

Youth Participation in Politics and Elections

Introduction

Participation is an essential democratic rights, being the backbone and an explicit part also of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 27), and young people's right to participation has been deemed important in numerous international agreements. For instance in 1994, 179 countries recognized the importance of ensuring young people's "integration and participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the political process and in preparation for leadership roles". In Europe, participation in public life is recognized in article 10.3 TEU of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and states: "Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union."

The focus on youth participation, in terms of their engagement in the political arena, is a relatively new but an extremely important priority, particularly in the light of recent events and democratic transitions in the Arab World as well as in the other parts of the world.

Evidence suggests that young people are often neglected in the formal political structures, be it government bodies, political parties, electoral systems, and/or other bureaucratic institutions. Their situation, needs and demands are often overlooked and excluded from the political and electoral processes.

The feeling of exclusion, which is common

among young people, has led to the complete withdrawal from the formal political and electoral processes as their voice is often unheard.

As the Arab Spring has emphasized, traditional institutions of governance and electoral participation has proven to be ineffective, many of the youth have turned their attention towards alternative methods of political participation¹. On the one hand, it has become a source of meaningful youth participation and an opportunity for their political engagement, while on the others, it undermines the representativeness and the inclusivity of the political system.

Undoubtedly, the past several decades were marked by the declining levels of youth participation in the political and electoral processes.

Voter turnout tends to be significantly lower among young people than among the

adult population, more importantly, young people are less likely to become members of political parties or other political institutions.

For instance, in many countries, people under the age of 35 are rarely found at

the formal political leadership positions. Eligibility for the national parliament is often starts at 25 years or even higher, and it is a common practice to refer to the politicians as 'young' if they are below 35-40 years of age.

1: Social Inclusion and Young People. Excluding Youth: A Threat to Our Future (p.9), May 23, 2016 <http://www.youthforum.org/publication/excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future-report-on-social-inclusion/>
2: Guide to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, UN-DESA, 2006 (p.31)

At the EU level, Youth programmes have helped to galvanise young people in the Mediterranean; they have sought to fight the stereotypes, encourage cultural dialogue and mutual understanding as the basis for a new society. Two positive instances of European involvement are provided by the Youth in Action (2007-2013) and Euro-Mediterranean Youth IV (2010-2016) programmes². In many Arab countries of the Med, many projects have focused on enhancing the values of active citizenship and youth participation in political development and political reforms processes, including women's participation.

Finding a way to promote Youth Participation in Politics and Elections through institutionalized processes, while at the same time, integrating less traditional forms of political engagement, which is popular among youth, is an important challenge for governments and policymakers - one which, if left unresolved, may threaten the stability and security of the countries³.

“LEVELS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION:
Effective and meaningful youth political participation has one of three attributes: it can be consultative; it can entail youth-led participation, where young people have a direct impact on decision-making within their own youth communities; finally it can involve youth collaborative participation, where young people effectively take part in regular political decision-making processes“. UN YOUTH „youth, political participation and decision-making“

Civic engagement as a driver for political and social change

A clear example of less traditional forms of political engagement is the one run by the CSO, like the voluntary participation of young people in various associations and non-governmental organisations, which has been a key instrument that helped to improve social cohesion among individuals in the Mediterranean region. Active involvement in the civic and social organisations from a young age is, first of all, beneficial for the countries but also it prepares young people to play a more significant role in changing political and social context of their countries. More importantly, civic involvement is a driver for political / social change as it offers new and innovative solution to deal with traditional problems.

The MedNet dimension of Youth Participation in Politics

Across the Mediterranean, young people face widely varying and radically contradictory social and political situations with the common denominator of rising unemployment, frustration and widespread worsening poverty. Despite this, young people are showing great dynamism and mobilising in ways for which traditional civil society organisations have been unable to provide a conduit. Young people – increasingly well organised and coordinated – are loudly demanding their say in decision-making processes and calling for genuine participatory

democracy at all levels. The political context around the Mediterranean varies greatly, and specific situations cannot be extrapolated to all Mediterranean countries.

Nonetheless, one can understand a common tendency on the part of young people to demand new forums for participation and a new way of conducting politics. People in general, and the young ones in particular, feel excluded from social dialogue and remote from the political parties on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Spaces for youth political participation

Based on EACEA "Youth Participation in Democratic Life" Annual Report, a normative conception of Youth Participation, defining political participation broadly, is about engaging in forming opinions and taking actions to bring about positive change in the society. It can take different forms:

- Participation of young people in representative democracy: standing for or voting in elections or membership of political parties;
- Participation of young people in participatory structures: promoting the involvement of more young people in structures, such as youth organisations or issue-based NGOs or volunteering;
- Participation in debate: on youth or community issues; opinion-shaping through written press or youth radio, participating in online discussion fora, writing or following blogs;
- Seeking information and learning about democracy: participating in simulations of political processes, attending training or learning at school, engaging in youth organisations⁵.

Among the factors that promote political participation, we can state that the political stability plays a fundamental role. However, despite being a politically stable area, Europe has seen an unprecedented disengagement of young people from politics. If we look at the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region then we can see a further challenge, as we can say that this region is in turmoil. Fifteen million people have fled their homes, many to the fragile or economically strapped countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Djibouti and Tunisia, giving rise to the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. Countries undergoing political transitions, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, have to address security concerns over growth-promoting policies.

On a positive note, the political consensus around the constitution in Tunisia, and constitutions and legislation in Morocco, and Jordan that give greater rights to women and protect freedom of expression and information, indicate that citizens are increasingly engaging in policymaking⁷.

A post-2015 world should recognise the rights of citizens, as well as facilitating everyone to be active citizens, with a real inclusion of young

people in the decision-making processes. Everyone should play a role in taking social responsibility, through participation, youth empowerment and spaces for young people to participate in policy making and responsible activism.

Youth consultations speak clearly: governance is the most important issue. Young people want to see effective governments that are held to account, and governance structures where young people have access to decision making processes.

Young people are not relying on older generations to change the world, from the Arab Spring to technology revolutions, they are already doing it.

This is the generation of 3,5 billion who will hold the responsibility for the implementation of any future goals, and be in charge of their delivery. Decision-makers therefore need to recognise the innovation and expertise that young people can bring to the new development agenda.

They have a duty to build partnerships with young people, their organisations and their networks to deliver participatory and inclusive decision-making on the decisions that matter and will make a difference⁸.

#YouthStats: Public and Civic Participation

- Young people are not at the center of political decision making even though almost half the world's population is under 30 years old.
- Globally, less than 6% of the parliamentarians are under 35 years old.
- Globally, less than 2 per cent of parliamentarians are under 30 years old.
- The average age in parliament in 53 years old.
- Only 1.65% of parliamentarians around the world are in their 20's and for a third of countries, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years old.
- Voter turnout among 18-25 year olds continues to be lower than other age groups.
- 2 out of 3 countries DO NOT consult young people as a part of the process of preparing poverty reduction strategies or national development plans.

Which are the benefits of youth participation in politics?

It fosters a sense of citizenship and makes policy processes more transparent and accountable towards young people. At the same time, it helps young people build self-confidence, develop a sense of initiative and acquire and test skills that are relevant for the workplace, such as communication, negotiation or teamwork, in a practical environment.

1: Youth Participation in Democratic Life. EACEA 2013 (P3) [eacea.ec.europa.eu]

2: Cit. INFORMATION REPORT of the .. Brussels, 2014.

The Euro-Med Youth Programme Phase IV has been designed to facilitate meetings, youth partnerships and networks in the Euro-Mediterranean region. On the one hand, it encourages youth mobility, focusing on activities that promote non-formal education, intercultural learning, mutual understanding and active citizenship of young people and, secondly, it aims to consolidate the ownership of the Programme by the Mediterranean partner countries. Phase IV of the Euro-Med Youth Programme (2010-2013) aims to consolidate the decentralization process and the participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of the program, to strengthen the role of technical assistance, tailor activities to different national situations in the field of youth and contribute more to the development of national youth policies. Check the website for detailed information: www.euromedyouth.net

3: World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement, UNDESA, 2016 (p.65) [www.unworldyouthreport.org]

4: PDF Version: Youth Stats: Public Participation <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/political-participation/>

5: Cit. INFORMATION REPORT of the .. Brussels, 2014

6: Youth Participation in Democratic Life. EACEA 2013 (P3) [eacea.ec.europa.eu]

7: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/overview#1>

8: The global conversation on a post-2015 world is one of the most important debates of our time. As youth-led and youth-focused agencies working internationally, we see no sense in discussing future development goals without recognising the role that young people can and must play as assets and problem-solvers in development. Youth Voices on a Post-2015 World is the result of youth consultations that were run in 12 countries globally from October 2012 to January 2013 to understand young people's views on what should come after the Millennium Development Goals. 346 young people were given the space to discuss the local and global issues of importance to them, and articulate their solutions and visions for a world beyond 2015.

The EACEA Report recognizes 6 key themes about Youth Participation in Democratic Life:

- (1) the representation of young people, with a particular focus on youth organisations
- (2) decision-makers' engagement with young people in policy processes, with specific attention to the EU's Structured Dialogue
- (3) youth electoral participation, including an assessment of e-voting and social media

campaigning

- (4) non-electoral (both organised and unorganised) forms of participation, including volunteering
- (5) the role of mainstream media, community media and new media in fostering participation in democratic life amongst young people
- (6) youth exclusion and its relationship to civic participation⁹.

Youth participation in the elections in the Med area

"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.

Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death".

Kofi Annan, UN Former Secretary-general

Speaking about tools, we can state that voting is the most quintessential form of political participation in democratic systems. Ensuring access to vote to young people and finally set up inclusive and fair participation policies would be a first step to guarantee a full participation and representativeness of young people at all levels of the decision-making processes. The reality is different though. The

past decade has shown a declining level of youth participation in the electoral process and a clear feeling that traditional intuitions of governance and electoral participation provides ineffective tools for meaningful political engagement. This feeling of disconnection has led to disengagement from institutionalized processes and widespread disappointment, disillusion and frustration among young voters¹⁰.

According to UNDP' Good practice guide, the strategies to support the youth participation should cover all phases of the Electoral cycle and ideally should focus on:

1. The legal framework: a review of electoral law and its effects on youth political participation;
2. The pre-electoral phase: recognition and support for youth as community and political party leaders;
3. The electoral phase: mobilizing youth as voters, candidates, observers and active participants in all aspects of the electoral process; and
4. The post-electoral phase: supporting youth voices in the legislature and government¹¹.

9: Ibid. (p.4)

10: Cit. World Youth Report 2016 (p.63)

[www.unworldyouthreport.org]

11: Exolore the UNDP's meaning and strategies [[UNDP, 2013 (pp.36-) http://bit.ly/1dd2a2L]

12: Cit. Enhancing Youth Political Participation ... UNDP, 2013. International Framework. Documents and Resolutions (p.21) [[UNDP, 2013 http://bit.ly/1dd2a2L]

I do not want to vote

Reasons why young people do not vote

Among the different reasons why young people do not vote, we can list:

- 1- Laws and regulations do not provide the right to youth participation. For example in Lebanon, the age of voting is 21 years and the age of running for elections is 25 years. This means that the young person who is 18 years old can be sentenced to prison just as an adult, but cannot vote until he/she is 21 years old.
- 2- Lack of young citizens' trust in their elected representatives. Because of the negative reputation and impression that the politicians are giving to the citizens and to the world, young people tend to stay away from politics rather than engaging in any way.
- 3- Education systems do not educate to political participation. There is a general poor knowledge of the parliament/local government and how they work among young people also because the educational system does not provide

information and the skills to engage youth in political life.

4- The lingering impact of the global financial and economic crisis. Young people may tend to focus on day-to-day priorities and challenges rather than politics: the high unemployment rate and the instability in the Arab and Mediterranean regions have led the youth to focus more on improving their economic status rather than engagement in politics. Even in Europe, the focus on the socio-economic status is taking a priority over the focus on elections and participation in politics.

5- General perception that political parties are corrupted. Many youth in the Arab region and Mediterranean regions view politics as extremely corrupted and the political parties as mere players in this game. There is little trust from the citizens and youth in specific that the political parties can improve the situation of the country.

A youth-friendly legal framework is an important component of an environment that enables youth political participation. It reflects cultural norms and values, and determines structural rules and conditions for engagement¹².

Morocco / The effects of the Arab Springs

The Arab Awakening protests that swapped in the Middle East and resulted in regime-change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya did not start a real revolution in Morocco but surely raised the voice of young people asking for democracy and human rights, and paved the way for essential constitutional reforms.

In fact, the policy reform introduced by King Mohammed VI in March 9, 2011, led to the

adoption in July 2011 of a new Moroccan constitution that has institutionalized youth participation and allowed for the creation of the Consultative Council of Youth and Community Work. Through law N 29.11 on political parties stipulates (Article 5), it is also stated that the legal age of creating a political party is 18, which is also the legal age of presenting candidacy to elections and voting.

Moreover, at a local level, the Moroccan Parliament has amended the local election law to raise female representation from 12% to 27% in municipal councils and Constitutional reforms and legislative elections are perceived as more transparent.

Youth-led CSOs, with their engagement and determination, played a key role in mobilizing Moroccan citizens to take part in the constitution referendum and vote in the pre-matured Nov 25, 2011 legislative elections. Moreover, after a

series of consultations with youth and stakeholders, a national youth policy saw light after being approved by the council of Government on April 2014. The strategy is yet to be approved by the Council of Ministers, chaired by the King. After the adoption of the 2011 constitution, Youth are currently advocating for the amendment of the law to have a clear mention of youth participation. The leadership of the parliament expressed publically in several occasions that the institution is open to collaborate with youth and civil society.

13: TUNISIA Breaking the Barriers To Youth Inclusion. Chapter 2 Youth Participation, Voice, and Active Citizenship. WORLD BANK [www.worldbank.org]

Tunisia / Young people made the revolution, old people are making the rules

Youth under the age of 30 played a critical role in fueling the 2011 Tunisian revolution that toppled former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Demanding social justice and improved livelihoods, Tunisia's youth took to the streets in 2011 hoping that their voices would be included in a new Tunisia. However, the low participation rate by youth in the first truly democratic Tunisian national elections of October 2011 (just the 17% of those 18-25)¹³ has resulted in a lack of youth representation in the National Constituent Assembly: of the 217 members of Tunisia's NCA elected through the watershed elections are in their 50s or 60s, and the oldest member of the NCA is 74. "A youth revolution has produced an assembly with very old people. There is a lack of representation of youth in the NCA and within political parties," explained Kharrat, High school students. A political scene dominated by older Tunisians explains youths' withdrawal from the country's political landscape and this is how Tunisian youth are caught in

an unending cycle. They are criticized for political inexperience, yet they are neither empowered, nor allowed to gain this necessary experience. Instead, they are relegated to the political periphery.

At the same time, post-revolutionary freedoms have opened up new forms of political and civic participation for Tunisian youth, like youth NGOs and CSOs. Therefore, while many eschew participation in traditional politics, they have found other ways to remain active in constructing their country's future. "I prefer civic activity to political activism," affirmed 24 year-old Mondher Youssfi. "It involves no partisan allegiance and no electoral maneuvers." Still, alternative forms of youth participation have made gains in post-revolutionary Tunisia and are rebuilding their society. They have witnessed the challenges that Tunisia currently faces and are proposing innovative solutions.

Lebanon / Very active young citizens but sect oriented

Despite Lebanese youth throughout history (even prior 1943) has had a high degree of participation in politics and social life and although they constitute a priority to government and civil society (youth policy, 2012), it still has a disadvantage concerning elections and participation in elections and politics. The voting age in the country is 21 years and a citizen must be at least 25 years old running for any politics related governmental position. This eliminated the majority of youth age from voting leading to exclude them from the decision making process. Moreover, most political parties in

Lebanon do not rely on capacity building tools that would encourage active challenging political life participation and do not include youth in discussions on setting priorities, which marginalize them. In some universities, student elections are prohibited in order to prevent violent conflicts in between the student body which results with gaps on the civic engagement level.

Adding to that, youth in Lebanon are put under pressure from several factors whether it was sectarianism, economic or peer pressure. Especially after the civil war, elections

became more sect oriented in order to ensure the sustainability of ones "sect power" and youth were the main targets of those political parties since they can be manipulated more easily. Youth are voting according to sects partitions disregarding the actual plan of candidates which also results with the un-transparency of elections. Last but not least women, despite their high levels of education and participation in many aspects of public life, remain dramatically underrepresented in politics, with access to power largely limited to women from the country's political families.

Bosnia and Herzegovina / Informed, but not interested in politics

Young people in BiH are today more than ever involved in the global communications networks, and better informed about political developments in country, region and the world. They are able to through channels of digital technology together much easier than previous generations, communicate and discuss, including communication about and discussion of political events. On the other hand, although they are well informed, they show far less interest in politics, discussion about politics, and a smaller volume of political action. Young people do not show great interest in political events, regardless whether it is a world, the Balkan, the EU or policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The attitude of youth towards politics and democracy requires special attention, since it is about a specific social group with peculiar and distinctive political needs. Today's young people in BiH have grown exclusively in democratic society. They have no

experience with autocratic socialist regime of Yugoslavia that shaped political attitudes of the older generation, including the views of the elected political representatives. Conversations about politics, either with their parents or with friends, are very rare among young people. The largest number of young people, almost half of them, do not talk about political events with their closest, while those who do so daily are the smallest group. Political leaders do not affirm full participation of youth, or process of generation change with greater involvement of young people in decision-making process. As a direct result, young people in BiH show less and less interest in gaining knowledge about political system in BiH, functioning of the institutions of government and participating in election-making process in general as well as active participation in decision processes. Passivity of youth in BiH can be seen through their low turn-out during the elections on all levels (cantonal, entity, state and district).

Italy / Youth participation perceived as something partially legitimate

In Italy, young people today are an evident minority of the Italian population and are also very discouraged by a corrupted political system and political parties. This causes a clear imbalance of power between generations and, when it comes to participating in elections, results are rather disappointing. Adult people, justify this by saying that young generations have no values anymore, especially when compared to older generations but truth is that there has been a shift in the political panorama that has decreased the number of politically engaged young people. The universal suffrage in Italy was introduced in 1945 (at the end of the Second World War) and was applied the year after: in this occasion, for the first time in the Italian history, women were allowed to vote. From then on, the Italian Constitution considers the right to vote as a "civic duty" (art. 48) and each voter can

express his/her vote freely, secretly and anonymously.

- 18 years old: young people acquire the right to vote for the election of the Deputies Chamber. They can also vote for the Regional and Local elections when they are 18.
- 21 year old: young people can vote for the European Elections;
- 25 years old: young people can vote for the Italian Senate. Moreover, young people can candidate themselves for the national and European elections. It must be said that, somehow, adult people still perceive youth participation as something "partially legitimate". The majority of youth politics are based on the so-called "Youth-development model" which states that young people are "in development" and not something that it is already structured.

Good practices

Bosnia and Herzegovina / Monitoring the electoral process



Coalition "Pod Lupom" formed by 7 civil society organizations, has started monitoring the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 1, 2014, through main and seven regional offices with 42 long-term observers in the field. Coalition "Pod Lupom" was founded by the following NGOs: Centre for Civic Initiative, FTC, CGS, INFOHOUSE Sarajevo, OIA Sarajevo, Perpetuum Mobile Institute Banja Luka and DON Prijedor. On the Election Day, the Coalition was monitoring the opening of polling stations, the voting process and the processing of votes, and the work of the election administration throughout the country. In the post-election time, the Coalition has conducted monitoring of the received

comments and complaints about the electoral process, and a number of them forwarded to the CEC. The coalition also, as part of the final report, provided a set of recommendations which seeks to advocate for the improvement of electoral legislation and processes in BiH. Results of the Action:

- 2,890 observers were deployed;
- 1,335 polling stations were covered (25% of total number of polling stations);
- 370 complaints issued related to agitation to voters near polling stations, a deceased person on the voter lists, vote-buying, etc.

Lebanon / Involving youth in elections and political life

The absence of the Lebanese government has placed the burden on the Lebanese Civil Society to work and tackle the involvement of youth in elections and political life. Several CSOs have implemented projects and programs related to this domain such as Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) and Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA). DPNA has developed and published three guides on:

- Guide for youth to participate in politics;
- Youth and Municipalities;
- Guide for Youth to Citizenship.

Playing the role of informative guides in order to introduce youth those three concepts as well as to build their capacities and reinforce their backgrounds on each domain knowing that the three are interrelated. DPNA has also implemented the project "Building the Capacities of New Municipal Members" during which 20 local leaders were trained and empowered with specific skills in order to ensure the active participation of community members in the municipal work with equal opportunities.

Italy / Mtv campaign 'io voto' / 'I vote'



MTV, the music television, has started the campaign "IO VOTO" / "I VOTE", in which they explain about all kinds of elections at all level. Its mission is to foster participation, encouraging young people to be informed and aware in order to act accordingly. "To participate in the political life of your country, to change things, you

do not have to be a MP. You can make those changes that make a difference starting from your school, your neighborhood, your city, your region. If you want to change things, act, make your voice heard, exercise your right to vote and advance your cause. If you do not deal with politics, politics will not deal with you".

Tunisia / Young leaders work non-stop for a new generation

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), in partnership with the Association of Young Leaders Entrepreneurs (YLE), a youth mentorship association, developed a two-phase activity aimed at increasing participation of young Tunisians in the voting process entitled Countdown: Build Tunisia in 20 Hours.

The first phase began in Tunis from December 20-22 as a three-day workshop on the

theme "How to Get Tunisian Youth to Vote." Project development and presentations were the main topics for the 100 participants. In the second phase on December 28th, teams exhibited their projects to the whole group, as well as a panel of judges.

Technology was a common feature in the projects, as six teams used hand held devices and social media in their plans.

Morocco / The parallel youth government

Benefiting from the impetus given to youth participation by the new constitution, the Moroccan Youth Forum (Forum des Jeunes Marocains) in 2012 established the "parallel youth government": a national shadow government in which every constitutional minister has his young "shadow"/counterpart. With this youth government, the Moroccan Youth Forum wanted to consolidate the voice of young people in national politics and at the Parallel youth government The Raissouni Palace in Assilah one of the council members is assigned to be the representative of young people with special needs. The youth council in Tetouan is very closely connected to the communal council; it was initiated by the commune, is facilitated by the commune and receives financial support from the commune. This might raise the question of independence, but according to the youth council members, they are

completely free to develop their activities and programmes as they wish. Recently, the youth councils in Assilah and Tetouan joined forces to develop the first regional youth council in Morocco. Its aim is to motivate and encourage other municipalities in the region to set up local youth councils themselves. same time act as an instrument for training the 'politicians of tomorrow'. The members of the youth government, mainly youth leaders and students, evaluated public policies developed by the national government and prepared reports together with other young people on issues on the political agenda. The youth government, now in its second term, has been a success, says Adib Lrhoul, who acted as the youth minister for foreign affairs in the first government: "We know that the ministers in the official government talked about the youth government in their meetings."

Youth Participation

While 40% of the world population is under 25, young people are systematically excluded from decision-making processes. For example, globally only 1.65% of parliamentarians are in their 20s. From the community to the global level, the vast majority of young people do not have a say in shaping their society. Despite the fact that youth movements around the world have demonstrated the ability, energy and creativity of young people in generating solutions to the major problems of our time, we are not considered as serious partners in decisions that affect our own lives as well as society as a whole. We lack opportunities to play a meaningful role in the development of our communities and beyond. Governments and other actors must

implement the laws and mechanisms needed – including youth quotas – to guarantee youth participation in decisions that affect our society whilst maintaining respect for the autonomy of our organizations. Society must promote and strengthen transformative youth leadership and eliminate stigmatization that excludes us. We young people must have the freedom and opportunity to assemble and strengthen our abilities in order to create a local to global movement that is plural and inclusive and has the capacity to raise awareness, generate new forms of mobilization, construct solid propositions and address power imbalances. Youth Manifesto to end Inequalities - Oxfam YAC (Youth Active Citizenship Community).

Recommendations

With the global youth population standing at 1.2 billion, the exclusion of young people from formal political processes threatens the legitimacy of political systems and structures, as a huge cohort remains unrepresented or underrepresented, which in many cases leads young people to find alternative means of political engagement.

- There is a clear disengagement of young people from politics, negative turnout numbers and a decreasing participation. However, finding reliable and updated data has been very hard. A higher monitoring of young people's participation in politics and elections is needed.
- Politics is driven mainly by older generations and young people are used in the electoral speeches but their needs are not included in the agenda. This results in a generational gap and a political system that does not speak to young people, generating an undending cycle of frustration. Policies should include explicitly youth representatives quota in the decision-making bodies, as this will ensure representativeness and generate a higher interest;
- The numerous parallel non-traditional forms of civic and political participation and the energy put by young people, should drive to a more active participation in elections. Voting is a fundamental opportunity for the new generations to make their voices heard. It is also important for them to remain active voting citizens and shape their countries present and future (either post-revolutionary or extremely corrupted);
- The process of change should start by amending the electoral law to set the voting age at 18 at least (or 16, as proposed by the Region of Tuscany, Italy), leading automatically to include a larger number of youth in politics.
- Young people should also be part of good governance and monitoring processes in order to ensure transparency.
- The educational systems should educate and train young people on the concept of participation in the political life. Introducing the democratic tools within school education will surely encourage youth to take part in the decision making process from an earlier age, ensuring that their voices are being heard and they will be able to make a difference and have an impact in their society.

Testimonies from Bosnia and Herzegovina



Aleksandar Talić, 24: *Many young people in my country decide not to vote in the elections. They don't think they can change anything by voting and that their vote matters. Not having someone to vote for is a usual excuse. I believe that being a member of society obliges me to choose. Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not understand the importance of being an active citizen. The essence of democracy is to have the right to vote, because that is one of the main ways to protect your rights. If I do not choose, I let others to choose for me. That way, I am not part of the potential change. I want to be asked and I want my opinion to be considered. Those are the reasons I VOTE.*



Dario Kalamanda, 25: *I DON'T VOTE. I know that many people will say that it is my obligation to vote and that if I choose not to vote, others will create my future. However, I honestly believe that my future in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the same, no matter which current political option is part of the government. Since 2013, 68,000 young people left BiH believing the same as I do. If I had a political party I agreed with, who would represent the interests of young people, and forget nationalism rhetoric I would probably start voting.*

The MedNet Project

for the fulfillment of human beings' potential

WHERE - The Mediterranean area

WHO - a Network of young people from countries of both sides of the Mediterranean basin


WHY - to reach common goals: to find shared and common solutions for the challenges that all young people of the Mediterranean area face daily.

HOW - Following Oxfam's Learn-Think-Act process and making our young people the protagonists! They make researches, collect data and support experts in setting up thematic Dossiers, then they reflect on the topics by taking part in online activities and finally they meet and... plan the actions that they want to take!

The key point is adopt the youth perspective to produce and share knowledge and the good practices by young people for young people!

For the second year of the project, the challenge accepted by the Mednetters was to enhance their role as researchers collecting first-hand experiences, starting from their own as key-players and witnesses to the youth condition within their own countries. Thus, during this year the experts have had the great opportunity to collect a series of qualitative thematic Country reports available to be read in a comparative perspective (for regional area) on which they were able to produce four renewed thematic Dossiers plus a new one that include both an overview on the topics that concern all the countries bordering the Mediterranean basin that of further informations about a specific context of each country.

**ARE YOU A YOUNG MEDITERRANEAN LEADER?
THEN, IT IS YOU WE ARE LOOKING FOR!**



For further information,
check the 2014 version
of Dossier #1
and the Country Reports

In collaboration with
Impact Hub, Florence, Italy

