



Co-funded by
the European Union

PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

Y-O MODEL

A Cross Regional Predictive Model
for Youth Policy Shaping – Youth
Observers

Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the Field of Youth
Project No. 101131525 – Y-O MODEL
1 April 2024 – 28 February 2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The field of youth participation is on the verge of transition. Youth's disillusionment with democracy is pressing youth workers, civil society and policy makers to call out the tokenization of youth participation and explore what meaningful youth participation actually requires.

The project "[A Cross Regional Predictive Model for Youth Policy Shaping – Youth Observers](#)" (Y-O Model), funded by the European Union, Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Youth Programme, tackled these concerns. Y-O Model, implemented by a consortium of 6 organizations from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Italy, developed and piloted a new model for youth participation. Through [targeted capacity building, study visits across public institutions and the CSO sector, and direct experience designing and piloting policy solutions](#), the project equipped 36 young people to address the most pressing challenges facing their generation.

The impact of this process was felt at multiple levels:

For Participating Youth

The project represented a transition from participation to a lived experience of civic agency, strengthening confidence and motivation to remain active in the field of youth policy.

For Partner Organisations

The close collaboration deepened their capacity to treat youth as implementation partners rather than project beneficiaries.

At the institutional level

The structured involvement of ministries, municipalities, employment agencies and civil society organisations in the consultation and roundtable process expanded cross-sectoral dialogue and contributed to building mutual trust between youth and the institutions that shape their lives.

What makes the Y-O Model **distinctively European** is its **transnational architecture and its youth-led approach**, with young people embedded as co-organisers at every stage.

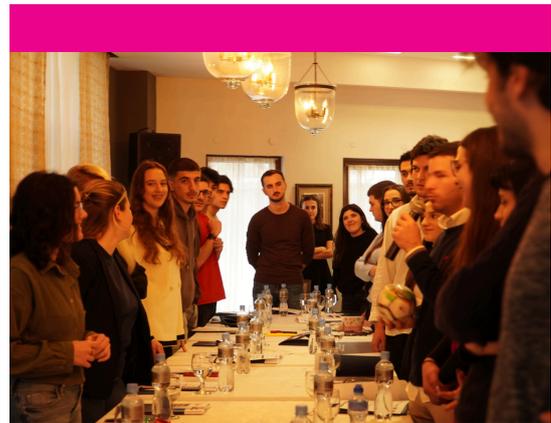
More importantly, the project demonstrated that **positioning youth as co-organizers of stakeholder collaboration** is achievable, even in more challenging civic environments.

In doing so, the Y-O Model offers a **tested and transferable contribution to the EU Youth Strategy's core question:**

What becomes possible when young people are treated not as the target of a project, but as partners in delivering it?

LEARNING, BONDING AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPOSURE

The project started with the capacity building of selected youth observers from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Italy. This phase of the project served as the foundation for establishing the national networks of youth observers through its team-building component embedded throughout working in pairs and informal networking sessions. Furthermore, the training sessions increased youth observers' understanding of policy analysis and advocacy and enhanced their leadership and crisis management skills using an approach that balanced theory and practice.



Each capacity building session was complemented by a **study visit among both public institutions and local civil society actors involved in youth policymaking**. The study visits offered an opportunity to gather direct insights into the stakeholders' priorities and approaches to youth policy beyond their national states, thus expanding their knowledge regionally and at EU level.



Study Visit Highlights

As a result, the youth observers gained strategic exposure to high level policy makers such as:

Prishtina, Kosovo

Head of Youth
Department in the
Ministry of Culture,
Youth and Sports



Skopje, North Macedonia

Young members of
Parliament on the
National Assembly of
North Macedonia



Campobasso, Italy

The Mayor of
Campobasso in Italy.



Tirana, Albania

Representatives from the National Youth Agency in Albania



YOUTH-LED STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

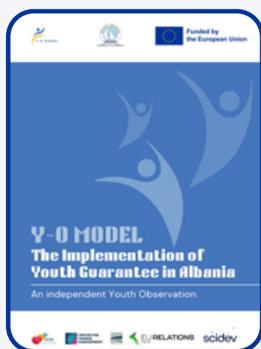
Building on the [capacity building sessions](#) and [study visits](#) conducted in [Prishtina](#), [Skopje](#) and [Campobasso](#), youth observers took the lead as co-organisers of [national stakeholder consultations](#), using them to test initial assumptions about potential policy interventions and map the landscape of relevant actors and ongoing policy developments.



This process shaped the selection of their policy paper topics and established the partnerships needed for data collection. Stakeholders were subsequently engaged in dedicated national [roundtables](#) to review and stress-test the preliminary findings and recommendations of each policy paper.

Supported by mentors appointed by their host organisations, youth observers produced [six policy papers](#) covering mental health, youth employability, and youth participation.

YOUTH OBSERVERS – POLICY PAPERS



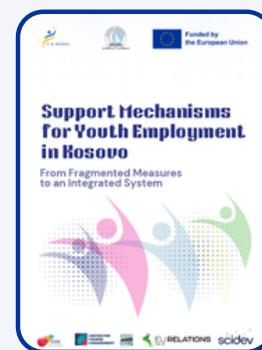
[Read full policy paper](#)

[The implementation of Youth Guarantee in Albania: An independent Youth Observation](#)

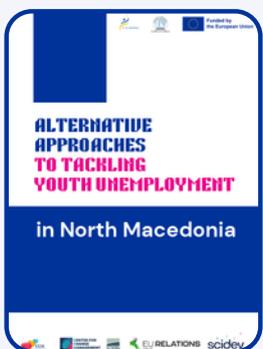
This policy brief evaluates the pilot phase of Albania's Youth Guarantee programme across Tirana, Shkodër, and Vlorë. The program demonstrates strong potential, with beneficiaries reporting high satisfaction. However, the programme effectiveness might be constrained by the structure of labour market, high social pressure towards young people and bias toward youth's work culture. To address these issues, the policy paper recommends increased budget and staffing for employment offices, continuous and specialized staff training, formalized role division with dedicated career guidance and a cross-cutting awareness strategy leveraging past beneficiaries as Youth Guarantee Ambassadors.

[Support Mechanisms for Youth Employment in Kosovo: From Fragmented Measures to an Integrated System](#)

Kosovo faces persistent youth unemployment driven by structural gaps including weak institutional coordination, outdated employment services, poor career guidance, and a mismatch between education and labor market needs. In response, this policy paper proposes the Employment Support and Transition Framework (ESTF), a youth-centered mechanism designed to modernize public employment services, strengthen school-to-work transitions, improve inter-institutional cooperation, and deliver a unified digital platform for employment support, thus turning fragmented policies into a coherent, inclusive, and effective national system.



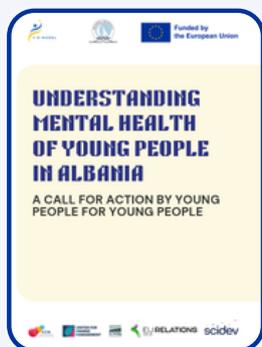
[Read full policy paper](#)



[Read full policy paper](#)

[Alternative Approaches to Tackle Youth Unemployment in North Macedonia](#)

Youth unemployment in North Macedonia remains persistently high, driven largely by skills mismatches, weak career guidance, and a disconnect between education outcomes and labour market needs. While existing measures such as the Youth Guarantee, wage subsidies, and internship schemes show institutional commitment, they fall short in coverage and effectiveness. Drawing on lessons from Spain, Greece, Luxembourg, Slovakia, and Lithuania, the paper identifies stronger public employment services, integrated career guidance, structured school-to-work transition pathways, and targeted financial incentives as key drivers of progress. Accordingly, it recommends deploying trained career counselors across education levels, making practical work components mandatory in university programmes, expanding internship schemes, and fostering coordination between education institutions, employment services, employers and civil society.



[Read full policy paper](#)

[Understanding Mental Health of Youth in Albania: A Call for Action by Young People for Young People](#)

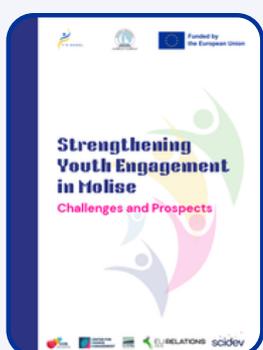
While national strategies such as the Mental Health Action Plan (2023–2026) in Albania signal policy commitment, significant gaps remain in school-based counseling, primary care integration, workforce capacity, and youth-friendly service provision. Research findings show that stress, anxiety, and feelings of being overwhelmed are widely reported among youth, driven by socio-economic pressures, academic demands, social media use, and relationship dynamics — though strong friendships, peer networks, and community engagement serve as important protective factors. To address these challenges, the brief calls for accessible and youth-friendly mental health services, stronger school-based support, expanded peer networks led by civil society and youth organizations, open dialogue within families and schools, and an interinstitutional committee to ensure coordinated, evidence-based, and sustained action across sectors.

[Youth Political Participation in Italy: Trends, Models and Levels](#)

While traditional indicators such as voter turnout and party membership are declining, young Italians are increasingly active through non-conventional channels, including street protests, online activism, petitions, boycotts, and independent university unions. Their key concerns center on climate change, job insecurity, mental health, and civil rights, approached through a post-ideological, values-driven lens rather than traditional party affiliation. To support meaningful participation, young people need stronger civic education, digital literacy, and soft skills, while institutions must respond with greater transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. The paper recommends reducing bureaucratic barriers, expanding youth consultations at local and regional levels, supporting digital citizenship, investing in mental health, and building social security structures that enable young people to envision and build a stable future.



[Read full policy paper](#)



[Read full policy paper](#)

[Strengthening Youth Engagement in Molise: Challenges and Prospects](#)

Youth political engagement in Molise, a depopulating region in Southern Italy, is characterized by low participation in formal institutional politics but a slowly growing trend of bottom-up advocacy and voluntary activism. Interviews with three associations reveal that the most significant barrier to engagement is not simply depopulation or disillusionment, but a cultural bias against dedicating personal time to civic and voluntary work. The paper recommends bridging the North-South economic divide, improving essential infrastructure such as transportation, promoting a culture of political engagement through schools and universities, and fostering genuine intergenerational dialogue.

BEYOND THE PROJECT: EMBEDDING THE RESULTS

As part of the sustainability strategy developed by SCiDEV, Youth Observers will continue their contribution to policy impact through youth observer networks supported by partner organizations.



Each national network will ensure at least one visible policy-oriented engagement annually, whether through presentation of policy papers, participation in consultation processes, thematic discussions, or structured dissemination activities. The format may vary, but the positioning function must remain active. Partner organisations will provide institutional anchoring and light supervision, while operational initiative remains youth-driven.

The networks will **sustain the regional and European connections through annual meetings** focused on youth policy developments, ensuring that this model of engagement keeps yielding informed policy recommendations for topics that impact young people in the region.

IMPACT AND EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

The impact of Y-O Model can be observed at multiple levels:

At the Individual Level

36 youth observers from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Italy had moved through a full arc, from capacity building and institutional visits to co-organising stakeholder consultations and roundtables, to authoring policy papers. This progression gave them direct experience in the practical dimensions of youth advocacy, strengthening their skills, confidence and motivation to remain active in the field.



At the Organisational Level

For partner organisations, the close collaboration, particularly in sustaining stakeholder engagement throughout the policy paper process, strengthened their capacity to involve young people as implementation partners in future work. The establishment of national youth observer networks also expanded each organisation's ability to engage young people within their own field of expertise.



At the Institutional Level

The project broadened cross-sectoral collaboration among youth, civil society, public institutions and international organisations. Stakeholders were engaged not as an audience for outputs, but as active participants, through data exchange, interviews and structured roundtable discussions, which helped build working relationships and mutual familiarity across sectors.



European Added Value

What makes the Y-O Model **distinctively European** is its transnational architecture and its youth-led approach, with young people embedded as co-organisers at every stage. By connecting three Western Balkan countries with an EU member state around a shared methodology for youth policy monitoring, the project gave participants a comparative lens on institutional and policy landscapes across different national contexts.

Y-O Model's distinctive added value is methodological. The positioning of youth as co-organizers of stakeholder collaboration serves as a case study that proves that reaching the stage of partnership in the ladder of civic participation is achievable and desirable and not just aspirational. And most importantly, it shows that this goal is feasible even in more challenging contexts such as the Western Balkans region.

In doing so, the Y-O Model offers a tested and transferable answer to a question that sits at the heart of the EU Youth Strategy: what becomes possible when young people are treated not as the target of a project, but as partners in delivering it?

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

1. Participation fatigue among youth is a medium risk in long term projects

Sustaining active engagement across a two-year project is more demanding than it appears at the design stage. In the Y-O Model, the cumulative weight of training sessions, study visits, consultations, policy paper development and roundtables placed real pressure on youth observers who, in most cases, were balancing project commitments alongside education, work and personal responsibilities. **The lesson is not that long-term youth engagement is unfeasible, but that project design must explicitly account for it.**

Recommendation:



- Partner organisations should develop a participant engagement strategy from the outset, with planned touchpoints between mobilities to maintain momentum and address early signs of disengagement.

2. Youth partnership is the right approach – and a time-intensive one

Treating youth as co-organizers rather than beneficiaries is the right approach, but it carries a cost that project timelines must absorb. Meaningful partnership requires investment in relationship-building, capacity development, and iterative feedback that transactional models of youth participation do not. When youth are genuinely involved in co-designing and co-delivering activities, decisions take longer; outputs require more rounds of revision, and support needs are less predictable. **Projects that commit to youth partnership without building this time into their planning risk either compromising the quality of the partnership or compromising the quality of the outputs.** The Y-O Model learned this firsthand, especially in the delivery of policy papers.

Recommendations:



- Project timelines should include buffers for unforeseen circumstances and avoid placing deliverable deadlines during or immediately before exam periods.



- Clear internal deadlines for both partners and youth observers are essential to protect output quality and sustain momentum.

3. Youth Networks require structure and continuous organizational support upon establishing

Regardless of the volume or quality of capacity building delivered, newly established youth observer networks require continued logistical and financial support from their host organisation beyond the project period.

Equally important is honest communication with youth observers from the outset on four points:

1. How will the network be governed?
2. What is their realistic time availability?
3. What organisational support can they expect and what resources are actually available?
4. What constitutes a feasible, concrete achievement for the network once the project concludes?

Recommendations:



- Host organisations should designate a staff member responsible for network continuity before the project ends, rather than treating post-project support as an afterthought.



- A brief network sustainability plan covering governance, communication channels and a realistic activity scope should be co-developed with youth observers during the final project phase, while engagement is still active and institutional memory is intact.



Funded by
the European Union



"A Cross Regional Predictive Model for Youth Policy Shaping – Youth Observers (Y-Os)" was led by the Mediterranean Center and implemented in partnership with the Center for Comparative and International Studies, Center for Change Management, INDEP, Eurelations GEIE, and SCiDEV.

Funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ Youth Capacity Building Programme.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) or Y-O Model project partners. Neither the European Union, EACEA or Y-O Model project partners can be held responsible for them.



Funded by
the European Union



ERASMUS+ CAPACITY BUILDING YOUTH

Y-O MODEL

[Read More HERE.](#)

FOLLOW US

