Where can we read this? They should give some suggestions." (F_20_Y20-25).

"Even at school, there should be a person or coordinator to whom you can turn to, who will support young people. There should also be a person in the city who will help them, who will coordinate and accompany them." (F_23_T).

"It is important that all adults respect young people" (F_39_P).

The study found that the youth of the Kolomyia City Territorial Community are ready to take responsibility and implement their own ideas. Young people do not need this work to be done for them. They want support and mentoring. The help of local authorities, parents, teachers and youth NGOs will be the key factor that will increase the level of youth participation in the social and political life of the community and become a catalyst for the development of the youth environment in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study “Youth Involvement in Local Decision-Making” in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community the following conclusions **can be drawn**:

■ **Low level of interaction and communication between young people and local authorities.** The Kolomyiska Community has created tools for involving youth in decision-making, but interaction between youth and local authorities is limited. Despite the availability of official communication channels (youth council and petitions), young people often feel left voiceless. The lack of regular meetings with community leaders and deputies significantly reduces their motivation. External communication also needs to be changed, as the official website and the city council’s page lack information about the achievements of the youth environment. Any events for young people are reported only through the social networks of the youth council, the Facebook page of the community leader, and internal chats of teachers-organizers of educational institutions. The lack of broad communication and promotion of youth achievements negatively affects the motivation of young people to join initiatives and reduces their level of activity in the community.

■ **Low level of youth involvement in decision-making.** It is related to the low awareness of young people about the tools of local democracy and their role in community development. The coronavirus, the full-scale invasion, and the perfunctory nature of student self-government in some schools are having a negative impact on young people aged 14-18.

■ **A large number of barriers to youth involvement in community decision-making processes.** The main barriers to active youth participation are distrust of the authorities, their ageism and condescension, lack of transparency in decision-making and funding of youth initiatives. Young people often lack information about participation mechanisms and feel unprepared for management tasks.

■ **Low efficiency of the use of participatory mechanisms and tools.** Youth representatives have access to various mechanisms of influence (public hearings, electronic appeals, participation in sessions, meetings of commissions), but rarely use them. The youth council meets a number of needs, but does not fulfill the key function of an advisory body – it does not provide proposals to the authorities on the development of the youth environment. Local petitions as an engagement tool are used with varying success, as there are no lobbyists within the LSG structure who could advocate for decision-making in favor of youth. This data indicates a lack of awareness among young people about the possibilities of using such tools or uncertainty about the potential impact of these mechanisms and their ability to influence the implementation of changes in the community.

■ **Formalism in the use of available tools.** Youth perceive existing programs in the Kolomyia City Territorial Community (youth project competitions and internships in local self-government) as formal initiatives that do not always reflect their real needs. Bureaucratic processes and lobbying for the interests of a single NGO or group of people cause young people to feel frustrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to increase the level of youth participation in decision-making in Kolomyia City Territorial Community, we recommend that the Kolomyia City Council familiarize itself with the following recommendations and take them into account.

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY OF LSG:

1.1. Organize regular meetings of young people with deputies and community leaders. Ensure that such meetings are held in an open format so that young people can directly express their ideas and questions.

1.2. Expand the list of communication channels, in particular, use the official resources of the city council (website and Facebook page) to disseminate information about youth initiatives and highlight the achievements of the community's youth. Use youth-oriented social networks (Instagram, TikTok) to activate young people and increase the level of audience reach.

1.3. Create a section on the city council website to regularly highlight youth projects, initiatives, and successes.

WIDER INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES IN MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND REDUCTION OF BARRIERS:

2.1. Introduce training programs for young people in the areas of local self-government and opportunities for participation in it (organization of workshops, trainings or webinars with experts).

2.2. Adapt youth programs to the real needs of young people. Enable participants to propose formats of events and competitions themselves. When developing such documents, rely on the real needs studied in the framework of relevant research.

2.3. Conduct training sessions for local self-government representatives on the importance and potential benefits of cooperation with young people to improve interaction between the communities.

2.4. Develop infographics or other informational materials on opportunities, mechanisms and algorithms of cooperation between youth and local authorities, including a single communication window of entry, contact persons and a list of services.

2.5. Organize trainings, mentoring meetings and exchange visits for deputy directors for educational work and teacher-organizers to analyze their role in the development of student self-government and youth consciousness.

2.6. Ensure that civic education lessons are held at the city council to familiarize youth representatives with the work of municipal and state institutions; involve youth in sessions and public hearings; and familiarize them with the tools and mechanisms of participation.

2.7. Conduct informational events for students, parents and teachers on the role, purpose and opportunities of student self-government.

2.8. Ensure the development of a strategic plan for the work of the youth council in the community, identifying its key priorities in the context of performing the functions of an advisory body.

2.9. Create conditions for engaging young people from all settlements of the Kolomyiska Community in youth work by holding outreach events in starosta districts. Ensure representation of youth from all starosta districts in the structure of the youth council; hold offsite meetings of the youth council.

2.10. Hold informational events for parents of young people to raise their awareness of the work of local self-government bodies, tools for participation in it, the political process, civic activities and opportunities for the development of their children.

2.11. Consider the possibility of including a representative of the community youth council in the executive committee structure, who can deepen the committee's trust in the youth environment and give young people a real opportunity to join the decision-making process.

SUPPORTING YOUTH INITIATIVES AND DEVELOPMENT OF MENTORING:

3.1. Provide support and guidance to young people in implementing their initiatives, including engaging experienced partners or mentors to help with lobbying and advocacy.

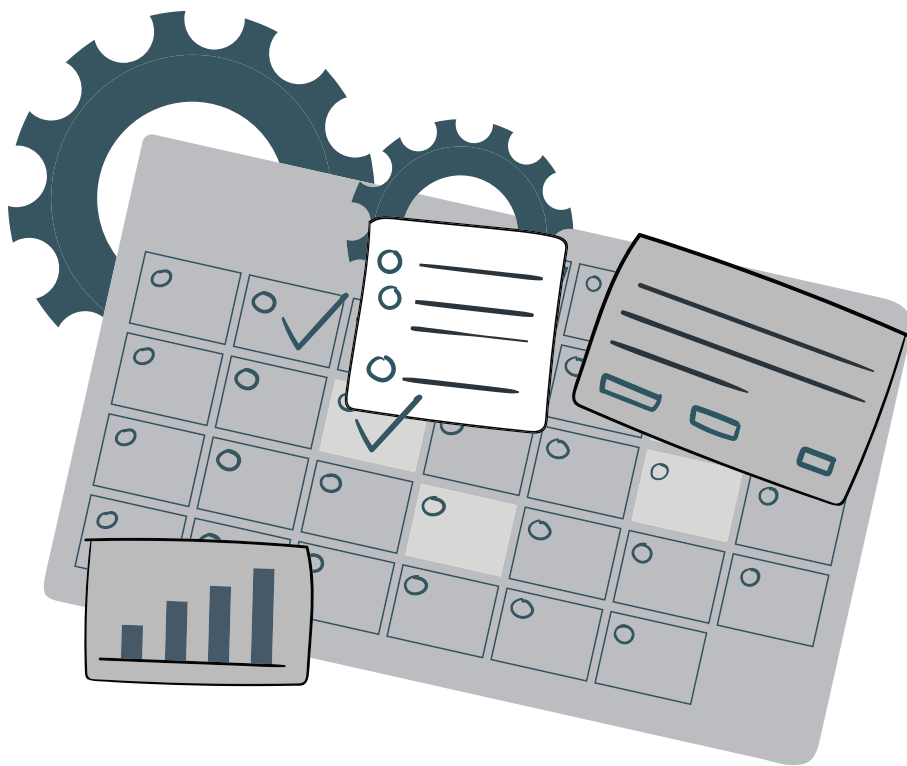
3.2. Provide more opportunities for youth to be consulted in decision-making, including by intensifying the work of the youth council as an advisory body.

EXPANDING AND IMPROVING MECHANISMS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING:

4.1 Establish a feedback mechanism through which young people can receive information about decisions on their proposals and initiatives (e.g., petitions or public hearings).

4.2. Simplify bureaucratic processes related to the submission of projects and initiatives to increase the involvement of young people in the socio-political life of the community.

4.3. Review the mechanism for organizing internships for young people within the local self-government. Create an updated internship program, involving youth representatives in its development.



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