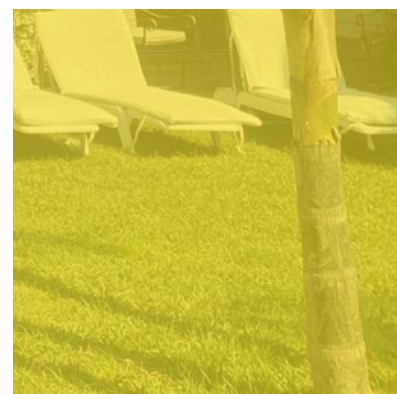
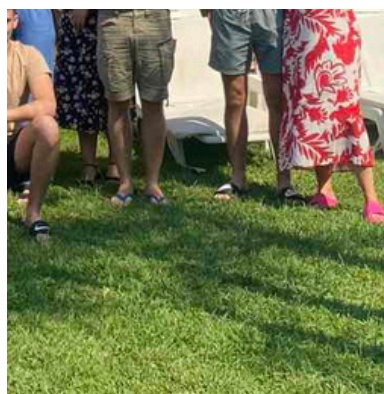
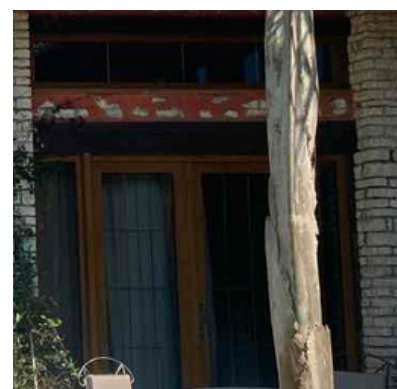
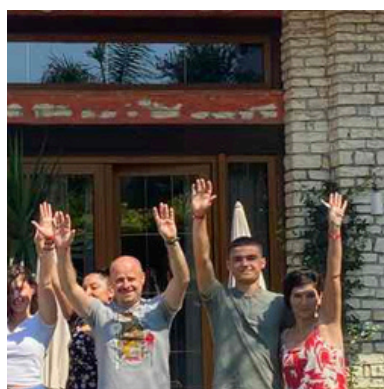
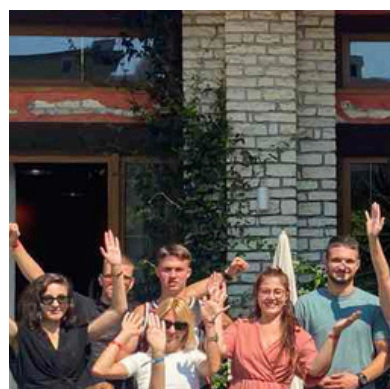
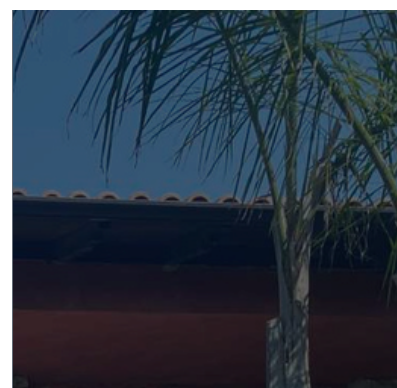
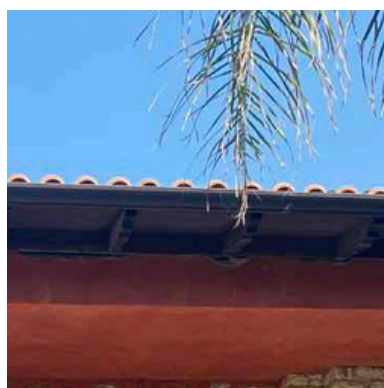


YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN KOSOVO:

MECHANISMS AND OPPORTUNITIES



INTRODUCTION

Kosovo has one of the youngest populations in Europe – over half of its people are under 30. This youthful demographic means young people have a huge role to play in shaping Kosovo’s society. Youth activism – whether through volunteering, advocacy, or community projects – is a powerful way for young people to voice their concerns and drive positive change. Activism is a continuous journey toward social justice, giving youth a powerful voice in their communities.

In Kosovo’s context, where different ethnic groups share a small country, youth activism is also about building a culture of civic engagement that bridges communities. The Kosovo constitution guarantees equal rights regardless of ethnicity, but it’s up to citizens – especially young people – to make those rights a reality on the ground.

For non-majority groups like the Serbian community in Kosovo, activism is particularly important: it empowers them to stand up for their rights, preserves their culture and language, and ensures they are heard in decision-making that affects their lives. When minority youth engage in activism, they help build bridges with other communities and combat the isolation that minorities sometimes feel. In short, activism matters because it allows young Kosovo Serbs to shape their own future and contribute to a more inclusive society for all.

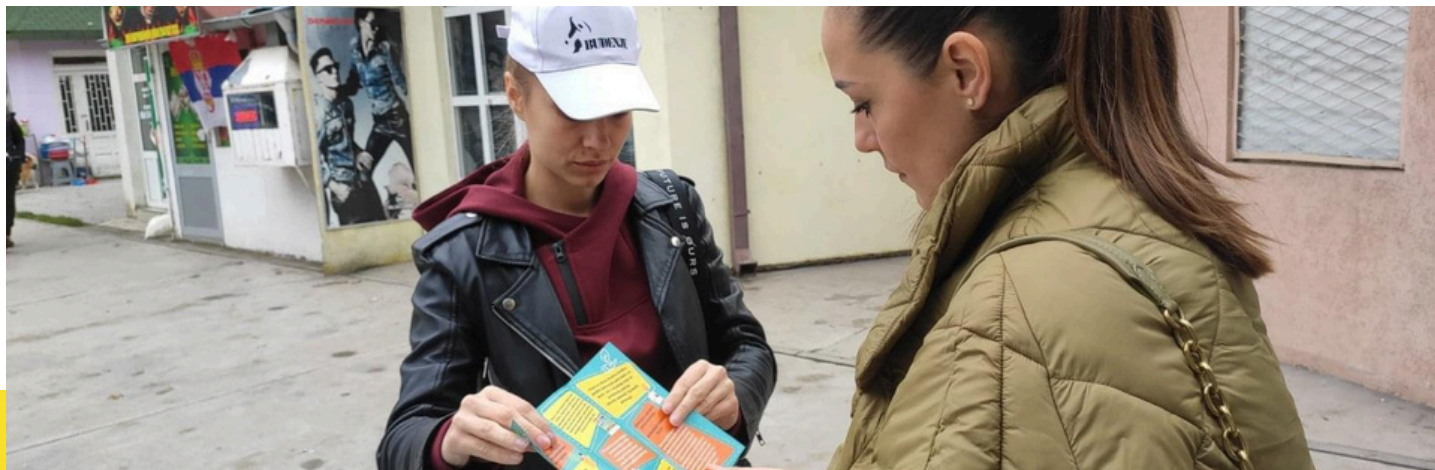
Activism is a continuous journey toward social justice, giving youth a powerful voice in their communities.

This brochure will give an overview of how you, as a young person from the Serbian community, can participate in activism, what challenges you might face, and how to overcome them.



CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH FROM SERBIAN COMMUNITY

Being an activist in Kosovo presents challenges, with additional barriers for young Kosovo Serbs. Recognizing these obstacles is the first step toward overcoming them.



Inter-ethnic tensions and trust gap

Years after the conflict, tensions between Kosovo's Albanian majority and Serbian minority persist. Many young people have grown up with memories of war or inherited narratives that shape their perspectives. A survey found that **only 1% of Kosovo Serb youth believe things are moving in the right direction**, compared to 11% of Albanian youth, reflecting deep frustration and low institutional trust. Ethnic divisions are reinforced by separate schools and communities, limiting interaction and fostering stereotypes. However, **18% of youth believe joint activities could improve relations**. While overcoming mistrust takes time, activism—especially through collaborative projects—can help bridge these divides.

Language and communication barriers

Language remains a significant barrier between young Serbs and Albanians. **Only about 5% of Kosovo Serbs speak Albanian fluently**, while many Albanians don't speak Serbian, making communication difficult. This gap discourages participation in Kosovo-wide youth initiatives, which are often in Albanian or English. A Serbian youth may hesitate to join a workshop if they're uncomfortable with the language, and vice versa. Without a shared language, divisions persist—even between nearby communities like Gračanica and Pristina. Activists often navigate this challenge by using English as a neutral medium or relying on interpreters in mixed settings.

Barriers to mobility and safety concerns

Many young people from the Serbian community feel physically cut off due to security concerns or political issues. Those in the north and south of the Ibar River often hesitate to travel outside their areas for fear of harassment. A young Serb from North Mitrovica, for example, may think twice before attending an event in Prishtinë/Priština, especially during heightened tensions. **Past incidents of inter-ethnic violence have made families cautious, creating barriers to participating in broader initiatives** or studying in other cities. While peacebuilding programs have helped foster safer interactions, concerns about safety and comfort remain a real challenge for engagement beyond familiar surroundings.

CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH FROM SERBIAN COMMUNITY

Economic hardships and limited opportunities

Serb youth face **high unemployment and economic uncertainty, with rates even higher than the 29%** average among young people. In many Serb-majority areas, jobs are scarce, pushing many to consider emigration. Economic struggles make activism seem like a luxury when securing a livelihood takes priority.

Political disputes limit access to certain institutions, reducing internship and training opportunities. Serbian-language schools follow Serbia's curriculum, but degrees may not be fully recognized, complicating employment. These challenges often lead to frustration and withdrawal from public life. However, activism can help address issues like job programs and education—if youth feel empowered to drive change.

Narratives, pressures, and invisible barriers

In Serbian communities, activism—especially involving cooperation with Albanians or Kosovo institutions—can be met with suspicion. Youth working on peacebuilding or human rights may be labeled as “traitors” by hardliners, discouraging participation. **Political dynamics also play a role; if local leaders boycott institutions, young people may hesitate to engage in councils or protests for fear of backlash.** Gender norms add another layer, with young women activists facing additional scrutiny in conservative circles.



Understanding the Law on Youth (08/L-264)

Law No. 08/L-264 on Youth, adopted in July 2024, establishes the legal basis for youth participation, empowerment, and institutional support. The law defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 and affirms their right to self-organize, engage in decision-making, and access institutional support.

The right to self-organization

The law guarantees the right of young people, defined as those aged 15 to 29, to **freely organize in youth organizations, informal groups, and other social structures**. This means **Serbian youth in Kosovo can establish and join organizations that advocate for their rights, promote activism, and address community challenges**.

The law explicitly prohibits central and local authorities from interfering with this right, except in cases explicitly defined by law. Additionally, **young people are entitled to access information on all matters relevant to them, including youth strategies, policies, and budget allocations that impact their future**. This provision ensures transparency and accountability, empowering youth with the knowledge necessary for meaningful civic engagement.

Youth representation in decision-making

To guarantee youth participation in public affairs, the law establishes formal youth councils at both the national and local levels.

The Central Youth Council serves as a **national advisory body, responsible for identifying youth needs, advocating for their interests, and proposing initiatives for improving youth engagement**.

The Council has an advisory, advocacy, and monitoring role, and its membership must reflect diverse representation, including non-majority communities, rural youth, youth with disabilities, and marginalized groups. The council operates with financial support from the Youth Development Agency, though it can also receive external funding that must not compromise its independence.

At the municipal level, **Local Youth Councils** ensure youth participation in local decision-making processes. These **councils collaborate with municipal authorities, contributing to the design and evaluation of local youth policies**. Each council is democratically established, ensuring inclusive representation, and municipalities are required to financially support their functioning. These structures provide Serbian youth with direct access to local governance, allowing them to advocate for their rights and influence policies affecting their communities.



THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Institutional support for youth engagement

The law mandates several institutions to support youth participation and ensure the implementation of youth policies:

The State Youth Commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, is responsible for setting national youth priorities, ensuring inter-institutional coordination, and monitoring the implementation of youth policies. The Central Youth Council has an advisory role in its meetings.

The Ministry of Youth is responsible for drafting legislation, developing policies, and overseeing youth programs. It is also in charge of allocating resources for youth initiatives and ensuring that national youth strategies align with broader government policies.

The Youth Development Agency, operating under the Ministry, is an executive body responsible for implementing youth programs, supporting youth organizations, and promoting volunteerism. The agency also manages a youth database, making information on youth policies and initiatives publicly accessible.

Local public institutions, including municipal youth directorates, are required to appoint youth officials, develop local youth policies, and provide financial support for youth infrastructure.

This structured institutional framework ensures that youth policies are implemented effectively, providing young people with the necessary support to actively participate in society.

Youth centers as spaces for activism and development

The law mandates the establishment of youth centers, ensuring that every municipality has at least one youth center. These centers serve as safe, inclusive spaces where youth can engage in civic activities, social events, non-formal education, and personal development programs.

Youth organizations or organizations for young people are granted management rights for youth centers through a public selection process, ensuring that these spaces serve the needs of the youth community.

Additionally, municipalities can partner with neighboring municipalities to establish inter-municipal youth centers, promoting regional cooperation.

Financial support for these centers comes primarily from municipal budgets, with additional funding from central government programs and international donors.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Non-Formal education and volunteerism

Recognizing the importance of non-formal education, the law **promotes programs that enhance youth skills, increase employability, and encourage civic participation.** These programs cover areas such as civic activism, entrepreneurship, intercultural dialogue, and health education.

Youth volunteerism is officially recognized and supported by law. **Volunteer work must be formalized through agreements, ensuring that young people receive certificates that can improve their employment and educational opportunities.** The Youth Development Agency is responsible for issuing these certificates, guaranteeing that volunteer contributions are formally acknowledged.

Additionally, the law strictly prohibits the exploitation of youth volunteers, ensuring they work under safe conditions and that their well-being is protected. Volunteer work cannot replace formal employment, and young volunteers must not engage in activities that jeopardize their health or education.

Funding for youth initiatives

The law ensures **financial support for youth policies** through multiple funding sources:

- The Kosovo state budget, which must allocate resources for youth programs, councils, and infrastructure.
- Municipal budgets, which finance local youth initiatives, youth centers, and local youth councils.
- External funding from international donors, supporting programs related to youth participation, leadership training, and civic engagement.
- Alternative funding sources, including sponsorships, grants, and partnerships with the private sector, ensuring that youth organizations can secure financial support for their projects.

All financial resources allocated for youth policies must be publicly accessible, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Empowering Serbian youth to shape their future

The Law on Youth (08/L-264) guarantees Serbian youth equal access to programs, funding, and decision-making processes. By participating in youth councils, volunteering, and advocacy, they can influence policies, spark social change, and strengthen their communities. Youth participation is not only a legal right—it is a crucial investment in building a more inclusive society. By taking advantage of these opportunities, Serbian youth can step into leadership roles in community development, policy advocacy, and intercultural cooperation.

What Does This Mean for You?

If you are a young person from the Serbian community in Kosovo, the Law on Youth (08/L-264) gives you important rights and opportunities to get involved, make changes, and improve your community. This law is designed to support youth activism, make sure your voice is heard in decision-making, and provide resources for your ideas and initiatives.

1. You have the right to organize and speak up

This law guarantees that young people (ages 15-29) can freely organize, create youth groups, and start initiatives. **This means that if you see a problem in your community—like a lack of youth spaces, employment issues, or cultural projects not being supported—you can form a group, advocate for change, and demand action.**

Example: If you and your friends want to start a youth organization to promote Serbian culture, environmental awareness, or employment opportunities, you can legally register your organization and work on real projects without interference from the government.

2. You can participate in decision-making

Do you ever feel like decisions about youth are made without asking young people what they actually need? **This law creates official youth councils at the local and national levels so that young people can speak directly to policymakers and influence decisions.**

Example: Let's say your municipality is deciding how to spend the youth budget for the next year. If you are part of the Local Youth Council, you can attend meetings, propose ideas, and make sure money is spent on things that actually benefit young people—like funding for youth centers, skill-building workshops, or local events.



3. There is support for your activism

Sometimes, young people have great ideas but don't know where to start. The Ministry of Youth, the Youth Development Agency, and municipal youth offices are **required by law to help young people start initiatives, access funding, and connect with decision-makers.**

Example: If you want to organize a community project—like a language exchange program between Serbian and Albanian youth, a local art festival, or an employment fair—there are institutions that can help you with funding, space, and logistics.

4. You have access to youth centers

The law states that every municipality **must have at least one youth center, where young people can gather, organize events, and participate in educational programs.** These centers are meant to be safe, inclusive places for activism, learning, and socializing.

Example: If there is no youth center in your area, you and other young activists can demand that your municipality follows the law and creates one. If there is a youth center but it's not being used properly, you can push for better programs and management.

5. Volunteer work is officially recognized

Many young people want to gain experience, meet new people, and make a difference, but they also want something that will help them in their careers and education. The law ensures that **volunteer work is officially recognized, meaning you can get a certificate that proves your experience.**

Example: If you volunteer for an organization, participate in activism, or organize community projects, you can receive an official certificate from the Youth Development Agency. This document can be used when applying for jobs, scholarships, or university programs.

6. There is funding available for youth initiatives

One of the biggest challenges for young activists is finding money to support their projects. This law guarantees that **youth programs and initiatives will be financially supported through different sources,** including: Government funding, provided through state and municipal budgets, International donors, including organizations that fund youth activism and development programs, Private sector partnerships, where companies and businesses support youth projects through sponsorships or grants.

Example: if you want to start a community cleanup project, organize a youth exchange, or launch a small media platform for Serbian youth, you can apply for financial support from your municipality or through government youth programs.

Insights from the State Strategy for Youth 2024-2032

The State Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 aims to empower young people, enhance their participation, and address key challenges in education, employment, and civic engagement for a more inclusive society.

The Vision

All young people, without distinction, realize their needs and rights in a way that enables them to reach their full human potential and to participate actively in all spheres of society.

The strategic objective is

for young people to enjoy a healthy, safe, comfortable life, and contribute to the development of an inclusive and sustainable society.

Through three specific objectives, State Strategy for Youth focuses on three areas of action, summarized in three key words:

Empower, Serve and Engage.



The specific objectives of the State Strategy for Youth

- 1** Empowering or equipping young people with essential life skills for a successful and prosperous life.
- 2** Improving the availability, accessibility, and quality of services (online and live) and support provided to young people that effectively address their needs.
- 3** Improving youth policies and empowering young people in decision-making, policy-making, and implementation of programs aimed at society development.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Proposed activities and measures for improving youth policies and empowering young people in decision-making, policy-making, and implementation of programs aimed at society development.

Re-organization and empowerment of youth structures (such as the Central Youth Council, Local Youth Councils, youth centers, etc.) as well as youth NGOs.

- **Creation and functionalization** of youth structures foreseen by the legislation in force
- **Organization of training** for youth structures or organizations and organizations for young people
- Provision of **institutional grants for the development of youth structures** and organizations and organizations for young people
- **Promotion of youth structures** to student councils, student parliaments, as well as young people in rural areas, in order to encourage their participation in these structures

The establishment and operation of youth spaces (namely youth centers) in accordance with the established standards, accessible to all young people without exception

- Definition of **youth space standards** (including accessibility standards)
- Monitoring the implementation of these standards either during the determination of youth centers by the Municipality or by other parties
- Providing **support for the construction, rehabilitation, and/or functionalization of youth center buildings** according to developed standards

Strengthening or creating mechanisms to promote the participation of young people in decision-making, policy-making, and development of their community and raising the capacities of institutions (local and central) and young people for the application of models for the participation of young people in decision-making and executive processes

- **Evaluation of the mechanisms or current practices** applied to promote the participation of young people in decision-making
- **Promotion of youth participation in decision-making processes**
- Organization of **trainings for raising the capacities of institutions at the local level** for the application of models for the participation of young people
- Organization of continuous **dialogues with youth** on various issues **using digital platforms**

Encouraging, promoting, and increasing the quality of volunteering among young people

- Development of standards for the organization, recognition, and certification of voluntary work
Informing and training volunteer work providers to implement volunteer programs that specifically target marginalized youth (such as youth with disabilities, youth from rural areas, etc.)
- Organization of activities for the promotion and stimulation of volunteerism among young people, not only from the aspect of professional development but also personal and social

What Should Your Municipality Be Doing for You?

How the State Strategy for Youth 2024–2032 Supports Your Engagement, Voice, and Future

The State Strategy for Youth 2024–2032 isn't just a national vision—it comes with clear responsibilities for every municipality in Kosovo. Through the 2024–2026 Action Plan, municipalities are formally obligated to take concrete steps in supporting young people in their local communities. These obligations aren't optional or symbolic; they're designed to ensure that every young person—no matter their location or background—has access to real support, opportunities, and spaces for growth and participation.

From providing youth-friendly services and non-formal education to supporting youth councils, volunteering, and access to mental health services, municipalities play a central role in turning the goals of the strategy into visible, everyday improvements at the local level.

This section lays out the most important things your municipality is expected to do—so you know what to ask for, what to focus on, and where your rights and expectations stand.

Specific Objective of the State Strategy for Youth:



Empowering or equipping young people with essential life skills for a successful and prosperous life.

Planning and funding local life skills programs

Municipalities are expected to **organize public calls aimed at improving life skills among youth in identified priority areas**. They should clearly define which types of programs will be funded from the municipal budget and, where possible, include them in the municipality's annual work plan for implementing the Strategy. Coordination with central-level authorities is also required when deciding which programs receive local funding.

Ensuring quality and accountability in youth programs

Municipalities are **expected to participate in setting quality standards for non-formal education and youth work programs**. These standards should gradually be included in all public calls for organizations providing non-formal education. Municipalities must also report within the system on the types of programs offered and the number of youth who benefit from them.

Coordinating and funding youth awareness campaigns

Municipalities are **required to share the list of awareness campaigns and projects for and by young people that will be financed from the municipal budget, coordinate with the central level** in determining which campaigns are included, and, when possible, include these activities in the **annual work plan** for implementing the Strategy.

The specific objective of the State Strategy for Youth:

2

Improving the availability, accessibility, and quality of services (online and live) and support provided to young people that effectively address their needs.

Developing and applying protocols for youth support services

Municipalities are expected to **engage or participate in the development of protocols and procedures for the identification, treatment, and referral of various youth cases to specific services**, and to **support the implementation of existing protocols**. In addition, they must **provide opportunities for training** of teachers, municipal youth workers, youth directorates, and social workers to ensure these protocols are properly applied in practice.

Early identification and prevention

Municipalities are expected to **engage or participate in the development of manuals for the early identification of children and young people who may be at risk of harmful or disruptive behavior**. These manuals help local professionals recognize early warning signs and ensure timely support and referral to appropriate services.

Youth-Friendly spaces and access to services

Municipalities must allocate budget and **improve adequate and inclusive spaces where young people can access vital support services**. These include **services related to mental health, sexual health, prevention and treatment of substance abuse, and the prevention or reporting of harassment, bullying, and various forms of violence**. These spaces must be safe, accessible, and tailored to the needs of youth.

The specific objective of the State Strategy for Youth:

3

Improving youth policies and empowering young people in decision-making, policy-making, and implementation of programs aimed at society development.

Youth structures and Youth councils

Municipalities are **responsible for the establishment or functionalization of Local Youth Councils** as defined by legislation. They **must also provide financial support for the development and implementation of Local Youth Councils' activities.**

Youth center development

Municipalities are expected to participate in the **definition of youth space standards**, including accessibility requirements, to ensure youth centers are inclusive and functional. They must also **support the construction, rehabilitation, or functionalization of youth center buildings** in accordance with these standards. Once established, municipalities are responsible for **selecting youth organizations to manage the centers** through a transparent process and for **providing financial support** to implement each center's annual work plan and activities.

Youth participation in decision-making

Municipalities are required to **promote youth participation in decision-making processes** and to **actively engage young people** in shaping policies and initiatives that affect their lives and communities. This includes creating **opportunities for youth to take part** in local governance, consultations, and the development of municipal programs and plans.

Strengthening volunteer engagement

Municipalities are expected to **encourage, promote, and improve the quality of volunteering** among young people. They should **engage youth volunteers in activities financed by the municipality** and use the **national volunteer platform to register and report volunteer engagement**, ensuring visibility, accountability, and broader access to opportunities.



The change you want to see in your community—more support for youth, real spaces for participation, better services, honest decision-making—starts with people like you speaking up, getting organized, and taking action.

The Awakening Initiative is here to help make that possible.

Awakening is a project implemented by NGO CASA and supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). We work with young people from different communities to build leadership, strengthen youth voices, and support meaningful civic engagement, especially in places where youth are often overlooked or excluded from decision-making.

If you want to:

- Start something in your community
- Push for real change in your municipality
- Learn how to organize, advocate, or get involved
- Connect with others who care like you do

**We're here. And we'd love to support you.
Let's build something better—together.**



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