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Functioning of the Local Youth Action Councils in Kosovo

Policy Brief



ACDC
Advocacy Center For Democratic Culture



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POLICY PAPER ON FUNCTIONING OF LOCAL YOUTH ACTION COUNCILS IN KOSOVO

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List of Abbreviations

1. LYAC – Local Youth Action Council
2. MCYS – Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Kosovo
3. LEPY – Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth
4. AI – Administrative Instruction

Introduction/Executive summary

During the September and October 2018, NGO ACDC implemented the project **“Strengthening the role of LYAC offices in Kosovo”**, which was supported by USAID/AKT-LS. For the successful implementation of the project, NGO ACDC owes its gratitude to Local Youth Action Councils from the 16 municipalities in Kosovo, who actively participated in all project activities and indirectly contributed to the development of this paper. NGO also recognizes the contribution of the Central Youth Local Action Council in Pristina, who whole heartedly provided their assistance and support.

The Advocacy Centre for Democratic Culture and its partners have established Local Youth Action Councils in four northern municipalities (Mitrovica North, Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok) during the year 2017. Four northern Local Youth Action Council have been established based on the Empowerment and Participation of Youth Law and on an Administrative Regulation for LYACs from 2010. The Law was created to allow LYACs to “operate at local level and (to) represent the interests of youth and youth organizations to the institutions of local government“. During the project implementation, ACDC have implemented all activities pertaining to the proper functioning of LYAC’s. All LYAC have established governing bodies, obtained registration document, including stamp and bank account. All LYAC’s have undergone through capacity development trainings. Given the limited timeframe for internal capacity development within LYAC members, the wide array of capacity building activities are needed. Through the implementation of the Development of Local Youth Action Plans implemented by ACDC and Friendship, all LYAC’s in four northern municipalities have developed action plans using the youth mapping exercise. These action plans have been submitted to municipal assemblies for adoption. Project partners expected that implementation of activities outlined in submitted plans shall commence after approval of new municipal budgets for year 2019.

During the project implementation, ACDC was focused on implementation of practical activities outlined in action plans prior to approval of municipal budget and bridging organizational gaps identified. Identified gaps in four northern LYAC are lack of skill set in area of: project cycle management, organization management, organizational development, financial management, communication skills, networking skills, advocacy/lobbying skills. Consequently, this puts a contrast to the wide range of duties, needed to preform, and diminish strategic objectives the LYACs should cover, starting from representing youth and youth CSOs in their local governments, developing strategies/action plans, participating in budgeting and decision making, to fostering cooperation between youth actors.

This project goal was to develop networking and cooperation between 16 LYAC offices in 16 AKT LS target municipalities, to implement Action Plan for Local Youth Action Councils on the Northern Municipalities (Mitrovica North, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic), as well as to develop awareness campaign among youth structures targeting enhancing skills in identification of youth priorities. The approach of the action was empowerment of youth through networking capacities development, followed by on

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hands support during the implementation of Local Youth Action Plans. All actions are focused on increasing skills and capabilities of LYAC's in Kosovo, to become more efficient, visible, cohesive, and proactive partners within their communities.

The project contributed to: a) the organizational functioning of the LYACs and member CSOs by building trust and possibilities for networking with other LYACs throughout Kosovo, consequently leading towards improved interethnic cooperation and creation of sound linkages between LYAC's in AKT LS target municipalities, b) Their ability to undertake initiatives, mobilize and represent youth in their municipalities, c) Implement the Local Strategy for Youth on local level in four northern municipalities, d) Increase the presence of LYACs in the media and awareness campaign that they exist and have capacities and knowledge to help youth in their active participation within the municipalities, e) The information and project exchange between youth and youth actors Kosovo wide.

Methodology and Limitations

This Policy Paper is a result of the activities implemented within the project “**Strengthening the role of LYAC offices in Kosovo**”. Project was supported by USAID/AKT-LS. It shall be noted that the views expressed in the research report are the responsibility of the Advocacy Centre for Democratic Culture and do not necessarily reflect the views of the USAID/AKT-LS.

The methodology of data collection for this paper consisted of several methods. Basic method of data collection was interviews with representatives of LYACs, youth representatives, youth activists and youth associations. Interviews were during the implementation of the project activities. During each interview, representatives of ACDC asked already prepared, targeted questions, with the aim to obtain relevant information, significant for the paper.

Second method in the development of this paper included desk research of relevant legislation in Kosovo, including Youth Strategies and Action Plans. The research have shown that even though the legal framework for improving the position of youth and promoting youth participation was largely in place, not much has been done to empower youth bodies and association, including LYACs/

The main challenge or obstacle, during the implementation of the project was the low level of the operational capacity LYACs in northern Kosovo, which was the result of the lack of organization and lack of concrete support to LYACs from the respective local self-governments/municipalities in which they were established.

BACKGROUND

Young people present a significant percentage of the population in Kosovo (Kosovo structure is characterized by a very young population, where the average age is 30.2 years¹, this category is affected by unemployment (Youth Unemployment Rate in Kosovo increased to 55 percent in the second quarter of 2018 from 54 percent in the first quarter of 2018² and lack of support and funding from local institutions for youth activities/activism, sports and cultural activities. The CSOs dealing with issues of the young people and youth as the group are more neglected, maybe even detached from the local community and unable to effectively address community needs while at the same time they are far from decision making processes at the local and national level due to lack of transparency and support from local institutions in the first place.

To be sure in proper support and proper representation of youth, adequate conditions must be created, to provide for proper study, play and overall personal development. Of equal measure, is the need to create conditions and opportunities that encourage and facilitate youth's active participation in the broader social, cultural and economic life of their country. National organizations like the National Youth Associations, the Municipal Youth Departments, and the Local Youth Action Councils, have been involved with varying degrees of success in promoting the participation of youth in the process of national development. This Youth Policy paper, therefore, gives substance and recommendations to the local efforts especially. The policy paper provides guiding principles in accordance with requirements to harness the opinions, talents, initiatives, resources and experiences of youth living in Kosovo, all in the noble cause of building a better Kosovo as multiethnic community. Investments in the youth of country are investments for the future. Thus, it is felt that effective and genuine implementation of the recommendations proposed in the Policy document will benefit Kosovo in the medium to long run which is the only sustainable solution for this fragile region.

Legal framework

Legal framework to ensure continued participation of youth in the decision making process is largely in place. Namely, **LAW ON EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH**, which was adopted in 2009, "aims to promote and reaffirm continued participation of youth in the decision making process, without any difference and exclusion, in the development of a democratic society, in order to improve the quality of life of youth and their social status".³

The Law defines the following:

¹ See Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo, <http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/4369/statistical-yearbook-2018.pdf>

² Source: www.tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/youth-unemployment-rate

³ Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth, Article 1

1.1. basic responsibilities for strengthening the youth sector in Kosovo and for supporting the participation of youth in decision-making.

1.2. responsibilities of the institutions of central and local government to young people and youth organizations in relevant areas regulated by this law.

1.3. voluntary work and informal education of young people.

1.4. instruction for the licensing of youth centers.⁴

In relation to this policy paper, the most important provisions of the Law are those which regulate the right of youth to self organize. In this respect, the law recognized three forms of organizations of youth:

- 1) **Youth Organizations** – which are defined as a “non-profit organization, established in accordance with the legislation in force, where most members are young”;
- 2) **Youth Center – defined as** “the space functionalized for development of youth activities licensed by the municipal Directorate responsible for youth”;
- 3) **The Youth Action Council** – defined as a “youth representative body composed of representatives of youth non-profit organizations of Central and Local Level”.⁵

As this project pertained to capacity building of Local Youth Action Council, focus of this paper will be on this form of the self-organization of youth. It shall be noted that, according to the Law, there is a Central Youth Action Council seated in Pristina and Local Youth Action Councils at municipal level.

According to the Law, the Central Youth Action Council is a “voluntary organization of youth organizations operating in Kosovo.” The Law reads that the “Central Youth Action Council” is an advisory structure for youth, which represents the interests of youth organizations at the central government institutions and mechanisms of international youth.”

On the other side, each municipality in Kosovo has the **Local Youth Action Council**, established in line with the Law and relevant sub-legal acts. The Law defines LYAC as “the local Advisory formation youth organizations, which operate at local level and represents the interests of youth and youth organizations to the institutions of local government.”

When it comes to the responsibilities of municipal bodies vis-à-vis youth and youth empowerment and participation, the Law reads that, *inter alia*, they have the following responsibilities:

⁴ Ibid. Article 2

⁵ Ibid. Article 3.

1. to ensure the provision of financial and human resources for the implementation of youth programs;
2. to care for the provision of adequate public space in consultation with the council to resume the action of the municipality, where young people plan, manage and develop their youth activities and informal education;
3. for youth policy development in consultation with the local youth council to resume the action of the municipality, in accordance with local needs.⁶

In addition to the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth, the legal framework also includes the **Administrative Instruction on Responsibilities and Procedures on the Establishment and Functioning of Youth Action Councils in Kosovo.**

In Article 13, the AI provides the procedure for the registration and recognition of Local Youth Action Councils. According to the AI, LYACs must be registered as legal persons in accordance with the Law on Freedom of Association in Non-Governmental Organizations. Following the registration, LYACs must submit a written request to municipal authorities for recognition, which will issue a decision thereof in 30 days, after the consultation with the municipal Directorate for Youth.

According to the AI, municipal authorities have the obligation to provide all costs , expenditures that result from the organization of the LYAC assembly, administrative costs, travel expenses, expenditures for salaries etc.⁷

Apart from obligations of municipal authorities towards LYACs, which include both financial and logistic support, Councils also have certain obligations and responsibilities to meet. These responsibilities mainly include reporting to the Municipality every six months on the implemented activities.⁸

Key challenges of youth in Kosovo

YOUTH PARTICIPATION & REPRESENTATION: Youth constitute the largest single chronological group or cluster of our population. The Population and Housing Census Report reveal that young person's below 30 years constitute 40% of our population. It is reasonable to expect therefore, that the youth would be involved in and consulted on issues of national concern. This should be achieved by participation and representation. Making available, to young citizens, appropriate decision-making for a meaningful and sustained participation at local community, and on the national levels.

EMPLOYMENT: Employment is a fundamental human right. It follows therefore, that the provision of jobs and equal opportunities for employment that utilize the human resources of a nation. Meaningful employment of our youth would not only sustain but also improve productivity. At the same time employment would prevent the tendencies

⁶ For complete responsibilities of municipal bodies, see Article 7 of the Law.

⁷ Article 16.

⁸ Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth, Article 15

toward social misconduct, it will prevent departures from the country of young and successful students, it will reduce the social misconducts (eg. Drug use, crime, delinquency) which are consequence of the long term unemployment of youth.

EDUCATION: Education is the preparation of the human resource. Faith in the education of youth is a fundamental part of our democratic tradition of preparing youth for the world of work and for life in general, the latter including how to live as good citizens who can promote the welfare of all.

CULTURE: Culture is the forces that connects and gather people together as they grapple with the challenges of adaptation and development. The acceptance and promotion of its culture diversities is valuable to any nation or country. Promotion and support of culture would provide the youth with an opportunity to gain knowledge and insight in different cultural values and they will learn to appreciate those values, and be more familiarized with diversities in their neighborhood which can serve as an inspiration for better understanding and tolerance.

SPORTS, RECREATION AND LEISURE: The development of a proper sporting, recreational and leisure program is critical to the overall development (physical, social, mental and spiritual) of our youth. At the same time, it offers a positive outlet for the natural enthusiasm, energies and creativity of youth, acting thus as a deterrent to non-productive, anti-social activities, such as drug abuse, minor delinquency and crime.

Key challenges in the operation of LYAC

1. Lack of funding

Even though LYACs in Kosovo were established through the procedure established by the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth and in line with the Administrative Instruction for Responsibilities and Procedures on the Establishment and Functioning of Youth Action Councils in Kosovo, these Councils lack efficient and sustainable sources of funding to support their activities.

As already presented above, respective municipalities have the obligation to provide funding to Local Youth Action Councils for the implementation of their activities. This funding is essential to ensure that the implementation of Activity Plans of LYACs is ensured through support from the local governments. However, the research conducted by NGO ACDC has shown that the vast majority of LYACs in Kosovo still lack regular and sustainable sources of funding from their respective municipalities.

Recommendation: In order to ensure efficient operation of LYACs and proper representation of youth interest at local level, all municipalities shall be urged to comply with the provision of the above-mentioned Law and the Administrative Instruction, and provide sustainable source of funding for LYACs.

In light of this, the participation of LYACs representatives in municipal budget planning and development, in particular in the budgetary section related to

support to youth and youth organizations. In this way it would be ensure that the plans and activities of youth at municipal level would be supported through allocation of appropriate budget for their implementation.

2. Lack of strategic documents

Even though the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth and the Administrative Instruction provide that the municipal authorities should develop youth policies in consultation with the Local Youth Action Councils, this is lacking in many municipalities in Kosovo, including the four municipalities in northern Kosovo. Failure to develop and adopt relevant strategic documents make the LYACs in Kosovo not sustainable in longer-term. Currently, LYACs operate based on *ad-hoc* plans and projects, which are supported through various sources of funding.

Recommendation: Local self-governments shall develop local youth policies formulated in a local youth strategy and action plan, in cooperation with LYAC representatives. These documents should contain clear goals and measurable results. Robust advocacy efforts by LYAC representative and youth associations are needed in order to obtain strong commitments by local governments to develop the mentioned strategic documents and ensure systematic and sustainable operation of LYACs.

3. Lack of youth participation in decision making at local level

The Administrative Instruction reads that Local Youth Action Councils represent youth and youth organizations before relevant municipal authorities and municipal bodies.⁹ The Instruction also provides that LYACs address youth issues before municipal authorities and also advice relevant municipal bodies on actions which should be taken to address youth issues at local level.

However, in order to ensure youth participation in decision making at local level, there has to be a legal mechanism established at municipal level. Law on Local Self-Governance provides for the establishment of Consultative Committees at municipal level in Kosovo, which is to serve as a body which ensures public participation in decision making at local level. Among other stakeholders, the law envisages the participation of youth organizations too, aiming to ensure the resolution of youth issues at municipal level.

Recommendation:

Representatives of Local Youth Action Councils should be encouraged to regularly participate in the sessions of the municipal assemblies in order to be informed about municipal plans and projects related to youth. They should be

⁹ Administrative Instruction, Article 10

also encouraged to submit their proposals for the consideration of the municipal assemblies and relevant municipal bodies.

Also, it is necessary to have the Consultative Committees established in municipalities in order to ensure the legal mechanism for public participation in decision making at local level. This mechanism would also allow youth representatives to participate in decision making process at their respective municipalities.

4. Low capacities of LYACs

Although LYACs in Kosovo were established in accordance with applicable procedures, many of them lack capacities to efficiently advocate for the address of youth issues and for youth involvement in decision making process at local level. According to LYACs representatives, many of them lack skills and experience to ensure long-term and sustainable sources of support for the Councils; and they also lack skills in terms of project cycle management, fundraising, advocacy and reporting.

Recommendation:

LYACs representatives should continuously seek for training opportunities to improve their skills. They also should design the training program themselves, in cooperation with civil society organizations with relevant experience, and seek support from both municipal authorities and donor's organizations for these activities. Continuous training and education will empower youth activists and representatives to efficiently represent interest of youth.

SOURCES

1. Assembly of Kosovo web-site, <http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/?cid=2,1>
2. Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth
3. Administrative Instruction for Responsibilities and Procedures on the Establishment and Functioning of Youth Action Councils in Kosovo
4. Interviews with representatives of LYACs



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