

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



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CONTRIBUTION OF NON-PROGRAMME COUNTRIES TO THE EU YOUTH WIKI

CHAPTER V: AZERBAIJAN PARTICIPATION

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5.1. GENERAL CONTEXT

Main concepts

According to Article 1 of [the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Youth Policy”](#) (“Genjler siyaseti haqqında” Azerbaijan Respublikasının Ganunu), adopted in 2002, “youth” is defined as people from the ages of 14 to 29. Young people in Azerbaijan (14-29) make up 2.3 million or 22.8% of the general population,¹ while the young population (up to the age of 29) makes up 53.2% of the total of 10 million. Compared to neighbouring countries in the region and in Europe, Azerbaijan is a very young nation. Youth participation is understood by stakeholders and youth organisations themselves mainly as youth volunteering. The perception is that the more young people are involved in volunteering, the more they participate in the political, social, economic or cultural life of the country.

The [Law on Public Participation](#) in decision-making processes mandates all ministries and agencies to have advisory councils. Even though this council does not consist of youth only, the Ministry of Youth and Sports mainly includes young people on its leadership board, in contrast to other supervisory boards and public consultative bodies operating at state level.

Institutions of representative democracy

According to the [Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#), state power in the Republic of Azerbaijan is based on the principle of separation of powers. The politics of Azerbaijan takes place in the framework of a semi-presidential republic, with the president as head of state and the prime minister as head of government. Executive power is exercised by the president and the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the parliament. The judiciary is nominally independent of the executive and the legislature.

Azerbaijan is governed by a centralised system with a strong hierarchy. At national level, the country elects a head of state – the president – and a legislature. The **President of Azerbaijan** is elected for a 7-year term by the people; until a constitutional referendum changed this in 2009, the position was limited to two terms. The **National Assembly** (Milli Məclis) has 125 members. Before 2005, 100 members were elected for a 5-year term in single-seat constituencies and 25 members were elected by proportional representation. Since 2005, all 125 members are elected in single-seat constituencies. Azerbaijan is a one-party dominant state. Each political party has the same rights and opportunities to compete in elections as defined by the constitution and respective laws. The most recent parliamentary elections were held on Sunday, 9 February 2020. The most

¹. Youth of Azerbaijan by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at <https://stat.gov.az/source/demography/ay/>, accessed 16 September 2022.

recent presidential election was held on Wednesday, 11 April 2018. Voting is not compulsory in Azerbaijan, and votes cannot be cast online.

5.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Young people as voters

All citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan aged 18 on the day of an election or a referendum have the right to vote. There is no upper age limit for voting. There is no special provision in the election code that limits the voting rights of citizens. However, the constitution spells out the following categories of citizens who are not able to vote due to special circumstances regulated by law.

Article 56. Right to elections²

- I. Citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan have the right to elect and be elected to state bodies and to participate in referendums.
- II. Persons whose incapacity has been determined by a court decision have no right to participate in elections and referendums.
- III. The right of military servicemen, judges, civil servants, religious officials, persons imprisoned pursuant to a court judgment that has become effective, and of other persons specified in the present constitution and by law to be elected in elections may be restricted by law.

Article 16. Cases of Non-Participation of Citizens in Voting³

- 16.1 Citizens, who are in airports or travelling by planes, or are in trains or railway stations, or on expeditions on the voting day, shall not participate in voting.
- 16.2 If no Precinct Election Commissions are established in the ships which navigate on the voting day in accordance with Article 35.4 of this Code, the citizens on these ships do not participate in voting.
- 16.3 If no Precinct Election Commissions are established according to Article 35.4 of this Code on the voting day on oil and gas production platforms (hereinafter the oil platforms) located in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, the citizens being on such platforms shall not participate in voting.
- 16.4 If neither Azerbaijani Diplomatic Representation nor Consulate is in the foreign country, or no Precinct Election Commission is established according to Article 35.6 of this Code in the Azerbaijani Diplomatic Representation or Consulate, the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan being in this foreign country shall not participate in voting.

². The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at https://stat.gov.az/menu/3/Legislation/constitution_en.pdf, accessed 16 September 2022.

³. The Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at <https://e-qanun.az/framework/46953>, accessed 16 September 2022.

- 16.5 No voting shall be held on the Election Day for the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan being in foreign countries, during elections of deputies to Milli Majlis or municipal elections.
- 16.6 No voting shall be held on the Election Day in the ships navigating on the Election Day, hospitals, sanatoriums, rest homes, oil platforms located in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, during elections of deputies to Milli Majlis or municipal elections.

According to the Article 17.6.19 of the Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, special conditions for voting procedure should be organised for people with disabilities.

Young people as political representatives

Young people are not actively involved in the social, economic and political life of the country and do not participate in decision-making processes. At present, there is only one member of parliament under the age of 30 – a woman – out of a total 125 (or 0.8%).⁴ Out of 56 officially registered parties, only two have dedicated youth wings. According to the information of the [Central Election Commission](#), these are the YAP (New Azerbaijan Party)⁵ and REAL (Republican Alternative).⁶

In 2019, municipal elections took place in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Central Election Commission and Youth Organisations made a particular effort at increasing youth participation in these elections, with promotional leaflets and posters, social media promotion and information sessions, leading to an increased interest among young people. As a result, just over a quarter of all candidates were young people.⁷

[A new draft law](#) submitted on 7 September 2022 would require new parties to have at least 200 founding members who have each lived in Azerbaijan uninterrupted for the past 20 years. In addition to that, a party should have at least 10 000 signatures, compared to 1 000 under the previous regulation. Other new restrictions would affect existing parties: parties that don't participate in two elections in a row – whether they be presidential, parliamentary, or local – would be closed down.⁸

⁴ Deputies of the Milli Majlis, available at www.meclis.gov.az/cat-dep.php?cat=51&lang=az, accessed 16 September 2022.

⁵ The Statute of the New Azerbaijani Party Youth Union, available at <http://yap.org.az/az/view/pages/101>, accessed 16 September 2022.

⁶ REAL Party's decision regarding the establishment of a Youth Union, available at www.realpartiyasi.org/news/141/respublikaci-alternativ-real-partiyasi-siyasi-komitesinin-qerari, accessed 16 September 2022.

⁷ Report on the Municipal Elections of 2019 by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at www.msk.gov.az/az/hesabatlar/1162/, accessed 16 September 2022.

⁸ What is in the new draft law on political parties? In response to nine questions by BBC News, available at www.bbc.com/azeri/azerbaijan-62839273, accessed 16 September 2022.

According to the election code and the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan below, the following restrictions are in place for running for government positions:

Article 100. Requirements of Candidates for the Presidency of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan can be any citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who has been residing in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan without interruption for more than 10 years, enjoys the right to vote, has never been tried for a major crime, has no commitments towards other States, has benefited from higher education and does not have dual citizenship.

Article 85. Requirement of Candidates for the National Assembly (Milli Majlis)

I. Every citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan enabled with the right to participate in election may be elected, as prescribed by law, as a deputy of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

II. Persons having dual citizenship; persons having obligations to other states; persons serving in the executive or judiciary; persons engaged in other paid activity, with the exception of scientific, pedagogical and creative activity; religious officials; persons whose incapacity has been determined by a court of law; persons convicted of serious crimes; and persons serving their sentences in places of imprisonment pursuant to a court judgement that has become effective, may not be elected as deputies of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Article 215. Rules for Collecting Voters' Signatures in Support of a Candidate for Member of Municipality

215.1 Each nominated citizen should collect voter signatures as follows, to be registered as a candidate for member of a municipality in the relevant election constituency:

215.1.1 area having population of more than 99 999 people – 150 signatures; 215.1.2 area having population more than 49 999 people – 100 signatures; 215.1.3 area having population more than 19 999 people – 75 signatures; 215.1.4 area having population more than 9 999 people – 50 signatures; 215.1.5 area having population more than 4 999 people – 30 signatures; 215.1.6 area having population less than 4 999 people – 15 signatures.

215.2 Voters shall have the right to sign in support of several candidates to the municipality membership.

215.3 Voter signatures shall be collected in accordance with the rule mentioned in Articles 56 and 57 of this Code.

According to Article 83 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Deputies of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan shall be elected on the basis of a majoritarian electoral system and universal, equal and direct suffrage by free, secret and personal ballot.

There is no specific quota for young people in any governmental or political sphere, and such a proposal has never been discussed as part of the legislative proposal.

Since 2016, there is no longer any age limit in running for any elections in Azerbaijan. According to the previous law, only citizens above the age of 25 could be candidates for the National Assembly (Milli Majlis) and citizens above 35 could be candidates for president.

5.3. YOUTH REPRESENTATION BODIES

Youth parliament

There is no youth parliament in Azerbaijan. In the past, there were several attempts to start such a parliament, but they ended up as simulation projects where young people were asked to discuss different legislation projects as a role play.

Youth councils and/or youth advisory boards

The [National Assembly of Youth Organisations of the Republic of Azerbaijan \(NAYORA\)](#) is the only recognised and active umbrella for youth organisations in Azerbaijan. Since 1995, NAYORA has played an important role in youth representation on both national and international levels. One of the main goals of the National Youth Council is to support the representation of youth and youth organisations at national, regional and international levels. NAYORA is funded by the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation and very often consulted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Moreover, NAYORA plays a role in the decision-making process concerning funds allocated for the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation. Since 2011, the National Assembly has been represented as a non-governmental youth organisation member in the Supervisory Board of the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation. NAYORA has a role of “watchdog” and expert in deciding on grant allocations to youth organisations and individual youth (applicants). NAYORA also chairs the public council within the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which is elected every two years.

NAYORA has 146 member organisations, which are elected during a statutory meeting conducted twice a year. Only youth organisations led by young people may apply for membership of NAYORA. Candidate organisations are obliged to be registered NGOs (with state registration) in order to become members.

The Supervisory Board within the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation decides on the results of grant applications (calls for youth NGO structure grants, annual work plans, short-term and long-term projects) and the annual operational budget of the foundation's secretariat. Out of nine supervisory board members, four are representatives of ministries and four are representatives of youth NGOs. The chair of the board (the ninth member) is Head of the Youth and Sports Department in the Office of the President.

The Public Council on Youth Policy within the Ministry of Youth and Sports consists of 15 members representing different youth organisations (members or non-members of the National Youth Council). The council is elected every two years through voting conducted among youth organisations.

Higher education student union(s)

Azerbaijan Students Youth Association Union. Founded in 2009, the “Azerbaijan Student Youth Organisations’ Union” (hereinafter referred to as the union) is a non-profit organisation united by common interests and based on the principles of volunteerism and equality of rights. It aims to help high schools with developing and supporting the interests of students and their protection, and to support their activity in socio-political, cultural, social and economic life. To achieve this goal, it operates in various areas, such as encouraging students in their scientific and education researches by organising contests, competitions, scientific and entertaining games, seminars, round tables, promoting human values among young people, and organising cultural events in order to achieve the effective organisation of students’ leisure and to ensure the participation of talented and creative students in competitions within the country and abroad, at exhibitions, festivals and sports competitions. The union includes 101 Student Youth Organisations within 101 educational institutions, 500 student clubs, 15 000 active members, and 200 000 students. Since its establishment, the union has guided the scientific, cultural and social development of young people while establishing the direction of its activities. Supporting the representation and protection of the rights of young people in the field of education, many of the projects implemented by the union were based on the suggestions and ideas of young people. The union is considered the largest student organisation in the South Caucasus region. The supreme body of the union is the General Assembly, which convenes every two years, where the chairman and the members of the Co-ordinating Council are elected. The Co-ordinating Council is the main decision-making body and includes 109 chairmen and 20 vice-chairmen of the Student Youth Organisation. The board of the union consists of 19 people in total.

School student union(s)

There is no official information on recognised or unofficially operating school unions. School activism and experiential learning is not officially a part of academic school activities.

5.4. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING

Formal mechanisms of consultation

According to Article 3 and Article 11 of the [Law On Youth Policy](#), the government is responsible for organising regular consultations and creating safe spaces for young people to provide their feedback on policies and decisions concerning their lives. Mostly, it is youth policy which is covered by the law. Indeed, the law states that young people should be directly involved in the drafting, implementation and evaluation of youth policy. There is no indication of other policies where young people should be consulted. There is no data showing that there is a specific policy engaging youth in public administration. Nevertheless, recent appointments in Azerbaijan suggest that the new human resources management strategies are mainly focused on young professionals between the ages of 30 and 45. Even though this is not the official youth age (14-29) in Azerbaijan, this positive tendency of engaging the relatively younger generation has been taking place over the last five years.

Actors

Youth and Sports Committee

In 2015, [the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan established](#) a parliamentary [Committee of Youth and Sports](#). The activity of this committee contributes to the further development of youth and sports in Azerbaijan, creates new opportunities for young people and improves legislation in these areas. The committee organises different small-scale consultations annually in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation.

Youth and Sports Department

By Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 1 June 2017, [the Department for Youth Policy and Sports Issues was established in the structure of the Presidential Administration](#). The chair of this department is also the chair of the Supervisory Board of the Youth Foundation,⁹ meaning that they carry out general management and supervision in the foundation, including the determination of the overall structure, the identification of fields of development, strategic goals and plans, internal rules of activities, as well as the establishment of management, branches and representative offices.¹⁰

⁹. Supervisory Board of the Youth Foundation, available at <https://youthfoundation.az/about-us/supervisoryboard/>, accessed 16 September 2022.

¹⁰. The Charter of the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at <https://youthfoundation.az/about-us/nizamnamə/?lang=en>, accessed 16 September 2022.

Large-scale initiatives for dialogue or debate between public institutions and young people

One of the biggest large-scale initiatives for dialogue and debate is the [Republican Forum of Youth](#), which is held every three years. Before the large-scale national forum, the deputy minister for youth travels to the regions and meets with young people within the regional forum (usually more than 100 participants). This is not mentioned in the official legislation or any legal document. Young people all over Azerbaijan may register to join and express their opinions concerning the work of the State Programme or Strategy on Youth. This is the biggest state-level dialogue format between youth and government officials, and usually acts as a feasible space for consultations on youth policy.

Youth Policy Labs within EU4Youth Project

The EU4Youth Youth Policy Labs initiative is a unique platform for the co-creation and co-design of policy labs. Youth participation is a common pattern, including in social entrepreneurship, youth work and digitalisation, inclusion through cultural activities, career guidance and transition paths from education to work. Azerbaijani officials have showed an interest in participating in such a format based on non-formal education methodologies and tools.

5.5. NATIONAL STRATEGY TO INCREASE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Unfortunately, there is no specific strategy focusing on increasing youth participation. The [Azerbaijan Youth Development Strategy \(2015-2025\)](#) is a state strategy which was drafted through consultations with regional youth houses, rural youth and youth NGOs in January 2015.

Scope and content

The goal of the strategy is to develop the potential of Azerbaijani youth in accordance with the requirements of modern times, running over the period 2015-2025, and to use this potential in the best interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to develop an active citizenship among the new generation. To achieve this goal, 32 objectives were defined, which mainly touch upon spheres such as patriotic education, employment, intellectual development, decision making and support of youth with fewer opportunities.

The latest state programme on youth and the main operational document in the sphere of youth is [the State Programme on Youth of Azerbaijan in 2017-2021](#). This is the third programme of this kind. The previous two programmes were implemented in 2005-2009 and in 2011-2015. The goal of the state programme is to achieve more effective implementation of youth policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan, to create conditions for active participation of youth in all spheres of society, to

support their creative and innovative potential, to protect the health of the younger generation, to increase attention to education and employment of youth, to use information and communication technologies effectively, and to develop the voluntary movement in the country.

Revisions and updates

As of December 2022, the new state programme is being drafted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. It is not known exactly which years the programme may cover and it is still being discussed with the main stakeholders. Several consultations and meetings have been conducted in the regions of Azerbaijan but the state programme has not yet been finalised.

There is also a [Law on Volunteering Activity](#), which empowers youth volunteering in the political and socio-economic life of the country.

5.6. SUPPORTING YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Legal/policy framework for the functioning and development of youth organisations

According to the [Law On Youth Policy](#), youth organisations are required to be registered as NGOs at the Ministry of Justice. Registration of youth NGOs can take up to 6-8 months as it is a very bureaucratic process. There are more than 1 600 registered NGOs in Azerbaijan, but not all of them are actively engaged in youth work. The main changes recently introduced for the purposes of increasing youth participation was the change in the maximum age of the chairperson of youth NGOs from 29 to 35. These changes do not apply to NGOs registered before 2018. There is no exact number of youth NGOs in Azerbaijan, but the number is believed to be more than 300.¹¹

Public financial support

Every year, the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the State Agency on support for Non-Governmental Organisations announce a call for projects among youth NGOs.

14 million Azerbaijani manats (AZN) (around €8 million) is under the youth component in the state youth and sports budget (Ministry of Youth and Sports) and 9 million AZN (around €5 million) is for youth projects in the budget of the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation (NGOs and active youth).¹²

¹¹. Mentioned in the Activity Directions of Youth Organisations by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at www.mys.gov.az/gnclr-siyasti/gnclr-tskilatleri/ActivityAreas, accessed 16 September 2022.

¹². https://static.president.az/upload/Files/2021/12/23/95yknky5n4_QANUN_BUDCE.pdf, https://youthfoundation.az/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/%C6%8Flav%C9%99-1_GF.pdf.

The [Azerbaijan Youth Foundation](#) supports youth organisations based on a model similar to the [European Youth Foundation](#), with annual work plans, structural grants (administrative costs), local and international activities. Moreover, the youth foundation also supports the participation of young people in international conferences and the statutory meetings of organisations. Even though during Covid-19 the activities of youth organisations were very limited, the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation empowered the sustainability of youth NGOs by requesting the change of format of activities to online. The main funding allocated for youth organisations is under the supervision of the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation. A vivid example of this kind of public financial support for youth facilities is operating at the [Resource Centre](#) for Youth NGOs under the supervision of NAYORA: youth organisations have free access to meeting rooms, co-working space, a training room and other leisure activities.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports also announces calls for applications on an annual basis. Even though the ministry's role is focused more on establishing the legal framework and policy making, there is still support provided to youth NGOs.

The State Agency on Support for NGOs announces a call for applications twice a year. This call is not only for youth organisations, but youth is one of the priorities of the agency.

The European Youth Foundation and Erasmus+ and Visegrad+ funds are also somewhat spread out among youth organisations. Due to the restrictions on the registration of international grants in Azerbaijan, youth organisations are reluctant to apply for funding internationally. In addition to legal restrictions, there is a lack of visibility and awareness raising on the available resources of these international grant opportunities.

Initiatives to increase the diversity of participants

People with disabilities, rural youth and young war veterans are the main target group for state bodies when it comes to the diversification of participation among young people. The Youth Foundation has a special priority focusing on vulnerable groups. When initiating a project idea, youth organisations can choose this option and apply for a grant.

[Youth Houses](#) in Azerbaijan focus on work with rural youth and young people with disabilities.

The [Youth Development and Career Centre](#) also aims at empowering youth participation on local level by focusing on the career development of rural youth. Branches of the Youth Development and Career Centre operate in 55 regions of Azerbaijan.

5.7. “LEARNING TO PARTICIPATE” THROUGH FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Policy framework

Unfortunately, as of late 2022 there is no specific policy framework being discussed or implemented for promoting or raising awareness on youth participation through education.

Formal learning

According to the Law on Education, Article 1.0.21, formal education is defined as all form of education that comes to an end with the issue of the state education document.¹³

Non-formal

According to the Law on Education, Article 1.0.31, non-formal education is defined as a type of education received as a result of various courses, clubs and individual courses, where no state education document is issued upon completion. There is no citizenship education at school, nor has this emerged with any other subject. In the early 2000s there was a subject called “Human and society” which has now been reformulated as “Life skills”. These subjects cover personal relationships, conflict resolution and other interpersonal skills.¹⁴

Some of the schools, especially the ones with a European or American approach to education, encourage simulations for the purposes of raising awareness about decision-making processes in governments or international organisations. They partner with different initiatives and youth NGOs, such as the [Model United Nations Azerbaijan](#), [European Youth Parliament Azerbaijan](#), etc. Other than what is mentioned above, it is hard to conduct any kind of non-formal training at schools or universities without special permission from the Ministry of Science and Education.

Informal learning

According to Article 1.0.23 of the Law on Education, informal education is defined as a way of acquiring knowledge through self-directed learning.

Quality assurance of non-formal learning

According to the [State Agency for Quality Assurance in Education](#), informal and non-formal education are defined as follows:

¹³. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, available at <https://e-qanun.az/framework/18343>, accessed 16 September 2022.

¹⁴. E-textbook portal, available at www.e-derslik.edu.az/site/index.php, accessed 16 September 2022.

Non-formal education is a set of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired outside the formal learning environment, i.e. in various courses, study groups, training or individual sessions, as well as in the work environment.

Informal education is a form of acquiring knowledge through self-education. That is, all the skills acquired in our daily lives from different sources according to our interests or needs (mostly based on experience) can be included here.

From the perspective of the agency, informal and non-formal learning are only recognised for VET (vocational education and training). This recognition does not apply to youth work, which is not recognised as an official profession in Azerbaijan. Since 2018, a master's programme on [Management of Youth Sector and Youth Policy](#) has been developed in co-operation with UNICEF Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Science and Education and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This master's programme is taught in six different universities across Azerbaijan. However, most graduates from this programme are not youth workers from youth NGOs or trainers from the field of non-formal education, but rather social workers and psychologists who have never been part of youth policy in Azerbaijan.

Support for educators

Every year, [the Ministry of Science and Education](#) announces a call for [grant applications](#) for teachers and principals in both secondary schools and VET institutions across Azerbaijan. Before the call for applications opens, experts from the ministry and professional project management coaches conduct training for teachers in order to build/improve their project writing and project management skills. The main aim of this grant application is to empower teachers to organise extracurricular activities with pupils/students, develop their project management skills and encourage them to come up with innovative solutions to the issues and challenges within the education institution where they are employed.

[UNICEF](#) works with youth workers, teachers, counsellors, mentors and sports coaches across the country not only to facilitate young people's participation in education, sports and recreation, but to equip youngsters with a range of skills to enable them to play a full role in their communities. Creating an enabling environment for learning and developing skills can help to reduce unemployment, poverty and challenging behaviours that in turn can stifle economic and social growth and place increased pressure on public services and expenditures.

The [United Nations Resident Co-ordinators Office](#) in Azerbaijan conducted a special project for three years on boosting meaningful youth participation within UN structures. Young people had a chance to discuss different activities of UN structures, and raise awareness on the issues of sustainable development goals. The project was terminated due to lack of funding.

5.8. RAISING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Information providers and counselling structures

The government of the Republic of Azerbaijan always stresses its commitment to building democracy and strengthening democratic institutions. However, there is still space for development, especially with emphasis to be made on human rights education and education for democratic citizenship.

European Union: Youth is at the heart of EU co-operation with its Eastern partners. The EU promotes youth skills development and employability, education and training, and supports youth engagement in civic, cultural, academic and professional exchanges. Through its EU4Youth programme, the EU is dedicated to developing youth leadership and entrepreneurship through a variety of actions, including capacity building, fellowships, support to policy dialogue, as well as providing grants to organisations active in these areas. The Young European Ambassadors (YEAs) initiative brings together students, young professionals and community activists who volunteer their time to engage in awareness raising and the promotion of youth-related activities and opportunities.

The Non-Aligned Movement Youth Organisation is a subsidiary institution of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and has the status of international youth organisation that aims to provide the perspectives of NAM youth on issues deriving from the movement's agenda. The main domains of its activity consist of youth development, youth engagement and youth-related challenges under the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

OMBUDSMAN: The mission of the Ombudsman is to restore the human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in the international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party, which have been violated by governmental or local bodies and officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and to prevent the violation of human rights in cases envisaged by the Constitutional Law. The Commissioner conducts legal education work for vulnerable groups of the population, including children and youth, which include public hearings held in each city and region of the country for monitoring the implementation and promotion of the National Plan and Programme and for raising the awareness of people about the right to vote.¹⁵ Aside from this, there is a Resources Centre of the Ombudsman, functioning in the field of youth and child human rights, called the "Azerbaijan Child and Youth Peace Network", which regularly holds trainings on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, runs awareness events on

¹⁵. Human Rights Education, available at <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/pages/38>, accessed 16 September 2022.

patriotism, discusses the problems of children, and organises leisure activities for children and study tours to museums and historical sites.¹⁶

The [Council of Europe-Azerbaijan partnership](#) recently announced its 3rd Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022-2025. As in previous years (the first action plan on youth ran from 2018 to 2021), specific bilateral co-operation activities between the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan included in the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2018-2021](#) will continue in the coming years. They are grouped under the project Capacity Building of Youth Leaders and Activists from Azerbaijan, Human Rights Education and Democratic Citizenship. According to an interview with ministry and Council of Europe advisers from the Youth Department, if financial support is provided, there is a high chance of continuing co-operation in the youth field in the period 2024-2027.

5.9. E-PARTICIPATION

The e-participation of youth organisations and young people has increased in the past five years, partly due to Covid-19, when youth workers were forced to conduct all activities in virtual format. Some examples of e-participation were election to the board, statutory body meetings and other projects. Another example of e-participation is awareness-raising campaigns including those addressing the impact of Covid-19, support to the rehabilitation of war veterans and witnesses of the war. Among other social issues that young people address online are gender equality, intercultural dialogue and quality education.

The YouthApp ([Genz.az](#)) was introduced by Azerbaijan Youth Participation in 2019, aiming to increase equal access to opportunities among youth, especially targeting vulnerable youth living in rural areas or those who have never been involved with any youth organisations. In addition to this, there are different media websites dedicated to the promotion of opportunities for youth, education scholarships and calls for grant applications. An example of such a platform is [edumap](#). This is a private website and it is not funded by the government.

Although there is no specific framework mentioning the importance of e-participation or developing AI (artificial intelligence) skills among the young generation, it is important to mention that social media plays a remarkable role in boosting youth participation among youth in Azerbaijan: petitions, Facebook events, Instagram reels, live videos, etc. are very important tools for young people to express their opinions and participate in achieving social justice.

¹⁶. Protecting Child Rights, available at <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/pages/52/protecting-child-rights->, accessed 16 September 2022.

5.10. CURRENT DEBATES AND REFORMS (December 2022)

Forthcoming policy developments

The new State Programme for Youth is in the development phase. The new programme will cover the period 2023-2027. Previous programmes covered the period [2017-2021](#).

Ongoing debates

It is worth mentioning that of the six Eastern Partnership countries, Azerbaijan has enjoyed the fewest opportunities provided by different international organisations and donors. Looking at European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ statistical data, we see that youth in Azerbaijan are not benefiting from these opportunities in the same way as youth from Belarus or Georgia. Partly, this is because of cultural beliefs and norms which disempower the younger generation from travelling, as some families still believe that it is not safe to travel without the family. Another reason is that young people in Azerbaijan have less access to information about existing programmes due to the passive activities of youth NGOs in the regions. Most youth workers and youth NGOs are based in Baku, which leaves NEET (not in education, employment and training) and other vulnerable young people from the regions behind. Third, [restrictions on the registration of international grants](#)¹⁷ in the Republic of Azerbaijan demotivate younger generations of youth workers and activists from working with the bureaucratic structure of the grant registration process, therefore naturally reducing the access to opportunities for young people. As a result, Azerbaijani youth is not very well represented in European structures and the statutory bodies of European Youth NGOs or different pools of trainers (PoTs). There has been an ongoing debate about this among youth organisations and youth workers for many years now, but progress is very slow. Another important debate is around the topic of establishing a PoT in the field of non-formal education. This has been discussed on several occasions and at meetings with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation and NAYORA. The agreement between these three institutions highlights the importance of having one unified platform. It is planned to have the official website and evaluation criteria ready by the end of 2022.

The main issues which youth debate a lot are eco-activism and feminism, as these topics are very sensitive for the young generation. There is a misinterpretation of feminism and lack of citizenship education when it comes to an eco-friendly approach to life. Young people believe that feminism is only about women's rights and has nothing to do with the well-being of the male population. The messages on social media and school education do not create a clear picture of gender equality and its impact on both women and men. Most of the projects focus on women when it comes to gender equality, thus making it not inclusive. Owing to gender-based discrimination (a preference

¹⁷. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Non-governmental Organisations (Public Associations and Foundations), available at <https://e-qanun.az/framework/511>, accessed 16 September 2022.

for sons in the families), a demographic problem has developed in Azerbaijan over the past 30 years: according to UN statistics and the State Statistics Committee, Azerbaijan ranks first for gender-biased sex selection, with 116 new born boys to 100 girls.¹⁸ Families prefer to have a boy than a girl as a result of social gender norms and beliefs, a decrease in the fertility rate (from 2.8 to 1.8)¹⁹ and a lack of social protection policy. This is a great concern for young people, as they are the demographic future of the country and these changes in society will impact women's participation in decision-making processes, increase the crime rate, human trafficking and domestic violence, and empower masculinisation in all spheres of society including education, politics, the labour market, service business, tourism, etc.

¹⁸. Sidebar: sex ratios around the world, available at www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/08/23/sidebar-sex-ratios-around-the-world/, accessed 16 September 2022.

¹⁹. Demographic Indicators of Azerbaijan by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at <https://stat.gov.az/source/demography/ap/>, accessed 16 September 2022.

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