



Youth as Catalysts for Shaping Libya's Future

Pathways for Inclusion in National Dialogue and Vision-Making

Abdelkarim Skouri

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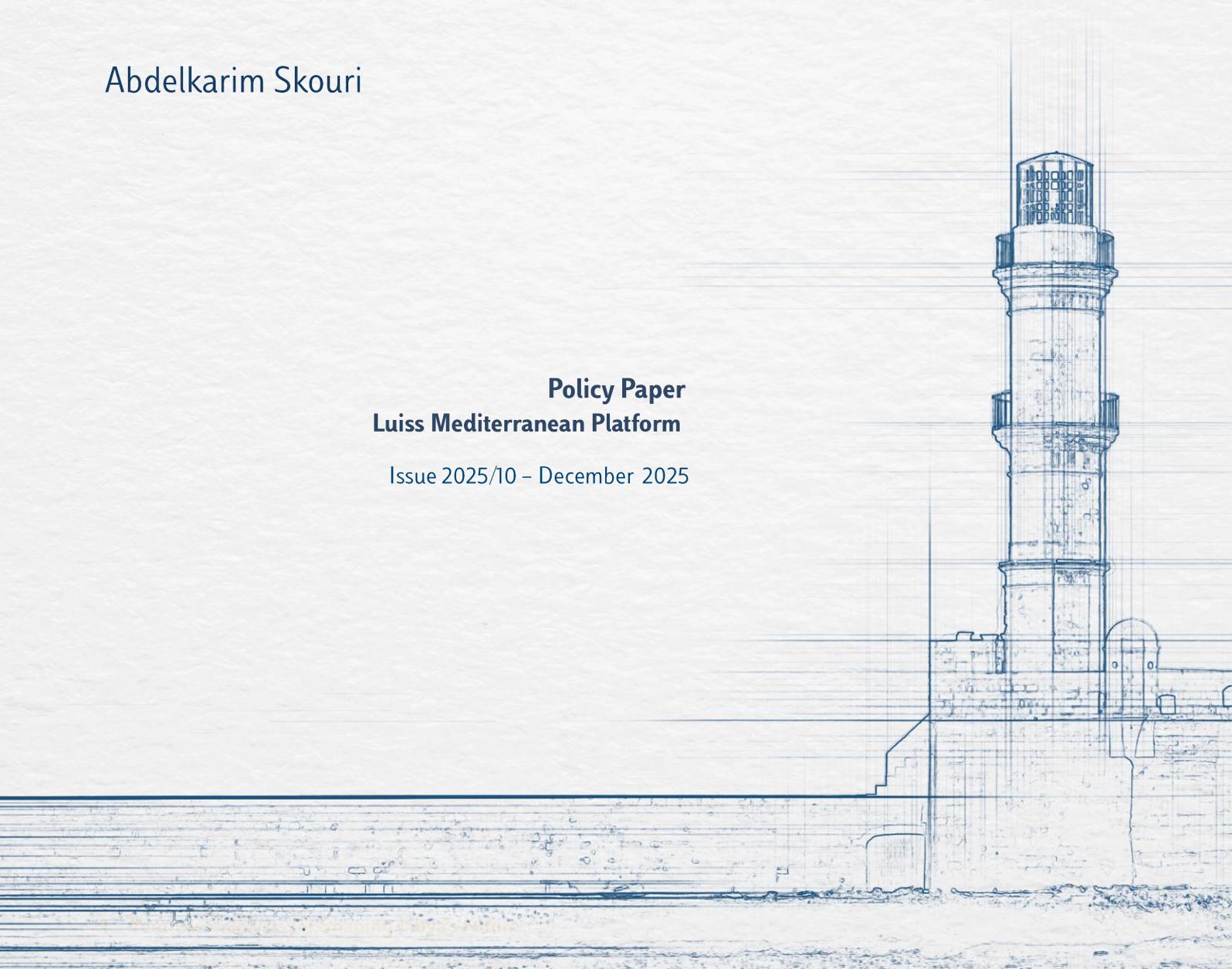


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Abstract

Libya's transition continues to sideline its largest demographic asset: its youth. Since 2011, young Libyans have driven civic activism, peacebuilding and local governance. Yet they remain largely excluded from formal decision-making. Their participation in political dialogues, party structures and international programs is often limited to token consultation, deepening frustration and undermining trust in institutions.

This policy brief examines the gap between youth activism and political influence, highlighting how structural constraints—weak party systems, restrictive civic spaces, political gatekeeping and fragmented donor initiatives—limit youth agency. It also shows that youth priorities consistently expressed across consultations—accountability, decentralization, inclusive identity and economic diversification—align closely with Libya's broader governance debates but lack institutional expression.

Drawing on evidence from local governance programs, international initiatives and comparative experiences, the brief outlines how isolated achievements can be scaled into systematic inclusion. It identifies practical pathways to ensure youth inclusion in decision-making through legal reforms, strengthened local governance, leadership pipelines and mechanisms linking youth contributions to national political processes. In doing so, it argues for repositioning youth not as beneficiaries, but as co-authors of Libya's political future.

1. Libyan Youth in Context

Libya is a strikingly young country. More than half its population is under 30, and the country will remain within a demographic dividend window until at least 2043.¹ This demographic weight carries both promise and risk. With the right policies, Libya could harness youth potential for prompt recovery and prosperity. Without them, marginalization risks fuelling instability.

Yet in Libya, the very definition of “youth” is socially and politically peculiar. While international frameworks often set youth between 15–24 or 15–35, at most, in Libya, youthhood is widely understood as a prolonged social condition that can extend well into the 40s. “Youth” does not merely designate age: it denotes a status of delayed adulthood, marked by economic dependence and political exclusion. Many Libyans note that people are still called *shabab* (youth) even when they are married, employed, or in their late thirties, as long as they lack decision-making power or social standing. This reflects a broader challenge, highlighting that adulthood is tied to access to some form of power and recognition.

As it is today, Libya has been aptly described as “no country for the young.”² Politically marginalized and economically disempowered, its youth face one of the highest unemployment rates in the world—51.5% in 2022.³ This crisis is further exacerbated by the saturation of the public sector—long the main source of employment and a reflection of the state’s dominant role in the economy—and by the continued underdevelopment of the private sector.⁴

In this context, many young Libyans – including highly qualified professionals – have already left the country, driven by limited opportunities and persistent political instability. Among those who remain, emigration is widely considered an option. This ongoing brain drain is steadily eroding Libya’s human capital base.⁵ According to the Arab Barometer data, among potential migrants in Libya, at least half (53%) say the economic conditions are their reason for wanting to migrate.⁶ Other reasons include security issues, corruption, and lack of educational opportunities.

Likewise, a 2024 UNICEF study on employability in Libya found that 70% of youth believe their skills are underutilized in the labour market, and many identify emigration as their preferred pathway for economic stability.⁷ Alongside emigration pressures, insecurity and the absence of state protection have led to the increasing securitisation of youth. For many, joining military, paramilitary, or security entities is not driven by ideology, but by necessity—seen as one of the only pathways to income, status, protection, and social legitimacy. As locally-grounded research highlights, this category of youth has become highly visible in shaping local power structures and security arrangements.⁸ In contrast, a less visible category of youth—those engaged in civil dialogue, policy debates, and community development—is often perceived as naïve or ineffective. This contrast highlights a fundamental divide between militarised and civic youth trajectories in post-2011 Libya.

It is also important to acknowledge that young women face an added layer of constraints when navigating public space and participation. Beyond the age-related marginalization affecting all youth, women encounter restrictive socio-cultural norms, limited access to civic platforms, and heightened risks of harassment or reputational scrutiny—all of which constrain their visibility and leadership potential. While women have been active in community mediation, digital activism, and civil society initiatives—often behind the scenes—their contributions remain largely informal and under-recognized, with few institutional pathways for representation. This gendered

¹ Asma Khalifa, “FES MENA Youth Study: Results Analysis – Youth in Libya,” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, December 2022.

² Emadeddin Badi, “No Country for the Young: The Degeneration of a Libyan Generation,” in *Violence and Social Transformation in Libya*, ed. Virginie Collombier and Wolfram Lacher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 19–46.

³ UNICEF, *Youth Employability Skills in Libya: Employability Study for Youth and Adolescents in Libya*, UNICEF Libya, September 2023.

⁴ World Bank, *Labor Market Dynamics in Libya: Reintegration for Recovery*, 2015.

⁵ International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), *A Study on Libyans Living Abroad: Profiling of Libyans Living Abroad to Develop a Roadmap for Strategic and Institutional Engagement*, 2020.

⁶ Arab Barometer, “Libya,” accessible here: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/countries/libya/>

⁷ UNICEF, *Youth Employability Skills in Libya*.

⁸ See for example: Emadeddin Badi, Archibald Gallet, and Roberta Maggi, eds., *The Road to Stability: Rethinking Security Sector Reform in Post-Conflict Libya*, DCAF, 2021.

exclusion is not merely a social dynamic but a structural governance challenge that shapes who can speak—and who can be heard—in Libya’s emerging public sphere.

This overview reflects a bleak outlook for the country’s future, but it also reveals a dual reality in the aftermath of conflict. While devastation has produced disillusionment, it has also created a resilient, adaptive generation seeking opportunities wherever they can be found. Today in their 20s and 30s, these young Libyans are at the centre of civic engagement in the country. Since 2011, they have been central to the establishment of CSOs, leading local peace initiatives, and leveraging digital platforms for advocacy. They have, for instance, pioneered inclusion of women in grassroots activism and contributed to local governance in cities like Sebha, Zuwara, and Benghazi.⁹

Box 1. UNSMIL and Youth Engagement

Although UN-sponsored processes such as the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) created youth tracks and consultation spaces, these initiatives rarely translated into decision-making power, deepening the gap between young people’s informal activism and their formal political inclusion.

In fact, before 2018, UNSMIL’s engagement with youth was sporadic and largely confined to civic or reconciliation projects. When the LPDF and the 5+5 Joint Military Committee were launched in 2020, no youth were formally included.¹⁰

Since then, UNSMIL has progressively structured its approach. By 2022, it had appointed a Youth Engagement Lead, and in May 2024 launched YouEngage, a mission-wide strategy to empower young Libyans with the skills to advocate for themselves and their vision for the country. The Mission’s first Youth Report (July 2025), marking the tenth anniversary of UNSCR 2250, summarized outcomes from over 40 workshops and trainings reaching 1,200 youth nationwide.¹¹ Participants called for unified institutions, better education and jobs, and fair political representation.

According to the same report, YouEngage also improved perceptions of the UN’s role: 71% of participants reported a more positive view of the UN, and 96% found it more inclusive thanks to open registration and online youth spaces. Such efforts not only fill Libya’s youth knowledge, capacity, and inclusion gaps but also contribute to rebuilding trust and preparing young people to engage in future elections—where the decisive question will be how many of them turn up to vote.¹²

However, these contributions remain fragile. Civil society space, especially for youth-led CSOs, has shrunk significantly since 2022, with new laws imposing onerous registration requirements and allowing security interference. Human Rights Watch and Libyan organizations have described these measures as “draconian,” posing major challenges to initiatives led by young people.¹³ Moreover, most lack professionalization, stable funding or institutional protection, while political gatekeeping, security risks and limited institutional pathways hinder their meaningful civic participation. According to UNDP’s 2023 CSOs’ mapping,¹⁴ youth empowerment constitutes just 16% of civil society activity in Libya, trailing behind peacebuilding (40%) and social services (18%). This is a sign of both potential and unmet demand.

Despite their civil activism, youth remain largely excluded from formal political structures. Following the 2014 Libyan parliamentary election, only 13.5% of MPs were under 40, with none under 30; no updated data on the age distribution of the current House of Representatives (HoR) or High Council of State (HCS) members is readily

⁹ UNDP, “Resilient Youth for Brighter Libya,” August 12, 2025.

¹⁰ Mohamed Edabbar and Khaled Emam, “Agents and Drivers of Peace: Strengthening Meaningful Engagement of Young Men and Women in Building Sustainable Peace in Libya,” Policy Brief, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), December 2020.

¹¹ UNSMIL, *Youth Voices: Toward a Better Future for All Libyans*, September 25, 2025.

¹² Mary Fitzgerald, “Libya’s Wild Card: The Youth Vote,” Commentary, ISPI, November 25, 2021.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, “Libya: Crackdown on Nongovernmental Groups,” News Release, April 18, 2023.

¹⁴ UNDP, *Libyan CSOs Mapping Report*, UNDP Libya, May 10, 2023.

available.¹⁵ The minimum age to run for parliament is 25, yet no formal mechanisms –such as quotas or reserved seats– exist to ensure youth representation in legislative (or executive) bodies.

Beyond numerical exclusion, qualitative evidence illustrates the barriers young people face in policymaking. First-hand observations from various policy analysis and dialogue projects, including the Youth Platform of Peace Makers Libya and the Youth Economic Research Forum (YERF), a World Bank-funded project implemented by the Luiss Mediterranean Platform in 2024-2025, have revealed how Libya’s brightest young minds are systematically locked out of decision-making while simultaneously expected to deliver as project implementers or “fixers” for international organizations. Field research confirms that youth often help define policy agendas in consultation rounds but lack authority to ensure implementation or follow-up; they are treated as beneficiaries rather than agenda-setters, a discrepancy that erodes trust and hinders long-term engagement.¹⁶

2. Youth and National Vision-Making: Between Tokenism and Agency

Youth engagement in Libya has long been shaped by a fundamental contradiction: young people are widely portrayed as central to the country’s future, yet they remain largely excluded from formal decision-making authority. Across consultations—from UNSMIL’s youth dialogues to reports of civil society initiatives—young Libyans consistently express the same core priorities: accountable governance under the rule of law, decentralized and responsive institutions, an inclusive national identity transcending tribal and regional lines, and an economy capable of generating meaningful employment.¹⁷ These shared aspirations underscore not a lack of vision, but the absence of structured for youth to meaningfully influence political decisions and policies.

Since 2011, the political offer has largely failed to speak to youth priorities. During the 2021–2022 electoral registration process led by the High National Election Commission (HNEC), 98 candidates applied to run for the presidency. However, only a few put forward detailed programmes, and even fewer addressed issues resonating with young Libyans, with the notable exception of the youngest contender, then in his thirties.¹⁸

Political parties have since attempted to create entry points through youth wings, designed to recruit members, mobilize constituencies, and train future leaders. Yet, there remain major barriers to broader involvement of youth in these party wings: distrust rooted in past experiences, negative societal perceptions of party activity, and widespread doubts about the ability of parties to deliver real change.¹⁹

Structural constraints further exacerbate these challenges for young Libyan interested in getting involved in politics, including the need to navigate power dynamics between political parties and the current interim Government of National Unity (GNU). For instance, in August 2025, a coalition of 28 parties criticized what they saw as government interference in party affairs after the Ministry of Youth proposed a “National Committee for Youth Party Liaison.”²⁰ This initiative is established to arguably allow “interested youth wings to submit a detailed action plan for their programs and activities, so that it can be evaluated to explore paths for support and collaboration.” In reaction, the coalition argued that the initiative violated Law 29 (2012) concerning political parties and its executive regulations, whose Article Five stipulates that state agencies are prohibited from

¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Libya – House of Representatives (LY-LC01),” IPU Parline database, accessible here: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/LY/LY-LC01/>

¹⁶ Chiara Loschi, “Youth as Agenda-Setters between Donors and Beneficiaries: The Limited Role of Libyan Youth after 2011,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 13(1): 49–71, 2021.

¹⁷ UNSMIL, “Youth Engagement,” accessible here: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/youth-engagement>

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, “Libya’s Wild Card.”

¹⁹ Ministry of Youth - Libya (Facebook page), “The Ministry of Youth holds a meeting to promote youth participation in party politics” [translated by the author], Facebook post, April 30, 2025.

²⁰ Ministry of Youth - Libya (Facebook page), “Opportunity for party youth wings: Registration is open for the National Committee for Youth Party Liaison” [translated by the author], Facebook post, August 4, 2025.

interfering in the internal affairs of parties. They also highlighted the risk of establishing parallel, non-elected structures, such as this Committee, describing it as an attempt to impose an illegal guardianship over parties.”²¹

Such institutional clashes complicate the path for young Libyans, who must navigate the risks of co-optation and instrumentalization while trying to build youth-owned platforms and seeking genuine political influence. Despite these pressures, some progress is emerging: in the August 2025 municipal elections, over 25 youth candidates ran across 22 municipalities and more than 45,000 voters aged 18–40 participated, indicating a rise in youth engagement at the local level.²²

International partners have played a complex, dual role in shaping youth engagement in this context. On the positive side, their initiatives often promote agendas and discourses around democracy, rule of law and intergenerational justice – all key to empowering youth as political actors. Conversely, these international organizations are also criticized for relying on young people to access local communities without creating pathways for them to influence high-level decision-making. This dynamic has contributed to the emergence of a small group of young “globalized elites” who experience growing frustration, lowering their expectations of setting these organizations’ agendas and prompting them to adopt a transactional approach focused on personal advancement rather than agenda-setting.

While tokenistic practices are rarely intentional, they are highly risky: they stifle leadership development, cause frustration and may lead to disengagement. As highlighted in the FES Libya Youth study, such practices are already fuelling cynicism, and disillusionment among Libyan youth.²³

Taken together, these dynamics reveal a structural reality: young Libyans are increasingly visible in political life but remain insufficiently empowered. Promising examples—from municipal election participation to youth-led policy proposals—demonstrate that meaningful engagement is possible. Yet, so far, these examples have remained isolated rather than systematic. This sets the stage for the next section, which explores concrete pathways to anchor youth contributions into national political processes, ensuring that young Libyans move from being mere symbolic participants to genuine co-authors of the country’s political future.

3. Pathways for Systematic Youth Inclusion

An analysis of 46 national and local peace-making agreements reached in Libya between 2011 and 2021 (e.g., Constitutional Charter for the Transitional Stage (2011), Humanitarian Appeal for Benghazi (2016), Reconciliation Charter between Tebu and Zway Tribes from Kufra (2018), Second Berlin Conference for Libya (2021)) found that only 16 referenced youth, and just 8 addressed youth participation substantively.²⁴ This pattern demonstrates that youth have largely been treated as a peripheral concern in formal political processes, despite being a central often been limited to *ad hoc* consultations or symbolic invitations, creating parallel spaces for youth and civil society that are largely disconnected from decision-making on politics, security, and the economy.

Beyond consultation, the 2025 United Nations Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security (hereafter YPS-TR) emphasizes the need for affirmative action to translate youth visibility into meaningful political inclusion.²⁵ Comparative experiences from other fragile and conflict-affected settings illustrate how institutional design can shift this dynamic. In countries such as Tunisia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Uganda, age-based quotas and other measures have helped bring younger generations into arenas such as peace negotiations,

²¹ Nisrin Suliman, “[Libyan Parties Denounce What They Described as Government Intervention in Party Life](#)” [translated by the author], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, August 8, 2025.

²² Safa Al-Harathy, “[Libya’s Youth Praised for Strong Turnout in Municipal Elections](#),” *Libya Observer*, August 18, 2025.

²³ Nouran Ragrag, “[Libya: Peacebuilding versus Youth](#),” *Peace Insight*, February 21, 2025.

²⁴ Jusaima Moaid-azm Peregrina, “[Meaningful Inclusion? Enhancing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in Euro-Mediterranean Conflict Resolution](#),” Policy Brief No. 137, EuroMeSCo, 2024.

²⁵ Erica Gaston et al., “[2025 Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security \(YPS\)](#),” United Nations University (UNU-CPR), 2025.

oversight bodies, and parliaments.²⁶ In Yemen, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) combined a 20% youth quota across all stakeholders with 40 seats reserved for independent youth representatives, enabling young people to participate across multiple committees.²⁷ These outcomes demonstrate that institutionalized participation can not only address youth-specific needs but also strengthen their capacity as agents of political change.

In Libya, existing legal and institutional frameworks shape youth participation in complex ways. Law 59, enacted as part of post-2011 local authority reforms, focuses on administrative restructuring rather than genuine decentralization and does not mandate youth involvement, leaving engagement dependent on local authorities. Formalizing youth participation in law would both legitimize their roles and protect them from political manipulation. Similarly, international actors such as UNSMIL have periodically invited young people into dialogue spaces, including the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) in 2020-2021. However, these consultations often lack clear mechanisms linking youth inputs to official roadmaps, electoral preparations or constitutional debates. The result is a persistent gap between rhetorical commitments to youth inclusion and the absence of binding, systemic arrangements that ensure their participation is both substantive and continuous rather than occasional.

3.1 Anchoring Youth Locally

Evidence from the latest UN Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS-TR) emphasizes the importance of engaging youth at the local level. Across diverse peacebuilding and transitional contexts globally,²⁸ young people participating in local councils or dispute resolution bodies have contributed to mediating local conflicts, lowering levels of violence, and preventing the escalation of tensions. Their contributions extend beyond youth-specific disputes, suggesting that local arenas can act as effective gateways for youth to exercise agency and influence broader community outcomes.

In Libya, municipal youth councils in cities such as Misrata, Sabha and Zuwara illustrate the potential of local governance to enable youth participation. Supported by EU and UN agencies, these councils have gathered youth perspectives on issues ranging from employment, service delivery, social cohesion and civic engagement. However, the absence of a legal framework, stable funding, and clear coordination with municipal authorities means that such bodies frequently operate in a consultative rather than decision-making capacity. This limits their potential to shape municipal priorities or influence the implementation of decentralization reforms.

The *Baladiyati* programme, a joint Libyan-European initiative launched in 2018, shows how large-scale local governance support can intersect with youth engagement. Operating in 40 municipalities—including 21 in Southern Libya in its second phase—*Baladiyati* has implemented over 700 priority interventions, benefiting more than 3 million people through improved access to health, education, sanitation, and livelihoods.²⁹ Within this framework, youth-focused components have included the establishment of a youth centre in Benghazi dedicated to local peacebuilding, youth clubs, life skills and entrepreneurship training, as well as UNICEF's Youth Employability Study, the first of its kind carried out in Libya. By prioritizing municipalities where governance gaps and community tensions intersect with youth marginalization, *Baladiyati* provides a model for inclusive, locally anchored youth engagement.

Taken together, these experiences—alongside comparable initiatives in Tunisia, Morocco, and beyond—can offer highlight valuable lessons for Libya. Structured, legally supported, and locally anchored mechanisms can help move youth participation beyond *ad hoc* consultation, enabling young people to meaningfully influence governance, service delivery, and conflict prevention at the municipal level.

²⁶ ACE Project, "Quotas for Youth," accessible here: <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt20/quotas-for-youth>

²⁷ Ali Altiok and Irena Grizelj, "[We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes.](#)" Global Policy Paper, Youth4Peace, 2019.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ UNDP, "[Baladiyati, the EU funded Programme, held its 7th Steering Committee meeting in Tripoli.](#)" Press Release, November 21, 2024.

3.2 Capacity-Building, Leadership and Symbolic Recognition

Despite their energy and engagement in civic life, Libyan youth are frequently unprepared for formal political participation. Targeted capacity-building in governance, negotiation, and communication is largely absent, limiting their ability to translate activism into influence within institutional settings. Young people often drive community initiatives, civic campaigns, and local mediation, yet seldom have sustained access to the skills and mentorship needed to operate effectively within institutional frameworks.

Experience from other contexts demonstrate the value of structured capacity-building. For instance, UNDP-supported youth political leadership programs in Kenya have created pipelines of young leaders equipped with governance, negotiation, and communication skills, enabling them to participate confidently in institutional settings and electoral processes. Such programs show that investments in training and mentorship can bridge the gap between grassroots activism and formal political engagement.

In Libya, institutional mechanisms for youth inclusion must be complemented by similar investments in leadership development. Programs aligned with municipal and parliamentary electoral timelines could prepare young candidates for sustained engagement in governance, ensuring that youth participation moves beyond *ad hoc* consultation toward meaningful, long-term influence. By combining targeted capacity-building with opportunities for formal recognition and representation, Libya can develop a generation of young leaders capable of shaping governance, policy, and peacebuilding processes.

Among national initiatives advancing youth political engagement, Libya's first Youth Parliament, launched by the Ministry of Youth in 2021, stands out. The initiative opened candidacies to 200 young people aged 16 to 25 across the country. In 2023, it was relaunched under the Ministry's broader "Youth Democratic Learning Initiative." The 2023 cycle featured a large-scale electoral process conducted through electronic voting, with 7,000 candidates competing across 13 electoral districts and over 45,000 voters aged 18 to 40 participating.³⁰ In the same year, 64 local youth councils were elected in three phases—out of an envisaged total of 128 councils—using a list-based electoral system and involving over 120,000 registered members nationwide.³¹ These top-down initiatives demonstrate the potential for structured, institutionalized pathways for youth participation.

At the same time, Libya has a rich ecosystem of youth-led innovation at the grassroots level. Local youth councils and mediators operate in cities such as Sebha, Zuwara, and Benghazi, often under challenging conditions and with minimal support. These actors provide locally grounded leadership in community engagement and conflict management, offering contributions that national-level processes often overlook. Mapping, evaluating, and scaling successful grassroots practices—with financial and logistical support from Libyan institutions and international donors—would strengthen youth engagement and foster a more inclusive political ecosystem.

³⁰ International Peace Institute, "[IPI and Youth Experts Call on the International Community and MENA Nations to Fully Implement Resolution 2250](#)," News Release, July 20, 2023.

³¹ Ibid.

Box 2. The experience of the Youth Platform of Peace Makers Libya

Since its establishment in 2015, Peace Makers Libya has placed youth at the centre of its peacebuilding initiatives. The organization has engaged with young Libyans and provided training opportunities in dialogue facilitation, local mediation, and civic engagement, supporting youth-led initiatives in different municipalities and encouraging informal mediation efforts to build young leaders' capacities in conflict resolution and community engagement. Through these sustained efforts, Peace Makers Libya has become one of the few organisations actively linking youth to local-level peace efforts and the broader transition processes.

In October 2022, Peace Makers Libya launched the “Youth Platform,” an open space for young people to collectively reflect on political and policy issues, engage with experts and decision-makers, and develop sustainable networks. From March 2023 onward, the initiative intensified in-person engagements in Tripoli and several other towns, while also conducting outreach through student unions, youth wings of political parties, the Youth Parliament and civil-society organisations. This approach allowed for broader geographical inclusion without claiming nationwide representation.

By late 2023, the Youth Platform had successfully connected young individuals from multiple localities, fostering emerging networks and strengthening capacities for participation in local and national processes. While not yet a mechanism for large-scale representation, the Platform demonstrates the potential of sustained, locally anchored initiatives to empower youth as active contributors to Libya's peacebuilding and governance efforts.

The broader civil society environment, however, remains fragile. EU and UNDP analyses describe Libyan CSOs as weak and fragmented, operating in a conflict-dominated context with limited institutional support and facing restrictive regulations, complex registration requirements, and visa barriers for international NGOs.³² These conditions constrain cooperation between CSOs and municipal councils and limit the ability of youth-led organisations to contribute meaningfully to local governance, accountability and inclusion.

A further and often overlooked barrier concerns the scarcity and vulnerability of civic spaces—both physical and social. Youth organizations, including informal collectives, struggle to access safe and reliable venues in which to meet, organize and plan joint initiatives. Public spaces are limited or heavily securitized, while private venues are increasingly restricted by security monitoring, social pressure, and fears of association with political agendas or foreign actors. For young women, these restrictions are even more acute due to gender norms, reputational risks, and family-based limits on mobility and visibility. As a result, many youth initiatives remain digital or informal, hindering their institutionalization and long-term impact.

Despite these constraints, programs supported by actors such as GIZ—including the establishment of new youth centres in coordination with the Ministry of Youth—indicate both strong institutional demand for youth engagement and the motivation of young people to participate. This reveals significant but still under-supported youth capacities that could be strengthened through more systematic backing.

In this context, symbolic recognition should not be underestimated, as it intersects with the structural and institutional constraints highlighted above.³³ Since 2011, Libyan youth have been at the forefront of resistance, documentation, and local peacebuilding, and their participation in municipal elections has been publicly praised. In other transitional settings such as Tunisia, young activists who led street protests in 2011 were subsequently included in truth and reconciliation processes, ensuring that their contributions were reflected in formal narratives. In Libya, however, the limited presence of youth within transitional justice bodies, fact-finding missions, or reconciliation councils illustrates how official processes have yet to acknowledge their role. The interplay between organisational capacity and recognition is therefore central to understanding youth perceptions of belonging and ownership in Libya's political trajectory.

³² See for example: UNDP, *Libyan CSOs Mapping Report*.

³³ Gaston et al., “2025 Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS),”

3.3 Reimagining International Partnerships

The central challenge for international engagement in Libya is that youth are treated as beneficiaries rather than partners in shaping the country's transition. This limits the relevance and long-term impact of external support. To avoid tokenism, donors such as the EU and UN agencies should integrate youth participation across all stages of program design, from needs assessments to implementation and monitoring, ensuring that young people co-define priorities rather than simply receive services. Regional platforms can further amplify Libyan youth voices: cross-border networks have consistently demonstrated how youth activists share strategies and advocacy tools. Hence, expanding Maghreb-based cooperation would reduce the isolation faced by many Libyan youth while connecting local experiences to broader regional debates on governance and development.

The upcoming UN Strategic Framework for Libya 2026-2028 offers a critical opportunity to operationalize this approach. It will need not only to build on existing youth-focused initiatives but also to frame youth participation as complementary to established structures, rather than a substitute for traditional actors. Although UNDP's Local Peacebuilding and Resilience Strategy for Libya 2023-2025 rightly identified youth—alongside tribal mediators—as emerging “peace entrepreneurs”,³⁴ societal and institutional barriers persist. Patriarchal norms and legitimacy tied to age, status, or security roles continue to limit youth influence, particularly for young women, who are largely excluded from formal positions of authority within security bodies, armed groups, or tribal hierarchies.

For future programming to be effective, youth engagement must be anchored in inclusion and complementarity: youth should be recognized as contributors who can reinforce local mediation ecosystems, strengthen early warning mechanisms, and bridge formal and informal processes. This approach can enhance buy-in from traditional actors and protect youth from being perceived as externally imposed or politically threatening.

International financial institutions have already begun to support these aims. The World Bank, through its Libya Development Trust Fund (LDTF), has mobilized resources to strengthen youth-focused programming. Its Country Engagement Note 2023-2025 highlighted widespread youth disappointment with the post-revolutionary trajectory and instability that has shaped their transition into adulthood. In response, the Youth Economic Research Forum (YERF) was established with LDTF support to increase institutional capacity for citizen engagement on the municipal level, while promoting dialogue on development challenges and opportunities for Libya's largest demographic group.³⁵ Sustaining and expanding these efforts remains vital in the current context.

Similarly, the EU's support for CSOs development and institutional capacity-building is essential. EU analyses underline that CSOs in Libya remain weak and fragmented, limiting their potential to advance youth participation and local governance. Operating in a conflict-dominated environment with limited institutional support, most CSOs lack the resources and structures needed to promote accountability, transparency and inclusion. Conflict conditions, limited institutional support, restrictive regulations, and burdensome registration procedures further constrain civic space, hindering cooperation between CSOs and municipal councils—an essential partnership for meaningful youth engagement

Beyond these individual initiatives, a more coherent approach to international engagement is needed—one that recognizes youth as long-term partners in Libya's transition. Fragmented, donor-led programs with short project cycles often prioritize visibility over sustained impact. A coordinated framework among international actors (EU, UN, and others) could help harmonize priorities, pool resources, and provide continuity across youth-focused efforts, enabling youth-led structures to translate training, consultations, and research into sustained political influence. Moreover, a core unmet need is protection: without safe physical and social spaces free from surveillance, intimidation or reputational risk—especially for young women—youth participation cannot be meaningful or sustainable. Predictable and coordinated international support is therefore crucial to enable youth engagement, rather than to drive it from the outside.

³⁴ UNDP, [Local Peacebuilding and Resilience Strategy for Libya](#), June 2023.

³⁵ World Bank, [“Libya Development Trust Fund \(LDTF\) - Annual Progress Report 2024.”](#) Progress Report, September 2025.

Key Takeaways

Building on these trends, the challenge now is to transform scattered youth initiatives into a coherent architecture of political inclusion in Libya. This means creating predictable, institutionalized channels through which youth can contribute to national dialogue, constitutional design and local governance. Intergenerational dialogue must underpin this shift, supported by mechanisms that formalize youth representation, clarify mandates and ensure that youth perspectives inform decision-making at every level.

The following priority actions outline practical entry points for building such a system:

- Introduce concrete mechanisms—such as youth quotas in dialogue tracks, constitutional and electoral bodies, and binding youth engagement requirements in municipal governance—to shift youth participation from *ad hoc* consultations to systematic, sustained involvement.
- Create a youth advisory track within UNSMIL-facilitated political process to formally incorporate youth perspectives into electoral preparations, constitutional discussions, economic reforms, and reconciliation efforts.
- Strengthen and expand local youth participation by formalizing municipal youth councils, supporting youth centres, and leveraging large-scale programmes like *Baladiyati* to engage youth in marginalized municipalities.
- Focus on creating safe and accessible civic and public spaces, including cultural, sports, and educational venues, where youth can meet and participate openly.
- Co-create international programmes with youth, scaling initiatives such as YERF and Peace Makers Libya's Youth Platform to develop leadership, policy and research skills, and strengthen connections between local and national governance.
- Provide sustained support to youth-led CSOs to strengthen internal governance and technical capacities and to foster the creation of joint platforms and coalitions.
- Ensure that crime documentation, transitional justice, and reconciliation processes recognize and incorporate the contributions and experiences of young Libyans since 2011.



Mediterranean Platform

Founded in 2022, and directed by Prof. Luigi Narbone, the Mediterranean Platform is a research, dialogue, and educational programme at the School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli. It offers a space for collective reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the Mediterranean region and promotes informed policymaking and advocacy at the national and transnational levels.

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