

# Youth Participation in Georgia: Myths & Facts

In recent years, Georgian youth have become increasingly active in social, cultural, and environmental life. Despite economic and political challenges, they continue to find creative ways to express their opinions, organize, and contribute to positive change. This report explores the structures of youth participation, opportunities for empowerment, barriers to inclusion, popular myths and facts, and the future vision of young people in Georgia. The findings are based on our group research, interviews, and real-life examples from youth organizations and initiatives across the country.

Youth participation in Georgia is mostly organized through non-governmental organizations, community centers, and local youth initiatives rather than formal state institutions. Although Georgia has adopted a National Youth Policy 2020–2030, its implementation remains limited, and most effective youth work comes from independent organizations. There are three regional youth centers actively working to empower young people outside the capital: Gori, Sachkhere, and Martkopi. These centers organize workshops, volunteering projects, and cultural exchanges that help rural youth gain new skills and become active citizens. Young people can also influence local decision-making through municipal councils and consultative bodies, though their impact remains small. Erasmus+ and other EU-supported initiatives play a vital role in connecting Georgian youth to European values and democratic participation.

Georgia's youth scene is dynamic and diverse. Dozens of organizations create opportunities for growth, activism, and leadership. Our organization, Umbrella, is based on democratic and liberal values, focusing on environmental awareness, human rights, and youth democracy. Similar NGOs such as CENN, EU-Georgia Youth, and Young Greens run projects supporting civic education, environmental protection, and gender equality. Erasmus+ projects provide international mobility and cultural exchange, while regional youth clubs organize environmental actions, digital literacy training, and art projects. Volunteer programs offer practical ways to help communities and promote solidarity. These programs help young people develop communication, leadership, and teamwork skills while giving them a sense of purpose and belonging.

While youth activism in Georgia is growing, several challenges limit participation. Most opportunities are concentrated in Tbilisi, which creates inequality between urban and rural youth. Those living in villages often lack access to programs, transportation, and digital tools. Many young people also struggle to find information about available opportunities, and some cannot afford to volunteer or attend unpaid events due to economic hardship. In addition, political disillusionment discourages engagement, as many believe that their opinions do not influence real decisions. Traditional media rarely highlight youth achievements, which further reduces visibility. Despite these barriers, young people continue to find alternative spaces especially online to express themselves and organize for change.

There are several popular stereotypes about young people in Georgia. One of the most common myths is that all Georgian youth go abroad and never come back, but in reality, many who study or travel abroad return home with new ideas and experiences to share. Another myth claims that youth are not interested in politics, yet Georgian youth have played key roles in recent protests and civic movements for freedom and democracy. It is also said that young people no longer respect traditions, but in truth, they successfully mix modern values with cultural identity, respecting family bonds while promoting openness and equality. Lastly, the belief that Georgians are close to Russia and mostly speak Russian is outdated. The younger generation is strongly pro-European and communicates primarily in English.

Traditional Georgian media often underrepresents youth voices and achievements, focusing instead on political or economic topics. However, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become new arenas for activism, creativity, and storytelling. Through art, music, and online movements, young Georgians show a different reality one of resilience, self-expression, and courage. Cultural traditions, while sometimes viewed as restrictive, also serve as a source of pride and unity, inspiring young people to preserve their heritage while pushing for progress.

One of the most inspiring stories of youth-led environmental action comes from Mariam Narsavidze, a 17-year-old from Svaneti. She won the EU4Youth Green Scholarship for creating reusable, eco-friendly tote bags to reduce plastic waste in her mountain community. Mariam also organizes sewing and embroidery workshops for local youth and leads awareness campaigns on nature protection. Her initiative even helped protect a critically endangered tree species, *Buxus colchica*, by educating locals about its importance. Her story shows how one young person can combine environmental care, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation to create real change in a rural region where opportunities are limited. Another inspiring example is the illustrator Ana Miminoshvili, who became the first Georgian artist to win the Communication Arts Award and founded the Illustrators Club of Georgia to support young creatives. Through her work, she promotes freedom of expression and shows that Georgian art can succeed internationally. These stories prove that Georgian youth are capable, innovative, and deeply engaged in their communities.

Young people in Georgia envision a future where they have equal opportunities, freedom of expression, and active participation in shaping their country's path. They dream of a society that values creativity, protects nature, and connects with Europe through shared democratic ideals. Georgian youth want equal access to quality education and cultural programs across all regions, more transparency in institutions, and stronger representation in both municipal and national politics. They hope for better support for youth-led initiatives and for independent media that truly reflects their voices. They believe that environmental awareness, art, and volunteering can become key tools for uniting communities and inspiring civic participation. International exchange programs like Erasmus+ remain especially important, as they allow young people to connect with their European peers, share experiences, and bring new ideas back home.

Georgian youth represent energy, creativity, and hope for democratic progress. Despite barriers, they continue to build communities, protect the environment, and express their identity through art and activism. By investing in youth empowerment especially in rural areas Georgia can ensure a more inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant future. As young people themselves often say: ***"We don't just want to be the future - we want to shape it now."***