



## ARMENIA CIVICS FOR ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

# COMPEREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING IN ARMENIA

## FINAL REPORT



YEREVAN 2023



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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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ACE	Armenia Civics for Engagement
AMD	Armenian dram
APY	Armenian Progressive Youth
ARMSTAT	Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia
CAYEDMA	Comprehensive assessment of youth engagement in decision-making
CoE	Council of Europe
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Center
CSO	Civil society organization
DM	Decision making
EU	European Union
FB	Facebook
FG	Focus group
HRDO	Office of the Human Rights Defender
ICHD	International Center for Human Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDP	International Development Partner
IT	Information Technology
KEI	Key expert interview
KII	Key informant interview
LG	Local government
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus other
MESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport
NA	National Assembly
NEET	Not in education and not in employment

NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PH	Project Harmony
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RA	Republic of Armenia
SC	Student Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YEDM	Youth Engagement in Decision-making

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Comprehensive Assessment of Youth Engagement in Decision Making (CAYEDMA) was commissioned by the International Center for Human Development in July 2022 with the purpose to identify the strengths, gaps, challenges and opportunities of youth engagement in decision-making. This study rests on the findings from the Armenia Youth Situational Analysis conducted by Making Cents in 2019 (Making Cents, 2019). A considerable evidence base was collected regarding the situation of youth in Armenia, specifically following the 2018 Velvet revolution. However, the need for updated evidence was imperative in the context of the major social-political events that significantly affected Armenia in the recent five years. Three important time-periods were identified for the present study, namely, the Velvet Revolution of 2018, the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh in the fall of 2020, and the subsequent military clashes on the border of the country having resulted in palpable security threats. CAYEDMA aimed to examine how and to what extent the mentioned events have affected youth aspirations and readiness to engage in decision-making processes in Armenia, how their agency and beliefs get manifested in these processes and how young people choose to engage in them. The study provides policy recommendations to key national, local and international stakeholders for effectively engaging youth in decision-making.

The USAID’s framework of Positive Youth Development (PYD) was used as an underlying analytical framework to identify the key assets, manifestations of agency and youth contributions, as well as the key features of the enabling environment that characterize youth engagement in decision making in Armenia. Within this framework, the qualitative research methodology was employed to provide analysis of young people’s experiences and views vis-à-vis PYD domains on one hand, and an analysis of how key stakeholders perceive and practice engaging young people in decision making on the other.

The study followed a mixed-method approach, combining secondary quantitative data review and qualitative methods of primary data collection to obtain rich insights on youth profile and their engagement in decision making. The following methods were used to collect data:

- a. a comprehensive literature and desk review
  - o The desk review was carried out to identify (a) the profile of Armenian youth, based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, gender, area of residence, education, employability and vulnerability status; b) YEDM practices vis-à-vis the PYD conceptual framework; c) political, institutional and funding arrangements, including the government’s level of commitment to establishing a favorable environment for engaging youth in decision making; d) the current youth policies and practices in Armenia.
- b. semi-structured key informant and key expert interviews (individual, dyadic and triadic);

- Twenty-four KIIs were held with the representatives of key public agencies responsible for implementation and monitoring of youth policies; university student councils; a CSO representing an ethnic minority in Armenia; two CSOs targeting gender issues and women’s rights; and eight international development partners.
- Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with two special youth groups namely those returning from the 44-day war and those representing LGBTQ+ communities.
- c. focus group discussions with youth and civil society organizations.
  - twenty-two focus groups with over two hundred young people aged 15-29 in Yerevan and the selected urban and rural communities of Syunik and Armavir were conducted. Additionally, three special groups are identified among youth that included youth with disabilities, youth from ethnic minorities and youth displaced from Nagorno Karabakh.
  - Eight FG discussions were conducted with the representatives of the civil society organizations and with the representatives of the public councils and local governance bodies. Twenty-seven representatives from CSOs targeting their activities for youth participated in six FG discussions.

## Key Findings

The findings in this study regarding the **definitions of youth and youth engagement in the decision-making** may be used as a departure point for the national policy makers in their actions to develop the policy and regulatory framework. **The findings regarding the definitions of youth** indicated at the need for a broader, more holistic approach to defining youth in the Armenian context. The review of the policy documents in Chapter IV showed that the provisional definition of youth adopted in the RA Draft State Strategy on Youth 2021-2025, *which is persons between the age range of 13-30 transitioning from adolescence to adulthood*, may be the gateway to definition of youth essential for ensuring the legal protection of the target groups. Given the level of vulnerability of youth with regard to their backgrounds, identities, socio-economic statuses and various experiences safeguarding them through legal provisions will indeed be necessary. The views collected from the target participants reflected the multi-dimensional approach to defining youth and showed how the complexity of youth may be reflected in their experiences, opinions, backgrounds, identities and beliefs, as well as the diversity of their transitions and pathways. The young people in Armenia view the concept of youth as composed of various factors, including both the illusive factor of the age (such as, youth maturity at various age), youth characteristics, and the importance of their transitional period. Moreover, different social groups prioritized different factors when talking about youth. While there seemed to be insignificant differences in the perceptions among youth from different locations, the differences among various age groups and vulnerable groups were quite essential. For these groups, the opportunities to exercise their rights and the capacity to manifest their identities were equally important in their definitions of youth.

The perceptions and opinions of young people about what youth encompasses are closely tied with their understanding of **engagement in the decision-making**. The experiences, backgrounds and identities of young people as a heterogeneous group appear to be strongly affecting their understanding of and attitudes to YEDM. Three elements were considered essential for youth to meaningfully participate, namely, their rights and responsibilities, independence and mutual partnership with adults, and these would determine the degree of their participation in the DM at the identified levels (family, community and state). **The findings reveal that the perceptions of youth about YEDM appear to be consistent with the elements in the PYD framework**, which emphasizes an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults in the decision-making. This could be another important aspect for consideration for the national policy-makers at present.



Judging from the available draft strategic documents, the government intends to develop the framework of YEDM moving away from purely awareness raising towards more proactive participation. In case this intention remains, adopting an all-inclusive approach to participation would mean taking into account the variety of views about YEDM as expressed by the target youth in this study.

The findings in the **domain of Assets** appeared to be consistent with those in the desk review. Largely, both young people and stakeholders working with them (e.g., community leaders, educational institutions) reported about the **lack of necessary competencies** such as civic skills, communication, negotiation and advocacy skills and fairly **lower degree of awareness of the platforms, spaces and channels** that would enable their engagement in the decision-making processes at the state level more than at the community level. that would allow young people to meaningfully participate in the decision-making. These findings were in line with those in the USAID's Youth Situation Analysis Report, according to which young people were ill-formed about their civic rights and responsibilities, as well as about decision-making processes at state institutions (Making Cents, 2019). This finding may signal about the **relevance and efficiency of the programs** that are being implemented by the formal and non-formal institutions in developing the competencies of youth.

The findings related to the **domain of Agency**, as expressed in youth perceptions of their own self-efficacy, positive beliefs about the future and expectations of engagement, seemed to have confirmed the available evidence reviewed in Chapters II and V. In their majority, the future plans of young people included furthering their education (most frequent among 15-24 age group), as well as getting a better employment (in the older age group). This finding was consistent with that in the USAID's Youth Situation Analysis Report (Making Cents, 2019). One of the aims of this study was to look at how the Velvet Revolution, COVID-19 pandemic and 44-day war have affected youth aspirations and readiness to engage in decision-making in Armenia and how the youth exercise their agency for their engagement. Several trends observed in the present study appeared to be strongly affecting overall intentions of young people. Specifically, the **concerns of the young people about their own future, the high level of uncertainty and the overall instability in the aftermath of the 44-day war** seemed to be the factors affecting youth agency. These factors appeared to lead to restricted contribution among all groups of youth, exacerbated by the decreasing level of trust towards both their communities and the state.

With reference to the **social contexts**, the majority of the findings which play instrumental role in the YEDM engagement also got confirmed to some extent. In many instances, often irrespective of the residence type and age, the overall tendency prevailed according to which males (fathers, grandfathers, brothers) would play a more decisive roles in their families and their communities. At the same time, however, the second trend became observed according to which the diversity of families mattered in the overall decision-making, with families becoming more open towards their younger members. Several other factors appeared to be affecting youth agency at the family level, which were observed for different groups in this study. For the participants of the 44-day war a certain shift was mentioned towards a higher degree of trust towards them in their families. The young people with disabilities, in their majority shared the views about the consultative nature of their families, yet mentioned about the excessive care and hinderance of their family towards them in certain situations, mostly related to their jobs and education. Young people from the ethnic communities appeared to be most affected by their family decisions. At the **community level**, a distinct factor among the youth in the older age group affecting their agency was the **disposition of the young people towards the leaders and the employees of the local government**. **Trust** was seen as one of the crucial factors that affected the engagement of youth. Frustrations of youth, most often of younger groups in the 15-19 age group, about not being valued

and heard by adults in general and decision-makers in particular often led to disengagement from DM processes. The **absence of the consultative dialogue** due to a number of reasons, including the mutual trust among the youth and the decision-makers was among one of the factors mentioned in the discussions

The findings from the focus group discussions regarding the domain of **Contribution** appeared to have confirmed those from the desk review about the **motivations** of young people and the ways they engage in decision-making. **Self-goals** and **self-development** were evident as motivational for youth. In many discussions, youth noted that **volunteering** specifically affected their future plans, helped with career opportunities and expanded their network. It could be inferred that youth may be motivated to engage in DM when their **beliefs about civic action and the potential change** that they can bring into their personal lives and in their communities were meaningful to them. Youth valued such meaningful and intentional engagement opportunities where they would feel their voices would be heard and valued. In this regard, their views about volunteering in crisis situations seemed to strongly prevail over other engagement forms. For youth representing LGBTQ+ groups their motivations may be directly related to the **expression of their identities**. The identity development and self-expression within this group played a large role in the definitions of youth and engagement in DM in general. These findings appear to be connected with the concept of meaningful youth engagement, which is one of the central aspects in this study. Within CAYEDMA, **meaningful youth engagement** was considered as a **participatory** process, when youth have the knowledge, information and skills to engage throughout the decision-making processes and adults are ready and willing to **share power** with them. Such meaningful and participatory process often implied the importance of effective **feedback mechanisms**, such as building and maintaining communication with youth on their participation and its outcomes that would likely impact their future decisions to participate.

**Traditional forms of participation**, such as participation in elections and in formal politics, were mentioned as being important and practiced by youth. The participation in the formal politics, for instance, was mentioned as one of the avenues for younger people following the Velvet Revolution. Despite the reported decrease of the number of young people in their activities, **CSOs** were seen as viable platforms for engagement for some youth more than for others. For a more vulnerable youth, such as those with disabilities and from LGBTQ+ communities, CSOs were still the channels and spaces of their engagement. One of the findings in this study was the **decline in the digital participation** among youth. In their majority, the youth were skeptical about the value of the social media and/or digital platforms and preferred to use other pathways to raise voice about a community issue, such as directly approaching the person who may be in charge and or may have respective competencies. A significant factor that affected the use of social media and digital space in general was attributed to its distrust following the 44-day war events, and particularly the fake news that were spread through social media. In the smaller communities the prevalence of personal networks appeared to be the most common form of participation.

In **the domain of Enabling Environment**, the findings show that the **absence of an overarching policy targeting youth continues to be one of the main priorities of the policy-makers**. Although various interpretations were reported about the relevance of the law at present by different stakeholders, the state appears to be committed to its developing as the foundational document for several strategic documents. The process, however, did not seem to be as transparent and inclusive, since apart from a limited number of stakeholders (such as IDPs and some CSOs), very few others seemed to be involved in the working process. Additionally, the limited capacity and number of the public bodies in the government responsible for youth-related policy development and implementation were mentioned as challenges towards the implementation of

the law once it was developed and adopted. Next, the findings showed that the **institutional platforms** existent at present for youth engagement, **such as youth councils and youth centers, were considered as rather ineffective due to the lack of working mechanisms** that would allow for these institutions to function independently, without being susceptible to the changes in the individual public officials. These findings were in line with those reviewed in the literature and secondary data analysis in Chapter V.

The **role of the CSOs**, as one of the largest stakeholders in YEDM, in building the skills of youth was confirmed in this study, although it was one of the contradictory findings in the context of the available skills and resources that the youth possess. Both the mapping of the CSOs in the desk review and the FG discussions showed that many CSOs offer youth trainings to address career and job-related skills, negotiation, communication and critical thinking skills along with subject-specific topics of IT skills, environment and a few others. However, the soft skills were considered as the ones that young people needed the most for more effective engagement in DM. The role of the CSOs in the provision of **safe spaces** for youth was confirmed in this study. The provision of such spaces is especially significant for socially vulnerable youth, such as young people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, and to some extent young women. The presence of healthy relationship related to **bonding and kinship and peer networks** typical of the Armenian contexts appeared to affect the participatory behavior of the young people in their families and communities, which was another confirmation to the available data in this study.

## Key Recommendations

### To the national policy-makers:

1. Adopt an all-inclusive approach to the definition of youth in the policy and regulatory framework that reflect both age-driven and social aspects of youth and their forms of participation.
2. Hold national consultations with both youth and relevant experts on how the apathy and withdrawal from civic and political engagement of young people, a result of the 44-Day War and its aftermath, can be challenged and what relevant mechanisms can be streamlined into youth policies and programs.
3. Ensure engagement of youth from all segments of the population, including marginalized and otherwise vulnerable young people, in all stages of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs, policies, and investment of resources.
4. Create and use youth-friendly feedback mechanisms to respond to youth engagement regardless of its outcome at various levels of decision making.
5. Involve youth as valuable partners to determine the best methods and mechanisms for how they would best like to be engaged in the decision-making in educational institutions and community and national levels.
6. Conduct extensive consultations with all the relevant stakeholders and youth primarily on the development of the law on youth and the strategic documents. Incorporate feedback mechanisms on the results of these consultations and communicate to the stakeholders about how they were used, as well as about the outcomes and impact of their participation.
7. Ensure that the meetings, consultations and activities regarding youth policies and programs are adapted and use a clear and accessible language for young people to understand and relate to.
8. Ensure effective coordination of youth programs and services offered by the state, international development partners, CSOs and other relevant entities to streamline the investment of resources into the youth field.

9. Collect and, when necessary, produce the evidence base for the design and implementation of youth-related policies and programs and make it available for all the interested bodies and individuals.
10. Expand the institutional structures that are responsible for the design and implementation of youth policies by allocating sufficient human, physical and financial resources and ensure capacity building of public authorities.
11. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the civic education programs at schools, both curricular and extracurricular, and incorporate the results in the development of the new curriculum reform.
12. Review the concept of the youth centers as 'safe and participatory spaces' for the youth to explore and develop their own ideas and meet decision-makers. These should allow young people to openly express their ideas and themselves without creating barriers to any young people.

**To the LG bodies:**

13. Ensure youth-focused effective communication channels, both online and offline, and publicize the ways how young people can get engaged, including the places where young people are frequent (schools, universities, youth centers, CSOs).
14. Develop communication capacities of the LG bodies with youth through examining the best strategies of communication with the target youth groups. Employ a variety of communication strategies (including physical, digital, school-level, alternative community premises) for youth of various age and social groups depending on what works for each of the groups the best. Adopt a user-friendly language and communication strategies that would enable the youth to engage more frequently with the community-related issues.
15. Conduct and maintain a mapping of youth organizations and other informal initiatives in order to improve the coordination of the youth engagement activities with no exclusion of diverse youth groups.
16. Ensure involvement of diverse groups of youth into the planning, implementation and monitoring of community programs and activities, such as five-year community development plans.
17. Ensure that youth engagement encompasses levels ranging from family to policy, without exclusion of one level from another, but rather in tandem.
18. Provide safe and convenient meeting spaces for youth beyond the regional and community official premises and be open to meeting youth in them, which will allow for an open dialogue and reflection.

**To the CSOs:**

19. Assess the effectiveness and relevance of youth capacity building programs so that they promote youth understanding of the technical content, the socio-political context, and the stakeholders with whom they are engaging. Ensure learning and practice contexts where youth can apply the capacities they have gained.
20. In the programmatic activities, aim to target broader segments of youth, including "unorganized youth", i.e., youth not representing any particular organizations, as well as young people with fewer opportunities. This will allow to go beyond the "silo" approach to working with the same community of youth.
21. Ensure that the programmatic activities directed at youth equally target their working with their families and communities.

22. Facilitate the development of partnerships between communities and/or government and youth groups so that youth can engage in community work and have opportunities to volunteer.
23. Establish partnerships between youth organizations and local and national government to promote mentorship programs for youth.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

---

The Comprehensive Assessment of Youth Engagement in Decision Making (CAYEDMA) was commissioned by the International Center for Human Development in July 2022 and with the aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of youth engagement in decision-making processes in Armenia. This task is driven by the terms of reference of the assignment developed within the Armenia Civics for Engagement (ACE) program, a USAID-funded project that aims “to educate youth on the importance of engaging in civic activities and creating pathways for them to do this” (see the Terms of Reference in Appendix 1). The project rests on the goals of USAID’s Armenia set out in the 2020-2025 USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy<sup>1</sup>. In relation to the goals outlined in the above strategy, the ACE prioritizes the goals leading to the increased citizen engagement for democratic consolidation through “effective engagement of citizens, particularly women, youth, and traditionally marginalized populations in the governance of their country through activities to strengthen inclusive political processes, civic education, media, and civil society” (subgoals of 1.2.2 and 1.2.4).

The findings and recommendations in this report can inform the relevant policymakers, given the ongoing youth policy reform. Specifically, the analysis of the findings and the recommendations can inform the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport in its current efforts to amend the regulatory framework. The report will provide up-to-date evidence to civil society organizations and activist groups, international organizations, experts and youth workers in planning, adjusting and implementing their youth-targeted actions. Most importantly, the findings of the report will be used by the ACE consortium to inform their programming and project implementation.

Following the Introduction, Chapter II describes the conceptual framework of this study, namely the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework and its components, and explains how the study is shaped by this framework. Chapter III includes the review of the key concepts, i.e., *youth and youth engagement in decision making*, which set the ground for this study. The review of these terms is done both in relation to the available literature and to the policy documents. Chapter IV discusses the research design and the methodology that inform this study; the limitations to the study are discussed in Chapter VII. The key findings of the desk review are discussed in Chapter V and those gained from the qualitative study are reviewed in Chapter VI. Chapter VIII concludes this report and specifies the recommendations to the national and local decision-makers, as well as to the civil society actors.

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### CAYEDMA BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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Guided by the above-mentioned goals of the ACE project and the 2020-2025 USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy, the purpose of CAYEDMA is to identify the strengths, gaps, challenges and opportunities of youth engagement in decision-making in order to:

- a) assess the capacity and commitment of key national and local stakeholders, including both governmental and civil society organizations for effectively engaging youth in decision-making;
- b) provide a baseline analysis of the support for participation of youth in decision making;

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<sup>1</sup> The overall goal of the USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy is “to build Armenia’s capacity and further its commitment to self-reliance so that it seizes the opportunity to strategically transition to a more inclusive, democratic, and economically resilient partner”. See [the full document](#) for further details.

- c) provide robust evidence for prioritizing key policy areas for intervention to enhance participation of youth in decision-making processes, and
- d) provide policy recommendations for advocating for effective resource allocation and management.

Guided by the aims of the study and the PYD conceptual framework, the following research questions were designed for this study:

1. How does the Armenian society perceive “youth” and “youth (civic) engagement in decision-making” after the Velvet Revolution and in the post-2020 realities?
2. What are the opportunities and the barriers for young people to engage in decision-making in Armenia in the current environment? How are these different across social contexts and different groups?
3. What forms of participations are manifested in the current practice of youth engagement in decision-making processes? To what extent are the identified forms effective?
4. What motivations do youth report for their engagement in decision-making? How can these be leveraged to maintain/ improve youth engagement?

CAYEDMA was carried out in the background of several major social-political events having significantly affected Armenia in the recent five years, namely the so-called Velvet Revolution of 2018, the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh in the fall of 2020<sup>2</sup>, and the subsequent military clashes on the border of the country having resulted in palpable security threats. The Velvet Revolution in April of 2018 and the following political transition were turning points for the Armenian society. An unprecedented number of young people was observed participating in the national protests throughout the country, with marked participation of youth living in rural and remote areas (Making Cents, 2019). Despite the increased youth participation in the revolution, reviews show that many of them felt disengaged due to the lack of subsequent actions to maintain engagement and/or use the platforms to channel their participation. For instance, the findings of USAID’s Youth Situational Analysis (Making Cents, 2019) indicate that the decision-makers did not leverage their potential for engagement, despite the willingness of the youth to remain engaged in the civic and political processes. At the same time, young people in Armenia report being interested and willing to engage in civic and political activities, if they are given the necessary spaces, skills and tools to do so (e.g. CRRC, 2021; Yesayan & Yevdokimova, 2022).

Despite the fading momentum from the revolution, the need for youth development is acknowledged nationally and supported internationally. Indeed, the potential for youth engagement is acknowledged by the Government of Armenia, in its Strategic Program 2021-2026 (Government of Armenia, 2019), which sets out the vision for more inclusive youth policies and aims to increase the social, political, civic, socio-economic and cultural participation of young people<sup>3</sup>, an intention is well-received by its international partners. Pertinent to the development of youth, USAID’s 2020-2025 Country Strategy<sup>4</sup> aims to support youth by educating them on the “importance of engaging in civic activities and creating pathways for them to do this”. The EU remains one of the largest international donors, with many of its programs directed at youth in the areas of education and

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<sup>2</sup> The escalation of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh in September, 2020 is referred to as “44-Day War” further in the text.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed analysis of this document is given Chapter III below.

<sup>4</sup> The overall goal of the USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy is “to build Armenia’s capacity and further its commitment to self-reliance so that it seizes the opportunity to strategically transition to a more inclusive, democratic, and economically resilient partner”. See the full document for further details.

employment. Since 2018, Armenia has been part of four large-scale €1,9 million-worth EU4Youth grant projects targeting various groups of youth to support their employability and education, as well as capacity building (EU4Youth, 2021).

Next, like elsewhere in the world, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in early spring of 2020 have had significant impact on the major sectors in Armenia. The pandemic disrupted many of the ongoing reforms in the country and impacted the economic prospects, the labour market, and the educational continuity. The younger people in schools and universities seemed to have been affected due to the emerging digital divide of technological use, potentially leading to widening the pre-existing economic and educational gaps (USAID, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). In addition, heightened rates of stress and mental health issues were reported among young people in Armenia due to the pandemic (Pantea & Makharadze, 2021).

The detrimental effects of the pandemic were magnified by the 44-day war, which ended by signing a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement on November 9. The destructive consequences of the war, the death of 3,800 Armenian soldiers (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2021), mostly young conscripts; more than two hundred persons missing in action (Human Rights Defender's Office, 2022); the forced displacement of the affected population both from Nagorno Karabakh and communities bordering with Azerbaijan (IFRC, 2021); the ensuing political instability in the country and the decreasing public trust in governing authorities (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2022) by all likelihood have induced insecurities toward the future across the population. The study of youth mental health by the CRCC in 2020-21 shows that as many as 58% of young people were seriously concerned about their future. Among the reasons for such uncertainty were the 2020 conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 (CRCC, 2022). A recent public opinion poll by the Center for Insights Research similarly shows that 46% of the surveyed young people aged 18-35 have quite a negative outlook towards the country's future directions (Center for Insights Research, 2022).

In this light, CAYEDMA will examine how and to what extent the mentioned events have affected youth aspirations and readiness to engage in decision-making processes in Armenia, how their agency and beliefs get manifested in these processes and how young people choose to engage in them. Although there is considerable evidence collected regarding the situation of youth in the country (e.g., Armenia Youth Situational Analysis by Making Cents in 2019), the need for more updated evidence given the current reality is more than urgent. This report aims to address this gap as set out in its goals above.

## CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

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The USAID's framework of **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** is used as a conceptual framework for this report due to its holistic nature described in more detail below and the fact that it offers an evidence-driven and practical base to youth development (Hinson et al., 2016). According to the framework, **positive youth development** is identified as an overarching approach to developing competencies, skills and attitudes of young people, so that they develop holistically and reach their potential. As such, youth is viewed as "having assets to be supported, nurtured, and developed, rather than as having problems to be solved and risks to be managed (Shek Daniel & Yu, 2011). The framework suggests that through building the potential and agency of the youth and supporting them to be active partners in development efforts, the youth will "thrive as adults, enjoy good health, succeed economically, and make meaningful contributions to their communities" (ibid).



Learning Power Initiative defines PYD as the following:

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*Positive youth development (PYD) engages youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems (Hinson et al., 2016, p.21).*

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As seen from the above definition, PYD encompasses the interactions between the youth at the individual level with their families, peers, community, schools, workplaces, the broader level of government institutions, and society as a whole. The framework is set as an ecosystem where each of the above levels is supported and aligned, so that they effectively lead to a positive impact on youth across sectors such as education, economy, healthcare and governance.

As an approach, PYD is informed by the outcomes from a number of studies examining certain features impacting youth positive development. PYD goes back to the field of prevention efforts in the programming, which targeted single problems faced by the youth, such as teen pregnancy and abuse. Such an approach, however, was perceived by the practitioners, policymakers and international actors as limited in scope, and youth positive asset development was brought into focus. Over time, the positive development approach evolved into a holistic approach, which examined protective factors in youth development. Such factors included family support, caring adults and peers, a sense of belonging and self-esteem, future aspirations, and engagement in school and community allowing youth to experience more effective developmental outcomes (Institute of Medicine, 2002).

Earlier studies on the impact of PYD-guided approach to community programs in the United States and other countries, indicate several such outcomes that are summarized below. In order for youth to acquire positive developmental assets, they need:

- Structure and limits that are developmentally appropriate and that recognize adolescents' increasing social maturity and expertise;
- Physical and psychological safety and security;
- Opportunities to experience supportive relationships and to have good emotional and moral support;
- Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging;
- Opportunities to be exposed to positive morals, values, and positive social norms;
- Opportunities to be efficacious, to do things that make a real difference and to play an active role in the organizations themselves;
- Opportunities for skill building, including learning how to form close, durable human relations with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors, as well as to acquire the skills necessary for school success and successful transition into adulthood;
- Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources (Institute of Medicine, 2002, p. 117).

PYD is built on four distinct, yet overlapping domains (see Figure 1). The four domains set the foundations for the development of policies and practices towards reaching a vision of healthy, productive and engaged youth (Hinson et al., 2016, pp. 21–22).

- **Assets:** Youth have the necessary resources, skills and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Agency:** Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Contribution:** Youth is engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities' positive development.
- **Enabling environment:** Youth are surrounded by an environment that develops and supports their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities, and strengthens their ability to avoid risks and to stay safe, secure, and be protected and live without fear of violence or retribution.

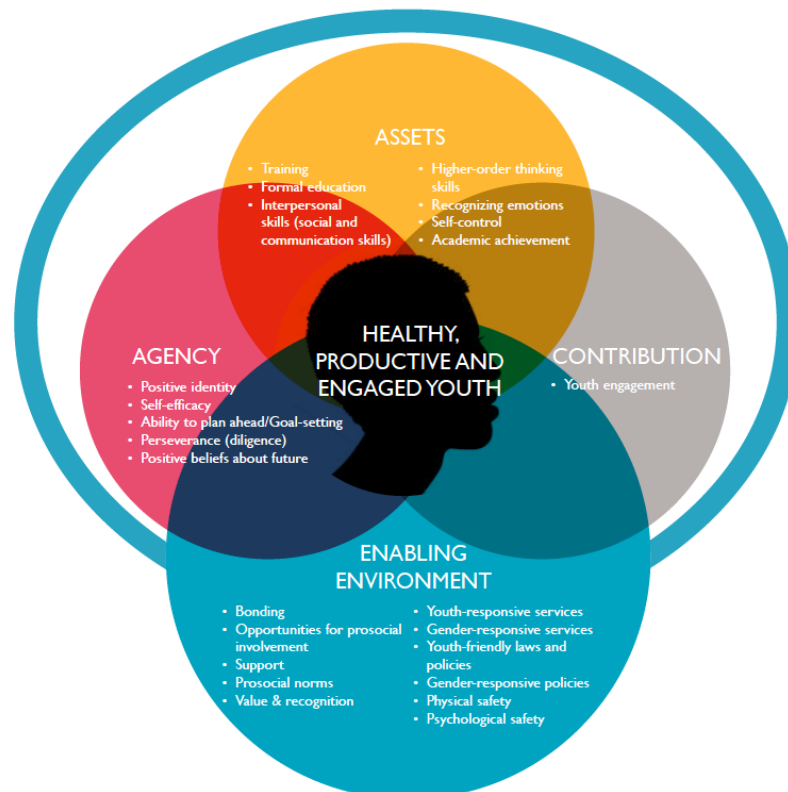


FIGURE 1 PYD MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK. SOURCE: HINSON ET AL., 2016, PP. 21–22

The four domains of the framework encompass seven features that are essential for youth programming, including skill building, youth engagement and contribution, healthy relationships and bonding, belonging and membership, positive norms and expectations, safe space, and access to youth age-specific services. Similar to the domains, these features are discernable in the evidence base, provided by the Institute of Medicine referred to above. In their programming approach to PYD-guided projects, USAID offers an additional level to the framework, which is termed as “construct”, as a means of observing and measuring the operationalization of the above features within the four domains (See Appendix 2 for the link to the full document). The extract from the framework illustrates the domain of Agency as an example (for a detailed review, see Hinson et al., 2016).

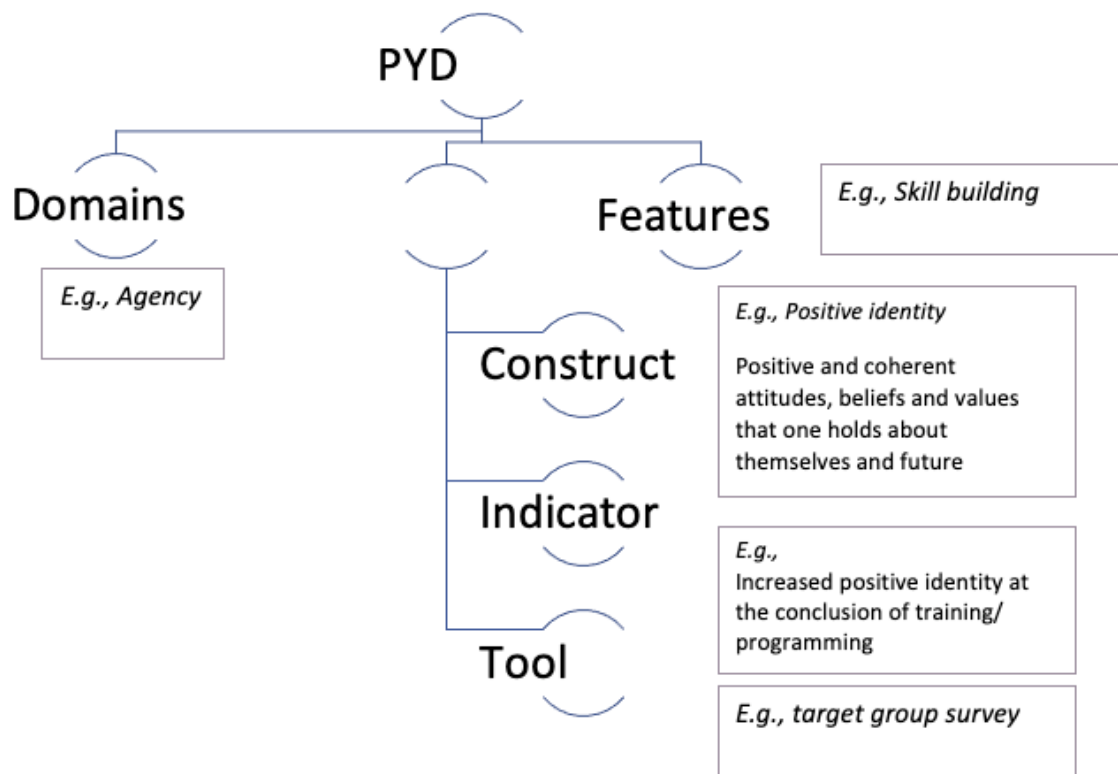


FIGURE 2 PYD FRAMEWORK, FEATURES AND CONSTRUCTS. ADAPTED FROM HILSON, 2016, P.21 AND P.7

**CAYEDMA will use the PYD framework as the underlying analytical framework to identify the key assets, manifestations of agency and youth contributions, as well as the key features of the enabling environment that characterize youth engagement in decision making in Armenia. Meanwhile, wherever necessary, the relevant literature was reviewed to enhance the analytical framework with additional evidence from academic and policy research.**

## CHAPTER III: DEFINING YOUTH AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

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### DEFINING YOUTH

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The target group of CAYEDMA is youth, and therefore, it is essential to define this group and set the boundaries for this study. There seems to be **no universal approach to defining youth**. Traditionally, youth is used in relation to persons in their transition from “a dependent childhood to independent adulthood”, or “as individuals that are in the process of becoming an adult member of society” (Walther et al., 2002, p. 47). Quite often, **age** is used as the main gateway to this definition. Age-based definitions of youth are mainly built on the universal stages of development borrowed from developmental psychology. This approach, however, views young people as a homogeneous group in a certain age category. Although clear and distinct, the definition of youth from the perspective of biological age ignores the holistic nature of youth represented by their diverse backgrounds, profiles, interests, needs and challenges. Furlong (2013, p.2), for instance, draws on the sociological tradition to defining youth and argues that **experiences of youth** are central to youth definitions and cannot be ignored. According to Furlong, **youth may be defined** as a life phase characterized by “semidependence”, or the transition from childhood to independent adulthood. This transitional period into adulthood and independence is marked by a certain level of vulnerability for youth in terms of their various backgrounds, and socioeconomic positions, but also their experiences, identities, forms of self-expression, values and beliefs. Although age may be a distinct indicator for the definition of youth (e.g., the legal maturity age), it is insufficient to determine the transition of individuals to adulthood. For instance, youth may be positioned in the same age category, however, their social contexts may be entirely different, such as with youth growing up in rural areas as opposed to those growing in urban areas in the same country; or youth from socio-economical lower backgrounds having to start working at an earlier age; or youth growing up in war conflicts as opposed to their counterparts in safer transitioning circumstances; or a considerable stratum of youth who may not have jobs, their own families and financial means to support themselves until the age of 30 or so. According to Roberts (2007, in Furlong, 2013), the transitional approaches to youth are not necessarily linear, but are socially constructed given the diversity of youth transitions from school to work, their family formation, housing and interrelations with the society in general.

The complexity of defining youth is reflected in policy making internationally, regionally and nationally to varying degrees, which is discussed in the section below.

### DEFINING YOUTH AS A TARGET GROUP IN POLICY MAKING AND PROGRAMMING

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Youth policies target various dimensions of youth lives relative to their education, employment, well-being and democratic participation. Targeting youth as a separate group is viewed as offering them **opportunities** to develop holistically and autonomously and become active members of society. In fact, the formative years of transitioning to adulthood may be significant for youth not only in terms of their biological growth and development, but also for the development of life skills that impact their success in education, family, health, work and the society overall. Furthermore, youth policies enable youth to transform from “development objects” to “agents of change” in their own lives and that of the communities and larger society they live in. Youth may benefit from a growing sense of empowerment, from the exposure to diversity and

plurality of other people, from better opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in the political and social issues of their countries and communities, from developing their identities and roles and number of others (UNFPA, 2018).

A number of international policy documents in youth policy making and programming affecting similar practices in Armenia, as well as national policy documents were reviewed to identify how the decision makers define youth as a distinct policy group (Appendix 3 ). It seems that there is a **variety of definitions of youth**. The majority of documents mostly **focus on the age-based definitions of youth** and their categorization. USAID defines youth as individuals aged between 10 and 29<sup>5</sup>. The Youth Partnership, a partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe, defines youth as persons falling between 15-29, serving the statistical purposes of the Members, with some variations in the Erasmus+ program (age range between 13-30) and youth sector activities of the Council of Europe encompassing youth between 18-30 (Youth Partnership, 2019). The definition of the United Nations is also largely age-bound, as it defines youth as persons between the age of 15 and 24, introduced in the General Assembly's 1981 resolution (United Nations, n.d.). This common UN approach is explained as a "statistically" unified approach for Member States for the purposes of assessing youth needs and ensuring youth development. However, this definition may vary in some UN agencies, given their specific mandates. Thus, UNICEF, through the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, accepts the definition of youth as overarching with that of "the child", whereby the "child" is the person under the age of 18. Such an approach is explained by the necessity to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of individuals within a wider age group considering that no similar document existed for youth as the target group. UNFPA identifies several age categories, such as adolescents, people between 10 and 19; young people between 10 and 24; and youth, individuals aged 15-24 (UNDESA, n.d.).

At the same time, almost all the above-mentioned actors tend to go beyond the age-bound definitions, adopting a more developmental and thereof, a more holistic approach of defining youth. Thus, USAID calls for broadening the scope of the definition beyond the developmental stages, and acknowledges the importance of including the diversity of social, emotional and cognitive skills of young people. The Positive Youth Development framework, which USAID has adopted as a fundamental approach to youth policy making and programming, includes such a vision. Youth Partnership (2019) initiative stresses the role of youth as agents of change. The World Bank (2007) focuses on the transitions, highlighting that young people may be **transitioning** in dimensions such as learning, working, migrating, staying healthy, forming families and exercising citizenship.

At the national level, there is no overarching youth policy, and youth policy making and programming is guided by the RA Government Program 2021-2025. The latter regards youth as a critical dimension of human capital development (p.71), yet no definition of youth is provided in the whole document. Since early 2022 up to the fall, many practitioners and decision makers considered the RA Draft State Strategy on Youth 2021-2025 as the main document specifying the youth-related policy in Armenia. It provided a provisional definition of youth: *persons between the age range of 13-30 transitioning from adolescence to adulthood*. This age band, however, includes two sub-brackets of 13-18 and 24-30, depending on the certain developmental characteristics. The lower age limit of 13 years old is justified in the document as being more effective for engaging young people in civic education programs, professional orientation and alike, as well as being internationally accepted for starting to work with youth. In addition, specific sectoral policies which have youth as target groups provide their own definitions. For instance, the Government Decree on Affordable Housing for

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>

Young Families (Government of Armenia, 2010) defines youth as citizens of Armenia aged 18-30. This definition is pertinent to this particular Decree and seems to consider the social and cultural dimension of youth transitioning to their adulthood. For more detailed discussion on the policy and regulatory framework see Chapter V, *Policy and regulatory framework: Review of the key policy and regulatory documents*.

Given the dynamic nature of youth and moving beyond the biological/chronological category, CAYEDMA defines youth as both a biological and a social construct that is shaped differently between contexts and time. Thus, the **working definition of youth**, is as follows:

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*Youth will be regarded as persons aged 13-30 transitioning into adulthood, recognized in their diversity and heterogeneity in the given social, political and economic setting.*

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This approach also underscores the situated nature of youth since the institutions, such as schools, the state, media, international and local organizations, and youth experts, all play an essential role in shaping the role and the nature of youth (Berrada, 2017).

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## DEFINING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

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### DEFINITIONS IN ACADEMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH

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Just like there is no common approach to defining youth, there is no unified approach to defining youth participation and engagement. Moreover, often the terms, such as “participation”, “engagement”, and “involvement”, are used interchangeably without a marked distinction. In youth research, the concept of *participation* seems to be broadly defined and includes a variety of aspects, such as the engagement of the youth in shaping their lives, co-shaping their immediate environments, such as schools and communities, with adults, and their efforts to influence decision-making processes (Spannring, 2008, p. 11).

One of the earlier approaches to the categorization of participation is Hart’s Ladder of Participation. According to Hart (1992), participation is considered a fundamental right of citizenship and refers to “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (p. 5). Although the overall framework, the ladder and the critical argument that it is impossible to ensure the robust participation of children in decision-making processes without gradual exposure to the practice of participatory activities and meaningful guidance from adults, have been developed towards ensuring children’s participation, they can be helpful for examining the relevant processes and activities for youth participation.



FIGURE 3: LADDER OF PARTICIPATION, HART (ADAPTED)

Certain criticism about Hart’s participation ladder refers to the linearity and the hierarchical nature of the structure. Cahill and Dadvank (2018), for instance, argue that middle levels of participation, such as “being assigned but informed” can still lead to meaningful participation<sup>6</sup>. Another dominant critique of youth participation seems to be embedded in the power domain of youth participation, whereby involvement of young people in decision making suggests another form of power exercise to them. Farthing (2012) contends that inviting young people “to participate” in decision making does not really empower them, but rather creates complacency with the (state) policy or service in question. According to him, youth participation is “a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them” (ibid, p.73). Drawing on this definition, the author provides a scope for how youth

<sup>6</sup> An example may be where in a project on sex reproductive health young people were assigned to be “simulated patients” for trainee doctors to practice issues related to sex, mental health and drugs. The authors discuss that such participatory practices were considered as meaningful and empowering for the participant youth. In later works on the model, Hart, indeed, notes that the model offers a “dialogue” rather than a hierarchy of actions.

participation can be justified in programmatic processes. **Four main justifications** are given, which are as follows:

- **A rights-based approach to participation.** Mainly driven by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation from this perspective means having the right participate in the decisions that affect their life.
- **Participation as a radical empowerment.** This includes participation as an opportunity to give power and chances to those young people who are considered marginalized or vulnerable or otherwise deprived of their voice.
- **Participation for efficiency in policy/practices.** From this perspective, young people are best positioned to know of their needs and opportunities that can inform policies and practices.
- **Developmental approach to participation.** This approach involves positive youth development where youth participation and their engagement in decision-making provide them with the social and emotional skills necessary to thrive as adults.

In this light, the definition proposed within the PYD framework seems to embed a holistic approach to defining youth engagement. At the core of it is the **shared power between the youth and adults**, i.e., young people appear to be active contributors and participants in both their own and their community lives. This definition encompasses a broader approach with multiple dimensions. It ties back to the holistic view of young people transitioning through various dimensions of their lives towards becoming active members of the society. This view is related to what Cahill & Dadvand (2018, p. 244) call the “lived dimension of participation”, which emphasizes the diversity of life trajectories of the young people. Young people are frequently viewed as “not-yet-ready for active participation in civic life”, as the transitional period is marked towards “becoming independent, becoming a citizen” (ibid). Such discourses are future-oriented and are rather marked by a deficit approach, as they do not seem to acknowledge the present competencies of youth and their possible contributions as active participants.

The proposed and adopted youth engagement approach within the PYD moves beyond this deficit view of youth involvement, as it recognizes and seeks:

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*to change the power structures that prevent young people from being considered experts in regard to their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities.*

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Given the above-mentioned definitions of youth engagement in decision making and the factors that affect it, CAYEDMA will adopt the operational definition in USAID’s Positive Youth Development Framework, (Hinson et al., 2016)<sup>7</sup>, as the latter encompasses all the above-mentioned aspects, namely the transitional

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<sup>7</sup> This report will primarily be guided by the term of youth engagement, with all the components discussed above. At the same time, it will not disregard the diversity of approaches to youth involvement, whether these are termed “engagement” or “participation”. Both of these terms may be used interchangeably depending on the original source. However, the above meaning will be the prevailing logic of this report.



nature of youth, their agency and potential for being agents of change, power relations with adults and influence (or lack of it) on decision making.

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*Meaningful youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally.*

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As mentioned above, CAYEDMA adopts the PYD definition of youth engagement, which is used interchangeably with both youth participation and youth civic engagement. Therefore, it is necessary to define the concept of **civic engagement** as well, as it will contribute to the adopted concept of youth engagement and in particular to its element of “meaningful engagement”. One of the simplest definitions to civic engagement is that it “describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p.242). UNICEF defines it as “individual or collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general” (Cho et al., 2020, p. 6). Such a definition can involve a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference (Youth.gov, n.d.). Thus, civic engagement emphasizes one particular aspect of engagement, i.e., engagement which affects social structures.

One of the helpful analytical tools to look at youth engagement in decision making is Silverman’s **Citizen Participation Continuum**. Although originally developed for community organizations to facilitate citizen participation in local, civic and policy decision-making processes, this continuum may also be helpful to identify the **levels** and **forms** of youth engagement in decision-making. The purpose of the continuum is to define the range of potential grassroots activities and the participatory outcomes that can be produced (Silverman, 2005). Silverman proposed two extreme forms of participation, **instrumental** and **grassroots**, suggesting that engagement in decision-making can be facilitated by community organizations in local, community, and policy levels.

Crowley and Moxon suggest that youth participation can “exclude the conventional forms of youth participation, that is voting in elections and membership of political parties, and include all forms of youth participation in decision making at a local, regional or national level that contain some kind of innovation or change in practice in response to an identified problem or trend” (Crowley and Moxon, 2017, p.21). **This definition goes in line with the approach in this report, whereby the conventional forms of participation, i.e., voting in elections and membership in political parties are not considered key activities reviewed herein.**

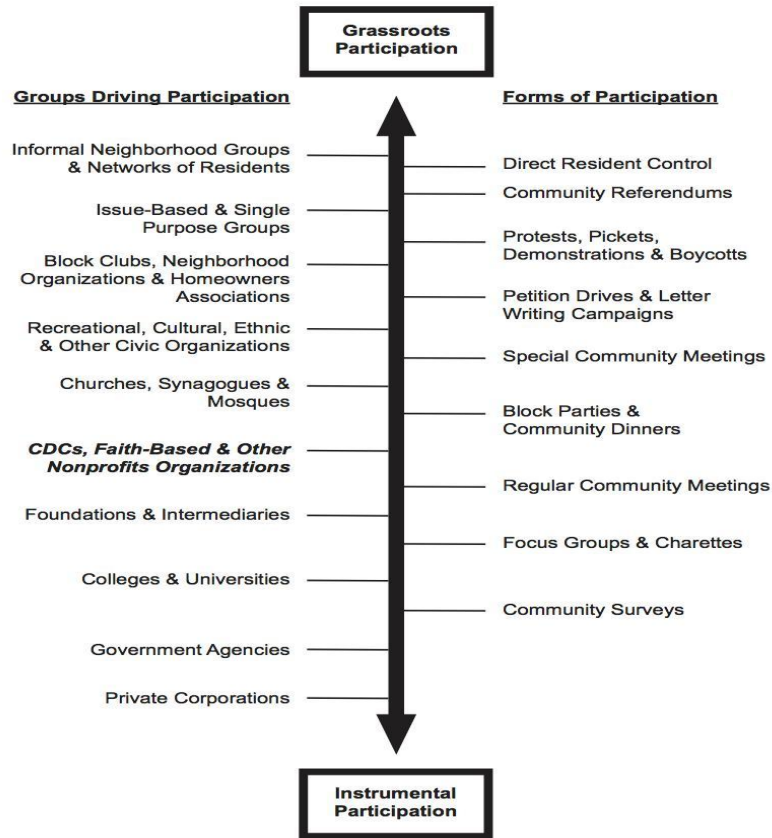


FIGURE 4 SILVERMANN'S CITIZEN PARTICIPATION CONTINUUM, SILVERMAN, 2005

Juxtaposing the continuum with the PYD framework allows us to identify certain levels of engagement. Youth participation is an important component of developing citizenship in an inclusive and democratic society. Participation in decision-making at local, regional and international levels thus becomes an important element in fostering young people’s active citizenship. It should be mentioned that these levels are in no way exclusive of one another and can include cross-cutting actions of the representative youth and their mobility between levels (see Figure 5).



FIGURE 5. LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING. ADAPTED FROM SILVERMAN, 2005

As seen from the above discussion the concept of meaningful youth engagement is quite multidimensional. As such, “meaningful” youth engagement can include the following components:

- inclusion of young people in all stages of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs, policies, and investment of resources;
- ensuring youth engagement in decision making processes that include their engagement in the levels ranging from family to policy, without exclusion of one level from another, but rather in tandem;
- ensuring their diverse representation that goes beyond tokenism and includes young people’s engagement from marginalized populations;
- ensuring young people’s access to accurate information and training when necessary, in order to effectively understand the technical content, the political context, and the stakeholders with whom they are engaging;
- power-sharing between and among stakeholders so that young people are partners and leaders, rather than merely beneficiaries (Engage Youth, n.d.).

Within CAYEDMA, **meaningful youth engagement** means a **participatory** process, when youth have the knowledge, information and skills to engage throughout the decision-making processes at the **programmatic, institutional, policy levels**, and adults are ready and willing to **share power** with them.

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## DEFINITIONS IN POLICY DOCUMENTS

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Youth participation and engagement is a core target for youth policies at the international, regional and national levels. The approaches to youth participation and engagement seem to vary in most of the documents (for detailed definitions see Appendix 3 ). Key international and regional policy documents which affect youth policy making in Armenia have been reviewed, since the country took on international commitments.

Thus, the **UN World Youth Strategy 2030** (United Nations General Assembly, n.d.) focuses on the **rights-based approach** to defining youth engagement. Similar to the PYD definition, embraced by the USAID, it focuses on **meaningful youth engagement** and ties engagement to the rights of young people to meaningfully participate in the forums specific to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Both political and public areas are emphasized, including participating in platforms at all levels.

The definition by the **Council of Europe** (CoE, n.d.) highlights that youth are entitled to have a **voice** in and **influence the decision-making processes**. This is also a rights-based definition, but seems to be incomplete in the way it encompasses all the diversity of youth and their participation in decision-making processes and platforms. In this regard, the **EU-CoE Youth Partnership Reflection Group on Youth Participation, 2014** moves further to expand its definition to include the **spaces** and **means**, in addition to the rights and opportunities for young people to participate. It suggests that young people can and should be supported in order to actively exercise citizenship and influence decisions.

Further, the **EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027** encompasses the broadest definition with the focus on youth engagement and highlights it as a “meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people” (European Union, 2018, para. 1). Youth engagement is defined as **development of citizenship**, emphasizing the right of youth to participate at local, regional and national levels; as well as educating youth about their rights and opportunities for participatory actions. Among the definitions reviewed above, this one explicitly mentions “**learning opportunities**” as an element of youth engagement, although the earlier discussed definitions might as well imply such elements, yet not explicitly state them in the concept definitions. The EU Youth Strategy also focuses on the **alternative forms of participation**, such as digital.

The **Youth Participation Strategy**, a strategy for enhancing youth participation in democratic life through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs developed by SALTO, is developed in contribution to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. The strategy puts forward the following definition of youth participation in democratic life: “Individual young people and groups of young people having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, contribute to and influence societal decision making on matters affecting them, and be active within the democratic and civic life of our communities” (SALTO-Youth,n.d., p.16).

The **national framework** is discussed in more detail in Chapter V below. However, a number of observations can be made here as well. The **RA Government Program 2021-2025**, which as of early 2022, is the only strategic document targeting youth, focuses on youth participation in social, political, civic, socio-economic

and cultural areas, as well as mechanisms for increasing youth employment. The definition, though, seems to focus on creating **conditions** for youth to participate and build their future from a one-directional aspect. As mentioned above, this approach may be typical to future-oriented participatory mechanisms, rather than encompass the present youth in its diversity and transformation. The definition does not elaborate on the contributions from and by the youth, positioning them in a somewhat deficit state. The next document, **Draft Youth Strategic Development Concept Paper 2021-2025, which was not ratified, yet might be indicative of the government’s overall approach to the youth policy**, includes both participation and engagement [trans. մասնակցություն և ներգրավվում] and aims to develop youth engagement in decision making by **moving them from pure awareness level to more proactive participation**. This definition relates to the principles of Hart’s ladder of participation, towards more active and engaged youth. By doing that it tends to be somewhat linear, without acknowledging the diversity of youth as it was claimed above. Youth participation in socio-political, socio-economic and cultural life and its promotion is one of the main principles of the Concept of State Youth Policy. The concept defines participation as “direct and indirect involvement of young people, active youth groups, as well as youth NGOs in the decision making in all areas of social life” (Government of Armenia, 2021, p.7).

The above definitions of youth engagement and/or participation seem to overlap in the way they **prioritize the rights of youth to participate in decision-making processes**. At the same time, as compared with the PYD definition of youth engagement and its elements, these definitions focus on certain elements of engagement, such as opportunities to participate, or developing citizenship skills. Per the categorization of participation by Farthing mentioned above, these definitions are in **the intersection of the rights-based participation and participation for efficiency in policy and practice**. Young people are both positioned as right-holders for decisions in their lives and as those who know their needs best to inform policies and practice. The PYD definition of youth engagement adopts a **developmental approach** to participation, which regards youth development and engagement more holistically, and considers young people’s rights and influence in policy making as part of their overall development.

As mentioned above, the dimensions of youth engagement include both **spaces** that enable the young people to express their views and opinions, and **opportunities** for the decision makers to listen to the youth. In this regard, the PYD framework focuses on the importance of the comprehensive environment enabling youth to engage in civic and political life, which encompass four interrelated settings:

1. **Structural:** laws, policies, programs and systems providing timely, affordable, and quality opportunities that are developmentally appropriate, needed and desired by youth;
2. **Normative:** positive attitudes, norms and beliefs that support, value and recognize positive development for youth;
3. **Social:** various nurturing relationships with peers, parents, teachers, and other adults;
4. **Physical:** supportive geographic and physical spaces, including those that facilitate the ability to exist without perceived or experienced violence or discrimination (Hinson et al., 2016).

Subsequently, CAYEDMA will analyze all the dimensions of youth participation and engagement as defined by PYD, (a) the rights and awareness of young people; (b) the four dimensions of the enabling environment; (c) opportunities, specifically learning opportunities and platforms; (d) resources, such as spaces and means; (e) skill sets and agency; and (f) influences of young people, specifically on some aspects of socio-political life of the country, which is their contribution to development of citizenship. It will not,

however, analyze their participation in some other aspects of social, economic and cultural life, such as the whole spectrum of education, employment, healthcare, sports, and culture, given the objectives and the limited resources of the assessment.

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## FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

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An important dimension of meaningful youth engagement is the forms of engagement/participation, and there are several categorizations of these forms that provide lenses of analysis. Bacalso (2016) draws on the categorization of the forms of participation in decision making into **traditional** and **alternative**. The **traditional** forms are often characterized by engagement in formal politics and policy engagement, and are longer in their duration. Most often, the nature of such participation may be invitation-based and include voting, joining a party or a formal community, such as youth councils, unions and alike. Newer or **alternative** forms, on the other hand, are rather informal, issue-based, horizontal rather than hierarchical, and may be shorter in duration. Such forms may be associated with the use of social media and a variety of digital platforms and tools, but they are not confined to them only. Horizontal engagement may become a channel for self-expression, often in an individualistic, personal and informal way. The most common means are signing petitions, joining networks, attending demonstrations and rallies. Such horizontal means of engagement may be attractive for youth, since there is no long-term commitment and organizational confinement (Spannring et al., 2008). Moreover, the newer forms of participation enable the youth to express their values, identities and lifestyles. Through the engagement in alternative forms of participation young people are shaping their participation around self-expression, individuality and self-organization. Such strategies are argued to be aligned with the dynamic life courses of the youth.

To a large extent, the new forms of participation are attributed to the **use of the digital technologies and social media platforms** that enable youth engagement. For the growing number of young people engaging in social networks and using digital media has become a daily routine and a form of engagement in social and political life. In the digital era, the concept of “**digital civic engagement**”, defined as “civic engagement activities specifically done by young people and involving digital media of some kind”, is gaining a momentum (Cho et al., 2020, p. 7). Galstyan et al. (2019) highlight the emergence of the newer forms of participation, such as hacking (forcing down online servers), clicktivism (clicks on certain links in agreement for a cause), and online campaigning (youth starting their own causes online and sharing them with their social networks). Similar to the benefits of civic engagement, digital civic engagement provides a number of outcomes for the youth to be exposed to civic issues, develop sense of well-being and esteem, as well as engage in a blend of traditional and digital forms of engagement (UNICEF, 2020). This, however, is likely to happen in the contexts with wide digital coverage and access.

Digital civic engagement is also positively related with the offline youth political participation (Cho et al., 2020), which indicates that the above-mentioned distinction between traditional and alternative forms of participation should not be considered as binary, but rather as complimentary. Harris et al. (2010) contend that a “dual strategy” may be necessary where the new forms of participation will “revitalize the interest of young people into democratic decision processes”, but will also sensitize the youth that may be marginalized from formal processes yet is engaged in daily self-expression acts to shape the society around them” (p. 29).

Galstyan et al. (2019) suggests another categorization of **basic forms youth participation**, based on two dichotomies: institutional versus individual, and political versus civic. The author proposes three main

categories: **institutional** (elections, campaigns and membership); **non-institutional** (protest activities, demonstrations and new social movements); and **civic engagement** (associative life, community participation, volunteering). Additionally, she defines **modern participation**, which includes a representative and direct participation (NGO-based structures, co-management, youth parliaments, school councils, youth hearings, demonstrations); **postmodern and future forms of participation** that include various types of expressive, emotional, aesthetic, casual and digital participation; as well as **pro-active participation**, when young people are involved in the social transformation of their societies (Galstyan, 2019; Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019).

Several studies looking at youth involvement in decision-making show that the **degree of participation** among young people seems to be waning (e.g., Crowley & Moxon, 2017; Harris et al, 2010). Although globally youth participation may be declining, it may be misleading and premature to conclude that youth are becoming disengaged from civic and political lives. The interpretations about the decline in youth participation often depart from the fact that young people become alienated from the civic and political processes. Such interpretations are based on a narrow view of participation, which is manifested through more traditional forms of participation, such as young people's involvement in formal organizations, participation in formal consultation events, or other forms of decision-making processes. On the other hand, traditional forms of participation seem to give way to unconventional paths, for instance, signing petitions, participating in rallies or participating in various civic initiatives. Crowley & Moxon (2017) define the phenomenon as the "**paradox of youth participation**", another useful lens to assess youth engagement in decision making. As the discussion of the forms of participation and engagement above shows, regardless of the terminological differences, one of the keys to meaningful engagement of young people is predominantly the ways and forms that lead to young people's participation.

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## FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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The literature review suggests that engagement of young people in decision-making depends on their **social contexts**. Ballard (2014), for instance, argues that young people develop their civic identities in response to the everyday situations they encounter in those social contexts, including families, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods, and communities. Wray-Lake & Syvertsen (2011) consider **modelling prosocial behaviors, communicating values** and **opportunities for practice of civic identity** as the key mechanisms for the development of civic identity. In particular, they argue that **parental civic engagement positively impacts youth civic engagement**, leading to politically and civically high activity of young people. Similarly, **direct communication showing sensitivity to the needs of others and compassion** is likely to be associated with civic actions among young people in later life. Finally, the third mechanism is through enabling young people with the **opportunities to practice**, in order to develop their identity and build self-efficacy and agency. Peer networks, schools and broader communities contribute to such opportunities. Specifically, Crowley & Moxon (2017) suggest that opportunities to participate that exist in schools and informal educational institutions, such as being represented in the school councils, electing student council representatives and heads, being engaged in community projects, enable young people to learn about the processes of decision making and participation. Both educators and educational institutions play an important role in developing and strengthening the practice of democratic participation. Research seems to be clear that **young people who have had opportunities to participate in democratic processes at schools are better equipped with knowledge and skills requisite for civic processes**. Some studies underline that participation of young people in school governance and community

service is very likely to result in youth participating in voting, joining community organizations, and other similar activities as adults (e.g., Obradović & Masten, 2007).

Yet, the opposite trends are also observed, when **civic engagement in communities declines after young people leave schools**. Several studies indicate that young people in high schools may be driven by the **instrumental reasons to participate in community services at school, rather than developing their civic values** (Malin et al., n.d.; Ballard, 2017). One possible explanation is the availability of structured opportunities and settings in schools through which young people engage in community service. Such instrumentally-driven motivations do not seem to lead to sustained civic development later on (Malin et al., n.d.). The findings imply that engagement of young people in civic activities through external, instrumental mechanisms can lead to civic participation, yet this kind of participation may be **short-lived** and **may not turn into internalization of civic values** by young people. For the youth to develop meaningful engagement in civic life, the focus should be on motivating them beyond instrumental reasons for involvement towards activities underlying a broader civic purpose. Such a civic purpose will include a “meaningful and committed intention to contribute to the world beyond self through civic or political action” (Malin et al., 2015, p. 109). Malin et al. contend that discussions about youth engagement should focus primarily on how youth are driven to participate in civic life, regardless of their skills, experiences, and/or opportunities to participate. This can include the intention to participate, together with actual involvement in civic or political activity, e.g., commitment to volunteer in the community and the volunteering activity itself. These two are combined with the motivation to contribute to the world beyond the self, which is the desire to improve society as a whole.

What is equally important is the discussion of the individual motivations of youth who decide to engage or refrain from action. Ballard, for instance, discusses several categories of **individual motivation** practiced by youth (2014). These include:

- issues/causes that motivate youth to pursue through their involvement;
- beliefs about civic action that motivate youth to participate. In this category young people believe in civic involvement per se as being important (e.g., “giving back to the community”);
- self-goals, which include personal development, self-enhancement, gaining skills and alike;
- identity: young people driven by the motivations to develop/affirm their identities may not necessarily be involved in other civic or political actions. For instance, youth representing LGBTQ+ groups, may be actively involved in various activities within and by LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, but not necessarily engage in other societal actions or causes;
- response to an invitation by a civic group or individuals. In this category, youth may opt for one-time involvement, based on an invitation rather than become engaged due to personal or issue-based motivations.

While the above factors determine to what extent and how young people choose to engage, certain **structural barriers to their engagement** are also observed. **Educational** and **social backgrounds** are among the most common barriers for young people to engage. Youth with **higher levels of education** may have more time and social capital to fully participate and engage in associative memberships – an opportunity that may be limited for youth from less advantaged social and educational backgrounds. Checkoway (2010) shows that youth from more affluent backgrounds may be more actively involved in democratic participation, as compared to their counterparts from lower-income groups. The latter group may believe that they have “better things to do with their time, and do not believe that their participation will matter” (ibid, p.342). This, however, does not



necessarily mean that low-income youth is disengaged, but that their activities may be beyond the mainstream processes and may tend to stay in smaller communities.

A similarly confining factor is the **access to digital technologies**. Limited access to internet resources and social media, and lack of adequate communication skills, channels and forms may create additional difficulties for young people who may need purposive communication forms. In most situations the youth engaged via social platforms already possess certain knowledge and skills in the use of digital tools, and may have had experience in public decision-making. This may create wider gaps between various groups of youth with different experiences.

Finally, **gender** remains among the main factors affecting youth participation. There appears a gender gap in youth political participation, which is skewed towards increased male participation (Grasso and Smith, 2022; Pfalzelt and Spies, 2019). Females tend to engage more in non-institutional and protest forms of participation, while males are likely to engage in more institutional forms (ibid).

The discussion in In Chapter III focused on the **definition of the target group**, youth as persons aged 13-30 transitioning into adulthood, recognized in their diversity and heterogeneity in the given social, political and economic setting. The the conceptual framework of CAYEDMA, the Positive Youth Development, was outlined, which is identified as an overarching approach to developing **assets**, i.e., competencies, skills and attitudes of young people; providing them with **agency**; creating opportunities for their **contribution** to decision making in their families, communities and/or governments; and strengthening the **enabling environment**, so that they develop holistically and reach their potential and contribute to the transformation of the systems. Subsequently, CAYEDMA will analyze all the dimensions of youth participation and engagement as defined by PYD, (a) the rights and awareness of young people; (b) the four dimensions of the enabling environment; (c) opportunities, specifically learning opportunities and platforms; (d) resources, such as spaces and means; (e) skill sets and agency; and (f) influences of young people, specifically on some aspects of socio-political life of the country, which is their contribution to development of citizenship. It will not, however, analyze their participation in some other aspects of social, economic and cultural life, such as the whole spectrum of education, employment, healthcare, sports, and culture, given the objectives and the limited resources of the assessment

Finally, **youth engagement in decision making (YEDM)** as meaningful youth engagement was defined as an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally.

## CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

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As mentioned in Chapter II, the USAID's framework of **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** is used as a conceptual framework for this assessment due to its holistic nature and the fact that it offers an evidence-driven and practical base to youth development (Hinson et al., 2016). After the scrutiny of the given framework, the framework was narrowed down to the review of the four domains: Assets, Agency, Youth Contribution and Enabling Environment. Due to the extensive nature of the domains, certain features in them were given more priority. Specifically, the domain of Assets includes broad categories of formal education and academic achievement which are beyond the scope of this assessment. Assets were studied only when pertaining to the

mentioned domains, for instance assets more directly related to contribution. The features and constructs pertaining to workforce development, entrepreneurship and other economic development were not considered either. With regard to political participation, the scope of the study went beyond mere participation of youth in electoral processes and included a broader scope of youth engagement in decision making processes.

This study sits within an interpretivist research philosophy to enable the research team to examine in more depth the experiences of young people as the main target group, their perspectives and experiences in relation engagement in decision-making processes. Within this framework, the qualitative research methodology was employed to provide analysis of young people’s experiences and views vis-à-vis PYD domains on one hand, and on the other, an analysis of how key stakeholders perceive and practice engaging young people in decision making. By employing only qualitative approach to this study, the research team acknowledges its limitations, discussed below in detail. While in some cases the findings may be extrapolated to groups of people with characteristics similar to the target group, the overall generalizations for the broader population may rarely be done.

The study methodology followed a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary quantitative data review and qualitative methods of primary data collection to obtain rich insights on youth profile and their engagement in decision making. The following methods were used to collect data:

- d. a comprehensive literature and desk review;
- e. semi-structured key informant and key expert interviews (individual, dyadic and triadic);
- f. focus group discussions with youth and civil society organizations.

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## DESK REVIEW

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The desk review was carried out to identify (a) the profile of Armenian youth, based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, gender, area of residence, education, employability and vulnerability status; b) YEDM practices vis-à-vis the PYD conceptual framework; c) political, institutional and funding arrangements, including the government’s level of commitment to establishing a favorable environment for engaging youth in decision making; d) the current youth policies and practices in Armenia.

For this study, both desk and literature review were conducted. The review of the available documents and studies, and secondary sources were essential to demonstrate the current situation with the topic of the study, i.e., youth engagement in decision making. At the same time, this study uses a rather broad conceptual framework of PYD (as noted earlier) and, in order for the research team to develop a viable and effective analytical framework in line with the scope and the focus of the study, an overview of scholarly literature was necessary. This led to identifying the gaps in the existing research, and sharpening the analysis of the available sources. The findings of the desk review informed the choice of methods to collect primary data, as well as provided guidance on finetuning the sampling strategy and relevant instruments for data collection. The desk review aimed at defining the key terms of the study, such as “youth”, “youth engagement” and “youth engagement in decision-making”. Although the PYD framework includes definitions of these concepts within the USAID programming approach, more concise definitions were necessary for this study. Moreover, since the study aimed to inform the national stakeholders in their current efforts to amend the regulatory framework, the need for definitions was more pertinent. Therefore, a body of academic literature was consulted to address this issue.

Next, the desk review addressed the existing national and international regulatory, policy and institutional frameworks pertaining to YEDM. Key documents were consulted and analyzed, including, the RA Government Program 2021-2026 and Draft Youth Development Strategy Concept Paper 2021-2025, a number of other policy documents and texts, national and international reports and previous assessment studies. These documents were reviewed through the lens of the PYD domains and, whenever possible through their salient features.

Thirdly, the desk review included an analysis of official statistics and a body of available secondary data analysis from previous reports and studies on YEDM. A comprehensive review of the existing secondary data was done to contextualize the situation of youth in Armenia and the dynamics of their engagement in decision making in the light of the recent major events specified above. Except for the relevant previous reports and studies, a mapping of youth actors in the civil society and relevant youth programs currently featuring the youth landscape of the country was conducted. Publicly stated missions and objectives of civil society actors and projects were reviewed on the official websites and social media platforms (on Facebook, specifically) of the CSOs and large projects since June 2022.

The available official statistics were identified to describe the demographic and social profile of youth in Armenia. There is no designated youth statistics at the national level, therefore data relevant to the age group 15-29 was extracted.

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## SAMPLING STRATEGY

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As primarily a qualitative study, CAYEDMA employed several sampling strategies to identify the sample frame of the study. Given the breadth of the participant groups and categories, the following strategies were applied. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants for the FGs with the representatives of the CSOs. The participants were grouped into three age brackets, namely, youth aged 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29. This was justified by a number of reasons. Firstly, the USAID's Armenian Youth Situation Analysis included youth aged 15-29, with similar age brackets as above. Since this study aims to identify how its findings compare with those from the USAID's Situational Analysis, the same approach was adopted for the selection of the young people to participate in the FGs. Secondly, the official statistics by the RA Statistical Committee provides data on young people mainly in the age ranges 15-29 and 15-24, while including people in their 30s in different age ranges. Taking these two approaches into consideration, the participants were grouped into three main age brackets 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29.

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## SELECTION CRITERIA OF THE TARGET PARTICIPANTS

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A number of criteria have been identified for the selection and recruitment of target group of youth participants for this study, including both primary and secondary criteria. **Primary criteria** included age, residence, gender, social vulnerability (ethnicity, sexual minority representation, disability, veterans). The first three criteria were primary for all target youth to be recruited for focus groups. The social vulnerability was the primary criteria for the special focus groups and interviews (in case of sexual minority representatives and veteran young people). The primary criteria were determined by the characteristics of the youth population in the study. Age was the primary criteria, since this study focuses on the target youth within the age brackets of 15-19; 20-24 and 25-29. Gender was another primary criterion, since it was essential to maintain the equal number of male and female participants in each focus group. The earlier Youth Situational Assessment

conducted in 2019 mentioned lower male participation in focus groups as one of its limitations since there seemed to be tendency for female youth to be more proactive in such initiatives and discussions. This study aimed to achieve an equal distribution of male and female participants to balance the views of both genders.

As described in the site selection section, youth from both urban and rural areas were recruited in regions of Armavir, Syunik. The initial literature review shows that the type of residence appears to be determining for youth engagement and participation overall, hence it was essential to examine the views and experiences of youth from both locations.

The social vulnerability criteria, including those of disabilities, ethnicity, sexual minority, as well as the experience in war actions were all significant for this study to achieve diversity and inclusivity in the data collection process. The initial desk review showed that young people representing these groups may have limited access and opportunities for engagement in decision making processes and levels for a number of reasons ranging from institutional restrictions (e.g., for those with disabilities) to more individual (e.g., as with war-affected youth). Therefore, exploring their ideas and experiences was necessary for this study.

In addition to primary criteria, **secondary criteria** were identified, including memberships to student (in case of older youth - university) councils, employment, marital status, experience in volunteerism and/or working in CSOs. Each of these criteria were identified based on the initial literature review according to which instrumental factors, such as memberships to councils and/or (previous) experiences in volunteering activities may influence the trajectory of youth engagement in decision making processes. Similarly, more individual factors, such as employment and marital status were likely to play a certain role in these processes, too.

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## RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

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In Yerevan, youth aged 20-29 was selected randomly through open calls of participation on online platforms and via partner CSOs based on the defined criteria. Youth aged 15-18/19 was selected through the convenience sampling. Particularly, two schools were selected in two different regions of Yerevan based on the partnerships with school management. Next, the youth were selected randomly based on the criteria and invited to the FG. In case of youth returning from the 44-day war and LGBTQ+ groups, snowballing strategy was used. Given the vulnerability and lack of visibility of these groups, this strategy worked better since young people were likely to make references to relevant youth with similar characteristics.

Given the limitations of the study, convenience sampling was employed as a secondary approach to sampling. This strategy allowed a better access to the research participants. Particularly, the research team worked with the established partner CSOs in the selected sites of Armavir and Syunik who were in charge of recruiting the participants for the focus group discussions. In Yerevan, the older group of youth (aged 20-29) was accessed through purposive sampling strategies based on the pre-defined criteria, the younger group was less accessible and the use of convenience sampling was employed. In all cases, the strict criteria for the focus groups participants were maintained. All FGs were carried with 8 participants meeting the primary criteria and the secondary criteria as described above.

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## SITE SELECTION

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The following three sites have been identified for the fieldwork for this study, namely capital Yerevan, Armavir and Syunik regions. The capital was selected as the central location of the decision making at the national level. It offers a political, economic and social context different from the rest of the country. Yerevan also hosts the largest youth population in the country allowing to set up focus groups with youth for all ages, including the ones with the disabilities. Additionally, it includes a variety of educational institutions, both secondary schools, vocational colleges and higher educational institutions that will offer an effective space for the recruitment of target youth population for the study.

In case of Armavir, a number of decisions have affected its selection as a site for this study. First, it has been identified as a proximal residence to the capital, yet with very divergent population in its urban and rural areas. Next, Armavir seems to show a relatively high dropout rate of schoolchildren, particularly from the upper secondary levels (after year 9 in school)<sup>8</sup>. Since the age of youth in upper secondary school corresponds to that of the target youth in this study, it will be of particular interest to examine such category of youth in addition to other criteria (discussed in more detail below). Moreover, Armavir is a region with the greatest number of ethnic population and since a special focus group is to be conducted with representative youth from ethnic minorities, it will be a relevant site for this activity.

Syunik has been identified, first, because it is the farthest region from the capital of Yerevan and it will be worth examining the experiences of the target youth there. Next, it is the bordering region with Azerbaijan and in light of the post-2020 events mentioned earlier, the experiences of the youth population may appear significantly different from the rest of the selected sites. Thirdly, the region of Syunik appears to host a large number of the displaced population from Nagorno Karabakh. So, besides focus group discussions with the target group in Syunik, an additional focus group was held with the displaced youth as well.

Following the identification of the regions, the specific urban and rural locations were selected. In case of Armavir, the city of Armavir was selected as the urban type of residence. This allowed the research team to work with the partner CSO, namely, Armavir Development Center to recruit participants. Additionally, for the purposes of triangulation of data, the data collected from the youth were compared with that collected through the interviews with Armavir municipality and community administration. The community of Baghramyan was identified as the rural site, since it appears to be the second smallest consolidated rural community in Armavir region<sup>9</sup> (the smallest one was an ethnic community, which seems to be too restrictive for this study). A similar strategy was used for Syunik. Goris was selected as the urban site and the Partnership and Training NGO were the coordinating partner responsible for the recruitment and management of focus groups in Syunik. Similar to Armavir, data triangulation with the representatives from regional and local community administrations were made possible. The consolidated community of Tegh was identified as the smallest rural community<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://armstat.am/file/article/sv\\_03\\_21a\\_5130.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/sv_03_21a_5130.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://armavir.mtad.am/about-communities/187/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://syunik.mtad.am/about-communities/992/>

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## PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

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Primary data collection utilized semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from relevant population in the study.

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### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

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Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the identified key informants/experts, and two special categories of youth, namely youth who returned from the 44-day Artsakh war and youth representatives of the LGBTQ+ communities. Primary data were collected through the semi-structured interviews with the identified key informants and experts. This list included representatives of national policy makers, such as public officials from various national and regional governmental institutions and ministries, international organizations and donor agencies, as well as independent experts in the field. The interviews were conducted using a pre-tested and modified questionnaire. The questionnaire included a core set of questions to the general pool of the interviewees, as well as a set of specific questions to the target expertise of the interviewee.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty-four KIIs were held with the representatives of key public agencies responsible for implementation and monitoring of youth policies; university student councils; a CSO representing an ethnic minority in Armenia; two CSOs targeting gender issues and women's rights; and eight international development partners.

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with the mentioned two special youth groups given the vulnerability of these young people. Conducting interviews, rather than a focus group discussion was guided by the fact that the young people who had returned from the war were reluctant to participate in large focus group discussions given their experiences and memories from the military actions. In case of the youth from LGBTQ+ communities, these individuals may often be reluctant to disclose their identities and thus vulnerable in Armenia, hence interviews were set up to ensure the protection of the interviewees in this regard. Interviews were conducted using the modified FG guides and the questions therein.

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### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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Focus groups (FG) have been identified as the most appropriate method to collect data from the target group of the study, namely, the youth. This means targeting particular group under scrutiny by the research team, "in full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population, it simply represents itself" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 113). Although, the FG does not allow to generalize data, as a qualitative method, structured discussions allowed to collect rich insights from the youth regarding their lives, experiences, perceptions and views of the questions to be discussed.

Overall, twenty-two focus groups with over two hundred young people were conducted with the primary participants of the study. Focus groups were conducted with youth aged 15-29 in Yerevan and the selected urban and rural communities of Syunik and Armavir (see below the sampling strategy and site selection). Additionally, three special groups were identified among youth. These included youth with disabilities, youth from ethnic minorities and youth displaced from Nagorno Karabakh. The FG with the youth with disabilities were held in Yerevan. The FG with the youth from ethnic minorities was held in Armavir, given

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<sup>11</sup> The instruments employed for data collection are available as a separate document on the ICHD website.

the large representation of the ethnic groups in the region (such as Yazidis and Kurds). The third group of the displaced youth was held in Syunik, given that the families affected by the war mostly settled in the south of the country.

Another group of youth was also selected as a special case for this study. This group included youth representing the youth council adjacent to the Human Rights Defender's Office. Since this group was being formed at the moment of conducting this study, it was of interest to tap into the motivations of these young people and their engagement in the council.

Eight FG discussions were conducted with the representatives of the civil society organizations and with the representatives of the public councils and local governance bodies. Specifically, FGs were conducted with (a) four representatives of the regional administrations of Armavir and Syunik; (b) three representatives of Yerevan and Goris municipalities; (c) eight representatives of the Public Council on Children's and Youth Rights at the Human Rights Defender.

The FG with the CSOs were organized based on the youth-related activities that the identified organizations implement (e.g., whether a CSO's activities promote youth volunteerisms; whether they focus more on training and skill acquisition, etc.). The mapping of the CSOs already allows the study team to group them according to their strategic and programmatic activities into 6 groups. Overall, twenty-seven representatives from CSOs targeting their activities for youth participated in the FG discussions.

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## DATA ANALYSIS

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Data were analyzed through the thematic analysis adopted from Braun & Clarke's (2022) model that included the following steps in the analysis of the obtained data:

1. engaging with data: this stage included familiarization with the collected data and datasets to identify their initial degree of relevance with the research questions. The research team reviewed the transcribed versions of the interviews and focus group discussions
2. coding: at this stage the researchers identified the initial codes and note the repetitive ones.
3. generating code categories: based on the iterations of the codes, the researchers looked out for the categories and whether the codes are conducive to categorization.
4. defining themes: when all data have been coded, the researchers looked for the aggregated themes and thematic groups.
5. contextualizing findings: at this stage, further verification was done using the suggested questions from Byrne, 2022. These will include questions, such as, a) Is this a theme (it could be just a code)? b) If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme; c) Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme? d) Are the data too diverse and wide ranging?
6. writing the findings: this was the final stage and included the process of writing up the findings of the study and producing the final report.

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## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Ethical considerations are paramount to CAYEDMA, as it engaged with young people, and minors. The basic ethical principles that must be considered are respect for persons (individuals should be treated as

autonomous agents), beneficence (“do no harm” and maximize possible benefits), and justice (those who bear the burden of the research ought to receive the benefit of the research). Young people are especially vulnerable and their welfare must be safeguarded, therefore, CAYEDMA had a thorough ethics protocol, in line with the Armenian regulations on conducting research with the engagement of human subjects.

The data collection and analysis methods focused on gender and human rights aspects. Prior to conducting interviews, the respondents’ informed consent was ensured, age-appropriate language and approaches to data collection involving children were used. The anonymity and confidentiality of individual data were protected, and ethical guidelines were followed as set out by USAID’s Policy and Procedures for Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by USAID. Steps in ensuring ethical dimension of the research while working with the participants included:

- obtaining consent for participation through the Interview Consent Forms and FG Consent Forms
- Obtaining parental consent forms from the participants aged 15-17;
- Ensuring the confidentiality of the participants through securing the data collection storage to no other person apart from the research team;
- Ensuring the anonymity of the participants by removing all identifiable data and mention of any of names in the final report;
- Maintaining the right of the participants to withdraw from the study at any particular point.

The broader scope of the methodology and all the forms are available in the CAYEDMA Study Protocol.

## CHAPTER V: ARMENIAN YOUTH, YOUTH POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF YEDM

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### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DESK REVIEW

#### PROFILE OF YOUTH IN ARMENIA: GENERAL OVERVIEW

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It should be noted that there is no designated youth statistics in Armenia; and the Armenian youth profile was compiled based on the demographic and social indicators that according to the literature review affect youth behaviors. Specifically, this included data on youth (a) youth population size, age, sex, and marital statuses; (b) education; (c) employment; (d) migration; and (e) internet use. The official statistics by the RA Statistical Committee (Armstat) provides data on young people mainly in the age ranges 15-29 and 15-24, while including people in their 30s in different age ranges. This made compilation of consistent statistics on youth rather challenging.

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#### DEMOGRAPHICS

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According to Armstat, as of December 2021, the total population of Armenia was 2, 961, 400. The youth (15-29 age group) comprised about 540 000 people at the beginning of 2022. The absolute number of young people has been steadily declining since 2017 (see Figure 6). If in 2018 the youth comprised about 21% of the total population, in 2022 the share of youth population was about 18%.



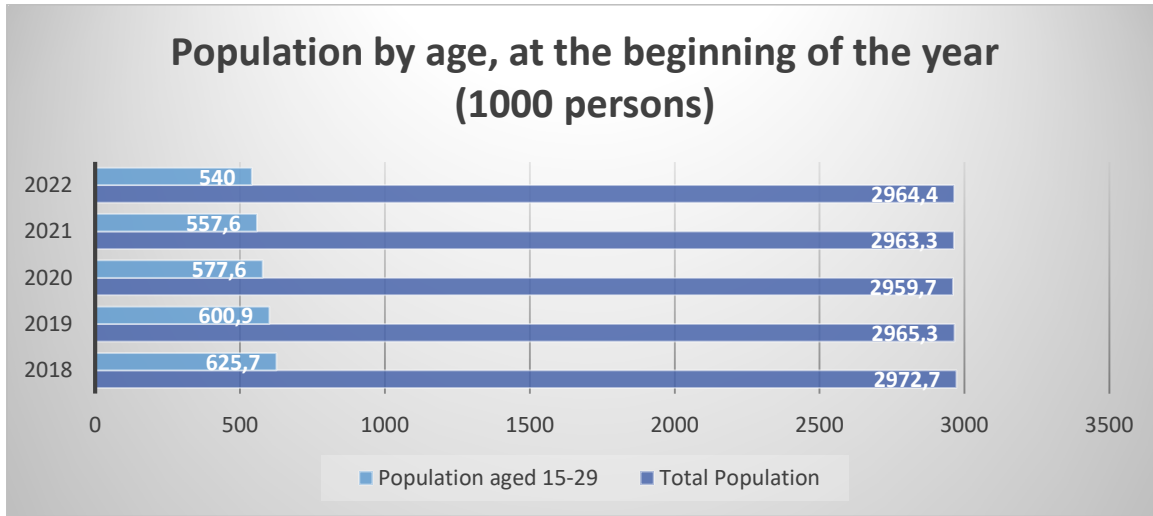


FIGURE 6 ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA. 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

The share of women and men within the youth population (15-29 age group) is almost equal, 49% and 51%, respectively.<sup>12</sup> Figure 7 shows that young men comprise 20% of the overall male population, while young women comprise 17% of the total female population.

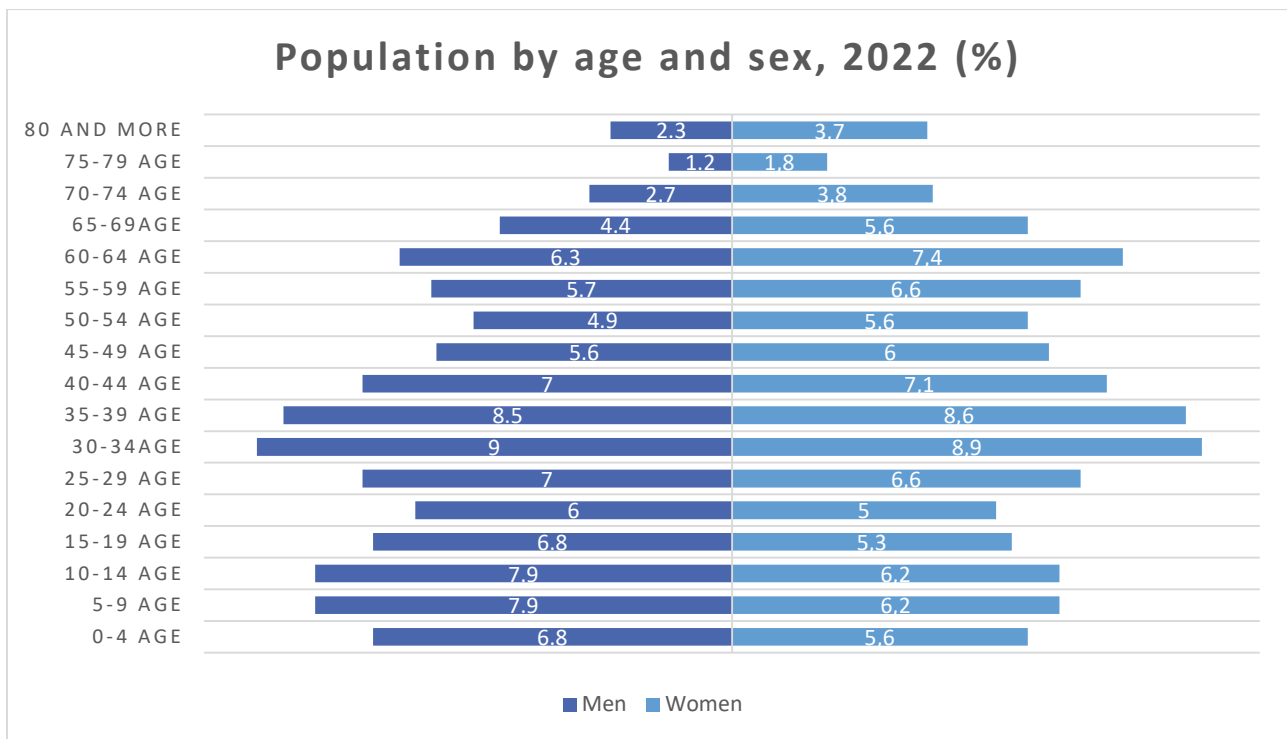


FIGURE 7 ARMSTAT, WOMEN AND MEN IN ARMENIA, 2022

<sup>12</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Armenia, 2022, p.28. Accessed at <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99533248.pdf>.

In 2021, 17165 marriages were registered in Armenia. Except for 2020, the number of registered marriages has increased in 2018-2021<sup>13</sup>. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of married youth by sex and age.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that statistics on marriage frequency is produced based on civil status acts on marriage, obtained from the Civil Status Register of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia.

## Distribution of married persons by age and sex, 2018-2021

Age	Sex	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	Man	14822	15561	12179	17165
	Woman	14822	15561	12179	17165
16-19	Man	35	18	14	28
	Woman	735	698	530	676
20-24	Man	2159	1929	1599	2009
	Woman	5452	5405	4270	5583
25-29	Man	5600	5683	4305	5443
	Woman	4552	4836	3736	4991

TABLE 1 ARMSTAT, DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF ARMENIA, 2022

In the recent five years young people tend to marry at a later age, as the mean age at marriage for women was 29 years old and for men 32 in 2021<sup>14</sup>. As Figure 8 shows, the average first marriage age for both men and women increased in 2017-2021 and was higher in urban than rural areas. If in urban areas women got married for the first time at the age of 28, in rural areas they married at 26. For the men the figures were 31 and 30 respectively.

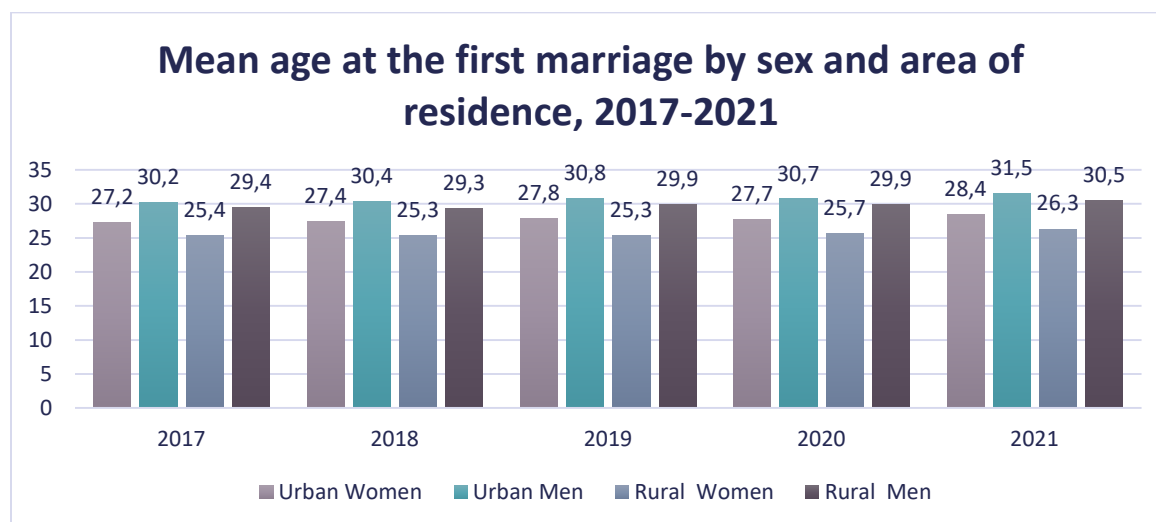


FIGURE 8 ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOK OF ARMENIA, 2022

Women tend to have children at a later age as well. Figure 9 shows that the mean age of women both at first childbirth and childbirth, in general, steadily increased in 2017-2021. In 2021, the mean age of a mother at first childbirth was 26 in urban areas and 24 in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> The data show that the average age of mother at the childbirth is lower than the mean age of women at marriage. This may be explained by the fact that marriage estimates are based on the number of registered marriages, whereas marriage registration may be delayed.

<sup>14</sup> ARMSTAT, Demographic Handbook of Armenia, 2022. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/demog\\_2022\\_6.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/demog_2022_6.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> ARMSTAT, Demographic Handbook of Armenia, 2022. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/demog\\_2022\\_6.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/demog_2022_6.pdf)

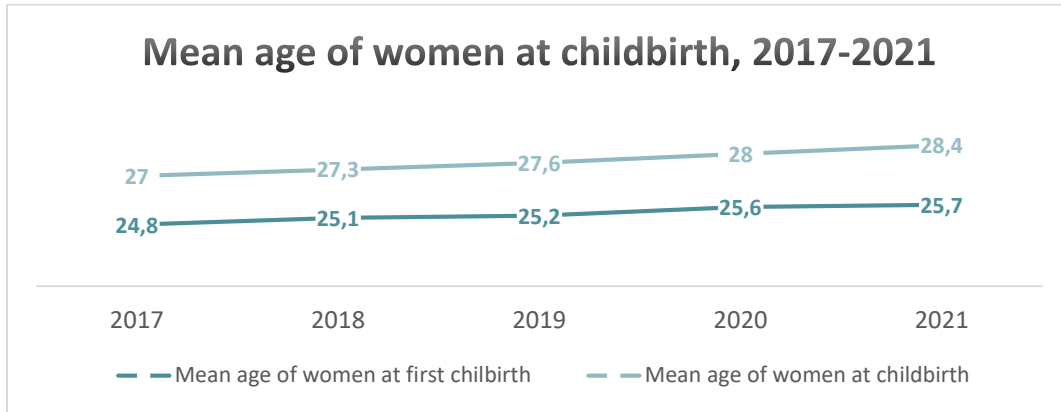


FIGURE 9 ARMSTAT, DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF ARMENIA, 2022

## RESIDENCE

About one third of the total young population, over 180,000 young people, live in Yerevan.<sup>16</sup> Outside Yerevan, about 60% of youth lives in rural areas and 40% in urban areas (See Figure 10).

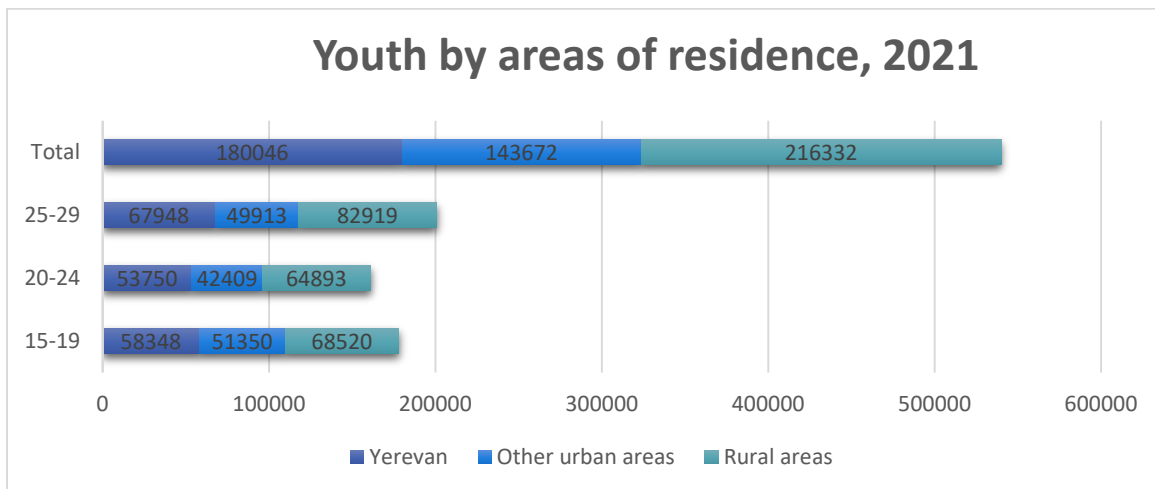


FIGURE 10 DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2022

As may be seen from Figure 11, the decrease of the youth population in the regions of Armenia is more notable, than in Yerevan. This can be explained by the internal migration from the regions of Armenia to the capital Yerevan, for education and work purposes, as well as the arrival of over 90,000 displaced persons from Nagorno Karabakh after the escalation of the conflict in September 2020 (REACH, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> ARMSTAT, Women and men in Armenia, 2022. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/gender\\_2022.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/gender_2022.pdf)

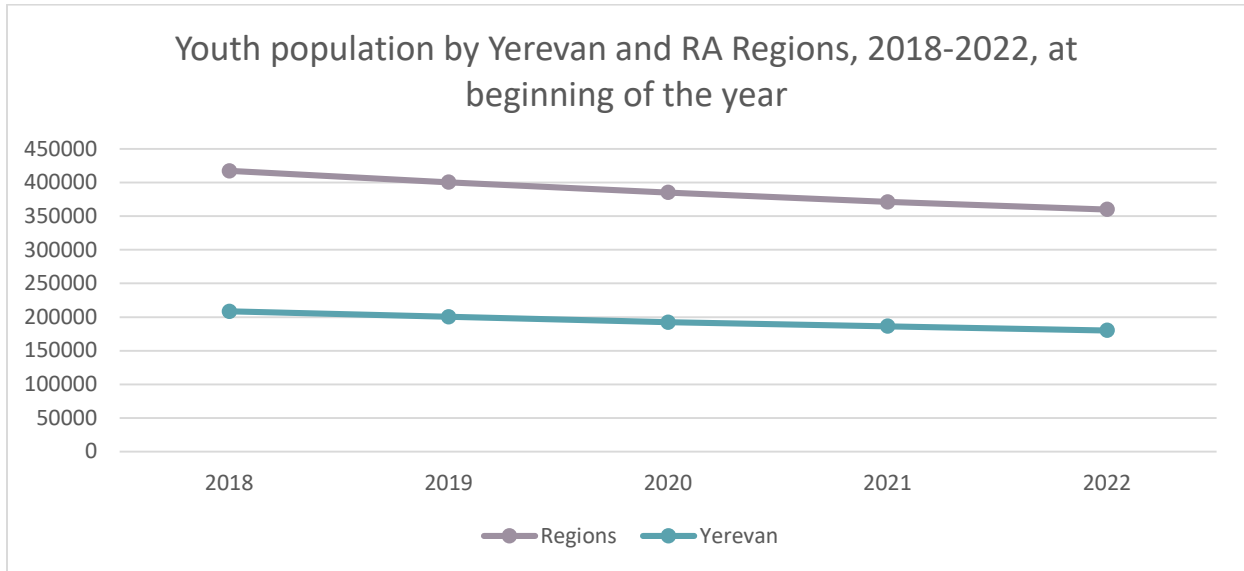


FIGURE 11 DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOKS OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Table 2 shows that both in urban and rural areas youth population decreased over 2017-2021. At the beginning of 2022, the share of youth population in urban areas comprised about 17%, while in rural areas the youth were about 20% of the total population. In 2018, the shares of youth population in urban and rural areas were about 21% and 25% respectively.

### Urban and rural population at the beginning of the year (1000 persons)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Urban Population</b>	<b>1 895.8</b>	<b>1 894.9</b>	<b>1 892.1</b>	<b>1 895.6</b>	<b>1 892.2</b>
Population aged 15-29	372.8	358.6	345.1	333.6	323.8
<b>Rural population</b>	<b>1 076.9</b>	<b>1 070.4</b>	<b>1 067.6</b>	<b>1 067.7</b>	<b>1 069.2</b>
Population aged 15-29	252.9	242.3	232.5	224	216,2

TABLE 2 STATISTICAL YEARBOOK OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2022

Table 3 shows distribution of youth population in Yerevan and the regions. The number of the youth living outside Yerevan is the highest in Armavir (about 53,000 young people) and lowest in Vayots Dzor (about 9,000 young people), although the share of youth among total population is almost identical in Yerevan and all the regions, 18% on average.

## Distribution of youth population among Yerevan and RA regions, 2021

	Total population	15-29 aged youth	The share of youth among total population
<b>Yerevan</b>	1 092 778	180 046	16%
<b>Aragatsotn</b>	124 646	24 621	20%
<b>Ararat</b>	256 615	49 397	19%
<b>Armavir</b>	264 383	52 558	20%
<b>Gegharkunik</b>	227 778	46 788	21%
<b>Lori</b>	211 677	40 002	19%
<b>Kotayk</b>	251 076	47 219	19%
<b>Shirak</b>	230 340	28 413	12%
<b>Syunik</b>	134 731	24 502	18%
<b>Vayots Dzor</b>	47 584	8 774	18%
<b>Tavush</b>	119 759	22 730	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 961 367</b>	<b>540050</b>	<b>18%</b>

TABLE 3 DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2022

### EDUCATION AND LITERACY

According to the World Bank, the total youth literacy rate<sup>17</sup> in Armenia in 2020 was 99.87, with the youth female literacy rate being slightly higher (99.90), and the youth male literacy rate being slightly lower (99.85), than the total<sup>18</sup>.

The gross school enrollment rate for young females at the secondary level increased from 85% in 2018 to 90% in 2020, whereas for young males the increase was smaller (from 82% to 85%). At the tertiary level, the gross enrollment rate for females decreased from 63% in 2018 to 61% in 2020, and for males from 47% to 42%. Though these statistics does not include the age range defined within CAYEDMA, as the secondary school enrollment considers the school age children and youth from 6 to 19, and the students at the tertiary level may include older students, it allows us to identify some trends characterizing the Armenian young people, such as high levels of literacy and large school enrollment.

<sup>17</sup> Percentage of people ages 15-24 who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life (Source: World Bank Databank available at <https://databank.worldbank.org>).

<sup>18</sup> Source: World Bank Databank available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

Figure 12 illustrates the enrollment of students at different levels of educational institutions in 2017-2021. It may be noted that the overall enrollment has slightly increased in secondary education institutions and preliminary (vocational) education institutions. A more notable increase of students' number was registered in middle vocational educational institutions, while in higher educational institutions the number of students declined.

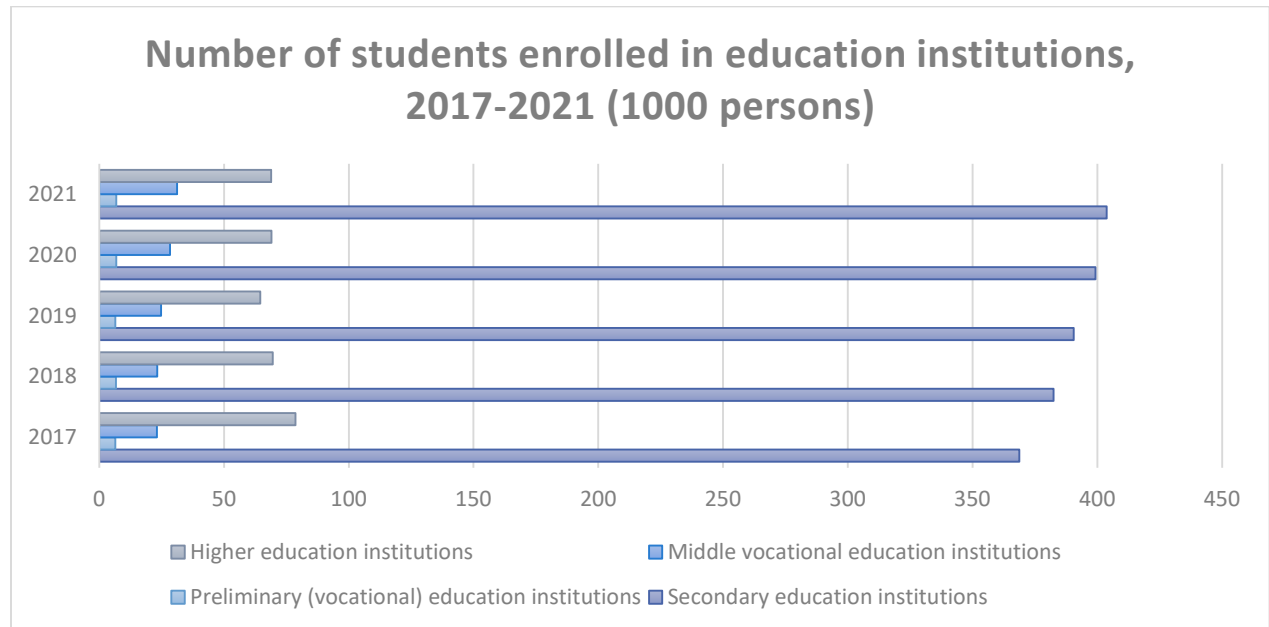


FIGURE 12 ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOK OF ARMENIA, 2022

In 2021, 31% of youth population is NEET (Youth not in Education and not in Employment), 63% of which is women. The share of NEET youth declined from 2017 to 2019 (from about 37% to 23% respectively). However, it has increased since 2019 (UNICEF, 2022).

## EMPLOYMENT

In 2021, youth at the age of 15-34 comprised about 35% of the total labor resources (15-74-year-old working age population). 51% of the total youth labour resources are women and 49% are men. As to the residence of working age youth, 434,000 young people live in urban areas and 337,000 in rural areas, comprising 56% and 44% of total youth labor resources.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> ARMSTAT, Statistical Handbook of Armenia, 2022, p. 79. Accessed at <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99533253.pdf>.

## Youth population by Economic Activity Status, 2022

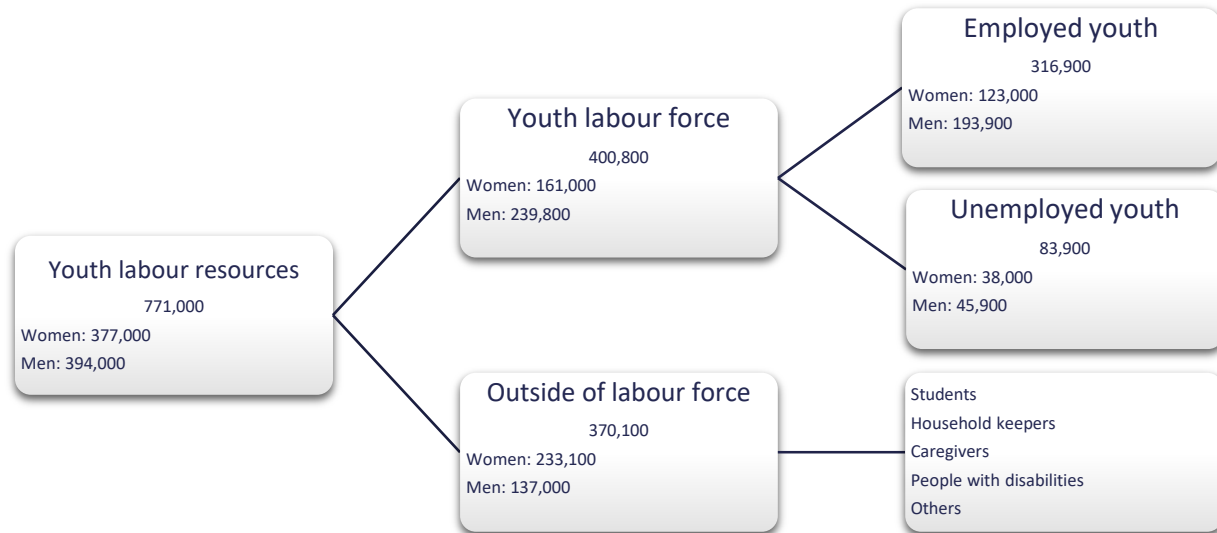


FIGURE 13, STATISTICAL YEARBOOK OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2022

As seen from Figure 14, the number of economically active youth increased during 2017-2019. In 2020, a significant decrease is observed in both 15-24 and 25-34 age groups, which might be explained by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the number of youth labour force declined for the age group of 15-24 and increased for 25-34. In general, in 2021 youth comprised about the third of total labor forces.

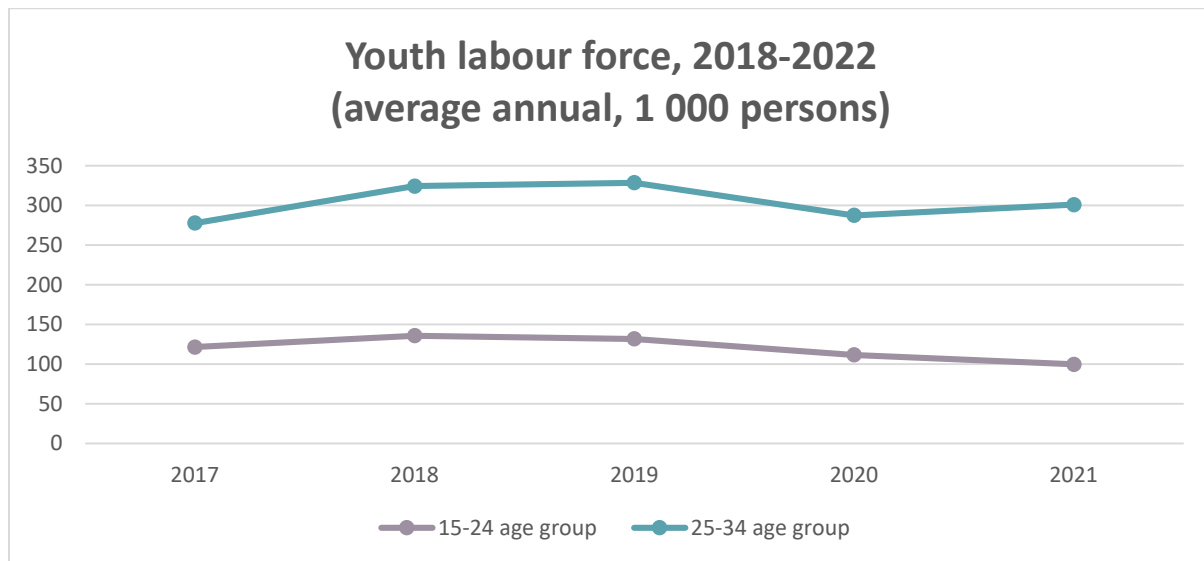


FIGURE 14 STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Figure 15 illustrates distribution of youth labour forces by sex. In the past five years the number of economically active young men was significantly, higher than the number of women.



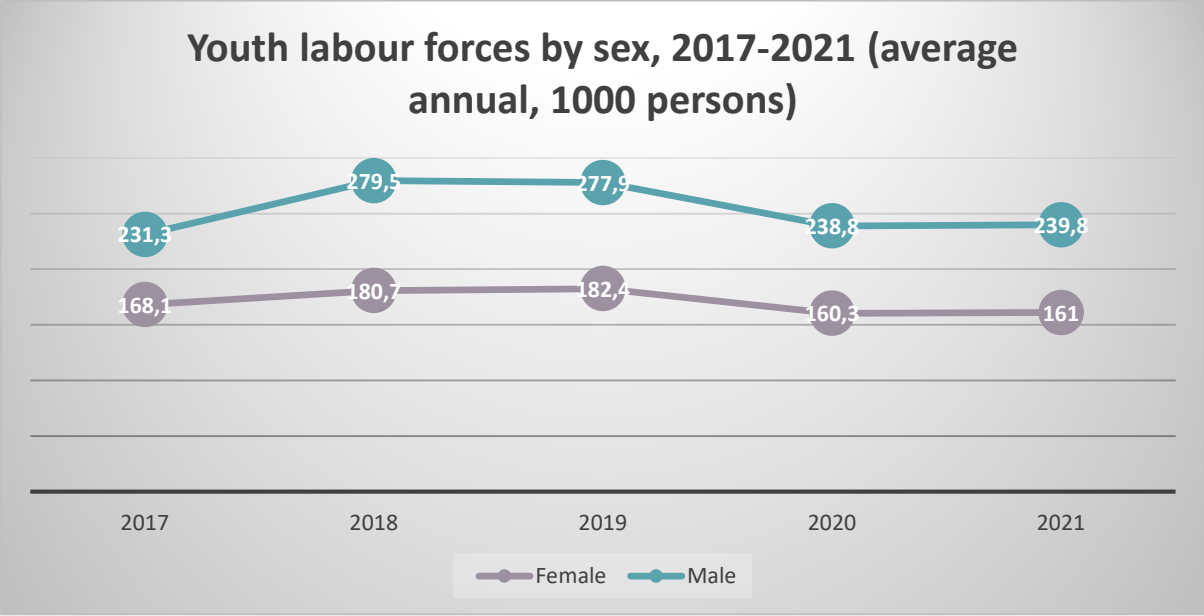


FIGURE 15: ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

In terms of residence of youth labor forces, there was a significant increase in the number of economically active youth in the age range 25-34 in both urban and rural areas in 2017-2019, which continued to slightly increase in rural areas and significantly declined in urban areas in 2020-2021. The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have affected the number of youth labor force by decreasing it in urban areas and increasing in rural. As to the age group 15-24, the resources in the urban areas tend to be more stable, compared to the fluctuations in rural areas, although in both areas decline was registered in 2020-2021.

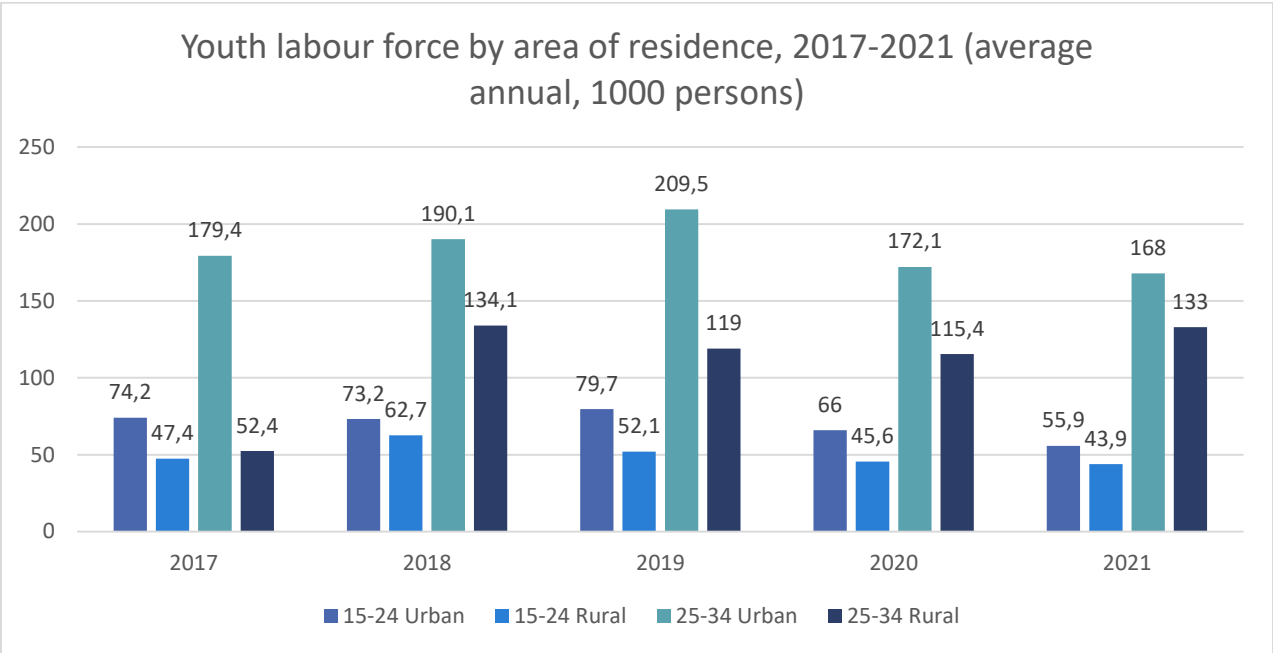


FIGURE 16 ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Among the economically active youth population, the employed youth comprised about 70% in the age range 15-24 and 82% in the age range of 25-34.<sup>20</sup> As to the gender distribution of economically active youth, Figure 17 shows that in both age groups, more young men are employed, compared to young women. Thus, it can be implied that the potential of the young women remains untapped, as they comprise a larger number in the labor resources.

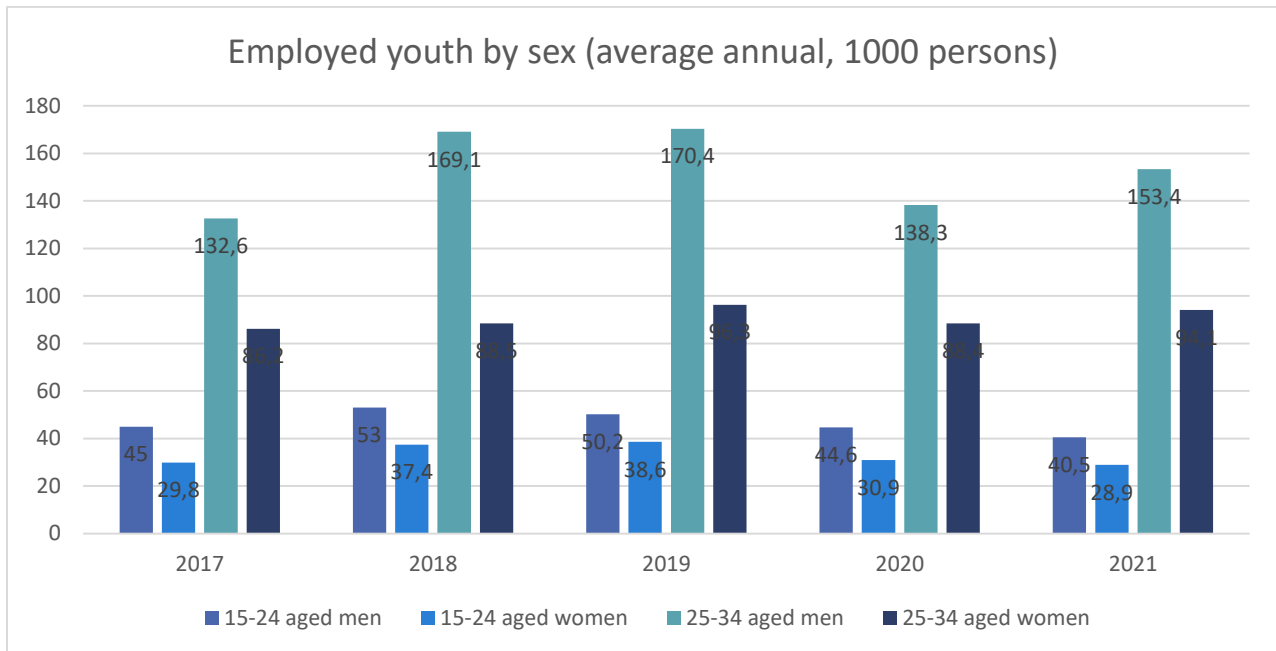


FIGURE 17 STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

In terms of residence, on average more young people aged 25-34 have been employed in urban, than rural areas in 2017-2021. There was almost no difference between the numbers of employed young people aged 15-24 in urban and rural areas (see Figure 18).

<sup>20</sup> ARMSTAT, Statistic Yearbook of Armenia, 2022, p 87. Accessed at <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99533253.pdf>.

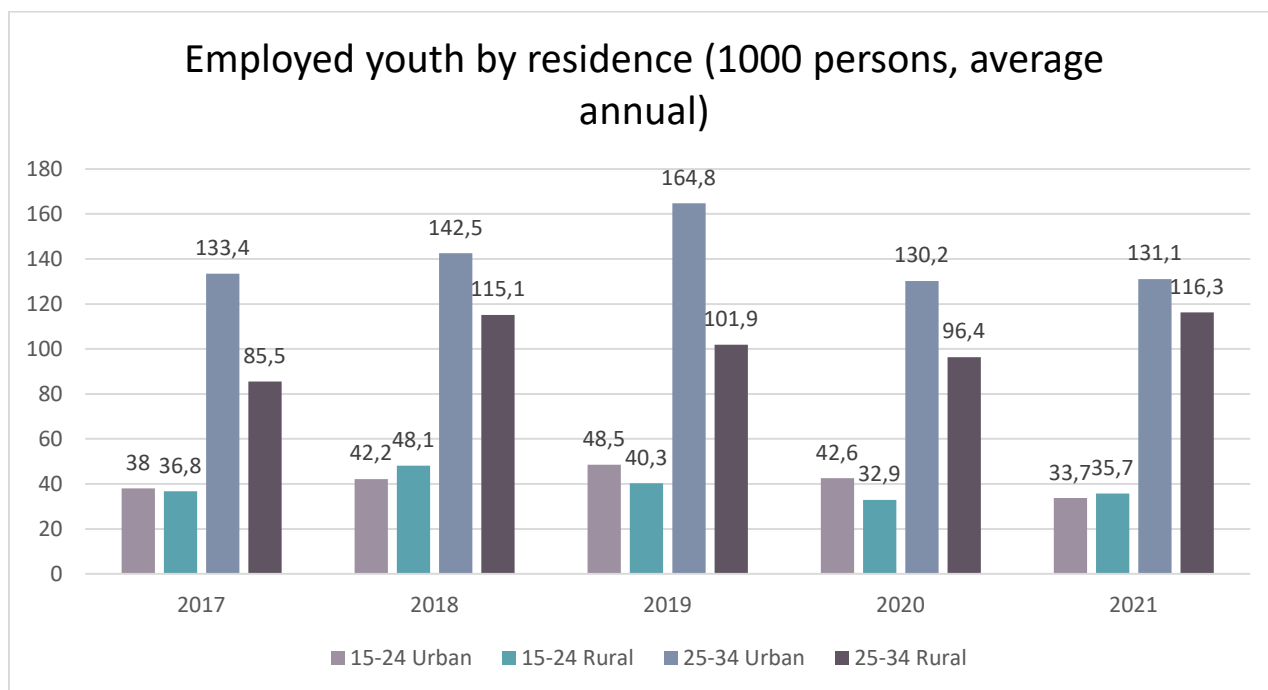


FIGURE 18 ARMSTAT, STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Although youth unemployment rate decreased in the past four years, it is still high in Armenia. Among youth aged 15-24, the unemployment rate reached as high as 31% in 2021. The unemployment rate is higher among young female population, compared to male population of the same age range (see Table 4).

### Youth unemployment rate, 2018-2021 (%)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>15.5</b>
Aged 15-24	<b>33.5</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>30.5</b>
Male	29.0	31.2	31.6	28.0
Female	39.0	34.4	33.3	33.6
Aged 25-34	<b>20.5</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>17.8</b>
Male	17.4	16.9	20.3	16.4
Female	25.9	22.0	22.4	19.9

TABLE 4 DEMOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2022

Women also comprise a higher share of the population outside youth labour force, i.e. the persons who are not employed or looking for a job, such as students, household workers, persons with disabilities, caregivers. Gender gap is especially evident in the age group 24-35. This may be caused by the prevalent perceptions of gender roles within a family, where a man is considered the main breadwinner and a woman is expected to run a household and provide childcare.<sup>21</sup> Over 370,000 young people are economically inactive, which comprises almost the half of total working age population (labour resources).

<sup>21</sup> UNFPA, Men and Gender Equality in Armenia, Report on Sociological Survey Findings, Yerevan 2016. Accessed at [https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/MEN-AND-GENDER-EQUALITY\\_Final.pdf](https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/MEN-AND-GENDER-EQUALITY_Final.pdf).

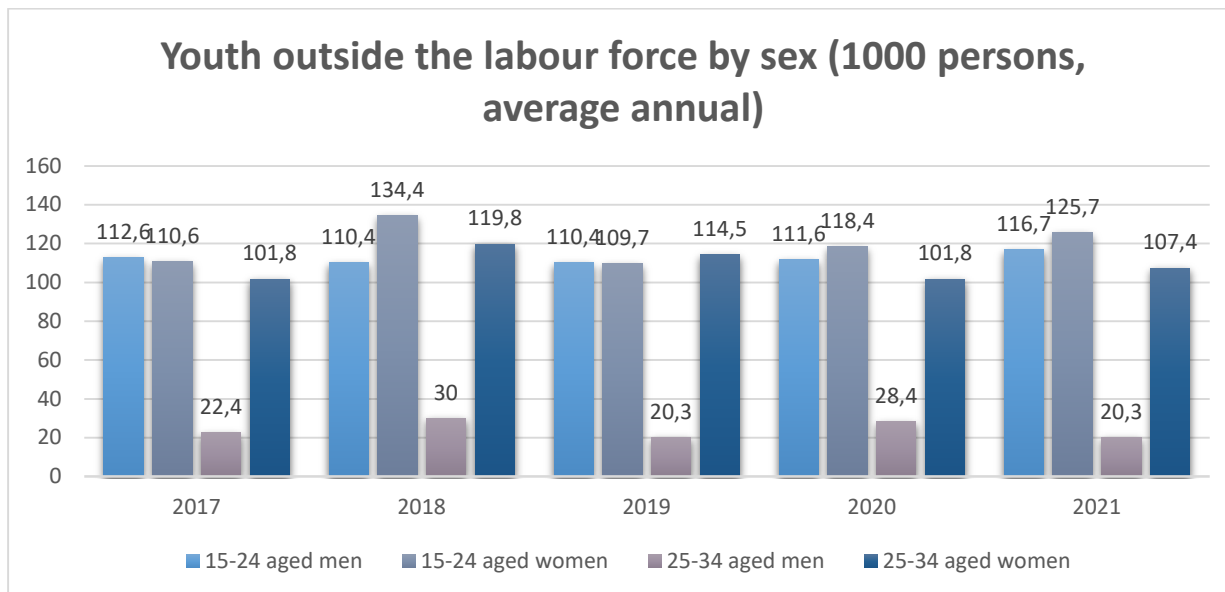


FIGURE 19, STATISTICAL YEARBOOKS OF ARMENIA, ARMSTAT, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

## MIGRATION

Several events that occurred in Armenia over the last few years, including economic decline during the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, have led to higher emigration rates from the country (Avagyan, 2021). An average of 24,000 and 10,000 people annually left Armenia in 2013-2018 and 2018-2020 respectively.<sup>22</sup> The high rate of labour migration, particularly of youth, both temporary and permanent, continues to be a means of coping with poverty and unemployment, rated at 15%<sup>23</sup> and 27%<sup>24</sup> respectively. Young people, especially from rural communities, opt for outmigration as a key mechanism to cope with unavailability of decent employment and high-quality education, as well as limited access to public services. According to the 2021 Caucasus Barometer, in 2020, the average age of the respondents wishing to leave the country (both male and female) was 40 years old (Enlight, 2022).

## INTERNET USE

According to the Digital Armenia 2021 report, 68.5% of the total population was using the internet (showing no meaningful change since 2018). The share of youth aged 15-24 with access to the internet is 83%<sup>25</sup>. No significant differences are observed among males and females regarding access and use of the internet. Urban areas are better connected, than the rural ones (60% and 56% respectively). The households in Aragatsotn have the lowest rate of connection (50%), while the highest rate (71.5) was reported in Yerevan<sup>26</sup> (World Bank Group, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Armstat. Demographic Handbook of Armenia. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/demog\\_2021\\_7.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/demog_2021_7.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> As of October, 2021. Armstat. Socio-economic Status of RA. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/sv\\_11\\_21a\\_141.pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/sv_11_21a_141.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Armstat. Armenia Poverty Snapshot. Over 2009-2020. Accessed at [https://armstat.am/file/article/poverty\\_2021\\_e\\_2..pdf](https://armstat.am/file/article/poverty_2021_e_2..pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2020: PART 3 Armenia: Non-Material Poverty. Available online at [poverty\\_2020\\_e\\_4.pdf](https://armstat.am/poverty_2020_e_4.pdf) (armstat.am)

<sup>26</sup>World Bank Group. Monitoring Impacts of Covid-19 in Armenia. July-September 2020. Accessed at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/510861613644434342/pdf/High-Frequency-Survey-Wave-1-AHFS-1-Surveys-I-and-II-July-September-2020.pdf>.

In Armenia, the internet is most often used to access communications and media services, including calls, messaging, social networks, and online news. However, virtual activities that are gaining in importance in the new “quarantined reality” have not actually been as popular thus far. The list of activities more recently considered vital includes: (a) sourcing critical information related e.g., to health, goods and services, job opportunities online (37%); (b) carrying out virtual work-related communications (31%); (c) publishing one’s own content (16%), e.g., for education purposes; (d) engaging in e-commerce activities (8%), such as online sales or internet banking. This may point to the fact that the unforeseen and abrupt transition of daily routines to the virtual environment during the pandemic might have been difficult for a significant portion of society. For example, although 83% of the overall population use the internet daily, only half of people older than 65 do so. At the same time, about 8% of the population report never having used it at all. Most of young people in Armenia currently have full access to the internet via mobile phones, laptops and PCs (UNICEF, 2022).

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## MAPPING CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF YEDM VIS-À-VIS THE PYD FRAMEWORK

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The mapping of the current policies and practices of YEDM, applying the PYD framework and focusing on YEDM at the levels mentioned above: family, community, organization and governance, whenever relevant secondary data was available. However, given the focus of CAYEDMA and its limitations, some PYD domains and features were given more priority, than others. Specifically, the domain of assets includes broad categories of formal education and academic achievement, which were not reviewed, as it was beyond the scope of this study. The review of YEDM practices focuses on the assets relevant to YEDM, specifically training; agency; contribution of the youth and the enabling environment. Whenever available, evidence on specific PYD features for each domain, e.g., higher order skills, is also included.

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### ASSETS

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As discussed in Chapter III, **educational institutions** play an important role in developing and strengthening the young people’s engagement practices. There is a **positive correlation between youth knowledge about the engagement platforms, participation in them and their active engagement in political and social activities in their adult life**. Yet, Tadevosyan and Azatyan (2022) argue that there is a certain level of **“participation illiteracy”** among Armenian youth, even in the higher education settings. They claim that young Armenians lack relevant participatory knowledge and skills, and therefore, there is a need for a broader development of their competencies. Moreover, the culture of participation among the Armenian youth is not yet well-established (ibid). Their argument is supported also by the findings of the latest Youth Situation Analysis, according to which **young people are not well-educated about their civic rights and responsibilities, as well as of the state institutions** (Making Cents, 2019). Some community leaders reported youth being “active in civic affairs”, but lacking the necessary knowledge and skills. They also noted that “the youth choose to demonstrate rather than engage in dialogue or make use of such channels as community councils” (p.20), which in fact supports the argument about the changing forms of participation. This finding indicates that **the national and local leaders may lack sufficient platforms and tools to engage with youth beyond the traditional forms of participation, such as community councils**.

The level of **awareness** about platforms, channels and spaces enabling young people to actively engage in decision-making, another significant social factor, is also rather low. Thus, almost half of the surveyed youth in Yerevan said they were not aware of any platforms that could enable them to influence decision making

(Yesayan & Yevdokimova, 2022). Only every fourth youth was completely aware of such platforms (ibid). Despite the existence of formal opportunities for young people to engage in decision-making through, for instance, student councils, the overall awareness level of young people about the purpose of these structures and how they operate is rather low at schools (HRDO, Save the Children Armenia and World Vision Armenia, 2017). Over 40% of students were not aware of the possibility of becoming a student council member, and were sure that membership was a rather easy task (ibid).

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## AGENCY

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In terms of youth agency, the Velvet Revolution was a turning point in political and civic participation of young people, as an unprecedented number of young people took part in the national protests. A series of public polls administered in August 2018, October 2018 and May 2019 showed that almost half of the surveyed young people aged 18-29 **strongly believed they could influence the decisions made in the country** (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2019). However, this number went down to 43% in 2021. In a recent study conducted by the Armenian Progressive Youth NGO. In a survey among 187 young people from all regions of Armenia, for almost half of them, participation in the decision-making processes meant being able to influence them individually and for another quarter - being able to influence them in their communities (APY, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and later the 44-day war had a significant impact on the perceptions of young people about their future prospects. About 60% of young people were seriously concerned about their future, given the uncertainty following the pandemic and the war (CRRC, 2021). Personal security and that of their families was a serious concern for about 70% of the surveyed young people. An overwhelming majority were also concerned about the negative consequences of the war, including security and potential new hostilities. In the longer perspective, about 40% of the young people wanted peace in the region, and the number of young people in the rural areas prioritizing peace was higher as compared to those living in Yerevan (40% and 30% respectively) (CRRC, 2021). This is explained by the fact the war affected the southern and eastern border communities of the country, which are mostly rural. When asked about their plans, young people mentioned education and studies as the main priority. Gender-wise, females were more determined to continue their studies than males. Among the ethnic minorities, the percent was about 25, and among the youth with disabilities, over 30%. Second to education was the plan to find a job (ibid).

Over 20% **young post-war returnees** reported about their determination to continue their studies (CRRC, 2021). There is little evidence on how the 44-day war has affected young men and women. According to 11 men aged 19-28<sup>27</sup>, who had directly participated in the military actions, their top priorities after the war were medical rehabilitation and professional re-orientation, as the disabilities inflicted by the war prevented them from returning to their previous occupations. Men in their late 20s were also breadwinners, and they struggled with being unable to provide for their families. Thus, for many of them migration to Russia, the US and the EU is the most desirable prospect, for a number of reasons: (a) to seek medical help not available in Armenia; (b) to get away from a society with which they are disillusioned; (c) to get away from the memories of the war (Mouratian, 2021).

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<sup>27</sup> In total, 19 men of varying ages participated in the small qualitative study.

Agency is closely tied to youth dependency as well. According to the **youth independence index** in four areas, namely, financial, economic, intellectual (including self-efficacy and agency) and lifestyles, the highest degree of independence was recorded in the intellectual dimension, with differences among urban and rural youth (Youth Studies Institute, 2013). The lowest degree was recorded for the economic and financial dimensions, which shows the higher dependency of youth on their parents regardless of their social and marital status and residence.

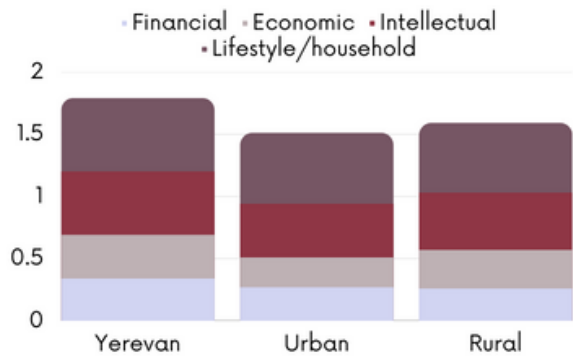


FIGURE 20 THE MEAN SCORES MEASURING YOUNG PEOPLE’S INDEPENDENCE IN THE MENTIONED AREAS BY THE TYPE OF RESIDENCE, YSI, 2013.

On average, young people in Armenia show a lower level of independence, with the mean score of 0.4 (on a scale 0-1). This finding is supported also by the Study on Youth Mental Health, according to which about 70% of the surveyed youth reported receiving financial support from their parents (CRRC, 2021). Thus, transition to adulthood can include higher dependency or semi-dependency on parents and families, which eventually may affect the sense of agency of the youth.

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## CONTRIBUTION

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As mentioned in Chapter III, one of the key social factors affecting YEDM, is trust. The review of the secondary data shows that **trust towards both state and non-governmental institutions** among young people has been declining. The recent research findings demonstrate that youth may not be willing to engage in the activities of local communities, various councils in formal education settings, and civic or political membership, due to the low levels of **trust** (Yesayan & Yevdokimova, 2022; USAID, 2019; Center for Research Insights, 2019 and 2021). Indeed, the study of youth aspirations and views on various aspects of their lives prior to the Velvet Revolution shows quite a low level of trust towards the political regime of the time (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016). After the revolution, which significantly raised the bar of expectations, the situation has changed, but very little. For example, a survey among Yerevan youth still shows a lack of trust in the state bodies and lower levels of responsiveness by the latter towards youth (Yesayan & Yevdokimova, 2022).

The most recent public opinion polls show that about 70% of the surveyed population did not trust any public agency (Center for Research Insights, 2022). Similarly, according to the results of the Caucasus Barometer 2021, the biggest downslide in public trust was in the case of the National Assembly, with over 70% showing distrust towards it in 2021, compared to only 28% in 2019. Younger people tend to trust this institution less, than the adult population (18% cf. 34%). The Office of the Ombudsman is among the institutions in which the most number of the surveyed population (60%) reported a solid trust.

**Trust in NGOs** is equally low and has been decreasing in the past years. According to the results of the Caucasus Barometer 2021, about 40% of the surveyed population distrusted NGOs in 2021, as compared to 26% in 2019. Recent research suggests several reasons for the lower levels of trust towards NGOs. Particularly, it is due to the lack of coordinated targeted youth work and mistrust in the genuine aspirations of the organizations (2022). According to Tadevosyan (2021), another reason is the so-called “NGOisation” of the civil society space.

Among the possible reasons is that the NGOs in Armenia tend to cooperate with one another rather than focus on civil society issues. Another one is when some NGOs tend to focus on their programmatic directions and target a limited segment of youth, by inviting just a few young people who “lock themselves from the same community and are content with the list of the scheduled events” (ibid). Citizens are often viewed as “objects” in NGO activities, rather than as active participants in the whole process of programming.

**Individual motivations** for participation are largely discussed within the volunteering context, and according to available research, young people are motivated both by self-goals and beliefs about civic actions, one overweighing the other in different times. Young people mention a number of reasons for volunteering, such as (a) developing knowledge and skills, (b) gaining work experience and future career prospects, (c) getting new friends, as well as (d) developing a sense of civic responsibility. More than half of the surveyed youth in 2016 reported that they volunteered for gaining professional knowledge and practical experience for future career plans, while motives such as personal development, or contribution to the public good, were not viewed as important outcomes of their volunteering engagements (Mkrtchyan et al., 2016). The CSO Sustainability Index 2021 report confirms that volunteering may be a good starting point for youth who consider it for their future career goals (USAID, 2023).

As to the **forms of participation**, in the recent years, **digital participation, specifically engagement on social media** was viewed as the main form of youth engagement, followed by engagement through NGOs (55% and 30% respectively). The NGOs were perceived as participatory platforms by the youth with prior experience in working with the NGOs (Yesayan & Yevdokimova, 2022). The two other frequently discussed forms in relevant literature are **civic activism** and **volunteering**. Paturyan et al. (2016) note that **civic activism may be positively correlated to volunteerism**, in a way that volunteering improves civic skills.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the 44-day war brought forward a rise in volunteering among the Armenian youth in particular, which is consistent with the argument that the number of volunteers increases in crisis or disaster situations, by around 40 % (Project Driver, 2020). Young people who volunteer in crisis are often unaffiliated and their actions may be characterized as “spontaneous”, “emergent”, “episodic”, “local” (ibid). Due to the lack of consistent data, reliance was on the “street evidence”, specifically from media in the time of the crisis in 2020 and onwards, which proves this true for the Armenian youth as well. This finding will be tested during the collection of primary data.

As to more **traditional forms** of participation, the major avenue to provide opportunities for such participation are NGOs and political parties, discussed in section *Enabling Environment*.

The forms and motivations of participation are also **affected by the social backgrounds of the youth**. Thus, young people with disabilities were more willing to engage individually, or through the organizations representing them. In contrast, young people from LGBTQ+ groups were more willing to engage in order to develop or protect their identity, rather than to support a wider cause (USAID, 2019).

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## ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

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Some of the PYD features of the enabling environment, specifically the “youth-friendly laws and policies”, and “gender-responsive policies” have been analyzed together, under the policy and regulatory framework of YEDM. In addition, the institutional framework and funding were reviewed to identify the various



stakeholders in the government, civil society and the international community are and on what other the PYD features of the enabling environment they focus.

## POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: REVIEW OF THE KEY POLICY AND REGULATORY DOCUMENTS

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There is no overarching strategic policy document targeting youth, despite the fact that several strategic documents have been developed and introduced since 1990s. The first national youth strategy was introduced in 1998 and the most recent youth strategy specified policy targets until 2017. Since then, there have been several failed attempts to adopt a national strategic document. The successive draft strategy for 2018-2022 was developed following the constitutional changes in 2015 and the Velvet Revolution in 2018, yet the strategy was declined for the lack of enough evidence to reflect the needs and interests of the youth, which were identified in the Monitoring and Evaluation of the 2013-2017 Youth Strategy (Galstyan, 2021). This report raised a number of concerns, including the **limited pathways for youth to participate at national, regional and local levels** (Youth Studies Institute, 2016). The **lack of adequately functioning platforms** was considered a serious obstacle to participation. The report referred to the passive, at times **highly politicized nature of the youth councils in regional administrative bodies** (Voskanyan, 2019; Youth Studies Institute, 2016). Despite the claimed priorities to increase youth participation, the involvement of youth in civic and political affairs was rather constrained. The young people's **awareness of the public administration system and reforms** and their involvement in the decision-making in the communities was rather low. The youth reported certain **"skepticism" towards state institutions**, and hence a lack of motivation to support their communities (ibid).

Furthermore, the participation of youth in decision-making processes was considered hampered by both **personal** and **structural barriers**. It was noted that young people did not have the **desire or motivation to engage in their communities**, in addition to the **lack of trust in state institutions**. Structural barriers, such as **lack of opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized groups** were mentioned, including people with disabilities, LGBT groups, orphans, refugees, those living in rural and remote areas, and extremely poor. Voskanyan (2019) notes that these issues were considered as priorities for the new youth strategy development process.

The above-mentioned discarded youth strategy was followed by the 2021-2025 Draft State Youth Policy Strategy and the respective Action Plan, which was not adopted by the National Assembly. Thus, currently, the key national documents guiding the youth policy implementation and defining YEDM are the RA Government Program 2021-2026 and RA Government Action Plan 2021-2026.

The analysis of the YEDM definitions and policy actions mentioned in the relevant national policy documents and regulations (see Appendix 4) shows a spectrum of commitments to the Armenian government has made to support youth development. The Government Program emphasizes the inclusive nature of youth policies, and focuses in self-expression and agency, as its vision defines young people as responsible for building their future. The priorities of the Program focus on developing the regulatory framework; enhancing the institutional framework, formal platforms and the participatory capacity of the youth. The priorities do not include any concrete objectives on providing opportunities for engagement and relevant practices, which is in contrast to the vision, which emphasizes agency. This contrast is addressed in the RA Government Action Plan, which focuses on youth contribution and engagement, yet fails to identify very concrete actions.

The analysis reveals also that the participation for efficiency in policies prevails among the four categories proposed by Farthing (2012), although the government's vision is more in line with the category "participation for development". **This may trigger incoherence in the interpretations of the policy goals and subsequent actions by the stakeholders at the national, regional and local levels.**

The participation of young people, specifically of legal maturity age, in decision- and policy-making is guaranteed by several regulatory documents. According to the RA Constitution, a draft law to the National Assembly can be proposed by at least 50,000 citizens. The regulatory includes also the RA Law on Local Referendum, according to which community members can directly participate in the administration of community matters through a local referendum; the RA Law on Regulatory Legal Acts, which requires that certain types of regulatory document should undergo public discussions and consultation; the Government Decree on arranging public discussions through a centralized system of [www.e-draft.am](http://www.e-draft.am)<sup>28</sup>; the Yerevan City Elders Council Decree on the procedure for open public hearings<sup>29</sup>. These legal acts, however, do not have specific stipulations for youth as a particular group (Voskanyan, 2019). The RA Law on Local Governing Bodies targets youth explicitly, as it stipulates that LGs are responsible for coordination and management of youth centers and youth-related issues.

In formal education, the RA Law on Education<sup>30</sup> and a number of adjacent laws enable the students to participate in the governance of educational institutions through being elected to student councils and student unions in both higher and general education.

#### INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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The main **public agency** in charge of the youth policy is the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, specifically, a curating Deputing Minister and the Department of Youth Policy, Supplementary and Continuing Education. The Department coordinates the development and implementation of the youth policy, subsequent to the structural in the RA Government in 2019, when there was a dedicated ministry in the government structure: the RA Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs. Two other agencies, the Youth Events Holding Center responsible for youth programming and monitoring of publicly funded youth programs, and the Youth Studies Institute, established by the UNDP and the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, responsible for providing evidence for policy making, were terminated. A limited scope of the functions of the mentioned institutions were transferred to the MoESCS of Department of Youth Policy, Supplementary and Continuing Education, yet there has not been any assessment of the impact of this institutional change on youth policy making and implementation.

To enhance youth participation in policy making, a number of **collegial bodies** operate, including the Public Council of the Republic of Armenia, which has a dedicated structural unit, Committee of Cultural, Youth and Sports Issues. However, from the publicly available information it is not clear how youth is represented in this council<sup>31</sup>. There are a few councils adjacent to the MOESCS, such as School Student Council<sup>32</sup>, an advisory body for the MOESCS comprised of representatives of school students in grades 8-12 from all over the country.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=109283>

<sup>29</sup> [www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=117054](http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=117054)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=22493>

<sup>31</sup> The official website of the Public Council of the Republic of Armenia: <https://publiccouncil.am/committees/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://escs.am/am/static/council>

The aim of the council is to “develop the principles of democratic governance, promote students’ self-expression and free speech, promote rights and duties of the students”. The most recent meeting was recorded in February of 2022 and was held to discuss the Education Development Strategy 2030. Another advisory body is the Public Council adjacent to the MOESCS, which is comprised of non-governmental organizations, including at least six organizations, which target youth, experts, media representatives, and individual experts<sup>33</sup>.

A recent platform is the Public Council on the Rights of Children and Youth adjunct to the Human Rights Defender’s Office, which is made up of children and youth aged 10-30 and deals with the issues pertinent to the protection of the human rights of these target groups<sup>34</sup>.

**Youth councils**, as public institutional platforms of participation, operate in some local and regional administrations. A current model of youth councils adjacent to the local municipalities and regional governments aims to promote youth policy development and implementation in communities and regions and to foster youth participation and engagement in the community decision-making<sup>35</sup>.

All the above-mentioned platforms are important spaces for the young people and the civil society to voice their positions and participate in policy making. Though these platforms host public discussions, some youth experts voice a concern that very few public discussions are being held on future matters related to youth policy. They find such insufficient attention to the youth sector quite concerning, considering the unprecedented number of youths involved in the Velvet Revolution in 2018 (Galstyan, 2019 in UNDP, 2019).

Another model for youth engagement in the communities, namely, the establishment of **youth centers** through public grants, has just been launched by the MOESCS, in line with the 2021-2026 Government Strategy. By supporting establishment of youth centers in communities across the country, the government aims to develop the potential of the youth, give space for them to self-express and develop intellectually, exercise their rights and duties and others. The centers aim to become spaces for debates and discussions, non-formal educational activities and entertainment, and also as research hubs serving the needs of the particular community<sup>36</sup>.

Since 2019, digital platforms of direct participation started to emerge. Yerevan Municipality operates the platform *Active Citizen*<sup>37</sup> that enables Yerevan residents to present various community projects and apply for funding. The *Public Transport Platform*<sup>38</sup> is another platform for the municipality to hear the concerns of the residents about the city transport and take a consultative part in its reform.

The **civil society organizations** (CSO) are the other largest stakeholder in YEDM. According to the 2015 mapping of youth CSOs, there were about 300 active CSOs in Armenia, including NGOs and funds dealing with youth issues; youth branches of political parties; university student unions; and faith-based organizations. The beneficiaries of these CSOs were youth, and their mission statements included commitment to youth development (Youth Studies Institute, 2015). As Armenia has undergone significant transformations since 2015,

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<sup>33</sup> For the membership see [http://escs.am/static\\_manual/staff1](http://escs.am/static_manual/staff1)

<sup>34</sup> Question-and-answer session between Public Council on Children's and Youth Rights adjunct to the Human Rights Defender and public officials: [https://www.ombuds.am/en\\_us/site/ViewNews/2410](https://www.ombuds.am/en_us/site/ViewNews/2410)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=88366>

<sup>36</sup> Technical requirements for establishment of youth centers

<sup>37</sup> <https://activecitizen.yerevan.am/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.yerevan.am/en/news/gortsarkvel-e-hasarakakan-transporti-barep-okhowmneri-transport-yerevan-am-hanrayin-p-okhgortsaks-o/>

the map was reviewed in May-June, 2022 map, in an attempt to identify the key youth CSOs and ongoing youth programs, actively featuring on the youth landscape of the country. The following sources were consulted:

- (a) public registers of civil society organizations (CSO), such as HK Depo, which lists active youth NGOs, among others<sup>39</sup>;
- (b) internal databases of CSOs, with which ICHD has cooperated for over two decades and has followed their activities since;
- (c) participant lists from events targeting youth since early 2022.

To ensure that the review provided accurate and up-to-date information, both the official websites and social media platforms (on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter specifically) of the CSOs and large projects were double-checked for the most recent activity. Those CSOs and programs that have shown no activity as recent as in June, 2022, were not included in the review. The youth programs reviewed are either ongoing, or were completed in 2022. Thus, about 130 active CSOs and civic groups were identified that either target youth specifically, or engage them extensively, and about 30 recently completed or ongoing youth programs.

The mission and vision statements of the CSOs, their goals and objectives were reviewed and analyzed to identify on which PYD domains and/or features they mainly focus. It should be noted that in many cases, CSOs use the terms of mission, vision, goals, and objectives interchangeably, which does not allow for a clear differentiation for the analysis. The CSO goals, described as “addressing youth issues in the communities”, “youth empowerment”, “youth development” and “promoting youth leadership” may be quite comprehensive that may refer to several PYD domains.

The review showed that about 25 CSOs mention **youth empowerment** and **skill building** as a primary area of their work. However, they do not specify the skills and capacities they target to develop. This made it impossible to clearly categorize CSO interventions under ‘Assets’ and ‘Agency’ domains of PYD framework and is presented as ‘other’ within PYD framework (see Figure 21).

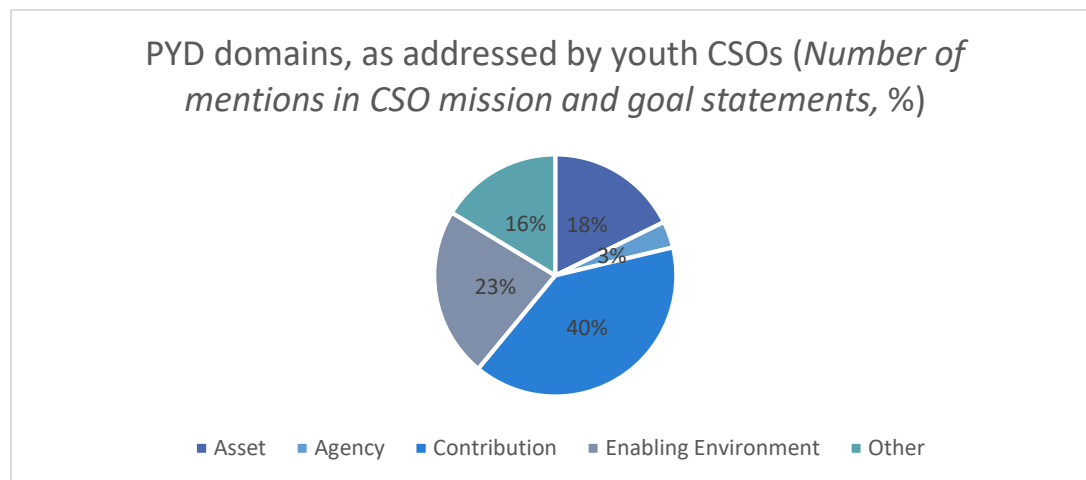


FIGURE 21 PYD DOMAINS ADDRESSED BY CSOS

<sup>39</sup> CSO DePo: CSO Development Program, <https://hkdepo.am/en/page/about>

**Skill building** is one of the most common CSO strategies to contribute to youth development and reach organizational goals. About 25 CSOs considered youth capacity building, formal or non-formal training as a crucial part of their work. Trainings addressed **professional and job-related skills, interpersonal skills, higher-order thinking, and specific topics, such as technology, ecology, and political science** (see Figure 23).

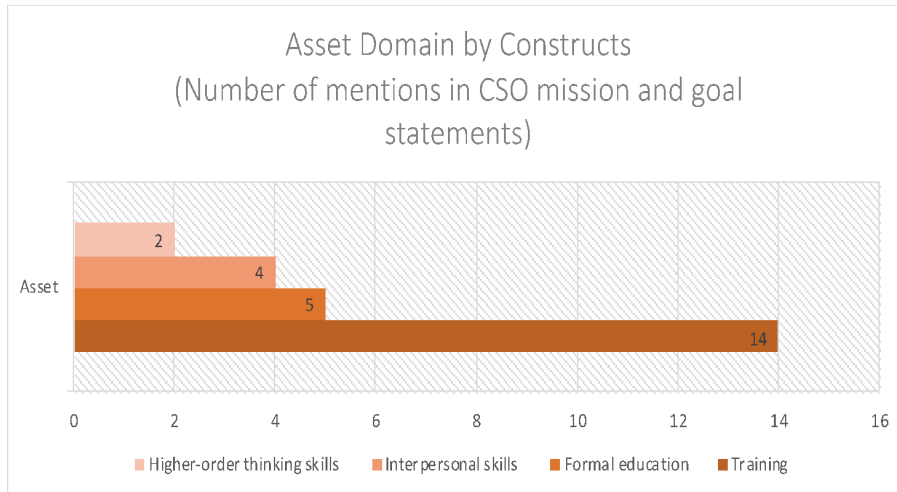


FIGURE 22 PYD DOMAINS ADDRESSED BY CSOS: ASSETS

Activities related to youth **agency have received the least attention** by CSOs and were rarely mentioned in organizations’ mission and goal statements. Only five organizations out of 25 claimed to enhance young people’s positive identity, self-efficacy, goal-setting skills, as well as positive beliefs about the future. About 50 CSOs mentioned **youth engagement** as a key goal of their organization, making particular emphasis on either social, economic, political participation, or youth engagement in community and educational institutions (see Figure 24).

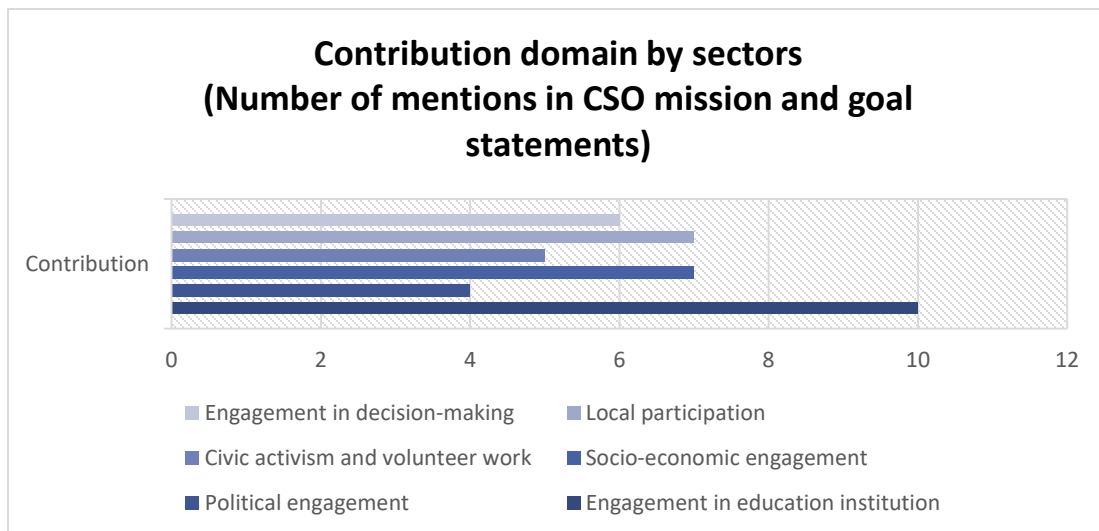


FIGURE 23 PYD DOMAIN ADDRESSED BY CSOS: CONTRIBUTION

Finally, CSOs highlighted the **importance of creating enabling environment for youth mainly at school, local and national levels** (see Figure 25). At least thirteen organizations considered **enhancing youth civic education and deepening the norms and values** importance directions that would result in improved civic consciousness; more active engagement in “addressing societal issues”; “protecting environment”; “making government accountable”; and “sustaining democracy and protecting human rights”. Fewer CSOs sought to improve **social relationships and bonding** between youth and adults and acquire support from family, peer

group, school or community for positive youth development. These issues were mainly acknowledged by CSOs that work with youth with disabilities, and youth in difficult socio-economic conditions. Only six CSOs mentioned vulnerable youth as a key target group in their mission and goals statements, prioritizing the work with rural youth, youth with disabilities and national minorities. As to **policies and services**, about sixteen CSOs consider their primary goal supporting development of youth-responsive and inclusive policies at school, community, and national levels, through youth mobilization, engagement, and advocacy. **Safe space** is undermined as a key component of the enabling environment, as only few CSOs claim to assist youth in their self-expression, or to provide a physical space for their activities. However, the issues of physical and emotional safety are not explicitly stated in their missions, goals or objectives. Yet, availability of shelters for women having survived domestic violence indicates that even if not explicitly stated, and even if limited, some safe spaces for specific vulnerable groups do exist.

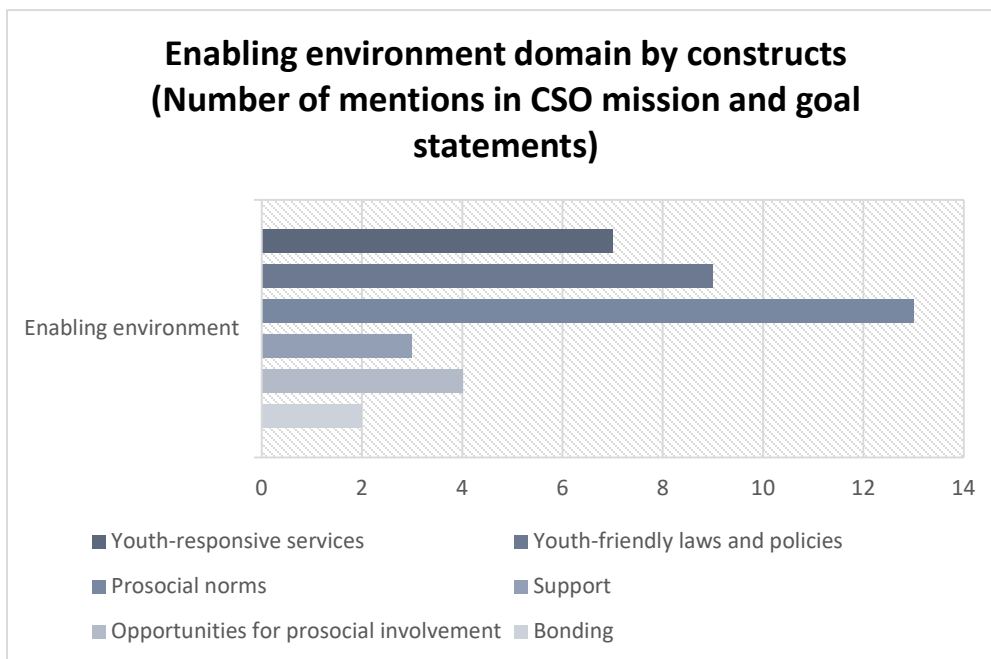


FIGURE 24 PYD DOMAIN ADDRESSED BY CSOS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The review of the 30 recently completed and ongoing youth project descriptions on the official websites and social media of CSOs makes it evident, that most of the projects (17) aim to enhance **youth engagement and contribution at national, community or school levels** (*Contribution*). In most cases, CSO actions seek to promote youth participation in public and local decision-making; enhance youth social activism and advocacy; as well as support student participation at educational institutions. The other major area of intervention is youth **capacity building** in the areas of professional and job-related training, development of interpersonal and higher order thinking skills (*Assets*). About 15 projects aim to support the **enabling environment** for youth development, by increasing opportunities for youth **prosocial involvement** and seeking to **advance norms and perceptions for youth for positive behavior and prosocial engagement** (*Enabling Environment*). It should be mentioned that **almost no attention has been given to developing healthy relationships and bonding within family, peer groups, school and community; belonging and membership, as well as youth physical and psychological safety** within their environment. These PYD feature remain largely neglected within the current

CSO initiatives. Only one project showed enhancement of youth **agency**, with an emphasis on developing youth **self-efficacy** skills (*Agency*).

**Thus, of all the PYD domains CSOs focus on assets the most, then on contribution and various features of the enabling environment, but fail to provide sufficient support to enhancing youth agency and safe spaces.**

An important development in the civil society in Armenia has been the emergence of new players, apart from, or rather in opposition to the NGOs. These are the **civic initiatives** that brought with them a new type of activity and organization. These initiatives were mostly issue-driven, horizontally organized and less formal. These new forms of civic participation became rather visible since 2008, due to perceived independence from political actors and creative forms of protest. As Ishkhanyan (2015) argues, these groups have introduced new forms of civic activism on the issues such as public spaces for private gains, governance, pension reforms, corruption. According to Tadevosyan (2021), one of the essential outcomes of such initiatives was the identity of an active, self-motivated, responsible young citizen. Despite the outcomes, these groups have not really expanded beyond Yerevan, or have resulted in larger systemic or structural changes.

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## YOUTH FUNDING

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There is no dedicated budget for implementing youth policies, and the funding for youth policy and programming is regulated through Armenia's state budget. In 2022, the planned state budget for youth programs was around AMD 1.9 billion<sup>40</sup>. However, the significant part, AMD 1.74 billion is planned to address the housing needs of young families. A number of specific government agencies run programs for and with youth, e.g., the state employment programs, or the "Work Armenia"<sup>41</sup> plan, which are much larger in scope and budget, than the government's national youth policy budget. Specific to youth, the government solicits grants that can be used towards a number of areas, including the development of indicators for youth program monitoring and evaluation; the development of guides/toolkits for engaging youth in decision-making processes; training and non-formal education programs on media and financial literacy, and participatory capacity building.

International development partners remain one of the largest donors of youth programming. The EU supports youth programs in education, employment and civic participation. The EU Erasmus+, Solidarity Corps, EU4Youth, and other programs involve a range of youth and youth stakeholders, and among various areas, targets also youth mobility. Many youth-related initiatives are funded by the UN agencies and the Council of Europe. USAID has emerged as the second largest donor of programs targeting since 2018, with ACE being the largest program on civic education in the country. Other USAID-supported programs target socially vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities, which indirectly target youth as well<sup>42</sup>.

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## SUPPORT

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Although the Velvet Revolution was perceived as a turning point in the country, along with the increased youth participation, the review of youth dispositions after the revolution reveals contradicting findings. Thus, according to the CRRC Armenia (2022), many felt disengaged due to the lack of subsequent actions to maintain

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.gov.am/files/docs/5146.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.e-gov.am/gov-decrees/item/33051/>

<sup>42</sup> For ongoing and recently completed projects see <https://www.usaid.gov/armenia/our-work/democracy-human-rights-and-governance>.

the engagement and/or use the platforms to channel their participation. Indeed, the expectations from the Velvet Revolution by the general public went down from about 80% to almost 45%. Yet, the findings of the needs assessment of Yerevan youth aged 16-30 show that youth civic and political participation has been on the rise since the Velvet Revolution in 2018, and about 90% of the surveyed youth believed they could impact their communities. Such positive disposition to civic and/or political engagement was identified more among the youth who had had some experience in participating in youth projects, as opposed to the ones who did not have such an experience, which implies that youth who felt supported, tended to have more positive beliefs on civic engagement (Yesayan and Yevdokimova, 2022). The findings of USAID’s Youth Situational Analysis (2019) indicate that the decision-makers did not leverage the potential of the youth for engagement, despite the latter’s willingness to remain engaged. This trend was more evident among young people in rural and smaller communities. This evidence shows that **unless young people are and feel supported, their positive dispositions towards engagement will be affected negatively.**

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### BONDING AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

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The socio-cultural context of Armenia plays a significant role in defining how bonding and healthy relationship are developed. The lives of many Armenian young people are typified by **kinship and district-driven styles**, more so in rural areas, as compared to the urban ones (UNDP, 2019). Such bonds and relationships tend to become a **decisive factor during elections**, whereby younger members of the communities follow the decision paths of the older, more authoritative men (ibid). Similarly, the decisions of younger females are highly influenced by men who tend to play more decisive roles in their families and their communities. There is a strong belief that fathers have a higher authority in the family, and this belief is stronger among adolescent boys, than girls (Arabkir Medical Center, 2019). These cultural patterns seem to be mitigated by the involvement of CSOs through their targeted programs, albeit they still encounter serious difficulties on-site. Despite the fact that young people from rural communities considerably contributed to the Velvet revolution, their participation in decision making is still hindered and more so for younger females (ibid).

The influence of relatives and peers on civic and political dispositions of young people was revealed also through the YP2LE Youth Civic Engagement Country Snapshot in 2021, based on an online survey among youth aged 18-35. Above 30% of the surveyed young people aged 18-29 mentioned their relatives as the major influencers on their decisions, followed by 25% opting for their friends. Less than 2% of the respondents said they were influenced by the NGOs. Thus, family, especially fathers, relatives, neighborhoods and peers have significant influence on young people’s attitudes, dispositions and decisions, which may vary according to their age and gender.

Such a culture tends to create “patterns of self-censorship” to political and civic engagement, and many youth, particularly in smaller communities, and men in particular, reported that they would tend to refrain from expressing an opinion, or from publicly engaging in an action, due to their dependency on their relationship with the people they know (USAID, 2019).

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### SAFE SPACES

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Youth programs implemented by CSOs and the emerging youth centers enable youth to make their voice heard, especially in the regions. Provision of such spaces is especially significant for socially vulnerable youth, such as young people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and to some extent young women (Tadevosyan and Azatyan, 2022). However, as mentioned above, safe space is undermined as a key component



of the enabling environment, as only few CSOs claim to assist youth in their self-expression, or to provide a physical space for their activities.

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## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SECONDARY DATA

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The evidence from the review of the publicly available national documents pertaining to youth policies and programs, youth statistics and previous research on YEDM depict the following portrait of Armenian young people and their practices of engaging in decision making. Aged 15-29, they comprise about the third of the population, and the number keeps steadily decreasing since 2017. The majority lives in Yerevan, and their number keeps increasing, unlike in rural areas. The share of young men and women is almost equal, and they tend to marry in their late 20s. They are literate, with the vast majority enrolled in secondary education, and about half enrolled at the tertiary level. However, every third young person is NEET. The majority is connected to Internet, and young men and women almost equally use it for information sourcing; work; publishing one's own content and engaging in e-commerce. Young females remain an untapped resource for the job market. On average more young people aged 15-24 were employed in rural than urban areas in 2016-2018, with the number decreasing since 2019. In contrast, more young people aged 25-34 were employed in urban, than rural areas. Every third young person is unemployed, and labour migration persists as a means of coping with poverty and unemployment.

In terms of YEDM, though there are many state and CSO programs targeting youth **assets**, there is an overall perception that young Armenians lack relevant participatory knowledge and skills, and they are not well-educated about their civic rights and responsibilities, as well as of the state institutions. **Agency** of young people as expressed in their positive beliefs about the future and expectations of engagement is constricted, since many of them are concerned about their future, given the uncertainties and overall instability resulting from the 44-Day War and subsequent security issues; the unmet expectations after the Velvet Revolution; and the comparatively lower level of independence. This leads to restricted **contribution** as well, exacerbated by the decreasing level of trust towards both state and non-governmental institutions; and low level of awareness about platforms, channels and spaces enabling young people to actively engage in decision-making. Evidence suggests contradicting findings about the motivations: some findings indicate that motivations of young people are rather personal, and valuing civic engagement is not considered a key factor for engaging, whereas another research finds that young people think engaging for a common good a strong motivation for volunteering. As to the forms of participation, in the recent years, digital participation, specifically engagement on social media was viewed as the main form of youth engagement, followed by engagement through NGOs, civic activism and volunteering. The forms and motivations of participation are also affected by the social backgrounds of the youth. Thus, young people with disabilities were more willing to engage individually, or through the organizations representing them. Young people from LGBTQ+ groups were more willing to engage in order to develop or protect their identity, rather than to support a wider cause.

The evidence indicates that the dominant feature of the **enabling environment** is the absence of an overarching policy targeting youth, despite the fact that several strategic documents have been developed and introduced since 1990s. There is some incoherence in the interpretations of the policy goals as outlines in the Government Program for 2021-2025 and the subsequent actions, the first being development-oriented and the second targeting participation for efficiency in policy. There are limited pathways for youth to participate in decision making at the national, regional and local levels. Many stakeholders, including youth, consider the lack

of adequately functioning platforms a serious obstacle to participation. The participation of youth in decision-making processes was considered hampered by both personal and structural barriers, the latter being more tangible for socially vulnerable groups.

The institutional framework comprises both public and non-governmental actors, that first being responsible for the whole policy cycle, yet currently focusing on policy implementation as per the objectives of the Government Program for 2021-2025, and providing formal platforms of participation, which many consider ineffective, and the second providing support to youth predominantly in the domains of assets, contribution and enabling environment. Agency does not seem to be a domain to where either public or civil society efforts have been targeted. To build skills, many CSOs provide trainings to address professional and job-related skills, interpersonal skills, higher-order thinking, and specific topics, such as technology, ecology, and political science. Fewer CSOs seek to improve social relationships and bonding; provide a safe space; develop healthy relationships and bonding within family, peer groups, school and community. However, the evidence suggests that the lives of many Armenian young people are typified by kinship and district-driven styles, more so in rural areas, as compared to the urban ones. Such bonds and relationships tend to become a decisive factor during elections, whereby younger members of the communities follow the decision paths of the older, more authoritative men.

There is no dedicated budget for implementing youth policies, and the funding for youth policy and programming is regulated through Armenia's state budget. International development partners remain one of the largest donors of youth programming.

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## CHAPTER VI: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

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### DEFINING YOUTH

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The discussions with all relevant participants in this study show a variety of views and approaches to defining youth that can be summarized in two possibly complimentary ways. One lens used to look at how youth can be defined by the target participants in almost all groups was that of **age** prescribed to youth. In all of the focus group discussions with target youth, there seemed to be no clear agreement on what the age bracket should ideally be for a person to be considered as “young”. Different variations were mentioned and, on average, a range of 15 to 35 was mentioned by young people from all age groups. The responses where the age bracket would go below 15 were quite rare in the focus group discussions, since the young people in almost all groups noted that persons below that age would be considered children rather than youth. These views do not seem to be aligned with the approach adopted in some of the policy documents where the lower age would be between 10-14 years old. For instance, as reviewed in Chapter III, the definition of youth adopted by the USAID includes the ages of 10-29; similarly, the age range included in the RA Draft Youth Strategic Development Concept Paper 2021-2025 viewed youth starting from age 13 to 30. The age bands may be regulated for various policy and legal reasons (e.g., as in the case of age bands adopted by UNICEF, where the legal protection is necessary for children and youth of certain age), yet it may be important to consider the perceptions of target youth in this study towards what youth encompassed in terms at the lowest. Similarly, the views of the young people varied about the upper limit, which for many of them appeared to be higher than the specified in the documents. As such, the age of 35 seemed to be the most frequent response in all groups.

At the same time, in many discussions with youth, the participants mentioned how, given the Armenian social fabric, age was a misleading factor in defining youth. The participants would note that, in some Armenian families, young people aged 35 or even above might still be classified as children, and on the contrary, some young people at early teenage would be viewed as adults. Therefore, the second, more dominating, approach to defining youth was about looking beyond the age factor and embracing a more comprehensive view to this definition. The characteristics of youth as a socially defined phenomenon were present in the responses of youth regarding the age brackets. In all the discussions, irrespective of the age, gender and residence type, the participants mentioned that **the characteristics of youth** would best be described as being the **driving force** of the community and playing an **active role** in the development of the country, having **newer and fresher** perspectives and ideas for life, being **active, swift and innovative** in making decisions about their own lives and beyond. In some cases, youth stressed that they their innovative and novel ways to see things allowed to position themselves as “superior” to the adults whose experiences and knowledge may have been somewhat outdated.

In my opinion, youth is the driving force of a society. No state can exist without youth  
(FG participant, 20-24, male, urban, Armavir)

Youth as being a **transitioning stage to adulthood** was most visible in the discussions with the target participants. For many of the young people the boundaries of the transition period were shaped by the transitions from school to further studies and then to work, to family formation and other “adult” chores that showed the diversity of the transition period on the whole. This finding was visible in youth groups where the certain aspects of their transition were more marked than others. For instance, for youth aged 15-19, the transition to their further studies was the notable marker, for youth 20-29 both further studies and their transition to work, family status were shared and mostly agreed upon. The transition from semi-dependence to independence was seen more frequently among youth from older age groups, namely in the 24-29 age bracket. Young people in these groups mentioned **transitioning to independence and acquiring status** (own family, serving in the army, employment) as one of the most important characteristics of youth.

...those people [are young] who are young by age and in their mindset, who can do something for their city, village, country. The youth age range for me is 21-30 years old. Why 21, because at the age of 21, girls graduate from university and boys return from the army. Until then they are inexperienced and are considered teenagers. (FG participant, 25-29, female, rural, Armavir)

The transitional aspect in the definition of youth was also confirmed by the **experts’** views. According to one of them, youth was categorized into three dimensions, namely youth as generation, as a group and a lifecycle. One of the most common approaches both in the literature and also confirmed by experts and target group participants is the definition of youth as a **lifecycle**, where the transition into adulthood is underscored.

A particular element in the definition of youth came up from the interviews with the youth from **underrepresented communities, specifically from the LGBTQ+ communities** and those with **disabilities**. In case of the **former**, similar to the groups above, age factors were mentioned (around 16-35/40) as an important element that defines youth. Youth from these groups, more than in other focus groups, would stress the

importance of diversity of youth, including their sexual and gender diversity. For these target participants, being able to exercise their sexual and gender diversity as part of their belonging was one of the most essential elements in the definitions of youth. Another peculiarity among this group was the importance that they placed on the **change** that young people bring with them. In several instances, young people voiced about youth being change-oriented and proactive in leading the changes they wanted to bring about.

In case of the **youth with disabilities**, one of the peculiarities regarding the definitions of youth mentioned by this group was the larger emphasis on the **opportunities for them to participate in life decisions** in order to lead a quality life. Young people in this group equally prioritized the socially constructed elements in defining youth and brought in a component of having equal opportunities to live to the full in the society.

There is no age limit for me. A 50–60-year-old person is not old as long as they manage to fully realize themselves in a society, and is integrated in it. Work is not important here. The person may have no job, but easily socialize, engage in social life and within their capabilities make use of their opportunities. For me, such people are young. *(FG with youth with disabilities, female, 15-29)*

The views and perceptions about youth among target participants seemed to be in some contrast with those from the **findings gained from interviews with the national policy makers and local governance bodies, community leaders and administrators**. In the majority of the interviews with the national and local governance officials, the approach to defining youth was mainly confined to the age factor. Views and opinions differed with regard to the lower and upper age brackets ranging from 16 to 30 and in some cases, given the social and cultural specifics of Armenian reality, to 35<sup>43</sup>. In conversations with the policy makers, age was indeed the departure point for them by setting the age brackets, such as increasing up until 35 years old considering that youth in Armenia tend to leave their parental homes late, change their marital status late, or even transition to work late. The national policy-makers would acknowledge the diversity of young people within any of these age brackets by distinguishing the younger age groups from the more mature adolescents in the older age group of 30-32 who may be in a different family, professional or otherwise personal status. In general, however, the national policy makers would prioritize the **importance of defining the youth on a legal basis**, which in their views would enable both civil society and international partners and agencies better target their programs, too. The importance of the definition of the legal basis for defining youth is discussed in more detail in the section on **Policy and regulatory framework**.

In an interview with one of the experts, the views by the national authorities about youth as an opportunity or as a problem were also discussed. According to one of the youth experts, both approaches could be observed about the Armenian youth. For instance, following the Velvet Revolution youth was regarded as an opportunity and harnessing their potential was one of the most important momentums, according to the expert views. The fact that a large number of young people engaged in policy-making in the legislative and executive branches was considered one of the examples of this approach. At the same time, the 44-day war brought forward the view about youth as a problem, as the war has affected many families and resulted in a large

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<sup>43</sup> As in the case of the Law on Affordable Housing for Young Families, 2010.

number of injuries and disabilities among young people. Although these two categories were discussed by the policy makers, they were not really considered in the dimensions that the definition of youth might embrace.

The findings from the focus group discussions regarding the definitions of youth were largely consistent with those from the review of the literature in Chapter III. In many aspects, the age was indeed the gateway to the definition of youth. While the young people age could certainly be a distinct indicator, age alone is not sufficient to determine all the sides of being youth. As seen from the above findings, the views of the target participants reflected the multi-dimensional approach to defining youth, where youth is characterized more holistically and is socially constructed. The insights gained from the focus group discussions with youth showed how the complexity of youth may be reflected in their experiences, opinions, backgrounds, identities and beliefs. The findings were in line with the review in the literature regarding the socially constructed nature of youth, which is often marked by the diversity of characteristics and identities, as well as the diversity of their transitions and pathways. This can be an essential implication for the national policy makers and international agencies in their approach to defining youth (**see Chapter VIII: Conclusion and Recommendations**)

## DEFINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

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In the focus group discussions with the youth, when asked how the participants perceived the concept of *youth engagement in the decision-making processes* a number of aspects were mentioned that can be grouped into three categories, namely, the emergence of rights and responsibilities, the independence and the mutual partnership with adults.

The first aspect related to the perception of YEDM was the acknowledgement of the **rights and responsibilities** of youth. In a number of discussions, the target participants mentioned that the engagement in the DM was often associated with the acquisition of rights and responsibilities, and the decisions that young people make to exercise their rights and demonstrate their responsibilities.

The second component that came up with the aspect of rights and responsibilities as one of the essential ones for YEDM was that of their **independence**. The importance of young people to be able to make decisions independently was viewed as one of the most frequent responses in their understanding of youth engagement in decision-making. In their majority, target youth responded that the ability to make decisions in their **own families** was one of the most decisive factors for youth independence in decision-making.

Along with gaining independence, any person gets a “bag of responsibilities”. When a parent takes on all the responsibilities of a child, they also deprive the child of their freedom. In other words, the parent should choose whether to grant the child their independence or take all their responsibilities and deprive of their freedom (*FG participant, 25-29, female, Yerevan*)

A number of factors discussed by the FG participants included the intersection of maturity of young people to make decisions and their independence. In particular, the participants in age groups of 20-29 mentioned the importance of young people to being able to independently make and communicate their decisions to their family members. Financial independence was particularly mentioned as one of the most decisive factors among this age group:

In short, if you are financially independent, you can be completely independent in making decisions. From my experience, males are more independent in decision making in the family. (FG participant, 24-29, female, Yerevan)

The importance of youth independence in the decision-making processes, financial independence specifically, was also confirmed during the **expert interviews**. According to one of them, young people in Armenia have **considerably strong bonds with their families** and may be affected by family decisions (See more in **Bonding and healthy relationship**). As argued by the experts, the fact that young people tend to live with their parents longer and share the households may affect their overall maturity and independence. For instance, it may be common for young people to be affected by the civic and political decisions made by their parents when they share the same households. The same would be true about the future professional lives of youth that may be directly affected by their parents. At the same time however, the experts would agree that, in the recent years, young people in Armenia started to display more independent behavior than previously even if they lived with their families for the decisions regarding their own lives.

At times, however, several responses focused on the **frustrations** of youth to engage, since their views and opinions would have been regarded as immature and lack sufficient grounds by adults. Some young people in their turn, mentioned that they increasingly engage in fields, where along with professionalism certain experience is also required. However, in some cases they used to underestimate the experience and knowledge of the elders, considering those outdated or irrelevant, which they later realized was not the case. This was mentioned as another factor hindering solidarity among generations. At such points, the young people agreed that a partnership between the adults and youth, with the guidance of adults and mutual respect would be the optimal framework. This leads to the **third component** that came up with the youth engagement was that of **mutual partnership** between the adults and youth. In many discussions, the target youth would agree that young people bring essential qualities to the decision-making processes, such as newer and fresher insights and perspectives and the ability to see events and things anew. Therefore, their understanding of engagement in decision-making was seen to be constructed on the utilization of this mutual partnership to harness these qualities brought by youth.

Regarding the engagement in decision-making processes, **young people who returned from the war prioritized mutual partnerships** as an important factor for the involvement of youth in such processes. In a few instances, the young people mentioned about their intentions to get involved in the decision-making opportunities to share their experience and opinions, mostly related to the military field.

For youth from the **LGBTQ+ communities**, engagement in decision-making meant development of the identity and opportunity to speak about their selves. As mentioned in conversations, youth from this category considered that the avenues for their engagement should be open and free to allow them to live their lives to the full. Such views were in line with the lived dimension of youth through which would include the diversity of their experiences and identities. In such cases, participation was not always regarded as “being active” or displaying “activism”, but rather exercising their identity and agency without restrictions. This approach was confirmed by one of the experts in the interviews, where the expert mentioned that, in the recent years, for many youth meaningful participation would often mean being able to exercise their identity and self-expression.

Many young people from the **ethnic minority group** would report that participating in the decision-making processes, whether in families or in their communities and schools, was not really their “business”. It seemed that young people would infer that they are not yet entitled to voicing opinions due to being “young”. There was an observation that the representatives of this group were rather detached from the decision-making processes, which according to them was considered more of an adult matter.

Children leave everything to the discretion of school elders; they are not old enough to organize things "outside of their frame of competencies". They should grow up at least to their 20s. (FG with ethnic minorities, female, 25-29, Armavir)

In case of the **youth with disabilities**, their views on the YEDM were strongly tied with their definitions of youth. For many of them, the engagement in DM processes was viewed as a window of opportunities to participate in decisions in order to lead a quality life. Engagement in DM would enable this group to realize their potential towards being a full member of the society. Due to the stereotypes and barriers, both physical and social, these young people viewed engagement in DM essential in challenging the stereotypes that they face and bypass them on their way to engage into the decision-making processes.

The conversations with the above groups on the three mentioned aspects of engagement in decision-making, namely, rights and responsibilities, independence and mutual partnership reveal that the perceptions of youth about YEDM are in line with PYD definition, which emphasizes an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated at all levels.

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## ASSETS

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The importance of enhanced **knowledge and skills** among young people was a frequent theme in many conversations in this study. In general, the **target youth participants** reported a fairly lower **degree of awareness of the platforms, spaces and channels that would enable their engagement in the decision-making processes at the state level more than at the community level**. This varied among the age groups, though. According to the observations, the group at the age of 25-29, mostly in the urban residences, reported better awareness of state institutions, electoral processes and their own civic rights. The youngest group, that of 15-19, seemed to be the least informed of the DM processes at the state level, yet better informed of those at their communities and schools. For this age group, as well as those at early 20s, the awareness of certain DM platforms and channels was more evident among the rural youth. This was explained more by the proximity and the existence of smaller networks in the communities that could enable this awareness. It should be noted that young people who were not in education and not in employment reported the lowest degree of awareness and reported little interest in civic engagement in all groups and ages.

Although this study did not focus on measuring the skills and civic knowledge gained by young people in formal institutions, in the focus group discussions with youth, many of them shared the importance of being educated about how the administrative structures of the community and how it functions, how the decisions are made and how youth will be able to contribute to them. Often, they mentioned the complicated system of such processes and **prioritized a user-friendly approach to educating youth especially in schools**.

As reported by youth, the **lack of confidence** and the **perceived lack of knowledge and skills** for meaningful contributions at community and state levels were often the main reasons for their disengagement in the DM processes stemming from their disbelief about their abilities to bring change.

I wanted to apply, but I didn't know how and where to apply. There is a water spring in our yard and the fact that the spring is running open, and that clean water just flows bothers me seriously. I have always wanted to know why they do get closed as we are going to have a very serious water problem soon. No steps are being taken to fix this problem and I never knew where to apply. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

The FG participants acknowledged the **lack of their own skills** and **educational resources** as a barrier towards their meaningful participation in the decision-making. For instance, in a conversation with a member of civic initiatives, while reflecting on their previous engagement in various civic and activist initiatives, the interviewee admitted that in many cases the participating youth did not have the necessary knowledge about the negotiation processes with the relevant bodies and/or communication skills with the state bodies. Similarly, the community leaders would mention that young people lack certain skills and competencies in applying to the stakeholders on the issues of their concern.

The lack of the necessary skills and competencies among young people was confirmed in the interviews with the experts. Per one of the experts, young people overall **lacked knowledge about political and civic processes in the country**, including little understanding of the voting processes, decision-making processes in the community, and/or policy-making processes at the national level. Although the experts agreed that there can be individuals who are well-informed about the above, yet on average, the degree of awareness of such processes among the youth was considered as quite low. The overall low degree of functional literacy in these processes claimed by the experts was in line with the literature, too. This view is confirmed by Tadevosyan and Azatyan (2022) who argued that youth in Armenia lacked relevant participatory knowledge and skills and was characterized by “participation illiteracy”, even in the higher education settings. Indeed, the representatives of student councils would similarly report that the young people in the universities lacked necessary skills and overall awareness about the existing opportunities at the institutional level. While they mentioned working with students in developing their awareness and skills, they still admitted that little progress had been made in this respect.

The importance of having soft skills and relevant competencies was also mentioned in the interviews with the representatives of **international organizations**. Many of them mentioned the **lack of soft, analytical and critical thinking skills among youth, as well as media literacy skills**, that would enable them to engage effectively in the decision-making processes. Several of them shared their observations of young people being present in decision-making events, yet not being able to articulate their views on the issues being discussed. This was supported by the views that it may be the prerogative of the decision-makers to be willing to share the power and be more open towards hearing youth.

The **national policy-makers** often referred to the **lack of necessary competencies** among young people as a basis for rejecting their proposals or solutions to a particular problem. According to them, these competencies often would include both **the lack of content knowledge about an issue under discussion and**



**also the soft skills, such as communication, presentation of the problem, negotiation**, that would enable the young people to effectively promote their views or a cause. In their interviews, a shared understanding was that young people should be prepared to participate in decision-making processes. Such preparation entails both understanding what kinds of young individuals the country itself wants to develop and what competencies young people end up gaining. In conversations with the community leaders, many of them highlighted the importance of the **value system** in working with youth. A representative from the National Assembly emphasized the importance of the community rather than individual-centered value system which should contribute to enhancing the commitment of young people to developing and protecting the country. The role of education was hence mentioned as a key factor in developing such value system among youth. However, the views of what such values may specifically be were not very clearly articulated by some of the national authorities.

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## AGENCY

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The discussions within this domain rest in two distinct categories. The first one is the review of the **perceived sense of agency of youth**, as affected by various factors, specifically by (a) the actors influencing YEDM in family, community and national levels; (b) socio-cultural characteristics of youth; (c) the disposition of the young people towards the leaders, defined by their perception of the latter's competences, their own self-efficacy, mutual trust, and availability of feedback mechanisms; and the second one is that of **their aspirations and future plans**. These categories are discussed in respective sections below.

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### SENSE OF AGENCY AMONG TARGET YOUTH

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In some respect, the discussion of the first element of the youth agency connects with the findings from the young people about their engagement in the DM in earlier section on **Defining youth engagement in decision-making processes**. Three important elements were identified that were perceived by young people as essential for meaningful DM, that is their rights and responsibilities, the degree of independence, mutual partnership. In this section, these elements are unpacked in relation to the factors that appear to affect youth decisions about their engagement in DM.

As discussed in the literature, social contexts appear to have a large influence on youth engagement and several **factors** were examined and identified.

In the focus group discussions with youth, at the **family level**, a number of observations were made. In general, youth in the FGD admitted that **fathers (also brothers, men in the family) would be the main decision-makers** in their families. This trend was observed in all age groups, including the oldest age group of 25-29, however, with some variations among the age groups and the residence types of the participants. In case of the younger age groups of 15-19 and 20-24, and in case of the rural communities, as compared to the urban ones, this was more observable. For the single young people, who assumingly lived with their parents, fathers, in some cases, grandfathers, were the main decision makers.

In our family, my father makes the decisions, he is the head of the family. In other words, whatever question is on the agenda [in our family], the last word belongs to him. *(FG participant, 20-24, rural, Armavir)*

Some young people would mention that their families tended to have a **consultative decision-making process**, where they would take an active part. Participants from Yerevan FGs, especially in the older age group of 25-29, seemed to refer to such family dynamics more often. This was particularly observed in such areas of their lives that directly affected their involvement, such as education and/or health. Yet, opinions would differ about the nature of such consultative decision-making. In a few cases, youth would be skeptical about whether or not their individuality and, perhaps, agency, is taken into account in such consultations. Some would claim that the Armenian families in general are very “collectivist” and the decisions may not really factor in each and everyone’s opinion, but rather a consensus will be reached based on set agreements in the families. The representatives of some of the CSOs, however, did not quite agree with this view, since according to them they had noticed that families have become more open and young people seem to have more freedom in their decisions. According to them, this could be a result of the civic education in formal and informal institutions, as well as the result of the CSOs long-term work with youth.

**Gender-wise**, it seemed that male participants were “in tandem” with their fathers more than their mothers and/or other members in the family. This was more typical of the youth in 15-24 age groups.

My father and I make the most important family decisions. There are many issues that the other family members are not even aware of. There are also issues that we discuss with them but decide the way my dad and I want. There were very few examples in the past that my dad and I were of different opinions. *(FG participant, 15-19, male, rural, Armavir)*

Despite the variety of responses about the role of the families in young people’s engagement in DM, a discerning approach was observable in the older group of young people, where the FG participants would put forward the **diversity of families and family member interrelations** as the determining factor affecting young people’s participation in the decision making. In a number of cases, the groups in all three study geographies would agree that a lot depends on the families and their approach to young people.

A lot depends on the family as to whether a child grows their ability to make the right decisions. If we put children in restrictions, do not allow them to act, they may not become stable young people, and do something for their community or state. The problem should be solved within the family, the parents should not keep the children “in a cage” and allow them to think. *(FG participant, 25-29, female, urban, Syunik)*

In the conversations with **young people who returned from the 44-day war** actions, one of the peculiarities they noticed in their family relations was that their parents, more specifically fathers, started to regard them more seriously after their experiences at war. A few of the young males shared that their family members started to trust them more for making their own decisions and saw them as “mature adults”.

After the war, people around me began to take me more seriously. They thought that if I had been able to overcome that difficult phase on my own, under more peaceful circumstances I would be able to act in a more mature way. *(Interview with a young person returned from 44-day war, 20-24).*

In case of the **youth with disabilities**, the young people observed that in their families more consultative process was present in terms of the decision-making. Almost all of the participating youth in the focus group discussion agreed that they participate in the decision-making processes in their families and there seemed to be no single member that would be the sole decision-maker. At the same time, in discussions with these young people it was observed that when describing their relations with their families, the older participants agreed that there was a tendency for the parents to demonstrate excessive care and protection to their children with disabilities. This was also supported by the CSOs working with youth with disabilities, according to whom young people with disabilities lacked independence and were not given much opportunity to make simple decisions on their lives. In such cases, there seemed to be an agreement among the focus group participants that the **power dynamics between the parents/adults and the youth tended to be disbalanced, irrespective of the age of the young people.**

Similar consultative approach to family decision-making was noticed among the **displaced** young people. In the majority of responses, these young people reported being part of the decision-making in the family, taking active role in it and being able to take decisions regarding their own lives.

At the family level, young people from **LGBTQ+ communities**, reported a range of cases from youth having trust-based relationships with their family members to a total unawareness of the family members about the identities of their children/siblings. In several cases, young people reported that their undisclosed identities would hinder their partnerships with the adults and affect their participation in the DM.

The views of **young people from ethnic minorities** included a distinct involvement of the adults as the main decision-makers in the families. In fact, the adults as the decision-makers in this group were the ones who included a variety of family members, both immediate, such as parents in case of single participants, as well as extended family members – in case of married individuals. The young people in this focus group reported their in-laws to be the decision-makers in their families. When asked about their understanding of decision-making processes, young people in this group reported the least of the involvement in them, since going against the opinions of the adults in their surrounding would be considered wrong.

When we do something wrong, the elders say the opposite. When we don't listen to them, we make mistakes. *(FG with ethnic minorities, male, 15-19, Armavir)*

At the **community level**, a distinct factor among the youth in the older age group affecting their agency was the **disposition of the young people towards the leaders and the employees of the local government**, manifested by their perceptions of the latter's competences, their own self-efficacy, mutual trust and availability of feedback mechanisms. Many of young people complained about the **lack of competence, necessary professional and soft skills** (e.g., communication) among the LG bodies that made it challenging for them to engage in the decision-making processes.

I agree, and the municipality should have very good staff, because the head of the community is basically their manager and supervisor. And good staff will be able to know what the youth needs. *(FG participant, 25-29, male, urban, Armavir).*

In a couple of cases, young people doubted their **self-efficacy** and to a certain degree **lacked agency** to voice about issues in their communities and engage meaningfully.

There may be a situation where no one has ever spoken about the issue before, and we are afraid that after raising about it, we will not be accepted as normal... we are afraid that they will not appreciate our work and start criticizing it. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, rural, Syunik)*

This view seemed to be confirmed by the representative of the Human Rights Defender's Office, too.

It is often unclear how adults decide whose opinion is worthy to listen to. Basically, they listen to the one who is successful and has "achieved something in life". And success is measured according to the listener's perceptions. *(KII, representative from the Human Rights Defender's Office)*

Another factor affecting youth agency is the **political views and beliefs** of young people: if a young person politically supported the local government, s/he had better chances of manifesting their agency and influencing decision making at the community level.

One of the factors that affected the establishment (or the lack of it) of partnerships between youth and adults was **trust** among adults towards young people and vice versa. This was clearly seen in the FG discussions with youth on the matters regarding their communities. On many instances, young people mentioned that their voices were not heard, they did not feel important to adults (e.g., the community leaders) and hence refrained from participating in any processes. This was frequently heard in the discussions particularly with the younger groups of 15-19 in all sites.

If there was a problem, I would not apply, because they would say "This is just a child [on the phone], there can't be anything serious here". *(FG participant, 15-19, male, Yerevan)*

Besides, since older people have been dealing with such problems for years, it has become a culture and a habit that it is the work of the elders. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

Lack of trust was also highlighted by the international development partners. The representatives would frequently mention that the perceptions of adults about youth in considering them "being little kids; still growing; having no voice as adults do" would be one of the restraining factors for youth. Many of them also mentioned that youth in Armenia would not display trust towards their community leaders that would allow them to share their views and opinions freely.

In the discussions, youth often related to the situations where they may get no **feedback** from decision makers about the results of their participation, and unsuccessful outcomes of their engagement may lead to the distrust towards the authorities and skepticism about impactful participation, thus affecting their further actions

and contributing to the increased feeling that their voices are heard. Hence, youth may see no purpose in further engagement.

Equally important for the representatives of international development partners was the robust **communication** with the youth on their participation through effective **feedback** mechanisms. This would entail ensuring communication with youth on their participation, regarding the results, outcomes and impact of the participation. In particular, they mentioned that the feedback young people receive on their engagement from the local and national authorities may have its impact on their future decisions for participation.

The **lack of a constructive dialogue** between youth and the national authorities similarly came up at the **national level**. In the discussions, for many of the target youth the activities of the national authorities were considered tokenistic and they seemed to be distrustful towards them. This was more typical of the youth in the older groups, whereas youth in the younger groups showed very little interest and engagement at the national level. The section on **Contribution** offers more details with this regard.

I realized that many state institutions are of formal nature, just to show they have done something, so I mainly avoid dealing with them. *(FG participant, 25-29, urban, male, Armavir)*

The national authorities similarly prioritized the meaningful engagement of youth people in decision-making processes. In some cases, they mentioned that the consultative role of young people was not enough for them to adequately contribute to these processes; expanding the capacity of youth people towards engaging them more fully, such as even getting them for state positions.

The international development partners would also mention that the state bodies do not effectively work with youth. In fact, many of them noted that the Velvet Revolution had offered a good momentum for the then-newly elected government to start building meaningful conversations with youth which was very active in it. However, according to many of them this momentum had been lost to start and not harnessed adequately.

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## YOUTH ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

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One of the key aspects of agency is the dynamics in the youth aspirations, beliefs and outlooks for the future, and it was examined in relation to three major social-political events of the recent years: the Velvet Revolution in 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic, the 44-day war in 2020 and its aftermath. These events were perceived differently by the target youth in the FG discussion and appeared to be quite different across different youth groups.

One of the most common responses among practically all FG participants was that the **COVID-19** pandemic led to the **uncertainty and unpredictability in the long-term planning**. This seemed to be the case for almost all youth across ages and residences. In some cases, youth would acknowledge the fact that the pandemic-caused shift to online modes of interaction had brought a wider access to resources and platforms for people to engage. Some CSO representatives mentioned about the wider opportunities for engagement especially for the people with disabilities. More detailed views about the digital platforms are discussed in **Forms of participation**.

Many young people viewed the **2018 Velvet Revolution** as a positive turning point in the lives of their communities. Many of them recalled that they felt freer to express their views and there were discernible developments the communities.

... Before the revolution when we tried to raise any issue, people would fear that because of voicing about their issues they could have suffered and face problems. Now this feeling is gone. *(FG participant, 20-24, male, urban, Syunik)*

This was observed across some FGs of all age groups in various communities. However, some participants were rather reserved while referring to the Velvet Revolution and its impact, focusing more on the impact of the 44-Day war during the discussions. The reservation might be a manifestation of an intention to shun any political discussion, given the Armenian society's polarized state (Freedom House, 2022). Some would even call it a 'regime change', and note that the fact that it incited great expectations, which were not met, resulted in indifference towards what was happening and towards their engagement.

In some cases, youth in Yerevan mentioned that the Revolution sensitized youth to be more active at its onset. However, the increase in youth interest and activism seemed to have encountered a lack of competencies among the newer government officials and a number of legal restrictions that stopped youth from more in-depth engagement.

I founded an NGO after the 2018 revolution because I had good ideas and it motivated me a lot as an active person. Everything changed, because it was not a revolution, but a change of political power. After working in different fields, I realized that there are many fundamental problems, and a bare change of an official may not be a solution. The whole regulatory framework should be changed. All this has affected my motivation, it has decreased. *(FG participant, 25-29, male, Yerevan)*

For the **LGBTQ+ youth** the Velvet Revolution was viewed as a chance to see changes in the standalone legislation on antidiscrimination, as well as improved conditions for people from this community in general. Similar hopes were mentioned about the adoption of youth policy. Yet, the interviewed young people reported frustrations about these processes that remained unresolved. According to them, these legislative processes were not given due attention, as compared to the issues of national security in the country in the post-2020 war context. As mentioned by an interviewee, the issues of LGBTQ+ people were nowhere close on the agenda of the national decision-makers, at least institutionally. The cases when the policy-makers, as individuals, would be open to hearing and consulting with the youth from this group were frequently mentioned, however, at the institutional level no legislative or other mechanisms were put underway.

The heightened spirits of the youth immediately after the Velvet Revolution have also been supported by the **views of the experts**. In conversations with them, they mentioned that youth participating in the revolution in 2018 were in fact strong believers in the change in the country. In the post-2018 contexts, however, the hopes for the changes waned and the momentum was lost. According to one of the experts, one of the reasons of the lost momentum is that the national policy-makers did not manage to channel the "street" activism into more institutional platforms through the meaningful dialogues with youth. At the same time, the opinions of national and local stakeholders differed as to the impact that the Velvet Revolution had on the

possibilities and practices of youth participation. On one hand, it was noted that the Revolution contributed to the change of the culture of participation, while on the other hand, it was discussed more with reference to its "artificial" nature, since the underlying factors, problems and perceptions of participation that would have contributed to the culture of participation had not really changed.

The **44-day war in 2020** and the post-war related security threats in the country seemed to have affected the youth most of all. For quite a large number of young people there was a strong desire to continue protecting and developing the country. To a certain extent, many of them wanted to engage more. This engagement was both about own development as an individual, namely, gaining more knowledge and skills about local and foreign policies and conflicts, as well as becoming more active citizens in their communities.

The war affected my professional orientation. Before I wanted to learn programming, after the war I changed my mind and entered the faculty of nuclear physics. *(FG participant, 20-24, male, rural, Armavir)*

In the interviews with one of the experts, this was explained by many young people having come to reconceptualize their lives and find new purposes.

In case of the **young people returning from the war**, the responses varied. The aspirations and plans for future among young men having participated in the 44-day war differed from those of the rest of young people in several aspects: (a) they focused more on short-term goals; (b) prioritized finding jobs as their immediate plans; (c) and showed stronger apathy, compared to other groups, conditioned by the uncertainty and fragile security of the country. On many instances, they noted of the lower degree of involvement in their communities and/or universities. For the young people in the higher education, cases included both lower degree of interest and effort in their studies and also disengagement from the university councils where they had been represented before the war. Moreover, in the conversations, many of them shared about intentions to leave the country as a result of the war. They mentioned also about the decreased **political** and **digital participation**, conditioned by the war, and the ensuing political crisis and polarization of the society. Political engagement was increasingly perceived as a *'bad thing'* and a politically active person would easily be categorized into *'one or the other side'*, thus being subjected to hate speech even by their own social environment. As to the digital participation, quite a few of the young people reported that they not only stopped participating in social media discussions, but also stopped following the news regularly, something of a routine before the war. The reasons mentioned to justify such a behavioral change were the consistent security uncertainty, overwhelming and omnipresent negativity, and lack of trust to both official and alternative news channels.

The uncertainty about the future was one of the most frequent responses among young men, a claim made both about themselves and their friends.

The impact of the war on young people's aspirations and attitudes has also been observed by the national and local stakeholders. In certain cases, they would mention a change in the attitudes among young people towards their own country and that each of them individually may be responsible for its security and development. For instance, the interview with a local governor highlighted that youth especially in the borderline communities became more actively involved in the development of their communities.

...Irrespective of the outcome of the war, they became more responsible towards their community, their place of residence. They started to love, fear, and protect more, and during any military operations, young people are the first to engage in the mob. *(KII, Representative of local municipality)*

In Syunik, however, the spirits of the young people, comparably, seemed to be different. Many of the young people in both urban and rural settings of the region mentioned about feeling lost and insecure, along with their intentions to leave the country. This view was also confirmed by the community representatives who mentioned that the war seemed to have affected young people causing apathy and a feeling of despair.

In my opinion, depending on the military situation, many people face a bit of uncertainty about their future. We draw some plans, but at the same time realize that the security situation can affect decisions we make... *(FG participant, 20-24, female, urban, Syunik)*

In general, when asked about their future plans, the majority of young people mentioned getting **education** as one of the primary goals, followed by perspective **career** plans. For the older age groups, **financial security** was one of the priorities given how uncertain life has become. Among all age groups, **leaving the country** for better life (whether study or job prospects) was among the most frequent responses. The views of the representatives of the civil society organizations were in alignment with those expressed by the above stakeholders. In many instances, CSOs would report a decline among young people's participation in their activities in the recent two-three years explained by the degree of uncertainty about their future and the overall security in the country that the 2020 events had caused.

Feelings of uncertainty about own future were also present among the **LGBTQ+ youth**. In the majority of the conversations, they reported a high degree of uncertainty about the future, however, in contrast with the rest of the youth discussed above, the concerns of the representatives of this group related to their own future with a LGBTQ+ identity in Armenia. Issues of security towards own future and the limited opportunities to fulfil personal and professional potential were reported as the most frequent reasons of possible migration from the country.

The **youth with disabilities** were perhaps one of the most "optimistic" groups in terms of their future plans. The majority of them mentioned that they wanted to stay in Armenia and pursue their career plans and/or education respectively. It was also observed that they shared about their intentions to continue advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities so that they become full members of the society.

Young people with **ethnic backgrounds** reported similar aspirations to most of the youth in the focus groups. Getting education and pursuing career goals were mentioned as the most frequent responses among this group. Migration was also one of the topics least mentioned by this group.

In case of **youth displaced from the war-affected regions**, the aspirations were similar to those reported in the majority of the focus groups. These young people similarly shared about their intentions to leave the country due to the current national security threats and seeing no future for them. Yet, these were not the only



plans of young people from this group. Several of them supported the views of youth for staying in the country and helping to develop it.

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## CONTRIBUTION

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The discussions in this domain will include the findings about how and why youth decide to engage in DM, with the focus on the forms of engagement and youth motivations.

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### YOUTH CONTRIBUTION TO DECISION MAKING AT THE COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL LEVELS VIS-À-VIS SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

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**At the community level**, the participants recalled a number of both positive and negative cases of some kind of participation. Overall, there seemed to be a **considerable awareness** among the target youth about the decision-making processes in their communities. A good number of the participants, especially from urban locations in the selected sites, recalled participating in some sort of community discussions. What stood out, however, was that in many cases the participants seemed **frustrated about the outcomes** of such discussions, or rather the absence of any outcomes. The participants would report being invited for discussions in their communities, be it with the community leaders or local governors, and witness little progress later about the issues on the agenda in such discussions. There were some differences in the perception of engagement among the FG participants who currently reside in Yerevan, yet had a different original residence. They noted that ties between the Yerevan municipality and the citizens are not as strong as in smaller communities. They mentioned that in their original communities, such as Berd and Aparan, they had been more active, than in Yerevan, because in these small communities they were considered as active young people and were engaged by the municipalities.

The community administrators, on the other hand, noted that young people are not particularly engaged in the decision-making processes at the community and/or national levels.

Our community also has a 5-year development plan, but now there is little engagement of young people in the process of developing the plan. Some opinions have been considered in the program, but the overall level of participation is not satisfactory. *(KII, representative of the local governing body)*

This contradiction can be explained by the extent to which young people get engaged in their communities and on what issues. For instance, in a conversation with a CSO representative active in civic initiatives, it was indeed confirmed that young people are more active at their community level more than at the national. However, this engagement was considered to be rather *superficial, involving activities, such as cleaning up the community, building a bus stop, or painting a graffiti, however this cannot be serious (KII with a member of a civic initiative, activist)*. There seemed to be a difference in the perceptions of the “seriousness” of youth community actions, though, among various stakeholders. For instance, a representative of the Human Rights Defender’s Office seemed to offer an alternative view by looking at the complexity of mechanisms through which youth may be invited to participate in their communities. Often, youth will be the target to be invited to discuss very complex policy documents, yet they will not be the target audience in smaller community issues, such as reconstruction of a park or a building in their communities.

The participation of **young people from ethnic minorities** in their communities was quite low. In fact, none of the participating young people mentioned voicing any particular issue related to their communities, or at the national level. Digital participation of this group was also reported as very little, since the participants did not attribute any meaning to such participation.

In case of the **displaced youth**, a number of quite positive cases were shared by the participants about their participation in the original communities. Many of these young people reported about public discussions taking place with the city councils and community leaders. These would involve, for instance, effective communication between the young people and their community leaders on certain issues. What made this communication effective was that young people felt their opinions mattered for the community leaders and that the latter were able to give feedback on how the issues raised by youth would be resolved or to give reasons for rejection. According to the young people, the community leaders should be taking the responsibility to provide for an effective communication with youth by, for instance, inviting influential people from communities to participate in the community meetings, which can be attractive for youth to engage as well.

In the discussions with the **young people with disabilities**, one of the barriers for them to participate was the **lack of participatory mechanisms**. They would note that the decision-making processes would often be *made about them but without them* and that they would be left out of the processes. At the same time, some of them would also note that, in general, there may be avenues for youth to participate, however, they would participate not because of the existing mechanisms or platforms, but rather due to the networks, often personal ones, that more or less “active” youth may be able to utilize. The participants in this group agreed that the voice of certain “active” youth may actually be heard in the decision-making processes, however, the participation of the so-called ‘general’ or ‘typical’ youth tends to be very low. The HRDO representative noted that young people with mental disabilities tend to be more vulnerable, than those with physical disabilities, as the perception of the latter changed positively after the 2020 war. However, the first group is not taken quite seriously by the public authorities during the decision making.

**Youth from LGBTQ+ communities** stand out in their chances to participate due to their belonging to this community, which constrains their chances to be “actively involved” outside such communities. As argued by an interviewee, a representative of LGBTQ+ community will have to face barriers that relate to their identity in the first place. For such youth engagement in an issue that includes decision-making related to a queer person would be impossible without disclosing their identity. This makes it almost impossible for youth to engage in the decision-making meaningfully. As shared by the young people, in such cases they prefer to hide their identities as a form of self-protection and self-express through other elements of their personal and professional identities. For instance, this may include situations when young people would speak up as a professional (I am a lawyer), or as representatives of certain groups (e.g., I represent a poor community, or a disability group); in other words, any element of their personal or professional identity that would make them feel safe and accepted in a particular community.

With regard to the **obstacles** to participations, the ones shared by the **displaced youth** were quite similar ones to those discussed in other focus groups. For these young people the smaller communities created barrier in terms of the existing networks of people and the fear of feeling ashamed for being the only person raising an issue in the community where everyone knows each other. Lack of information about the processes for decision-making, as well as the lack of confidence and belief in own skills were reported, similar to those in other groups. One aspect that came up in this group was more gendered, where the participants mentioned

that it may be more difficult for males to approach their community leaders with certain issues as there is a perception that they should be able to solve their issues themselves.

In their responses, young people in this group tended to compare their opportunities in their current residences with those in their original ones. One of the participants noted about the positive experience with the community leader which allowed him to address many issues in the community. However, the new experience was not seen that much collaborative in the new settlement.

...The former head of our village used to thank us after doing every little thing. Now, they don't ask the opinion of any young person... Since our problems were not solved, we were discouraged. If some young people joined me, I would try again. *(FG with the displaced youth, male, Syunik)*

The interviews with the youth **experts** about the importance of the youth involvement in the decision-making processes shows that there is a certain level of **skepticism** as to how youth in Armenia participate in these processes. According to one of the experts, the participation of youth has not gone beyond the consultation stage. The interviewee referred to the participation ladder by Roger Hart (discussed in Chapter III) to show that the instances where youth actually took initiative and were proactive in the decision-making were rare in Armenia. This view was supported by a number of CSO representatives, too, where they would mention the fact of using young people as a “decoration” on many occasions in their communities.

In fact, the engagement with the decision-makers seemed to be more effective in the smaller communities. According to one of the experts, one of the specifics in smaller communities was the fact that participation there could be typified by the presence of a so called “**core**” **group of citizens** that may facilitate the participation of everyone else in the decision-making processes. Such presence of a core group may lead to a better collaboration with the community leaders.

The rural communities is moving in that direction. If a core group of active youth is formed, they try to understand the quality of that group (there is a serious problem of knowledge) and they will go in that direction. If that active youth carries all the knowledge on participation, its concepts, and types, they will be able to realize that potential. *(KIE with youth expert)*

**Gender** was often viewed as one of the key factors affecting youth participation. Gender stereotypes about young females being unable to participate due to their household chores, restrictions from own or partner families were mentioned by the CSOs working with women. Several representatives mentioned that women’s status would be affecting their participation in the decision-making events. For instance, being a mother was viewed as a certain transition for women where the additional responsibilities would take time from their civic participation. Sometimes this transition would even relate to the age restrictions for women where approaching a certain age would imply a transition to motherhood.

According to some representatives of the LG, the family and marital status of young people, and particularly females, seemed to be a defining factor for youth participation in the decision-making processes.

Let me put it this way. We, the Armenians think that they stay in youth councils until they get married and then leave voluntarily. Perhaps they are freer and more active when they are single, but when they get married, the restrictions increase, especially in the case of girls. *(KII, Representative of the Local Governor's Office)*

The representatives of the CSOs working with women also supported this view. According to several representatives, women below 25 were more actively involved in civic processes as compared to older women, as for the latter their family status and full-time employment would be affecting their degree of participation in the decision-making. For instance, when talking about youth participating in their own organizational context, some CSO representatives would mention that females, especially females who did not have older brothers or lived with mothers, appeared to be more actively engaged in the decision-making processes in their organizations. The participants noted that there seemed to be a difference in the stages of decision-making. For instance, several CSO representatives would argue that while females may be more active at the consultative stages, at the implementation stage their participation would decline due to the family restrictions.

Gender was considered one of the serious factors affecting youth political participation, too. In the FG with members of the political parties, it was mentioned that female members of the parties and their families (e.g., husbands) would often be subject to hate speech and discriminatory attitudes, would have to deal with constant arguments and/or simply learn to ignore all of that.

In the interviews with experts, the issue of **existing opportunities** for youth came up in relation to the platforms and programs for youth to be involved to share their views and opinions. According to one of the experts, such opportunities were very limited for youth to participate at either community or national levels. In the event when youth met difficulties in participation through the structured institutional mechanism, they would frequently apply to **individuals and personal networks** to solve the issues of their concerns. This view was confirmed to some degree in the focus group discussions with youth, where they reported about similar experiences of utilizing their networks, especially at the community level. This was more typical among young people aged 20-29 in rural communities, specifically, where the personal networks served as opportunities for them to arrive at successful outcomes of their issues.

I had such an experience related to my work. There was a development institution in an art field that was about to be closed down. I applied to the municipality, and the result was that the institution was not closed, and the director changed. It was the result of my and any other people's cause. *(FG participant, 25-29, male, urban, Armavir).*

Some youth reported **non-formal education** as one of the channels enabling their participation in the community programs. In such cases, their previous experiences in debate clubs, non-formal education centers, and other recreational activities appeared to have led them to engagement in the DM processes.

At the **national level**, very few young people talked about their experience in participation in the available DM platforms. In fact, in many FG discussions, few of the target youth were aware of the channels available for citizens to participate in the public discussions, such as E-draft. Experts interviewed in this study agreed that youth were often ill-informed about the availability of the platforms; moreover, they often

mentioned that young people felt they had been left out of the process as they had not been informed in due manner about certain opportunities. Besides, the platforms at this level per se were quite limited in number, which was considered another challenge for young people to engage. According to one of the experts, when the channels for youth to participate in the DM at the national level are confined to a single platform (i.e., E-draft,) then the participation of youth in them tends to be less evidence-backed or professional.

On the other hand, FG participants would often report about their engagement with the state officials who would use social media and, particularly Facebook, as a channel for communication. In a few cases, FG participant would recall getting involved with official via Facebook to address a certain issue, and often, getting a solution to it.

I mainly participated in public discussions. I contacted the parliamentarians twice. I applied to the Minister of Education and Culture Arayik Harutyunyan regarding the university heating and the problem was solved. *(FG participant, 20-24, male, urban, Syunik)*

This view, however, was not supported by one of the experts according to whom participatory mechanisms through social media, such as Facebook, were not currently available. Indeed, youth responses, like the one cited above, often related to the past occasions, when a number of public officials hosted Facebook lives to address the questions and comments by students specifically. Such opportunities seemed to have become very rare, according to the youth experts.

#### FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Across different age groups in this study, various forms of participation were practiced. **Traditional forms** of participation, such as **voting in elections**, and membership in youth councils occasionally came up in relation to the engagement in the decision-making processes. Some young people mentioned the fact that the legal age of 18 entitling young people to vote per se meant their engagement in the decision-making processes. In the discussions, though, it was not quite clear whether or not young people do participate in the voting and elections.

As soon as a person gets the right to vote from the age of 18, for the first time they become full citizen and are able to make a serious decision at the state level. *(FG participant, 20-24, male, Yerevan)*

I have never actively participated in community or state decision-making, and now, even more so. I look at that participation with a good deal of skepticism. My participation is manifested by me merely going to elections. *(FG participant, 25-29, female, Yerevan)*

Among traditional forms of participation memberships in political parties, taking office seats were also observed in the discussions with the policy-makers. Some policy-makers would mention that a form of youth engagement entails youth running for offices and occupying positions in the official structures through public policy. This view was mainly explained by the fact that following the Velvet Revolution in 2018 many young

people ran for offices both in the executive and legislative structures. This was considered an effective form of participation by some officials.

I would prefer the young people to work here, instead of them coming over, expressing their opinion. By working, those opportunities would have been wider...Of course, participation of young people in the process of drafting legal acts is more desirable, than just expressing their opinions. *(KII with a staff member from the National Assembly)*

This view was similarly supported by the community leaders who mentioned that there are quite a few young people employed as staff members in the local governance structures (e.g., in the consolidated communities), which allows them to meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes. Although the views of the above stakeholders may refer to the traditional forms of participation, such as engagement in formal politics and policy engagement, this fact should not confine the views of the national policy-makers and the community authorities about the importance of youth-related policies overall. On the contrary, such views may offer a narrow view of participation, since the fact that youth follow the traditional forms of engagement and become duty bearers does not translate into the only way of youth representation. The representatives of the CSOs also supported this point. Many of them mentioned that the fact of youth being represented in the formal politics did not quite have its direct impact on the society, since according to them, many young people, and females especially, would become “ordinary political figures” that would easily give up on their promises once they get involved in it.

One of the experts observed also that appointing inexperienced and non-qualified young people in senior public positions may have a long-term negative impact on how the society perceives active youth engagement in public governance, as they fail to deliver successfully, and this often is explained by their youth and the subsequent inexperience and lack of professionalism.

Participation in decision-making through the **CSO platforms** seemed to be viable for some youth more than for others. Specifically, this was typical for both youth representing **LGBTQ+** communities and for **youth with disabilities**. Both of these groups noted that the engagement through the CSOs offered them more opportunities, as compared to the instances of individual participation. The youth in both groups reported about their motivations to have more channels to voice certain issues pertinent to their groups in public discussions, to feel protected and to advocate for the rights of these persons. In fact, CSOs were the channels for these young people to affect the decision-making processes, which they would have not been able to achieve individually. These views were also supported by the representatives of CSOs working with these groups and the international development partners. An LGBTQ+ participant, however, noted that the role of CSOs in uniting and protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ communities should be decreasing, since it is high time that the community itself gets organized for action.

In the discussions about the existing opportunities for participation with **youth with disabilities**, it mentioned that there were actually many opportunities for youth in general to participate in the decision-making processes, yet very few of them would be willing to participate. The young people would argue that the efforts made by them as representatives of a certain group, i.e., youth with disabilities, were incomparably

bigger as compared to “ordinary” youth. At the community level, for instance, these young people noted that they had to pave their own ways towards opportunities.

Let me say something about opportunities, now there are many things created for youth, but they don't want to do anything. I don't understand why they don't want to make use of them. In the community, it is us who create and open a platform of opportunities. *(FG with youth with disabilities participant, female, 20-24)*

The CSOs that worked with the people with disabilities would actually support this view and mention that they prioritized the participation of youth with disabilities in decision-making processes. In fact, the representatives from these organizations noted that the participation of young people from this group has recently increased in the civic and political sectors; young people would participate more in voting and elections, or serve as observers in the election processes.

A common trend practically across all age groups was the **decline in the digital participation**. On many occasions, youth in all age groups reported that the use of social media as a form for participation had waned considerably. This trend was more observable among the youngest group, especially in the rural areas. The participants from this group mentioned that they rarely, if at all, use social media to engage in any civic activities, and even those who used it regularly did not see any value in raising issues through such platforms. In many instances, the youth were skeptical about the value of the social media and/or digital platforms. In many cases, they preferred to use other pathways to raise voice about a community issue, such as directly approaching the person who may be in charge and or may have respective competencies.

I generally do not speak out [about any problems in the community]. I don't think it's right to write anything. It's better to do a little work instead, take the trash and throw it in the trash can, prove it with an action. *(FG participant, 15-19, male, urban, Armavir)*

In fact, for many young people in the FG discussions activities in the social media were not considered meaningful and intentional against the “real” participatory actions that could be taken by people.

Commenting, liking are not forms of participation, because you can like and just move forward. Participation will be real if you join the movement, find out what is happening, ask your questions or discuss face to face. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

Among youth in the older groups, responses varied. In general, many of them were reluctant to use social media, and Facebook in particular, as a platform for their engagement. A common reason among almost all groups was the post-war context that led to the lower engagement in the discussions on social media, but also reading daily news to the extent they used to do. On many occasions, the security uncertainties after the war, the flow of the constant “negative” news and lack of trust to the news in general were mentioned as the most common reasons for such disengagement.

Yet, some youth still mentioned that digital space can be a good platform for identifying like-minded people and uniting them around an issue. Such responses, though, were rare and rather an exception to the general trend. Some youth considered the use of social media as a good tool and platform for raising issues regarding private/business services rather than civic issues and activities.

The community leaders, on the other hand, seem to note that young people have become more active and persistent in their demands and making their voice heard. They would note that young people would use both digital and traditional channels to approach the stakeholders for the issues of their concern.

A significant factor that affected the use of social media and digital space in general among the youth was related to their frustration and distrust to it following the 44-day war events, and particularly the fake news that were spread through social media.

In the **rural** communities, two specific trends were observed in relation to the **digital** participation. First, rural youth, more than the city-dwellers, mentioned the specifics of smaller communities as enabling more face-to-face communication. According to them, the smaller communities offered closer networks to keeping up-to-date with the developments in the communities and engaging in them. In fact, using personal networks of family, friends, neighbors and school peers was one of the most common channels for keeping awareness and participating in the community events among all age groups.

These specifics of the smaller communities, on the other hand, had its adverse consequence for those young people who preferred to use the digital space to openly voice their issues. In a number of instances, the participants recalled being “chased after” for removing their posts or commentaries in the social media. As such, the safe space for such youth to raise their voice was assumingly not provided.

I wrote a comment once, and everyone forced me to delete it. In small communities where everyone knows each other, it is very difficult to publicize any problem. The mayor contacted me and explained the essence of the problem, but it was not an exact explanation for me. *(FG participant, 25-29, female, urban, Armavir)*

The second trend among rural youth was the **lack of access** to digital platforms. A few of the participants mentioned lack of electronic gadgets, such as personal computers and/or personal smartphones as a barrier to using the digital platforms and participating in them. This trend was observed in the extended families with large number of family members.

For example, there are 6 members in our family, and only 3 of them have cell phones. In our village, someone from the community administration was supposed to come and hold a seminar. Nobody was aware, only the staff and their family members were informed. If the head of community administration stood on the street and spoke to the residents, many people would participate. *(FG participant, female, 25-29, rural, Syunik)*

The group that mentioned a relative advantage for the digital platforms were young people with **disabilities**. For them, the use of the social media was clearly one of the most advantageous channels for participation. As noted by the focus group participants, the digital participation through the social media was



one of the existing opportunities for them to voice about the issues of their concern. Since the lack of the physical platform was one of the main barriers for this youth to participate in the decision-making processes, digital platforms gave them the platforms to do this without restrictions.

You may raise a problem without directly reaching the district administration, by putting a well-written post on Facebook, accessible to everyone. Someone sees and shares your opinion, and you already receive a call from the municipality. Facebook is used as the most affordable way to raise different problems. All the structures have their FB pages, you write to them, and they become aware. *(FG with youth with disabilities participant, female, 25-29)*

Young people from the **displaced families** also noted that social media could be one of the effective channels for them to learn about the community meetings and events. For instance, one of the participants shared his experience of how he would learn of the community initiatives from the respective Facebook page. These events were mentioned as both for upcoming as well as for already occurred community meetings, yet the participant noted that these were effective for him to keep pace with the community events and to participate in them.

Digital space was considered as a viable platform for participation for some of the **LGBTQ+** youth, too. Many of them prioritized the existence of digital platforms, channels, as well as various digital applications that could enable their participation. Yet, the participation of such youth remained in the private group domains where, according to them there was a safer space for them to engage, get informed and connect with one another. The absence of the safe space, even digitally, among this group, could also explain the decline in the digital participation. In one of the interviews, a young person mentioned how their participation had drastically decreased after the 2020 war. The interviewee noted that after the war the hate speech and attack on LGBTQ+ people has increased specifically in the digital space (most likely among biologically male representatives). This phenomenon made the online space unsafe for the LGBTQ+ young people and many of them preferred to disengage completely.

In a similar fashion, **young returnees from war** mentioned their digital participation through social media platforms decreased after the war. Their digital participation rather meant following the news and, in rare cases, sharing information for their international friends. In a way, these young people reported an awareness mission for their friends on social media where they felt their experiences mattered and were more accurate.

In the FG discussions with the youth, **volunteering** indeed was one of the most salient drivers for youth civic participation. Across all ages, genders and residence types in the FG discussions the majority of the young people reported participating in some sort of volunteering activities in their communities, schools and other initiatives. These activities often included participating in the cleaning of their community, mobilizing people to solve issues with the community transportation, volunteering for CSOs and/or private organizations and many others.

Most often, youth reported being engaged in volunteering activities during the 44-day war in 2020, when they mobilized resources to help their communities during the critical events.

I have not participated recently, but I did during the 2020 war. My friend and I went to the warehouse, packed products, and placed them in cars. We wanted to help our brothers there in some way. If at this age we couldn't go and stand by them, at least we thanked them this way. *(FG participant, 15-19, male, Yerevan)*

The findings from the FG discussions confirmed the arguments reviewed in the literature about the increase in the volunteering activities during critical times and disasters. Indeed, the majority of the FG participants mentioned their involvement in the volunteering activities during the 44-day war in 2020, but also during the September 2022 escalations on the border of the country. Similarly, youth reported being involved in the volunteering activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and also during the tragic explosion in one of the shopping centers in Yerevan<sup>44</sup>.

I have not personally participated, but I know a peer who recently volunteered during the Surmalu accident, without telling anyone at home. We learned about it from videos on the Internet. It was very important for him to be there. *(FG participant, 15-19, male, Yerevan)*

The increased engagement of youth in volunteering activities during the critical situations, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the 44-day war was also mentioned by the national and local stakeholders. Many of them mentioned that young people would be the primary group to engage into volunteering initiatives through CSOs or some active groups to help the target groups (displaced population, affected by war and/or COVID-19). Indeed, the 2023 report on the CSO Sustainability Index indicates that as of 2022 CSOs in Armenia overall were successful in engaging young people into volunteering activities (USAID, 2023).

Similar views were shared by the regional and local administrators. Many of them agreed that they witnessed an increased participation of youth in critical situations. This participation, however, was not always necessarily mediated by the local governance bodies. In fact, according to them, in most cases youth were “mobilized” through the platforms utilized by the civil society organizations, as well as participating individually, mobilizing through a cause. Such initiatives would include providing necessary resources to the elderly population during the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic breakout. During the 44-day war events in 2020, such activities included collecting necessary resources for the soldiers at the frontline and alike.

## YOUTH MOTIVATIONS

The review of the responses of target youth in the focus groups about their reasons of youth civic engagement can be grouped into several categories.

**Volunteering** was one of the most common forms of participation, as seen above. When asked about the motives to participate in volunteering activities, youth would report a number of reasons. In general, many of them would report their **beliefs about the civic actions** in helping others, their communities and own country. Quite a few young people would agree that volunteering provided them with such **benefits** as developing their knowledge and skills, soft skills (team work, communication skills), opening up social networks and friends, as

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31987311.html>

well as job prospects. In some minor cases youth would also report developing own identity and persona as one of the main incentives for them to engage in such initiatives.

You should find your own “self” that can do everything and express its opinion on every issue. *(FG participant, 20-24, female, rural, Armavir)*

The **positive experience** gained by youth from volunteering and it being a good source for their motivation was mentioned by the representatives of international organizations and some CSOs, too. These stakeholders added that experience in volunteering could also be considered by educational institutions to **provide scholarship, or for future job prospects**. One representative from a CSO pointed out that of the two possible ways for youth volunteer, namely through CSOs and through state institutions, youth may choose CSOs since the latter provided for more benefits, such as peer networks, travelling, learning about new cultures, whereas the pathways through the state bodies may be limited to the volunteering activity itself without any future perspectives.

Overall, it was noticeable that volunteering was more typical for youth from ages groups of 15-24, whereas young people in the older age group of 25-29 would report previous engagement and experience in volunteerism. The latter would report lack of time and the unwillingness to engage in “free of charge” activities. This tendency was also confirmed by the members of the professional organizations too. In conversations with them, they mentioned that the transition to employment may largely affect the decision of young people to volunteer. As argued by these participants, for many young people volunteering may become an unnecessary or a non-serious activity.

Some younger participants would also claim that they **lack time to volunteer**. Most interestingly, in one of the focus group discussions with youth aged 15-19 from Yerevan, lack of time and perceptions about volunteering seemed quite different from the majority of responses from the youth in other discussion groups. In these cases, the young people reported both the lack of time and the lack of awareness about any volunteering initiatives as the main reason for their disengagement.

I don't have time now. Besides, it's harder to participate in volunteer work in Yerevan than in smaller cities, because active youth there are always available. *(FG with youth, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

The **motivations to volunteer among young people who returned from war** actions were also increasing. Their responses included motivations to help their communities, to contribute more to their communities. In some cases, they reported being more motivated to participate in military or army-related discussions more after their return, as well as being willing to share their experiences in the war actions and to educate younger generations about certain skills based on their experiences. Their views were in line with the issue-based or cause-driven motivations of young people as reviewed in the literature in Chapter III. Additionally, such youth reported being competent about the issues under consideration and more confident in their involvement in such cause-driven discussions or public events. Although their participation showed certain decline in the institutional or communal contexts (e.g., in the communities or in the universities and university councils), their motivations to engage with war-related causes seemed to have increased. This view was not

ubiquitous for all target participants, though. Some of them reported being detached from social lives in general<sup>45</sup>.

The participation in volunteering activities was reported to be the lowest by youth from **ethnic minorities**. Of all the participants in the focus group discussions, none reported having an experience. Although the participants were aware of other young people volunteering in times of the 44-day events, none of them actually reported volunteering themselves.

The **decline in the political participation** was brought up by the political party members. In the discussions, they noted that the motivations of young people towards political participation or joining a party have been recently declining. This was often explained by the changing motivations of young people who would rather consider joining a civil society organization for their career goals. As mentioned by one of the participants in this group, *“my incentives for joining a political party at the time were to invest in the development of the state, however the priorities of youth nowadays seem to have changed”* (FG with political parties). In fact, the decline of youth political participation appeared to be consistent with the phenomenon of the **paradox of youth participation** in the literature (Crowley & Moxon, 2017), according to which more traditional forms of participation (e.g., youth involvement in formal organizations and formal politics) may be decreasing and more alternative forms may be on rise. These may include short-term, issue-based participation in various initiatives for various motivational purposes. One more explanation of the decline in the political participation was given in the FG with the CSOs. In the discussions with them, one of the participants noted that the decreasing political participation of youth could be the result of the outcomes of the 44-day war, since many young people saw that *“the institutional systems do not function properly, so why engage in them”* (FG with CSOs).

The conversations with the **LGBTQ+ youth** mostly confirmed the reasons for their engagement reviewed in the literature. As discussed in the desk review, youth from these communities tended to engage in **causes** that would support the expression of their sexual identity. Such youth reported being included in the institutional platforms offered by CSOs working with sexual minorities, as well as being driven by motivations to support similar youth people who may be struggling because of their identities in Armenia.

... for personal and professional reasons, for me those are the questions related to sexuality: to create a more or less secure place so that a person is safe to give something about themselves to the world. *(Interview with a young person, LGBTQ+)*

In one of the interviews, a young person commented on the **issue-based or cause-based** involvement of young people by saying that often the personal experiences of LGBTQ+ people (or any other people regarded as vulnerable) became specific drivers for them to engage in the protection of an equally challenged group or even a cause. For instance, a person may choose to engage in the causes related to the identities of sexual minorities, domestic violence, climate change, or even animal rights.

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<sup>45</sup> This was also noticed in the recruitment efforts of the young people who returned from war. The research team encountered challenges in accessing the young people and inviting them to the interviews. In many cases, the young people refused to participate in the interviews allegedly driven by the unwillingness to share their experiences in the war and after it.

Another factor affecting youth motivation viewed as a **cause-based engagement** with their communities was mentioned by the representative of the regional government of Syunik, who noted that after the war **national identity** has become one of the main sources of youth motivation to engage in their communities, "*to show the enemy that they continue to exist and develop*" (KII with a local governor).

The motivations of youth to participate in institutional councils, such as school and university councils are additionally discussed in **Participation in school and university councils below**.

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## ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

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The final domain reviewed in this study is the Enabling Environment, which includes the environment that holistically develops and supports youth assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities.

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## POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

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The lack of the overarching strategic policy document targeting youth was one of the frequent challenges brought up by the national policy-makers, some community members and civil society organizations. In particular, **the lack of the legal framework, i.e., the absence of a stand-alone law** regulating youth was considered by the national policy-makers as one of the barriers towards developing mechanisms and pathways to engage youth in the decision-making processes. In many conversations with the policy-makers, the development and the adoption of the law would trigger the work on the related strategic document that is pending at the moment of writing this report. Similar views were frequent among the community leaders. A few of them agreed that having the clear and targeted youth regulatory framework would help with better programming for youth activities and possibly reduce youth migration from Armenia.

In conversation with the representatives of the MESCS, it was mentioned that the new law on youth would be driven by the research study and be guided by the selected index that would best fit the Armenian context. The relevant funding and distribution of duties would be based on the gained evidence about the youth situation in Armenia; hence, the collaboration among the various departments and ministries would be respectively planned. The law is envisioned to be adopted by 2024, following the commissioned research study.

At the same time, the views of the representatives from the **civil society organizations** seemed to differ from those expressed by the community heads and policy makers. In the focus discussions with them, many disagreed that the insufficient regulatory framework is an obstacle towards more effective youth engagement. Some of them thought that the existing legal framework allowed adequate implementation of youth programs and the strategic document would come to serve as a roadmap rather than be a necessary pre-condition for youth-directed activities.

The opinions of the experts regarding the necessity to have a separate legal act on youth varied. They indeed confirmed that the requirement for the underpinning legal act for the strategy came as a result of the constitutional changes in 2018. However, the actual need for the law on youth was quite debatable. Per one of the experts, the development of the law on youth would in fact be a much larger document, than what was needed at present. For instance, the lack of the strategic approach to youth policies and programs, the limited capacity and number of the public bodies in the government responsible for youth-related policy development and implementation were all mentioned as challenges towards the implementation of the law once it was

developed and adopted. The top-down process was quite ineffective according to the experts, as this meant ignoring the existing structures and capacities of the national policy-making bodies. As an alternative, the processes could have been coordinated by drawing on the existing legal acts and mapping the bodies responsible for their implementation. This would allow to both meet the constitutional requirements and finalize the strategy documents relative to youth.

The views of representatives of international organizations about the importance of youth policy were mostly similar to those of national stakeholders. In most cases, the international organizations viewed the stand-alone policy regulating youth affairs as important. According to them, this would give the policy-makers an opportunity to focus exclusively on the youth matters, consult with them and enable their participation in the youth policy and its related programs. Views were also held about the importance of cross-cutting youth policies, although even in such cases the importance of a single body responsible for the field was considered necessary.

One of the views expressed by some experts was that there has been a backslide in the policy-making processes regarding youth in Armenia in the past five or so years. This was explained by a number of reasons. To some extent, the experts doubted the inclusive process of the development of law. Except for very few individual experts, neither international organizations, nor civil society organizations mentioned about their involvement in the development and/or discussion of the new law on youth. Similar views were shared about the Draft Strategy 2021-2025; in their majority the international stakeholders and the CSOs mentioned that except for some sporadic meetings organized by the relevant policy-makers to discuss its further development, no other actions were taken.

Contrary to the current process of law making, the experts regarded the development of the Draft Strategy 2021-2025 as a rather inclusive process with the involvement of a large number of youth organizations and individual young people to participate in the development of the draft strategy. Along with international partners, ministries, respective units and civil society actors, this process was considered as a rather efficient one for the development of a document that would regulate the field of youth-related policies and programs. However, the strategy was not adopted and, as one of the experts mentioned, this was one of the instances where “a large amount work is done by a number of organizations, huge amount of work is being done on the [policy] document, the process is made inclusive, yet the final outcome is not achieved” (*KIE, Youth expert*). Such results can definitely be frustrating for the participating youth, where they are unable to see the final outcomes of their participation.

Furthermore, in conversations with the youth experts, the national policy-makers and community leaders did not fully gain insights into what the concept of youth includes. According to one of the experts, this could have been one of the reasons of why the development of youth-related policies were held on halt and not getting due attention. There seemed to be little perception as to what this law will regulate that could not have been regulated by the existing regulatory framework.

The necessity for the **youth policy** was also brought up in conversations with the experts. In fact, they agreed that a separate youth policy would mean that a certain category of youth is not left out of the national policy-makers and other decision-makers’ attention. In some way, this view by one of the experts related to both the definition of youth and its relation to the separate youth policy. For instance, it was argued that an overarching policy should be able to address the needs and interests of certain groups of young people who

would otherwise fall outside the mainstream categories, or who may have specific needs that require targeted solutions. Hence, having a separate youth policy would mean to acknowledge the diversity of youth in the first place and to find pathways to reach out to them. This would also mean that the state acknowledges the importance of this segment of population as one of its priorities and puts efforts in meeting their needs.

The importance of youth policy came across in all of the discussions with the target stakeholders. Overall, there was a consensus among youth of all ages and groups that having a separate youth policy is essential and that youth should be involved in all of them. Targeting youth as a separate group was viewed as offering them **opportunities** to develop holistically and autonomously and become active members of society.

These views were consistent with the arguments for having a stand-alone youth policy discussed in the literature, which mean that youth as a particular segment of the population would be in the center of the policy-makers' attention. Taking into consideration the period of transitioning to adulthood, the country youth policy can be an essential roadmap for the strategies in the development of life skills that impact the development of young people's identities and shape their success in education, family, health, work and the society in general.

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## YOUTH FUNDING

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Insufficient human and financial resources were mentioned as one of the main challenges encountered by the regional and community leaders. Funding was mentioned as one of the key resources necessary for the regional governors to develop youth programs. In the target regions of Armavir and Syunik, the representatives of the regional governments would mention that lack of financial resources to implement activities were a serious obstacle to engage the youth. In such cases, there seemed to be activities planned for implementing a certain policy, but the pathways to bring the activities to life were limited. For instance, in cases when young people would want to participate in an event occurring outside their immediate community (e.g., in Yerevan) the local or regional governing body would not have the necessary financial resources to cover the transportation costs for the interested individuals.

Closely tied to the problem of funding, the lack of human resources was mentioned as a challenge by the local governors. They would agree that there was a certain disbalance between the programmatic activities and the insufficient number of employees competent of performing the due functions.

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## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

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This section focuses on the YEDM in formal structures, such as the state agencies, various student councils, CSOs, and informal structures, such as families and peer networks, and includes the discussion on safe spaces. These sections follow the features within the Enabling Environment of the PYD.

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## STATE AGENCIES

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The limited capacity and number of the public bodies in the **government** responsible for youth-related policy development and implementation was mentioned as one of the challenges in the development and implementation of youth-related policies. The CSO representatives would often mention that *“there is basically one person responsible for the whole youth sector in the Ministry [of Education, Science, Culture and Sport], and it is quite clear that one individual would be able to manage it all”* (FG with CSOs).

Communication with youth was viewed as an important step in the policy-making by many stakeholders. Both international partners and CSOs would agree that even when policies were developed using the existing studies and available evidence, the real conversations with youth would rarely take place. In their discussions, the participants mentioned that for the conversations to be effective and meaningful the state should be able to reach out to youth, rather than merely invite them to formal consultations, which may have various outcomes. As one of the CSO representative mentioned:

In the first place, it is necessary to talk to the youth by approaching them, since they need to see that they are being reached out. *(FG with CSOs)*

The CSOs working with the youth with disabilities would mention that the communities and the municipalities in fact had become more open towards working with the youth in general and with their beneficiaries in particular. This was noted as one of the positive changes in the recent years.

The views expressed by the **representatives of the legislative branch** were quite consistent about little engagement in the decision-making processes at the state level. At the same time, the policy-makers would also admit that there is little effort for targeting specifically youth and youth organizations and inviting them to public hearings.

In conversations with the representatives of one of the Standing Committees at the **National Assembly**, the interviewees discussed the programs that were offered for young people by the international organizations. A number of programs were mentioned, both structured and unstructured where young people would be invited to the National Assembly to get familiarized to its functions and structures. Among the structured programs, the joint partnership with the National Democratic Institute was mentioned as an effective platform for youth engagement. In order to take an internship program at the NA, young people go through a rigorous selection process to work in various departments in the NA producing background research for a policy. In the FG discussions with the target youth in this study, young people did not recall participating in such programs.

The lack of **coordination** among the youth programs and services was mentioned by both the CSOs and the international development partners. To some extent, the representatives of the international organizations agreed that there may be some coordination available among donor organizations in planning their activities in the country to avoid duplications. However, they seemed also consistent in their views about the lack of coordination by either the national policy-makers and LG bodies of the youth-related programs. According to one of the experts, the responsibility to coordinate these activities should primarily lie with the state, be it a unit within the current MESCS or any other regulatory body. This coordination also included collecting and/or producing the evidence base for the design and implementation of youth-related policies and programs and making it available for all the interested bodies and individuals.

## YOUTH SERVICES

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This section addressed the findings on the youth services provided at the national and community levels by the state bodies and CSOs, as well as the findings regarding the participation of youth in school and university councils, addressing the institutional level.



**The Youth council** functioning adjacent to the Yerevan Mayor's Office was often mentioned as a successful example of platform where young people were involved in decision-making processes. This was mentioned quite often by the international organizations, CSOs and target young people as well. With the resignation of Yerevan mayor, the council ceased to function, which according to the interviewees, once again showed the lack of institutional mechanisms in the country. According to the interviewees, the effectiveness of the platform was guaranteed by the political will of individual officials and decision-makers rather than the established functioning of the platforms per se. The CSO representatives often mentioned the inadequate functioning of the youth councils adjacent to the local municipalities. On many occasions they noted that the effectivity of the youth councils depended on persons in the LG and, hence, a change of responsible official would affect the overall functioning.

The representative of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, confirmed that **youth centers** are being developed at the moment. The state's commitment to developing youth centers was embedded in the necessary conditions for the youth centers that would ensure capacity building of youth, provide for entertaining opportunities and foster youth civic development. The representatives of the CSOs were somewhat skeptical of these youth centers, though. Several of them mentioned the fact that the effective functioning of youth centers might depend on the positive relations with the community leaders, thus pointing at the absence of the institutional mechanisms and at the high dependence on the presence of individuals and their networks.

**The Public Council on the Rights of Children and Youth** adjunct to the Human Rights Defender was one of the focal points in conversations with the relevant bodies. The council was newly set up at the time of this study, however, several insights were gained about its purpose and functions. Made up of children and youth aged 10-30, the Council is a consultative body that deals with the issues pertinent to the protection of the human rights of these target groups. In an interview with a representative of the Human Rights Defender's Office, it was mentioned that the Council was formed on the basis of applications from young people, and two peculiarities were mentioned about its composition at the earlier stages. The first one related to the perceptions of applicants about the age range, since the number of applications from youth above 25 were quite few. According to the interviewee, because of the lack of equal approach, there seem to be differences in perceptions among this youth about their representation in the same body with much younger ones, of 10-12 years old. The second difficulty related to the involvement of youth with disabilities. A member of the Council funding body mentioned that there were almost no applications received from youth with disabilities, and a more targeted, namely through the respective CSOs became necessary to recruit young people from this group. As seen, the perceptions of older age group of youth and those with disabilities about their engagement opportunities were consistent with the rest of the views in this study.

The focus group held with the members of the Council was indicative of well-informed individuals who appeared to have a solid knowledge about the legal processes of engagement, their own rights and responsibilities, as well as various mechanisms that worked into their communities. Many of the participants reported about their prior experiences with community engagement, such as attending public hearings, participating in the city council meetings, as well as shared about their own initiatives and organized activities to mobilize youth in their communities. Several of them were represented in their school councils. When asked about their motivations to engage in the Council, young people agreed about their intentions to make their voices count in the decision-making processes, especially at the school level. Many of the participants mentioned they wanted to see considerable changes in the educational system in the country overall and in

their schools in particular; hence their engagement to be able to promote those changes through the Council's platform.

While reviewing the factors affecting the civic engagement of youth in Chapter III, it was mentioned that the trajectory of youth participation in school governance is likely to improve their knowledge about democratic processes and result in their future behavior in elections, joining community organizations. This section addresses youth experiences **in the school and university governance**.

In the focus group discussions with youth, participants reported various reasons for engaging in the school and university councils and hence various motivations in doing so. In general, among school-aged youth in the 15-19 age group, youth would report considerable awareness of the functions and role of the school councils. Many of them were engaged in some way in the councils in their schools. In most cases, they realized that the school councils were necessary platforms for engagement in the decision-making that would enable change in their schools and communities on the whole.

Whichever initiative was held at the school, we learned that the student council organized it. I was motivated to witness students to make decisions that the principal had nothing to do with. This attracted me, as well as being able to raise the voice of all the students. *(FG participant, 15-19, male, head of the school council, urban, Armavir)*

Same trend was observed among youth who were enrolled in universities. They would report that the main functions of the university councils would be to channel the voices of the students and make their voices heard and count.

Voicing the opinion and interests of the students is the mission of the student council. Last year we developed a feedback form, we mentioned, for example, that there was no hanger in the auditorium or no mirror in the bathroom, and those issues were quickly resolved. The SC is an intermediate link between the students and the teaching staff. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

What differed, however, was the **motivations** of the young people to engage in the school councils. When asked about their experiences and pathways to becoming representatives or heads in the school council, the respective FG participants would sometimes report rather "random", somewhat "by chance" engagement in these structures.

I got involved in the student council by chance. I didn't even know what they were doing there, I was elected by the majority of the class votes and got engaged in it. *(FG participant, 15-19, female, Yerevan)*

What came up in the discussions of the motivations to engage in the school councils (perhaps more that in university councils) was that often the young people who were active and academically advanced in schools and universities would be the ones also representing their schools in the councils.

Apart from the desire, those who study well at the university and stand out for their activity are also offered to participate.... (FG participant, 20-24, female, rural, Syunik)

This fact perhaps explains the pathways of young people to **instrumentally engage in the councils** based on some secondary reasons rather than be pursued by the primary roles in these decision-making structures.

In case of **people with disabilities**, their motivations to get involved in the **university councils** were also reported in the focus group discussions. Here the participants supported the view that university councils were a space to be represented for mainly high achieving young people and that the councils per se lacked meaningfulness and did not serve their original purpose. When asked why the target participants had wanted to be represented in the council, they responded that they were driven by the incentive to make their voice heard. When compared to the responses from other university council heads, the latter indeed noted that youth with disabilities would rarely choose to engage in the councils, as they would feel insecure about their own status and/or identities to engage. This was somewhat contradictory with the views expressed by the youth with disabilities for whom the meaningfulness of the university structure was the factor, along with the opportunities it offered for this segment of the students.

In case of the youth **from ethnic minorities**, none of the participants reported participation in school or university councils.

Overall, although the FG participants admitted that university councils may differ and include both effective and ineffective experiences, they also seemed to agree that in most cases the nature of university councils may be rigid, politicized and serve to the mere interests of the university administrators. The politicization of the university councils as an obstacle for engagement was noticed more among young males from urban areas who claimed that in the event of depoliticization of the university councils, more youth would have been attracted to them. The depoliticization would also mean that the university councils will focus more on the actual council functions in the academic setting. Additionally, many of them agreed that the university (and also school) councils would have a limited scope in organizational events for the students, such as cultural events, tours and games and other pastimes. These observations were typical of the youth from the oldest age group who were no longer involved in the university life.

I was also a student, and in the first year I was engaged in the student council activities, but I stopped my involvement in the second year. For me the functions of that structure were purely formal, and I did not notice any constructive or positive influence on any process. Everything was just for entertainment. (FG participant, 25-29, female, urban, Armavir)

In the discussions with the representatives of student councils, the views that student councils would vary in their functions and overall approach depending on the university were confirmed. As noted by the head and members of the student councils, there seemed to be both effective and not so cases of student council operations in the universities, explained by the approach of the administration. Although these participants agreed that young people in the universities were mostly engaged in the university council operations, they also noticed a tendency of youth to step down from taking more responsibilities in the process of participation in the decision-making.

The views of the stakeholders were various about the nature and the functions of the student councils. As mentioned by the respective policy-makers in the MESCS, special guidelines were being developed by the Ministry to explain the purpose and the functions of the student councils in the universities. The rationale for such guidelines stemmed from the observations that student councils in the universities would mostly be engaged in organizing entertainment and pastime events for the students and there seemed to be an inadequate understanding of the council functions and activities.

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## CSOS

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**Capacity building** of youth was often mentioned as one of the key components in the programs of international organizations. Youth participating in the programs, either directly funded by the international organizations and as part of the CSO-funded programs were exposed to the knowledge and skills, such as **negotiation, debate skills, using social media, grant writing, job-related skills**. Programs where youth were involved in the activities with local municipalities where they were expected to attend public hearings at their communities and contribute were mentioned. A number of cases were discussed in the interviews with the international organizations where CSOs would be able to mediate the participation of youth in such programs. Indeed, as the mapping of the CSOs in Chapter V showed, capacity building was one of the main directions of these organizations, confirmed by many CSOs in the FG discussions. Their views were quite consistent with the mapping conducted in this study, whereby capacity building would often include awareness raising activities, building skills of youth in career orientation, job market and further education, developing student critical and higher-order thinking skills. In most of the conversations with the CSO members, there seemed to be a confirmation of the presence of the necessary skills for young people to engage in the decision-making processes. For the most part, CSOs would confirm the presence of certain skills, such as communication, or negotiation skills, in addition to the more career-directed skills (such as IT or entrepreneurship). At the same time, however, CSO members agreed that although youth may possess certain skills, in the majority of cases it needed improvement.

Many of the CSOs in the focus group discussions mentioned a shift in their target activities after the Covid-19 pandemic and the war. Many of them reported providing emergency humanitarian support to the families during the lockdown in early 2020. Similarly, in certain cases, the activities of CSOs started to include more rehabilitation work with the youth returned from the war actions, support with job placements and mental health counseling.

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## BONDING AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

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In the conversations with one of the experts, a key perspective that came up regarding the aspect of bonding where for the young people the role of a “significant other” may be defining their rate of participation. This may be affecting the motivations of young people to participate. To some extent this view can explain the role of peer networks that play a big role in youth participation as observed in the discussions with youth. This may show the solidarity and support that young people need to participate in the decision-making processes rather than the actual fact of affecting the decisions themselves. This view, however, was not fully supported by the target youth. In the focus group discussions, youth would in fact report being driven by the peer networks in their participatory behavior. Indirectly this view was supported by the responses where youth would report being involved in activism or social movements. For instance, the participation of some youth in the Velvet

Revolution was considered as one of those solidarity acts where youth would be protesting in the streets not really for the cause, but rather because their peers were protesting too.

Many young people shared the view that certain networks are necessary for them to approach their communities to discuss the issues they bring to the table. In case they were aware of the opportunities and channels to participate, they still needed the support of their peers. In their views, getting such support would mean that they were able to articulate their ideas better, be perceived more seriously by the decision makers. In the decision-making processes the FG participants would report the presence of strong **peer networks** that affected their engagement. Especially youth at the youngest group of 15-19 years old repeatedly mentioned the presence of **peer groups and kinship as a necessary condition** for their participation and engagement in any decision-making process in their community.

International development partners organizations seemed to acknowledge this in their programmatic actions, too. In the interviews with the representatives of international organizations, a few of them mentioned the need to acknowledge the existence of strong family ties among Armenian youth and the influence of adults on their decisions. In such comments, the representatives mentioned that avoiding to see youth in isolation would be in line with the framework of the Positive Youth Development, whereby the holistic view of youth can be taken into account. Working with youth, accordingly, would mean equally working with their families and communities.

Acknowledging the existence of family bonds, however, was still considered an obstacle by other representatives. In conversations with them, many would mention that Armenian youth is specific in manifestations of their independence, such as living with their parents longer compared to other countries or showing increased respect to the elderly. Although these manifestations were acknowledged as contextually important, they still were viewed as not necessarily helping the youth to exercise their agency and independence.

In smaller communities, the **network and the social bonds** seemed to be both the opportunity and a barrier. The FG participants reported being restricted in their communication and participation with the community leaders due to the close networks that may be operating in their smaller communities.

You ask why they don't apply, because in smaller communities the head of community is a relative of one community member, a neighbor of another, and that's why they don't apply officially. But in Yerevan people apply in a more official way to both the community head and the territorial administration head. It seems to me that this is also related. *(FG participant, 25-29, female, urban, Syunik)*

Similar cases, were also observed by the representatives of international organizations funding youth programs. Based on their experience of working with youth in smaller communities, they noticed that young people would refrain from engaging with the community leaders who happened to be their relatives.

## SAFE SPACES

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The discussion about the safe spaces came up a few times during the fieldwork in this study. Participation in decision-making through the **CSO platforms** seemed to be viable for some youth more than for others. Specifically, this was typical for youth representing **LGBTQ+** communities and women. In the interviews,

participants from these groups agreed about CSOs being a space for them to feel safe and supported. In their discussions about the safe spaces, youth representing LGBTQ+ communities would mention that such spaces included both physical spaces, as well as arenas/settings that would enable them to feel accepted for who they are. In this regard, being part of the CSO was viewed as giving them both the physical space and the sense of belonging in the community. At the same time, an opposite view was also expressed, where the role of the CSOs has been declining recently. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, LGBTQ+ youth was becoming more self-sufficient in their engagement processes, as well as acquiring necessary resources and opportunities to engage individually.

There were examples where the international development partners would report of alternative spaces where the young people would feel safe to express themselves freely. These spaces were set up and funded by the IDPs, functioning in the community and running non-formal programs in developing youth skills (such as entrepreneurship, ICT skills, job-related skills). Such programs would benefit the overall development of youth, yet may not always directly build their civic skills (e.g., public policy). In the interviews, the representatives of the IDPs shared about their concerns over youth being skeptical in expressing their opinions and unwilling to engage, since they would rarely be sure in the outcomes of their participatory efforts. An additional component for youth to engage was brought up in an interview with one of the international organizations, where the notion of a “space” for youth was stressed that would enable their active participation and well-informed discussion on certain issues on the agenda. Equally, the importance of youth “presence” was prioritized in such spaces. This would mean that young people are able to competently express their viewpoints and make their voices heard rather than being simply present in such spaces.

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## CHAPTER VII: LIMITATIONS

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A number of limitations should be mentioned in the research design and implementation of this study. As mentioned in Chapter IV, this study is primarily a qualitative study and therefore cannot be generalized. The methodological rigor was achieved through the triangulation of the collected data among the stakeholders with the previously analyzed secondary data and the evidence from the literature.

The target participants of this research are youth, hence accessing their behavior was a challenge. While in case of the Armavir and Syunik regions, the partner CSOs were more adept at accessing the youth who they were likely to have previous contacts or experience working with, the likelihood of accessing youth that are perceived as “common, typical”, or youth who are not active in any institutional environment, did not happen, as originally planned. Similarly, in Yerevan, the more active young people (predominantly female) were more likely to respond to the call for participation. To some extent, this left out the young people who share the characteristics of the target youth, but are less visible.

Another limitation identified by the research team was accessing the youth from LGBTQ+ communities due to the reservation of the CSOs dealing with LGBTQ+ issues in regard to engaging their target groups in initiatives other than their own. Here, snowballing sampling was used to ensure trust among participants towards the interviewer and the research team.

Next, parents of the target youth, although an instrumental group for this study, have not been included in the study population due to the lack of methodologically solid database and lack of access to this group.

Additionally, the research study is rather rigorous and was conducted by a large team. Therefore, ensuring communication and common approach to conducting the fieldwork was of utmost importance. A training was provided for the research team on all the strategies employed within the research, such as recruitment of the participants, moderation of the FGs, note taking and transcription. Unified forms were developed for each of the activities. The development of such common approach was likely to mitigate the consistency in the recruitment and data collection efforts of the team to the extent possible.

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## CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### CONCLUSIONS

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The conclusive remarks are first made for the concepts of youth and YEDM, and then are structured in accordance with the four main domains of the PYD Framework, i.e., Assets, Agency, Youth Contribution and the Enabling Environment. For each domain, the implications are drawn based on the key findings and relevant connections are made with the literature and secondary desk review in Chapters III and VI. The section on Recommendations provides a number of and sets out policy recommendations to key national and local stakeholders for an effective engagement of youth in decision-making.

The findings in this study regarding the **definitions of youth and youth engagement in the decision-making** may be used as a departure point for the national policy makers in their actions to develop the policy and regulatory framework. **The findings regarding the definitions of youth** indicated at the need for a broader, more holistic approach to defining youth in the Armenian context. The review of the policy documents in Chapter IV showed that the provisional definition of youth adopted in the RA Draft State Strategy on Youth 2021-2025, which is persons between the age range of 13-30 transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, may be the gateway to definition of youth essential for ensuring the legal protection of the target groups. Given the level of vulnerability of youth with regard to their backgrounds, identities, socio-economic statuses and various experiences safeguarding them through legal provisions will indeed be necessary. At the same time, however, confining the definitions of youth merely to age factors would mean neglecting their diversity. The views collected from the target participants reflected the multi-dimensional approach to defining youth and showed how the complexity of youth may be reflected in their experiences, opinions, backgrounds, identities and beliefs, as well as the diversity of their transitions and pathways. As seen from the findings, the young people in Armenia view the concept of youth as composed of various factors, including both the illusive factor of the age (such as, youth maturity at various age), youth characteristics, and the importance of their transitional period. Moreover, different social groups prioritized different factors when talking about youth. As seen, while there seemed to be insignificant differences in the perceptions of youth between youth from different locations, the differences among youth from various age groups and vulnerable groups were quite essential. For these groups, the opportunities to exercise their rights and the capacity to manifest their identities were equally important in their definitions of youth.

The perceptions and opinions of young people about what youth encompasses are closely tied with their understanding of **engagement in the decision-making**. The experiences, backgrounds and identities of young people as a heterogeneous group appear to be strongly affecting their understanding of and attitudes to YEDM. As seen in the discussion of findings, the **three elements** that were considered essential for youth to meaningfully participate, namely, **their rights and responsibilities, independence and mutual partnership with**

**adults**, would determine the degree of their participation in the DM at either of the identified levels (family, community and state). The findings reveal that the perceptions of youth about YEDM appear to be consistent with the elements in the PYD framework, which emphasizes an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults in the decision-making. This could be another important aspect for consideration for the national policy-makers at present. The existing policy and regulatory framework might offer a somewhat limited approach to the definition of YEDM and its adjacent terms, such as “youth participation”, “youth engagement”, “civic engagement” and others. The government’s approach to these definitions may be more towards future-oriented participatory mechanisms, rather than encompass the present youth in its diversity and trajectories. This approach seems to be more about viewing young people as “not-yet-ready for active participation in civic life”, as the transitional period is marked towards “becoming independent, becoming a citizen”. Such views do not seem to acknowledge the present competencies of youth and their possible contributions as active participants. Judging from the available draft strategic documents, the government intends to develop the framework of YEDM moving away from purely awareness raising towards more proactive participation. In case this intention remains, adopting an all-inclusive approach to participation would mean taking into account the variety of views about YEDM as expressed by the target youth in this study.

The review of the findings in the **domain of Assets** shows that largely, both young people themselves and stakeholders working with them (e.g., community leaders, educational institutions) reported about the **lack of necessary competencies**, such as civic skills, communication, negotiation and advocacy skills that would allow young people to meaningfully participate in the decision-making. The target youth participants reported a fairly **lower degree of awareness of the platforms, spaces and channels** that would enable their engagement in the decision-making processes at the state level more than at the community level. These findings were in line with those in the USAID’s Youth Situation Analysis Report, according to which young people were ill-informed about their civic rights and responsibilities, and about decision-making processes at state institutions (Making Cents, 2019). By and large, the **knowledge of political and civic processes**, at the national level specifically, were reported to be quite low among general youth. Additionally, the adequate degree of **content knowledge** was mentioned as lacking in young people. Opinions were expressed that in the event of young people’s participation at community or national level, they would often lack the necessary knowledge of the subject matter being discussed, in addition to the little attainment of soft skills. Young people often agreed on the importance of educational resources and programs about the structures, roles and functions of relevant community bodies. Often, they mentioned the complicated system of such processes and **prioritized a user-friendly approach to educating youth especially in schools**.

The findings may signal about the **relevance and efficiency of the programs** that are being implemented by the formal and non-formal institutions in developing the competencies of youth. The review of the efficiency of civic programs in the educational institutions was beyond the scope of this study, however, the findings gained from the FG discussions with youth indirectly point at the insufficient level of “participation literacy” that young people may possess. Additional studies may be necessary to understand why youth may be lacking competencies in considerably large scales and, in the event of their higher degree of awareness, why they do not get manifested in their practical behaviors.

The findings related to the **domain of Agency**, as expressed in youth perceptions of their own self-efficacy, positive beliefs about the future and expectations of engagement, show that **in their majority, the future plans of young people included furthering their education** (most frequent among 15-24 age group), and



**getting a better employment** (in the older age group). This finding was particularly consistent with that in the USAID's Youth Situation Analysis Report (Making Cents, 2019).

One of the aims of this study was to look at how the Velvet Revolution, COVID-19 pandemic and 44-day war have affected youth aspirations and readiness to engage in decision-making in Armenia and how the youth exercise their agency for their engagement. Several trends observed in the present study appeared to be strongly affecting overall intentions of young people. Specifically, **the concerns of the young people about their own future, the high level of uncertainty and the overall instability in the aftermath of the 44-day war seemed to be the key factors affecting youth agency.** These factors seemed to lead to restricted contribution among all groups of youth, exacerbated by the decreasing level of trust towards both their communities and the state. In most of the responses, the **COVID-19** pandemic led to the **uncertainty and unpredictability in the long-term planning.** The 2018 Velvet Revolution was often seen a positive turnout, whereas some youth regarded it as a 'regime change'. However, most often young people agreed that the heightened expectations of the revolution were not capitalized and led to indifference towards the situation in the country and towards their own engagement. The impact of the 44-day war appeared to be the largest among young people leading to quite varied responses. While for a large number of youths the desire to engage became more, for youth who participated in the war, the tendency was the opposite as they reported a lower degree of involvement in their communities or educational institutions, as well as decreased **political** and **digital participation**, conditioned by the war. The intentions to leave the country as a result of the war were very frequent in this group. In fact, the intention to out-migrate for better life (whether study or job prospects) was among the most frequent responses among all youth groups and ages, with the exception of youth with disabilities and ethnic groups, who were more determined to stay and work in Armenia.

With reference to the **social contexts**, the majority of the findings which play instrumental role in the YEDM engagement also got confirmed to some extent. In many instances, often irrespective of the residence type and age, the overall tendency prevailed, according to which **males** (fathers, grandfathers, brothers) **would play more decisive roles in their families** and their communities. **Gender-wise**, it seemed that male participants were "in tandem" with their fathers more than their mothers and/or other members in the family. This was more typical of the youth in 15-24 age groups. At the same time, however, the second trend was observed according to which, the **diversity of families** mattered in the overall decision-making, with families becoming more open towards their younger members. Some young people, especially in the older age group, noted that the decision-makers were the ones with larger income in the family.

Several other factors appeared to be affecting youth agency at the family level, which were observed for different groups in this study. For the participants of the 44-day war a certain shift was mentioned towards a higher degree of trust towards them in their families. The young people with disabilities, in their majority shared the views about the consultative nature of their families, yet mentioned about the excessive care and hinderance of their family in certain situations, mostly related to their jobs and education. Young people from the ethnic communities appeared to be most affected by their family decisions.

At the **community level**, a distinct factor among the youth in the older age group affecting their agency was the **disposition of the young people towards the leaders and the employees of the local government.** The **political views and beliefs** of young people seemed to be affecting their agency, as well, meaning that the engagement of young people could have been determined by their support to the local government. On many instances young people lacked agency to engage meaningfully, which, as discussed above, was both explained

by the lack of necessary competencies of youth and the inadequate feedback mechanisms from the decision-makers about youth participation results and outcomes. **Trust** was seen as one of the crucial factors that affected the engagement of youth. Frustrations of youth, most often in the 15-19 age group, about not being valued and heard by adults in general and decision-makers in particular often led to disengagement from DM processes. The **absence of the consultative dialogue** due to a number of reasons, including the mutual trust among the youth and the decision-makers was among one of the factors mentioned in the discussions. Quite often young people complained about the **lack of competence, necessary professional and soft skills** (e.g., communication) among the LG bodies that made it challenging for them to engage in the decision-making processes.

Overall, the findings regarding the domain of **Contribution** reveal that **self-goals** and **self-development** were evident as motivational for youth. Youth noted that volunteering specifically affected their future plans, helped with career opportunities and expanded their network. However, this was not the only incentive mentioned by the participants. On the contrary, it could be inferred that youth may be motivated to engage in DM when their **beliefs about civic action and the potential change** that they can bring into their personal lives and in their communities were meaningful to them. Youth valued such meaningful and intentional engagement opportunities where they would feel their voices would be heard and valued. In this regard, their views about **volunteering in crisis situations** seemed to strongly prevail over other engagement forms. The war has emphasized the role of national identity as sources of motivation, especially in Syunik, the region most affected by the 44-Day War. In a similar vein, it was observable that for youth representing LGBTQ+ groups their motivations may be directly related to the **expression of their identities**. More so, the identity development and self-expression within this group played a large role in the definitions of youth and engagement in DM in general. The findings in this section appear to be connected with the concept of meaningful youth engagement, which is one of the central aspects in this study. As discussed in Chapter II and III, within CAYEDMA, **meaningful youth engagement** was considered as a **participatory** process, when youth have the knowledge, information and skills to engage throughout the decision-making processes and adults are ready and willing to **share power** with them. Such meaningful and participatory process often implied the importance of **effective feedback** mechanisms, such as building and maintaining communication with youth on their participation and its outcomes that would likely impact their future decisions to participate. As seen in the discussion above, both in the domain of Assets and Agency, the engagement of youth as a participatory process where power is shared may not be quite happening. The lack of mutual trust, insufficient feedback mechanisms, youth frustrations and other elements appear to be affecting youth contributions in general. These are further manifested in the different **forms of participation** practiced by youth. As seen in this study, **traditional forms of participation**, such as participation in elections and in formal politics, were mentioned as being important and practiced by youth. The participation in the formal politics, for instance, was mentioned as one of the avenues for younger people following the Velvet Revolution. Despite the reported decrease of the number of young people in their activities, **CSOs** were seen as viable platforms for engagement for some youth more than for others. For a more vulnerable youth, such as those with disabilities and from LGBTQ+ communities, CSOs were still the channels and spaces of their engagement. One of the findings in this study was the **decline in the digital participation** among youth. In their majority, the youth were skeptical about the value of the social media and/or digital platforms and preferred to use other pathways to raise voice about a community issue, such as directly approaching the person who may be in charge and or may have respective competencies. A significant factor that affected the use of social media and digital space in general was attributed to its distrust following the 44-

day war events, and particularly the fake news that were spread through social media. In the smaller communities the prevalence of personal networks appeared to be the most common form of participation.

In **the domain of Enabling Environment**, the findings show that the **absence of an overarching policy targeting youth continues to be one of the main priorities of the policy-makers**. Although various interpretations were reported about the relevance of the law at present by different stakeholders, the government appears to be committed to developing a law on youth as the foundational document for several strategic documents. The process, however, did not seem to be as transparent and inclusive, since apart from a limited number of stakeholders (such as IDPs and some CSOs), very few others seemed to be involved in the working process. Additionally, the limited capacity and number of the public bodies in the government responsible for youth-related policy development and implementation were mentioned as challenges towards the implementation of the law once it was developed and adopted.

Next, the findings showed that the **institutional platforms existent at present for youth engagement, such as youth councils and youth centers, were considered as rather ineffective** due to the lack of working mechanisms that would allow for these institutions to function independently, without being susceptible to the changes in the individual public officials.

The **role of the CSOs**, as one of the largest stakeholders in YEDM, in building the skills of youth was confirmed in this study, although it was one of the contradictory findings in the context of the available skills and resources that the youth possess. Both the mapping of the CSOs in the desk review and the FG discussions showed that many CSOs offer youth trainings to address career and job-related skills, negotiation, communication and critical thinking skills along with subject-specific topics of IT skills, environment and a few others. However, the soft skills were considered as the ones that young people needed the most for more effective engagement in DM.

The role of the CSOs in the provision of **safe spaces** for youth was confirmed in this study. The provision of such spaces is especially significant for socially vulnerable youth, such as young people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, and to some extent young. At the same time, the existence of such spaces may be jeopardized for certain groups of youth, similar to the private groups in digital space for some LGBTQ+ youth. In these circumstances, the role of the CSOs in actively assisting youth in their self-expression, or in the provision of a physical space for their activities may be essential.

The presence of healthy relationship related to **bonding and kinship and peer networks** typical of the Armenian contexts appeared to affect the participatory behavior of the young people in their families and communities, which was another confirmation of the available data in this study.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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In the context of the ongoing youth policy reform in Armenia, this study aimed to provide recommendations to the national policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders, guided by the evidence collected and reviewed during the study and are addressed at national policy-makers, local governing bodies and the local civil society representatives. The following recommendations target short and mid-term actions the national and local policy makers and implementers, as well as the civil society organizations can initiate to improve youth policies and programming in Armenia:

### **To the national policy-makers:**

1. Adopt an all-inclusive approach to the definition of youth in the policy and regulatory framework that reflect both age-driven and social aspects of youth and their forms of participation.
2. Hold national consultations with both youth and relevant experts on how the apathy and withdrawal from civic and political engagement of young people, a result of the 44-Day War and its aftermath, can be challenged and what relevant mechanisms can be streamlined into youth policies and programs.
3. Ensure engagement of youth from all segments of the population, including marginalized and otherwise vulnerable young people, in all stages of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs, policies, and investment of resources.
4. Create and use youth-friendly feedback mechanisms to respond to youth engagement regardless of its outcome at various levels of decision making.
5. Involve youth as valuable partners to determine the best methods and mechanisms for how they would best like to be engaged in the decision-making in educational institutions and community and national levels.
6. Conduct extensive consultations with all the relevant stakeholders and youth primarily on the development of the law on youth and the strategic documents. Incorporate feedback mechanisms on the results of these consultations and communicate to the stakeholders about how they were used, as well as about the outcomes and impact of their participation.
7. Ensure that the meetings, consultations and activities regarding youth policies and programs are adapted and use a clear and accessible language for young people to understand and relate to.
8. Ensure effective coordination of youth programs and services offered by the state, international development partners, CSOs and other relevant entities to streamline the investment of resources into the youth field.
9. Collect and, when necessary, produce the evidence base for the design and implementation of youth-related policies and programs and make it available for all the interested bodies and individuals.
10. Expand the institutional structures that are responsible for the design and implementation of youth policies by allocating sufficient human, physical and financial resources and ensure capacity building of public authorities.
11. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the civic education programs at schools, both curricular and extracurricular, and incorporate the results in the development of the new curriculum reform.
12. Review the concept of the youth centers as 'safe and participatory spaces' for the youth to explore and develop their own ideas and meet decision-makers. These should allow young people to openly express their ideas and themselves without creating barriers to any young people.

### **To the LG bodies**

13. Ensure youth-focused effective communication channels, both online and offline, and publicize the ways how young people can get engaged, including the places where young people are frequent (schools, universities, youth centers, CSOs).
14. Develop communication capacities of the LG bodies with youth through examining the best strategies of communication with the target youth groups. Employ a variety of communication strategies (including physical, digital, school-level, alternative community premises) for youth of various age and social groups depending on what works for each of the groups the best. Adopt a user-friendly language

and communication strategies that would enable the youth to engage more frequently with the community-related issues.

15. Conduct and maintain a mapping of youth organizations and other informal initiatives in order to improve the coordination of the youth engagement activities with no exclusion of diverse youth groups.
16. Ensure involvement of diverse groups of youth into the planning, implementation and monitoring of community programs and activities, such as five-year community development plans.
17. Ensure that youth engagement encompasses levels ranging from family to policy, without exclusion of one level from another, but rather in tandem.
18. Provide safe and convenient meeting spaces for youth beyond the regional and community official premises and be open to meeting youth in them, which will allow for an open dialogue and reflection.

#### **To CSOs**

19. Assess the effectiveness and relevance of youth capacity building programs so that they promote youth understanding of the technical content, the socio-political context, and the stakeholders with whom they are engaging. Ensure learning and practice contexts where youth can apply the capacities they have gained.
20. In the programmatic activities, aim to target broader segments of youth, including “unorganized youth”, i.e., youth not representing any particular organizations, as well as young people with fewer opportunities. This will allow to go beyond the “silo” approach to working with the same community of youth.
21. Ensure that the programmatic activities directed at youth equally target their working with their families and communities.
22. Facilitate the development of partnerships between communities and/or government and youth groups so that youth can engage in community work and have opportunities to volunteer.
23. Establish partnerships between youth organizations and local and national government to promote mentorship programs for youth.

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## APPENDICES

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### APPENDIX 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

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#### TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR FORMATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE RESEARCH TEAM TO CARRY OUT COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING IN ARMENIA

##### **Name of the Assignment:**

Comprehensive assessment of youth engagement in decision making in Armenia (CAYEDMA)

##### **Context and background information**

The need for youth civic engagement is recognized by the Government of Armenia (GOAM) and its funding partners who are investing millions of dollars in comprehensive school reform in Armenia including a robust new civic education program. Armenians have limited public understanding of government functions, citizens' rights, and government responsibility and the formal civics courses currently offered in schools are not conducive to preparing civically conscious and responsible citizens and, because of this, Armenian youth lack the knowledge and skills needed to be active, engaged citizens. The design of the Armenia Civics for Engagement Program (ACE) is built on thorough analyses of extensive information collected on ongoing educational and social reforms as well as major non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives implemented to promote youth civic education and engagement in Armenia. PH International (Project Harmony, Inc.) has assembled a highly capable consortium of local partners to invest in and build the capacity of Armenia's civic education and youth civic engagement ecosystem through ACE.

Under the experienced leadership of PH International, the ACE program pools the talents of three highly respected Armenian organizations, including the International Center for Human Development (ICHD), the Armenian Center for Democratic Education (Civitas Armenia), and the National Center for Educational Technologies of Armenia (NCET), the ACE Consortium. Capitalizing upon the local and international networks and capacities of all four organizations, the ACE program will have expansive reach across the Armenian civic engagement ecosystem as well as the nuanced capacity to engage hard-to-reach populations and vulnerable youth.

The purpose of the Armenia Civics for Engagement program is to educate youth on the importance of engaging in civic activities and creating pathways for them to do this. The ACE team will work closely with and support the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) and other stakeholders in contributing to the achievement of USAID Armenia's goals outlined in its 2020-2025 Country Development Cooperation Strategy to advance democratic transition and increase citizen engagement for democratic consolidation by increasing civic and political participation, improving the sustainability of civil society (1.2.2), and amplifying the voice and agency of women, youth, and vulnerable groups (1.2.4). The Program Consortium will accomplish these results by an integrated set of program activities that include: Component 1: Formal education components, and Component 2: Non-formal education/youth engagement components.

A central tenet of ACE is the focus on and integration of the four cross-cutting domains of the Positive Youth Development framework (PYD): asset building, agency, contribution and enabling environment. Through formal civic education reform and non-formal youth engagement, ACE will increase opportunities for youth

involvement in decision making and youth leadership to catalyze systemic change that will bolster and sustain greater youth civic participation. Through its innovative model of capacity building, networking, learning, training and investment, the ACE program will ensure a robust, capable, and innovative youth education and youth civic engagement ecosystem in Armenia by 2026.

### **Purpose, objectives and scope**

To this end, ICHD mobilizes expertise to conduct a Comprehensive assessment of youth engagement in decision making in Armenia. Drawing on the findings of the Armenia Youth Situational Analysis<sup>46</sup>, ICHD will carry out a comprehensive assessment of the strengths, gaps, challenges and opportunities of youth engagement in decision making in Armenia in order to: (a) assess the capacity and commitment of key national and local stakeholders, including both governmental and CSO organizations for effectively engaging youth in decision-making; (b) provide a baseline analysis of the support for participation in decision making; (c) provide robust evidence for prioritizing key policy areas for intervention to enhance participation of youth in decision making processes; and (d) provide policy recommendations for advocating for effective resource allocation and management. The assessment will be available in Armenian and English as an e-publication.

ICHD will solicit services of a Research Team to conduct the assessment.

### **Working approach and methodology**

Under the overall technical supervision and guidance of the Youth Public Policy and Strategic Communication Coordinator and in close cooperation with the ICHD project team, the Research Team will accomplish the following tasks and will provide relevant key deliverables:

- Conduct literature and desk reviews to define youth engagement in decision making, identify the current policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks, supporting youth engagement, challenges and enablers to youth engagement, as part of the enabling environment;
- Develop a Study Protocol detailing the CAYEDMA methodology;
- Collect primary data to inform CAYEDMA, and analyze the data;
- Develop a draft report in English and submit to ICHD project team: it should contain an executive summary, the main report (should not exceed 70 pages) and annexes as necessary (this ToR is an integral part of the Report and will be provided in an annex);
- Develop the final report with relevant recommendations, incorporating the feedback received from peer reviewers, ICHD and PH international;
- Support the translator in translating the final report into Armenian;
- Participate in the final presentation event and other ACE activities as requested by ICHD.

The CAYEDMA **methodology** shall adopt a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide a balanced and richer analysis of youth participation in decision making, offer more practical and reliable insights on youth civic engagement, and assure triangulation of data sources and data

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<sup>46</sup> Making Cents International (2019). Armenia Youth Situational Analysis. [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WBW7.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WBW7.pdf)

collection methods. The detailed methodology of collection of the required data with a detailed sampling strategy, study instruments and analytical approach should be developed by the Research Team at the end of the inception phase and submitted to ICHD as a Study Protocol for approval and quality assurance.

The target participants of CAYEDMA are the youth, which will be defined in line with the draft RA State Strategy on Youth for 2021-2025<sup>47</sup>, where ‘youth’ is defined as people in the age band 13-30, as well as USAID programming definition, according to which these are individuals between the ages of 10 and 29<sup>48</sup>. Additionally, the research team may consult the definition of youth by the United Nations<sup>49</sup>.

The conceptual framework of CAYEDMA will be based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which illustrates that to achieve the vision of healthy, productive and engaged youth, PYD programs, practices and policies must work with youth to improve their:

- **Assets:** Youth have the necessary resources, skills and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Agency:** Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Contribution:** Youth are engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities’ positive development.
- **Enabling environment:** Youth are surrounded by an environment that develops and supports their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities, and strengthens their ability to avoid risks and to stay safe, secure, and be protected and live without fear of violence or retribution. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term “environment” should be interpreted broadly and includes: social (e.g., relationships with peers and adults), normative (e.g., attitudes, norms and beliefs), structural (e.g., laws, policies, programs, services, and systems) and physical (e.g., safe, supportive spaces)<sup>50</sup>.

The Research Team will adapt the **relevant PYD Illustrative Indicators** in these domains (Annex E)<sup>51</sup> and will develop relevant assessment instruments based on the recommended measurement tools (Annex F)<sup>52</sup>, which have good evidence of reliability and validity, and some have already been used successfully in the international context.

In addition to the PYD framework, a comprehensive literature review will be carried out to complement the definition of youth engagement in decision making for the purposes of CAYEDMA and define the relevant

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<sup>47</sup> Draft RA State Strategy on Youth for 2021-2025. <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/3268/about>

<sup>48</sup> Hinson, L., Kapungu, C., Jessee, C., Skinner, M., Bardini, M. & Evans-Whipp, T. (2016). *Measuring Positive Youth Development Toolkit: A Guide for Implementers of Youth Programs*. Washington, DC: YouthPower Learning, Making Cents International. <https://www.youthpower.org/resources/positive-youth-development-measurement-toolkit>

<sup>49</sup> United Nations: Global Issues: Youth. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

<sup>50</sup> Hinson, L., Kapungu, C., Jessee, C., Skinner, M., Bardini, M. & Evans-Whipp, T. (2016). *Measuring Positive Youth Development Toolkit: A Guide for Implementers of Youth Programs*. Washington, DC: YouthPower Learning, Making Cents International. <https://www.youthpower.org/resources/positive-youth-development-measurement-toolkit>. p. 22

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp. 69-74

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 75-99

assessment indicators, using the already existing research, including but not limited to the UN World Youth Reports<sup>53</sup>; the OECD (2017) “Evidence-based Policy Making for Youth Well-being: A Toolkit”<sup>54</sup>; Council of Europe (2018) “New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes”<sup>55</sup>.

ICHD project team will develop a peer review plan to ensure quality control over the CAYEDMA deliverables.

### **Responsibilities in the Research Team**

The Research Team may comprise of the Team Leader, two Experts and two Recruitment Specialists, to be supervised by the Youth Public Policy and Strategic Communication Coordinator. ICHD will organize thematic orientation sessions and will ensure regular consultation. The Team Leader will be responsible for developing, planning, and leading the activities of the Research Team for the assignment, with a full set of reporting documents adhering to ICHD quality assurance standards being developed and submitted in a timely manner. The Team Leader will ensure in-depth cooperation and communication with various stakeholders in the government and civil society. The Experts will be responsible for supporting the Team Leader in desk research, reviewing desk and secondary data and key literature upon the Team Leader’s request and based on approved and pre-defined approach of the Team, supporting the instrument design and quality control of data collection, assisting in the primary data collection and analyzing secondary and primary data. The Experts will be personally responsible for collection of primary data, its duly recording, transcription/categorization and support in analysis and initial preparation of summaries and inputs for the draft reports. They will also be tasked with supporting the Team Leader in preparing short memos and presentations for consultation meetings with key stakeholders if needed. Recruitment Specialists will be responsible for recruitment of CAYEDMA participants in line with the sample criteria and the ethical standards identified in the Study Protocol, and for filing of all the relevant documents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are paramount to CAYEDMA, as it will engage with young people, and may engage with minors. The basic ethical principles that must be considered are respect for persons (individuals should be treated as autonomous agents), beneficence (“do no harm” and maximize possible benefits), and justice (those who bear the burden of the research ought to receive the benefit of the research). Young people are especially vulnerable and their welfare must be safeguarded, therefore, CAYEDMA should have a thorough ethics protocol, in line with the Armenian regulations on conducting research with the engagement of human subjects.

The assessment approach, data collection and analysis methods should focus on gender and human rights aspects, be responsive and appropriate for analyzing the gender equality human rights issues, including child rights issues if younger cohorts are included in the CAYEDMA sample. Gender equality, equity and human rights considerations will be further elaborated by the Research Team during the inception phase and addressed across the final reports. Ethical dimensions should be taken into consideration by the Research Team, discussed

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<sup>53</sup> United Nations: World Youth Reports. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report.html>

<sup>54</sup> OECD (2017), *Evidence-based Policy Making for Youth Well-being: A Toolkit*, OECD Development Policy Tools, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264283923-en>. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/evidence-based-policy-making-for-youth-well-being\\_9789264283923-en#page156](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/evidence-based-policy-making-for-youth-well-being_9789264283923-en#page156)

<sup>55</sup> Crowley, A. & Moxon, D. (2018). New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes. Council of Europe. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth-in-europe/7625-new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-processes.html>

and measures taken to ensure those. More specifically, prior to conducting interviews the respondents' informed consent should be ensured, age-appropriate language and approaches to data collection involving children should be used. The anonymity and confidentiality of individual data will be protected, and ethical guidelines will be followed as set out by USAID's "Policy and Procedures for Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by USAID"<sup>56</sup>. CAYEDMA will also conform to all applicable international regulations, such as the United Nations (UN) Evaluation Group standards and norms<sup>57</sup>; the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis<sup>58</sup>.

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United Nations: Global Issues: Youth. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

United Nations: World Youth Reports. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report.html>

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<sup>56</sup> Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by USAID A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 200. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/200mbe.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> UNEG. (2016). Norms and Standards for Evaluation. <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1914>

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF. (2015). Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis . Document Number: CF/PD/DRP/2015-001. <https://www.unicef.org/media/54796/file>

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## APPENDIX 2: POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

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The Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit, developed by [YouthPower Learning](#), provides an introduction and a brief overview of the toolkit. The complete toolkit can be downloaded [here](#).



APPENDIX 3: EXTRACTS FROM INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL POLICY DOCUMENTS DEFINING  
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND/OR PARTICIPATION

Organization/Entity	Main term used	Concept of youth engagement or participation	Reference to Farthing's categories
<b>USAID, 2016 Positive Development Framework</b> <b>Youth</b>	Youth engagement	Meaningful youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally. Meaningful youth engagement recognizes and seeks to change the power structures that prevent young people from being considered experts in regard to their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities.	Participation as development
<b>UN World Youth Strategy 2030</b> <sup>59</sup>	Youth engagement	Expanded and meaningful youth participation in intergovernmental forums at the global and regional levels, particularly those related to the SDGs, including through extensive and streamlined support to youth delegates and representatives; Promote participation in political and public affairs; promote young people's right to participate in public affairs, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels, such as elections, constitution-making processes, political parties and parliaments.	Participation as rights-based
<b>Council of Europe</b> <sup>60</sup>	Participation	Participation is about being able to take part in and influence decisions that impact our lives. For 50 years, the	

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080\\_UN-Youth-Strategy\\_Web.pdf](https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/council-of-europe-youth-policy>

		<p>youth sector has been giving youth organisations and governments an equal say in decision making on programme priorities and activities. This approach is known as co-management.</p>	
<p><b>EU-CoE Youth Partnership Reflection Group on Youth participation 2014</b></p>	<p><b>Participation</b></p>	<p>Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship are about having the right, the means, space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities to contribute to building a better society</p>	
<p><b>EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027<sup>61</sup></b></p>	<p>Engagement</p>	<p>the EU Youth Strategy aims towards a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Actively engage young people, youth organisations and other organisers of youth work in policies affecting the lives of young people on all levels;</li> <li>○ Support youth representations at local, regional and national level, recognising young people’s right to participate and self-organise;</li> <li>○ Foster the development of citizenship competencies, through citizenship education and learning strategies</li> <li>○ Support and develop opportunities for ‘learning to participate’, raising interest in participatory actions and helping young people to prepare for participation;</li> <li>○ Explore and promote the use of innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation e.g. digital democracy tools.</li> </ul>	

<sup>61</sup> [https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/engage\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/engage_en)

<p><b>RA Government Strategic Program 2021-2025<sup>62</sup></b></p>	<p>Participation</p>	<p>Through inclusive youth policies, the government commits to creating conditions for the youth to develop and build own future perspectives. The program aims to increase the social, political, civic, socio-economic and cultural participation, as well as to develop mechanisms towards increased youth employment and mitigated socio-economic challenges faced by them.</p>	
<p><b>Draft Youth Strategic Development Concept Paper 2021-2025</b></p>	<p>Participation</p>	<p>Includes direct or mediated involvement of young people or groups in decision making processes in all aspects of public life. Holistic participation includes moving from information/awareness towards proactive engagement in decision making with the policy makers.</p>	

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.gov.am/files/docs/3133.pdf>

APPENDIX 4: DEFINITIONS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL POLICY DOCUMENTS

Policy documents	Vision of youth participation	Farthing's 4 categories (rights-based, as empowerment, for efficiency in policy/practices, and developmental) <sup>63</sup>	Possible adherence to relevant PYD framework domains (most relevant ones were selected)
RA Government Program 2021-2026	Main vision: Through inclusive youth policies, the government commits to building an ecosystem "where young people would be able to fully express themselves and build their own future". The program aims to increase social, political, civic, socio-economic and cultural participation, as well as to develop mechanisms towards increased youth employment and mitigated socio-economic challenges faced by them.	Participation for efficiency in policies	Enabling environment - mostly a combination of structural (laws, policies, etc.) - normative (attitudes, norms and beliefs) - social (relationships with peers and adults) and physical ones (safe, supportive spaces) are not mentioned in the Program
	<p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop the legal framework and the resources for the development of the full potential of youth</li> <li>- Promote establishment and development of youth centers, informal education, recognition of volunteering and youth work</li> <li>- Enhance school and university student councils</li> <li>- Enhance the participatory capacity of youth orgs</li> <li>- Promote critical thinking, research skills of youth, their proactivity and leadership</li> </ul>	Developmental	Enabling environment Assets Contribution

<sup>63</sup> A rights-based approach to participation- having the right participate in the decisions that affect their life. Participation as a radical empowerment - as an opportunity to give the power and chances to those young people who are considered marginalized or vulnerable, or otherwise deprived of their voice. Participation for efficiency in policy/practices - young people are best positioned to know of their needs and opportunities that can inform policies and practice. Developmental approach to participation - positive youth development where youth participation and their engagement in decision-making provides youth with the social and emotional skills necessary to thrive as adults.

	- Expand the inclusion of the disabled youth		
RA Government Action Plan 2021-2026	52. Participation: Development of the youth potential in the regions, holistic development of youth so that they are able to self-express, enabling environment for their intellectual activities 53. Increasing youth participation in decision making processes in all public spheres. 54. Promoting collaboration among national and international youth		Agency Contribution
Draft Youth Development Strategy Concept Paper 2021-2025	The vision is to build an ecosystem where “young people are enabled to become active and responsible citizens, self-express and work, be competitive in the labour market, continually develop and create, exercise their rights, becoming a happy individual and citizen, invest their potential towards the development and strengthening of their communities and the state”.	Developmental	Enabling Environment Agency Contribution
Selected Key Principles of the Draft Strategy <sup>64</sup>	Rights-based youth policy: this principle prioritizes the rights of the young people and considers the youth policy as an enabler for this group to fully exercises their rights.	Rights-based	Assets Enabling environment
	Youth as a driving force for country development: this principle prioritizes the potential of youth that should be developed both for their own benefit and for that of their country.	Participation for efficiency in policies	Agency Contribution
	Collaboration: this principle involves collaborative endeavors among the relevant regulatory bodies and key stakeholders to ensure congruency in actions leading to youth policy implementation	Participation for efficiency in policies	Enabling environment
	Participation: includes the direct or mediated involvement of young people or groups in decision-making processes in all aspects of public life. Holistic participation includes moving from information/awareness towards proactive engagement in decision-making with the policymakers.	Participation for efficiency in policies	Enabling environment Contribution

<sup>64</sup> Since the Action Plan for the Draft Strategy was put on hold with no future planning, detailed review of this document was not considered effective for this report.

	Equality: this principle means that all young people have equal opportunities to participate in activities	Rights-based	Enabling environment Contribution
	Innovation: this principle suggests new and innovative solutions to ensure sustainability in the youth policy development and implementation addressing both existing and emerging issues and situations	Participation for efficiency in policies	Enabling environment Contribution
	Inclusivity: this principle ensures that young people with limited opportunities are given equal opportunities through additional support	Participation as empowerment	Enabling environment Assets
RA Law on Local Governing Bodies	46. The head of the community is responsible for ...coordination and management of the ...youth centers and youth programs; the head assists with the resolution of youth-related issues in the community 4. the community members can participate [in the decision-making] in person or through civic associations and initiatives	Participation for efficiency in policies	Enabling environment (spaces)
Decision of the RA Prime Minister on Approving Statute of the Youth Council adjunct to the Governor (Marzpet), 2014	Youth Councils adjunct to the Governors (Marzpets) ensure youth participation in various spheres of public life, support and promote development and implementation of youth state policy in the marzes (regions) and promote activities of youth organisations.  The councils' functions include, but are not limited to - raising the effectiveness of youth policy in the marzes, and ensuring co-operation between state, regional and community bodies on youth issues; - assessing youth policy in the marzes and submitting recommendations to the governor (Marzpet); - discussion of regional and community programmes related to youth issues, creating favourable conditions for youth participation in various fields of public life, discussion of educational, social, health, environmental, legal and other issues related to youth and submission of recommendations to the governor and others.	Participation for efficiency in policies	Contribution



## **ARMENIA CIVICS FOR ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM**

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