

UDC 342.32

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/npuuola.v35.2024.9>*N. V. Mishyna***EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNANCE:
THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
IN HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION¹**

Problem statement and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. Youth participation in democratic processes is a cornerstone in building inclusive, resilient and rights-respecting societies. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe recognises this by emphasising youth empowerment in its revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. The Charter emphasises the crucial role of local authorities in ensuring that young people are active participants in democratic and decision-making processes, particularly in areas that directly affect human rights, and the third edition of this Charter is currently under active discussion.

Analysis of recent researches and publications, which initiated the solution of this problem and on which the author relies, highlighting previously unresolved parts of the overall problem to which the article is devoted. This problem remains under-researched in the Ukrainian constitutional doctrine. The majority of publications don't fully deal with youth – they mention its potential in relevance to the activities of local and regional authorities in general (see [1–4]) or in particular (see [5–8]).

The aim of this article is to critically examine the «Rejuvenating Politics» initiative, focusing on its role in empowering youth participation in local and regional governance, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The article seeks to explore how the initiative fosters democratic resilience, encourages civic engagement, and promotes human rights protection through youth involvement. Additionally, it will analyze the challenges and limitations of the program, such as the absence of voting rights and resource constraints, while highlighting its importance as a model for enhancing youth engagement in political decision-making during times of crisis and beyond.

The main text. Recent global challenges – from climate change to social justice movements – have highlighted the importance of youth voices in

¹ Funded under the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions «MSCA4Ukraine» (individual project 'The role of local authorities in the implementation of the judgments of the European court of human rights').

advocating for and defending human rights. In countries such as Ukraine, where local and regional authorities have been at the forefront of protecting fundamental rights in the midst of ongoing conflict, youth participation has become increasingly important. Ukrainian local governments have worked closely with young people, involving them in emergency response and human rights advocacy, providing a compelling example of how youth participation can strengthen democracy and protect human dignity in times of crisis.

This article examines the initiatives that the Congress has implemented to involve young people in governance, with a particular focus on their role in promoting and protecting human rights. Through campaigns such as the 'Youth Delegate' initiative, the Congress encourages young people to take an active part in local and regional governance and demonstrates how youth engagement at the local level can be a powerful tool for advancing the protection of human rights across Europe. The Ukrainian experience provides a concrete example of how local authorities, in partnership with young people, can respond to pressing human rights challenges and demonstrates the potential of youth empowerment in building a more just and equitable society.

The 'Rejuvenating Politics' ('Youth Delegate') initiative, launched by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 2014, represents a significant effort to engage young people in public life and decision-making processes at local and regional level. The initiative reflects the commitment of the Congress to include young people's voices in the political discourse, recognising that the perspectives of younger generations are crucial in shaping inclusive and forward-looking policies. A key component of this initiative is the 'Youth Delegate' project, which offers young people from the Council of Europe's 46 member states a unique opportunity to participate in European political processes, albeit without voting rights. Youth delegates are invited to attend Congress sessions and contribute to discussions alongside elected local and regional representatives.

Some of the benefits of the initiative are as follows.

Firstly, the youth inclusion in governance. The initiative stands out as an example, as a model of youth participation in governance. By enabling youth delegates to participate in European assemblies, it provides a platform for young people to voice their concerns, present ideas and influence political debate. This exposure is valuable for youth empowerment, as it builds their confidence in democratic processes and increases their understanding of governance structures.

Secondly, the diverse representation. The selection process for youth delegates ensures a balanced representation in terms of gender, age, cultural background and experience. This diversity promotes an inclusive and broad range of perspectives, which can lead to more holistic discussions during Congress sessions. By involving youth activists, students, young politicians, young NGO members, the project fosters a dynamic exchange of ideas across different sectors of society.

Thirdly, it is definitely the capacity building and networking. The mentoring and support provided to youth delegates by the project is essential for capacity building. Delegates will have the opportunity to develop projects at

local and regional level, working on issues of importance to their communities. In addition, networking opportunities with Congress members and other youth delegates create lasting professional relationships that can enhance their future political and civic careers.

And last, but not least – the promotion of the political engagement is important. The initiative promotes civic and political engagement among young people by involving them directly in policy discussions. Youth delegates can contribute to real-time debates and gain insight into legislative processes, potentially influencing policies in their home countries. This experience can foster a deeper commitment to civic engagement and political activism among young people.

As with any project, the 10 years of the initiative have revealed some drawbacks.

The biggest one is the lack of voting rights – this is the first obvious thing, that comes in mind. While youth delegates can take part in debates, their lack of voting rights limits the extent of their influence within the Congress. Although they can stimulate discussion and help shape the agenda, the inability to vote on key decisions can lead to a sense of limited agency. This lack of formal decision-making power may undermine the full integration of youth perspectives into legislative outcomes.

Then, it is the lack of such a resource, as time (in other words, limited timeframe for engagement). Youth delegates hold their positions for one calendar year, which may not be enough time for them to fully develop and implement their projects or to have a lasting impact on policy discussions. The short mandate can hinder the continuity of long-term projects, as new delegates have to take over each year, potentially disrupting the progress made by their predecessors.

Also, the resource constraints for local projects should be kept in mind. Although youth delegates are encouraged to implement local projects, they may face challenges in terms of financial and logistical support. Without sufficient resources, the scope and impact of these projects may be limited. While the Congress provides mentoring and guidance, local governments or non-governmental organisations may need to provide additional support to ensure the success of these initiatives.

It is important to mention the existence of the barriers to accessibility: despite efforts to promote diversity, there may still be barriers to accessibility, particularly for young people from disadvantaged or marginalised communities. The application process, while online, may not reach all potential candidates, especially those in rural or underserved areas. In addition, the need for delegates to attend face-to-face sessions can be a challenge for individuals who face financial or logistical barriers to travelling to congress sessions.

The Rejuvenating Politics initiative is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The war has severely affected the lives of millions of young people, disrupting their education, livelihoods and social stability. In such a challenging environment, initiatives that empower young people to participate in political processes and decision-making are important not only for the individuals involved, but also for the wider recovery and

reconstruction of the country. The role of local and regional authorities is crucial in promoting civic engagement and ensuring that young people have a say in shaping their future.

1. Youth as catalysts for post-conflict recovery.

In post-conflict situations, young people play a key role in the recovery and reconstruction of their communities. The Rejuvenating Politics initiative allows young people to bring their experience, ideas and energy to the table and influence policies that will directly affect their future. In Ukraine, where the decentralised political system has made local government a lifeline for many citizens, the involvement of young people in local decision-making is vital. Youth delegates from Ukraine participating in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities can provide a unique perspective on the immediate needs of their communities, particularly in the areas of rebuilding infrastructure, addressing social and economic challenges, and promoting reconciliation.

2. Empowering displaced and traumatised youth.

The war in Ukraine has displaced millions of citizens, including a significant number of young people. Many have fled their homes, seeking refuge either within Ukraine or abroad, and have experienced trauma, loss and instability. The Rejuvenating Politics initiative provides an opportunity for these young people to regain a sense of purpose and agency. By participating as youth delegates, they can channel their experiences into constructive political engagement, advocating for policies that support displaced persons, mental health services and youth rehabilitation programmes. This, in turn, can foster a sense of hope and empowerment among a generation that has been severely affected by the conflict.

3. Strengthening democratic resilience.

The ongoing conflict has also tested Ukraine's democratic institutions, particularly at the local level, where local governments have had to cope with the challenges of war while continuing to serve their citizens. Engaging youth in local governance through the Rejuvenating Politics initiative is an essential component of strengthening Ukraine's democratic resilience. By actively engaging in the democratic process, youth delegates can help shape policies that promote transparency, accountability and good governance – values that are critical to maintaining democratic stability during and after conflict. Their participation helps to ensure that the voices of younger generations are heard in shaping Ukraine's future, particularly in the context of rebuilding a democratic society after war.

4. The role of local initiatives in the protection of human rights.

As seen in various regions of Ukraine, such as the establishment of youth centres in war-affected communities, local initiatives play a crucial role in supporting youth, providing safe spaces and offering resources for civic engagement. In cities (Fastiv and many more) youth councils have become platforms for young people to organise humanitarian efforts, communicate with international partners and contribute to local governance. The Rejuvenating Politics initiative can strengthen these local efforts by providing young people with the tools, networks and opportunities to participate in broader efforts to protect human rights. Engaging with local authorities

on issues such as the rights of displaced persons, access to education and rebuilding infrastructure can make a tangible difference in protecting the rights of young citizens affected by war.

5. Fostering International Solidarity and Exchange.

The participation of Ukrainian youth in the Rejuvenating Politics initiative also fosters international solidarity. By connecting with youth delegates from other Council of Europe member states, Ukrainian youth can share their experiences and learn from others who have faced similar challenges in post-conflict environments. This exchange of knowledge and ideas can help in developing effective strategies for recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine. Additionally, it strengthens international support for Ukraine, as youth delegates raise awareness of the ongoing human rights challenges in their country and advocate for continued international assistance.

Conclusions. In times of conflict, engaging youth in political processes is not just important – it is imperative. The Rejuvenating Politics initiative, with its focus on local and regional authorities, provides a critical platform for young people in Ukraine and across Europe to influence decision-making, contribute to post-conflict recovery, and ensure their rights and needs are recognized. By fostering democratic resilience, empowering displaced youth, and promoting international solidarity, the initiative plays a vital role in shaping a future grounded in human rights, peace, and sustainability.

However, while this initiative is an innovative step toward integrating youth into governance, it is not without its challenges. The absence of voting rights for youth delegates, limited resources, and short mandate periods can constrain the potential impact of their contributions. Despite these hurdles, the initiative's strength lies in its ability to foster meaningful civic engagement and political activism. It serves as a model for other regions aiming to enhance youth involvement in decision-making processes. In particular, in the context of Ukraine, where local governance plays a crucial role in navigating the challenges of war, the active involvement of youth is essential for both immediate recovery efforts and long-term democratic stability.

By bridging the gap between generations and fostering collaboration at local, regional, and international levels, the «Rejuvenating Politics» initiative ensures that youth are not merely passive observers but active contributors to the policies that shape their future.

Bibliography

1. Lambert E. Execution of Judgment: European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) / Max Planck Encyclopedia of International Procedural Law (MPEiPro). 2018. 40 p.
2. Lambert Abdelgawad E. Dialogue and the Implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' Judgments. *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*. 2016. № 34 (4). P. 340–363.
3. Qaracayev C. Local Self-government in the Republic of Azerbaijan: Problems of the Administrative Supervision. *Науковий вісник Міжнародного гуманітарного університету. Сер.: Юриспруденція*. 2022. № 57. С. 24–27.
4. Qaracayev C. Axiological Function of The Constitutional Court of The Republic of Azerbaijan. *Juris Europensis Scientia*. 2022. №3. С. 135–138.
5. Mishyna N. European court of human rights' judgements implementation by local and regional authorities: relevant publications on the topic. *Наукові праці Національного університету «Одеська юридична академія»*. Одеса, 2023. Т. 33. С. 52–57.

6. Мішина Н. В. Органи самоорганізації населення в Україні: типологія та класифікація територіальних мікроколективів. *Наукові праці Національного університету «Одеська юридична академія»*. Том 27. Одеса, 2020. С. 104–109.

7. Мішина Н. «Кодекс зебри» як модельна схема інкорпорації європейських стандартів прав людини. *Актуальні проблеми правознавства*. Науковий збірник ЮФ THEU / редкол. : М. О. Баймуратов та ін. Тернопіль : Вектор, 2013. Вип. 3. С. 113-120.

8. Mishyna N.V. *Self-Organized Bodies of the Population and the Local Government's Nature Concepts* | Органи самоорганізації населення у контексті теорій про природу місцевого самоврядування. *ЮРИДИКА | JURIDICA*. 2020. № 1. С. 16-20.

Summary

Mishyna N. V. Empowering youth through local governance: the role of local and regional authorities in human rights protection. – Article.

The aim of this article is to critically examine the «Rejuvenating Politics» initiative, focusing on its role in empowering youth participation in local and regional governance, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The article seeks to explore how the initiative fosters democratic resilience, encourages civic engagement, and promotes human rights protection through youth involvement.

In times of conflict, engaging youth in political processes is not just important – it is imperative. The «Rejuvenating Politics» initiative, with its focus on local and regional authorities, provides a critical platform for young people in Ukraine and across Europe to influence decision-making, contribute to post-conflict recovery, and ensure their rights and needs are recognized. By fostering democratic resilience, empowering displaced youth, and promoting international solidarity, the initiative plays a vital role in shaping a future grounded in human rights, peace, and sustainability.

However, while this initiative is an innovative step toward integrating youth into governance, it is not without its challenges. The absence of voting rights for youth delegates, limited resources, and short mandate periods can constrain the potential impact of their contributions. Despite these hurdles, the initiative's strength lies in its ability to foster meaningful civic engagement and political activism. It serves as a model for other regions aiming to enhance youth involvement in decision-making processes. In particular, in the context of Ukraine, where local governance plays a crucial role in navigating the challenges of war, the active involvement of youth is essential for both immediate recovery efforts and long-term democratic stability.

By bridging the gap between generations and fostering collaboration at local, regional, and international levels, the «Rejuvenating Politics» initiative ensures that youth are not merely passive observers but active contributors to the policies that shape their future.

Key words: local self-government, local and regional authorities, human rights, youth participation, civic engagement, political activism.

Анотація

Мішина Н. В. Розширення прав і можливостей молоді через місцеве самоврядування: роль органів місцевого та регіонального самоврядування у захисті прав людини. – Стаття.

Метою цієї статті є аналіз ініціативи «Омолодження політики» з акцентом на її ролі в розширенні можливостей участі молоді в місцевому та регіональному управлінні, особливо в контексті триваючого конфлікту в Україні. У статті робиться спроба дослідити, як ця ініціатива сприяє зміцненню демократичної стійкості, заохочує громадянську активність та сприяє захисту прав людини через залучення молоді.

Під час конфлікту залучення молоді до політичних процесів є не просто важливим – воно є необхідним. Ініціатива «Омолодження політики», з її фокусом на місцеві та регіональні органи влади, забезпечує критично важливу платформу для молодих людей в Україні та по всій Європі, щоб впливати на процес прийняття рішень, сприяти постконфліктному відновленню та забезпечити визнання їхніх прав і потреб. Сприяючи демократичній стійкості, розширенню прав і можливостей переміщеної молоді та зміцненню міжнародної солідарності, ініціатива відіграє життєво важливу роль у формуванні майбутнього, заснованого на правах людини, мирі та сталому розвитку.

Однак, хоча ця ініціатива є інноваційним кроком на шляху до інтеграції молоді в управління, вона не позбавлена певних проблем. Відсутність права голосу у молодіжних делегатів, обмеженість ресурсів та короткі терміни повноважень можуть обмежити потенційний вплив їхніх внесків. Незважаючи на ці перешкоди, сила ініціативи полягає в її здатності сприяти значущому громадянському залученню та політичній активності. Вона слугує моделлю для інших регіонів, які прагнуть посилити залучення молоді до процесів прийняття рішень. Зокрема, в контексті України, де місцеве самоврядування відіграє вирішальну роль у подоланні викликів війни, активне залучення молоді має важливе значення як для негайного відновлення, так і для довгострокової демократичної стабільності.

Подолання розриву між поколіннями та сприяння співпраці на місцевому, регіональному та міжнародному рівнях, ініціатива «Омолодження політики» гарантує, що молодь буде не просто пасивним спостерігачем, а активним учасником політики, яка формує їхнє майбутнє.

Ключові слова: місцеве самоврядування, місцеві та регіональні органи влади, права людини, участь молоді, громадянська активність, політичний активізм.