

# From Youth Engagement to Youth Policy: Strengthening Youth Participation in a Border Municipality

## **Name of the organisation**

Information and Education Development Network (INEDNET)

## **Website of the organisation**

<https://www.inednet.com/>

## **Location of the organisation**

Bryusov 21, Yerevan 0023, Armenia, 0023 Yerevan, Armenia

## **E-mail address of the organisation**

[inednet@outlook.com](mailto:inednet@outlook.com)

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## **Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work**

- Participation of young people in implementing youth activities (planning, preparing, carrying out, etc.)
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Organisation of youth work
- Policymaking processes, methods and tools

## **Good practice category**

A practice of processes and methods

## **Good practice aim & purpose**

This initiative was implemented in the municipality of Vardenis, Armenia, within the framework of the Europe Goes Local programme in cooperation with INEDNET. The main aim was to strengthen youth participation and civic engagement in a border community where opportunities for young people to take part in community life had traditionally been very limited.

Vardenis is a geographically remote municipality located close to the Armenian border. In recent years the community has faced significant challenges such as youth migration, limited youth infrastructure, and weak communication between young people and local authorities. These challenges became even more visible after the escalation of regional tensions in 2022 (the 2022 Armenia-Azerbaijan border clashes), which contributed to the out-migration of many young residents. The purpose of the initiative was therefore to create opportunities for young people to become more engaged in community life through meetings, educational activities, and cooperation with local authorities. In addition to increasing youth participation, the initiative aimed to build sustainable cooperation between young people and the municipality and to promote structural changes in local youth policy, including the introduction of a dedicated municipal budget line for youth initiatives

## **Good practice description**

This good practice was implemented in the municipality of Vardenis within the framework of the Europe Goes Local programme in cooperation with INEDNET. The practice focuses on a step-by-step approach to strengthening youth participation in a community where youth engagement had previously been limited.

**Step 1 – Learning and capacity building.**The process began with my participation in the Participation Lab organised by INEDNET. The Participation Lab served as a platform where young people from different communities met regularly to exchange ideas, discuss challenges related to youth participation, and explore practical approaches for engaging young people in local governance.

Additional knowledge and inspiration were gained through international experience-sharing meetings organised within the framework of Europe Goes Local in Thessaloniki , Greece, and Chisinau, Moldova. During these meetings participants interacted with representatives of youth councils and local youth organisations, which allowed us to observe how youth participation mechanisms function in other communities.

**Step 2 – Mobilising young people locally.**After gaining this experience, the next step was to engage young people in Vardenis. Regular youth meetings were organised where participants could discuss local issues, share ideas, and learn about civic participation and the importance of youth involvement in community development.

**Step 3 – Youth education and empowerment.**To deepen youth engagement, a three-day summer youth camp was organised. The camp included workshops and discussions with invited speakers on topics such as civic participation, democratic values, youth rights, and the legal framework related to elections and citizen participation. These sessions aimed to strengthen young people’s knowledge and motivation to participate in community life.

**Step 4 – Public visibility of youth initiatives.**Another important step was organising the International Youth Day celebration in Vardenis for the first time. The event increased public awareness about youth participation and created a platform where young people, community members, and local authorities could interact.

**Step 5 – Cooperation with local authorities.**To ensure sustainability, cooperation with the municipality was established. Through the municipality’s spokesperson a meeting with the mayor was organised where youth initiatives and their potential benefits for the community were presented.

**Step 6 – Institutionalisation of youth support.**Following this meeting, the municipality organised a council session where the summer youth camp was approved and financial resources were allocated. Continued dialogue with the municipality later resulted in an important structural change: the establishment of a separate municipal budget line dedicated to youth initiatives. This step-by-step process demonstrates how youth engagement activities can gradually lead to institutional support for youth participation at the local level.

### **Good practice result & concrete effects**

The implementation of this practice produced several important results for youth participation in Vardenis. First, regular youth meetings created a new platform for dialogue among young people in the municipality. Participants became more aware of civic engagement and began to show greater interest in contributing to community initiatives. Second, the summer youth camp and educational activities increased young people's knowledge about democratic participation, youth rights, and civic responsibility. Participants developed leadership skills, improved their understanding of community processes, and became more motivated to take part in local activities. The celebration of International Youth Day also helped increase the visibility of youth initiatives and strengthened communication between young people and local authorities. One of the most significant outcomes of this practice was the establishment of a separate municipal budget line dedicated to youth initiatives. This structural change ensured that youth-related activities would receive dedicated financial support within the municipal budget for the first time. As a result, the municipality now has a sustainable mechanism for supporting youth participation and youth-led initiatives in the future.

### **Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work**

Youth work policy