

Youth policy in Hungary



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Conclusions of the Council of Europe international review team

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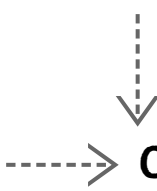
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Executive summary

The international review of youth policy in Hungary is part of the Council of Europe's series of youth policy reviews, in which Hungary is the 15th country reviewed since 1997. The review process begins with the production of a national report; this is followed by an international report prepared by a team of experts on the basis of two visits to the country. The first visit took place in September 2007 and was restricted to the capital; the second, in November 2007, included the Northern Great Plain region. Here we summarise the key challenges and recommendations of the international report.

The report is based on a cross-sectoral understanding of youth policy. Its focus lies on youth policy structures, youth work and youth information, and on education and employment, while the areas of health, youth justice and child protection have been dealt with in less detail. Of transversal issues, attention has been paid to poverty, diversity and participation.

The primary concern of the Hungarian Government was to look at the regionalisation of youth policy, the professionalisation of youth work and youth information. Because of the discontinuities in youth policy since 1990, a reliable youth policy infrastructure has only partly developed, with unclear roles and responsibilities, and a lack of shared understandings of youth, youth policy and youth work. Youth information appears to be the most developed and established part of youth policy, inasmuch as standards and networks do exist.

Whereas the authorities at national level provide a framework of policy and professional development, the main responsibility lies with local government, for whom youth policy however is only a voluntary task. Almost all services are delivered by actors in civil society. There are many NGOs in the field, but only a small proportion of young people are members of any organisation. The fragmentation of the youth sector is reflected by the lack of a coherent umbrella structure for youth organisations nationally. Funds for youth policy are scarce and distributed only through a tendering system. This undermines the continuity needed for a stable infrastructure and it constrains the application of voluntary and professional human resources. However, at present several initiatives are under way, such as the drafting of a National Youth Strategy and the development of youth worker training. These require appropriate political support, funding and reflexive monitoring.



Recommendations for youth policy development, youth work and youth information

- Youth policy needs to become mandatory, especially youth work and youth information; this includes spaces for young people and sufficient professional staff, but also a responsible role within local government (youth desk officers).
- The National Youth Strategy should aim at developing a legal framework which specifies the meaning, content and target of youth policy as well as the division of rights and responsibilities between national and local levels, and between public actors and NGOs.
- Aims and professional standards of youth work and youth information have to be defined and monitored; this includes aspects such as social disadvantage, gender and diversity.
- Youth work should provide spaces for leisure and cultural activities for all young people; youth information should develop clear links with professional counselling; youth work and youth information should be based on the principles of participation and non-formal learning.
- Clear job descriptions for youth workers, youth helpers and youth desk officers – including the educational requirements and/or experience, the tasks and the rights – have to be developed.
- Higher education and further training of youth workers has to be based on valid professional standards and occupational descriptions; a sufficient training offer is required at regional level.
- Training should not be developed from the top down, but make use of, involve and validate existing expertise in current practice at local level.
- Funding of mandatory tasks needs to be secured; this concerns especially salaries of sufficient professional staff, with the provision and maintenance of spaces and material (especially ICT); a second pillar of funding could provide support for youth NGOs according to the size of their membership; a third pillar could be a tender system restricted to funding of projects.
- Funding of public actors and NGOs should be conditional on fulfilling standards or – in the transition period – to participation in appropriate training.
- Mobile services of youth work, youth information and youth counselling have to be developed to reach out to small settlements.
- The exchange of knowledge between professionals needs to be extended and better funded; the development of a database and the spreading of good practice by Mobilitás are steps in the right direction, but might be complemented by face-to-face exchanges at regional level.
- The establishment of a National Observatory on Youth, functioning as a point of data collection and documentation on youth issues, could help to systemise and exchange different types of knowledge; Mobilitás could and should play an important role in such an Observatory.



- *Society needs to recognise youth work as an investment in the future; the value of non-formal learning and voluntary work should be recognised and made visible.*
- *It is strongly advisable that national youth policy maintains stability in the government structure, with a high professional profile, represented by a senior administrator with high authority.*

A striking challenge is the rise in youth unemployment, especially among young women. While the reasons and dynamics of this rise require more analysis, some factors have already been identified: Hungary's uneven regional development; dependence on volatile foreign investment; the rise in pension age; and the mismatch between education and employment. In order to improve the fit between qualifications and economic demands, regional vocational training centres have been set up, and vocational qualifications have become modular.

Another problem is early school leaving, especially from vocational training schools, which do not provide recognised qualifications. They are one aspect of the inequality and segregation in the Hungarian education system. Progress depends on social origin, and early school leaving is often connected to poverty. Scholarship programmes do exist, but are under-funded and often prioritise talented pupils. The education system is also highly segregated in that Roma youth and children are particularly disadvantaged (see below). Free school choice is one factor in this; another factor is the high proportion of pupils in special schools. There are few initiatives for recognising non-formal learning as an element of lifelong learning. Policies on unemployed youth, in the public employment service and the active labour market, have been expanded. However, their effectiveness seems to vary, since many young unemployed remain without any support and are not entitled to benefits either. More attention could be paid to the subjective motivation of young job seekers.

Recommendations for education and employment

- *Counteract the impact of social inequality and poverty by widening access to scholarships.*
- *Strengthen policies against school segregation, possibly by restricting free school choice.*
- *Integrate formal and non-formal learning – in school, in vocational training and through co-operation with youth work – including ways of recognising non-formal learning.*
- *In active labour-market policies, young people need counselling in terms of life planning rather than control, with a possibility of choice between measures and flexibility in the rules of access; measures might extend to providing paid or voluntary work experience in youth work, with outreach approaches to professional orientation, counselling and support in rural areas.*



- *Improve the analysis of youth unemployment and the evaluation of education, training and active labour-market policies by using longitudinal and qualitative methods.*
- *Integrate labour-market policies and regional economic development; balance supply-side and demand-side measures.*
- *Increase funding to secure wider access to education, and choice and quality in active labour-market policies, partly by improving use of EU funds and partly by rebalancing priorities.*

In the health sector, a wide range of prevention and care measures do exist for young people, but often they are not co-ordinated. Drug use is less prevalent than in other European countries, but there is strong concern about alcohol consumption; preventive action is being taken. Policy makers are concerned about the high rate of mental health problems among young people and about the link between poverty and health risks, especially among Roma youth. However, policy measures have either not been implemented yet or are apparently insufficient.

The key challenge in the field of youth justice and crime prevention is to stabilise a different system for young offenders. Considerable efforts have been made to develop community-based crime prevention, although more attention could be given to exploring the extent to which Roma youth are over-represented among prosecuted offenders. Within custody and law enforcement, youth-specific approaches have been initiated but are still in their infancy.

The child protection system overlaps with youth policy, especially in the under-18 age group, but it is much more institutionalised and distinct. Co-ordination between the two systems is still marginal, even though leisure and culture, non-formal learning and participation are relevant in both areas. In particular, the relation between child protection and children's rights is unclear. A positive exception is the ombudsman for educational rights.

Recommendations for health care, justice and child protection

- *Increase co-ordination of prevention and care in the health sector and involve youth-policy actors and NGOs, while maintaining the system of school-based health promotion.*
- *Improve the analysis of, prevention of and intervention in mental health problems among youth.*
- *Counteract the consequences of segregation and poverty on the health of Roma youth.*
- *Improve the knowledge base on the health and subjective well-being of young people.*



- *Evaluate the ethnic composition of young people in prison and the justice system generally.*
- *Co-ordinate youth work and crime prevention to give young people the opportunity to consider more positive and purposeful directions in their lives.*
- *Improve the learning infrastructure in the custody system.*
- *Experiment with a “personal officer scheme”, assistance in maintaining contact with families, supporting release or supporting transition to the adult prison system.*
- *Co-ordinate child protection and youth policy.*
- *Improve information and broaden the discourse on children’s rights.*
- *Give further attention to the issue of violence in schools and its prevention.*

Among the transversal issues, the first to mention is poverty. Poverty is over-represented among families with children and in the Roma population, and is concentrated in the eastern parts of the country. Poverty is high on the policy agenda, and a long-term strategy has been implemented to address the negative consequences of child poverty. To counteract the negative effects of poverty on education, scholarship programmes exist, although access is restricted. The poverty of young people is not addressed at the level of the individual: they are considered as members of family households and lack individual benefit entitlements, especially in the first period of unemployment. Individual housing is unaffordable, which restricts young people’s development of autonomy and geographic labour-market mobility.

Recommendations for policies against poverty

- *Increase funding and widen access to scholarships (see above).*
- *Introduce individualised benefit entitlements for young people.*
- *Include poverty in the agenda of youth information.*

A second difficult and delicate challenge is the management of diversity, especially the inclusion of Roma youth. Because of the inter-relation of poverty, segregation and discrimination – all of which have accumulated – they are the most disadvantaged group. This disadvantage has grown worse since 1990, with increasing unemployment and poverty among Roma families; at the same time, free school choice contributes to the segregation of Roma children in homogeneous classes and “ghetto schools”. They are under-represented in pre-school and secondary education but over-represented in special schools.



While there are active market policies addressing young Roma, the policies are sometimes too inflexible to be compatible with the living situation of Roma youth. Transition rates into employment are very low, because few employers are open to employing Roma. Young Roma are often excluded from regular youth work provision, while specific projects for Roma youth are the exception.

There is a National Strategy for the Inclusion of the Roma, in which problems are clearly identified. However, the effectiveness of integration policies seems to be limited. Counter-effects and barriers result on the one hand from making support conditional on adaptation to the norms and practices of the majority, although Roma culture has been included in the national core curriculum. On the other hand, because of data protection regulations there is officially no knowledge as to who is Roma, which inevitably inhibits positive action. In general, the relationship between Roma and non-Roma is characterised by mutual distrust.

Recommendations for the integration of Roma youth

- *Refine and adopt ways of identifying the Roma population that allow for both appropriate analysis and personal data protection; balance positive action and avoidance of stigmatisation, by the use of reflexive procedures.*
- *Improve trust on the part of the majority, to break the vicious circle of mutual mistrust.*
- *Accept and negotiate different ways of life, rather than connecting support to the expectation of explicit ways of using it; improve the mutual understanding of difference.*
- *Increase efforts to involve Roma representatives and groups in policy making.*
- *With regard to educational segregation: restrict or balance free school choice; widen access to scholarships, move special-needs education into the mainstream, reduce false diagnoses, abolish the system of special schools for mild mental disability, increase the number of Roma teachers.*
- *Increase flexibility of measures against unemployment, to match the needs and everyday life of unemployed Roma; identify and develop new niches in regional economy and labour markets.*
- *Include intercultural elements in youth worker training and provide Roma youth with their own spaces in which to develop their own styles and practices.*

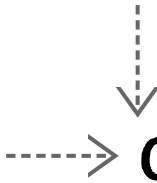
The final issue to be mentioned is youth participation. In Hungary, at present, this is discussed primarily in terms of representation in and through youth organisations. The lack of a single umbrella body for youth organisations reflects



the discontinuity and fragmentation of the youth sector. Although a national youth council seems to be needed to secure involvement in decision-making at the national level, there is little debate about other forms of participation. Taking the low rate of membership of Hungarian youth into account, more informal and situational forms of participation are needed to provide all young people with possibilities of influence on their own lives and their communities. The lack of a culture of youth participation is also reflected in the way children's and young people's rights are interpreted merely in terms of protection, and not in rights of participation, influence and involvement.


Recommendations on youth participation

- *Facilitate the development of a national umbrella body for youth organisations, and decouple the issue from national youth policy and potential political change.*
- *Give young people a voice by developing and diversifying forms of participation and by including them directly in the evaluation of youth policy.*
- *Prepare young people for participation by providing opportunities and skills, by listening to their voices and by securing visible results of participation.*
- *The National Youth Strategy could be a step towards developing a culture of youth participation, in which young people are seen as citizens in their own right and experts on their own lives.*



Chapter 1

introduction



1.1. Country

The Republic of Hungary, a landlocked country in the Carpathian basin, has an area of about 93 000 sq. km. Its capital, Budapest, has about 1.7 million inhabitants, which is almost one fifth of the whole Hungarian population of 10 056 000. The second biggest city is Debrecen with about 200 000 inhabitants and another nine cities have over 100 000 inhabitants. These numbers underline the importance of middle-sized and small cities, as well as the countryside, in Hungary. Nevertheless, one can detect a constant movement of population from small villages to the cities – especially among the young – which is driven by economics. Overall, the population of Hungary is tending slightly to decline. Like other central European countries Hungary has an ageing society: about 15 per cent of the population are under 15, and 20.5 per cent are in the 15-29 age group.

The President of Hungary, the country's leading representative, is elected by Parliament for five years; Laszlo Solyom was inaugurated in this position in 2005. After the parliamentary elections in 2006, Ferenc Gyurcsány became Prime Minister. His socialist-led coalition won 210 of the 386 seats in Parliament after promising further reforms to reach the goal of implementing Euro 2010. This was the first time a government had been re-elected since the change of political system in Hungary in 1989. The biggest opposition party is FIDESZ, with the former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Since 1 May 2004, Hungary has been a member of the European Union.

The regional governance structure of this parliamentary democracy reflects a sceptical approach to centralism after the change of political system. The country is divided into seven regions (Northern Hungary, Northern Great Plain, Southern Great Plain, Central Hungary, Central Transdanubia, Western Transdanubia and Southern Transdanubia), 19 counties, 23 cities with county status (those with populations over 50 000) and 174 micro-regions, to encourage co-operation among municipalities. The 3 175 local municipalities in the settlements also have



certain rights and tasks to fulfil. These different political tasks and rights are defined in Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments, which might be considered as the main legislative act for regionalisation in Hungary.

Hungary's economic development is slowing down compared to former years. The GDP per capita was 14 410 euros in 2006, which is far below the average of the 25 EU states; even in relation to the 12 new EU member states, the former "primus" now struggles to sustain its rate of development. In Hungary the differences between the regions are substantial: the wealthiest regions – the capital Budapest and the western region of Győr–Moson–Sopron have about two to three times the GDP per capita of the least developed counties (Nógrád, Szabolcs–Szamatár–Bereg). This is mainly the result of unbalanced investment by foreign companies, from which the so-called gate cities (e.g. Budapest, Győr, Szekesfehevar) have profited the most, whereas the other regions did not benefit from the economic upswing.

Besides these economic disparities between regions, other regional differences have to be highlighted. The biggest minority in Hungary are the Roma, and the highest concentration of Roma can be found in the counties of Borsod–Abauj–Zemplén and in Szabolcs–Szamatár–Bereg, both in the north-east of Hungary. In these same regions – Northern Hungary and Northern Great Plain – the poverty rate is double the rate in Central and Western Hungary (National Report (NR), p. 13).

Since the 1990s, Hungary has experienced a deceleration in economic development and economic growth, accompanied by an increase in unemployment and a perceived decrease in the quality of life. The national report also acknowledges an increase in poverty since the change of regime in 1989 that affects different regions, social classes and age groups to different degrees. Children are seen as the greatest losers from the change of regime. All in all, a growing disintegration and polarisation is noticed in Hungarian society, which makes a horizontal youth-policy approach all the more important.

-----> **1.2. Process**

The international reviews of national youth policies have been carried out by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe since 1997. Finland was the first country that asked for such an international review, followed by the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Romania, Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Cyprus, Slovakia and Armenia. A review of youth policy in Latvia also took place in 2007; Latvia and Hungary are the 14th and 15th countries to have their youth policy reviewed through such an international process.

The aim of the process is to contribute to the positive development of national youth policy, find and promote models of good practice – for both national and international audiences – and in this way help to develop a framework and standards for "good" youth policy. Since all these reviews are published, they have become an important part of the stock of knowledge that is needed to further develop an evidence-based and informed basis for thinking about youth policy



and developing strategies for implementation. Howard Williamson produced two synthesis reports after the seventh¹ and the fourteenth² review respectively, which highlighted both common themes and significant differences in thinking and the approaches to national youth policies in Europe.

The method of the reviews generally consists first of a preliminary visit, to establish the country's priorities or areas of concern, followed by the production of a national report on youth policy. Meanwhile a team of international experts (with nominations from each "side" of the co-management structure of the Council of Europe Youth Directorate – a representative of the inter-governmental steering group, the CDEJ, and one from the Advisory Council of youth organisations – and a member of the secretariat, supplemented by three youth researchers, one or more of whom is designated as rapporteur) is established to consider the youth policy of the country concerned with the critical distance of a stranger's eye. The team of experts visits the country twice and meets people involved in youth policy on different levels: from the central administration to the level of local delivery, taking in politicians, government officials at different levels of governance, professional practitioners, youth organisations and young people themselves. The review is concerned with how youth policy is expressed and experienced. The results and recommendations of the review are presented at both national and international levels.

The Hungarian authorities indicated before the review their particular interest in the international team's perspective on and analysis of three issues: the regionalisation of youth policy, the provision of youth information in Hungary and the professional training of youth work practitioners. These issues are prominent in this international report, alongside other issues that were considered to be significant by the international review team.

During the first visit, from 10 to 16 September 2007, meetings took place with staff members of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry for Local Governments and Regional Development (see Appendix 1). There were also meetings with representatives from Mobilitás (the Hungarian national agency for youth affairs) and from youth organisations, as well as with youth information workers, educationists and people connected to youth tourism.

The second visit (see Appendix 2) enabled the team to get further, more detailed information on labour market services, on youth work support through Mobilitás, on participation and on youth information. Further visits to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and to the Ministry of Justice took place in Budapest. Moreover,

1. Williamson, Howard, *Supporting young people in Europe – Principles, policy and practice. The Council of Europe's international reviews of national youth policy, 1997-2001 – a synthesis report*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2002.

2. Williamson, Howard, *Supporting young people in Europe Volume II – Lessons from the "second seven" international reviews of national youth policy*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2008.



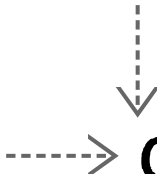
a visit to a prison holding young offenders was arranged for the review team. During this visit, from 5 to 9 November 2007, the team also went to the north-east of Hungary – to Debrecen, Karcag, Vámospércs and Encsencs – and had the opportunity to experience local youth work and youth policy.

After these visits, the report was drafted for the national hearing, which took place on 13 February 2008 in Budapest. During this hearing, representatives of the Hungarian authorities and of NGOs had the opportunity to comment on the report. We received a series of clarifications and corrections, and some additional information. Where these comments referred to factual mistakes or misunderstanding on our side, we have changed the text accordingly. Where reference to our interpretations or conclusions was made, we have mentioned them in footnotes and in some cases commented on them.

The structure of this international report reflects the general approach of widening youth policy from extra-curricular youth work in education and employment to include other issues like health, justice, welfare or family policy. Each chapter or section, covering a certain policy domain, is closed by some recommendations on that topic. The report concludes with more general recommendations.

The international team consisted of Bjørn Jaaberg Hansen (CDEJ representative, and chair), Roman Kühn (Advisory Council representative), Zsuzsanna Szelenyi (Secretariat), Elvira Cicognani (researcher), Andreas Walther (researcher and co-rapporteur), Manfred Zentner (researcher and co-rapporteur), and Howard Williamson (co-ordinator).

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Chapter 2

Structures and challenges



2.1. Concepts of youth

One of the first questions when reviewing a country's youth policy is: what is the understanding of "youth"? Policy concepts of youth are most often based on age, but status and life situations may also play a role. However, there is wide consensus in European youth research that existing definitions and concepts are becoming more and more blurred as a result of the de-standardisation of life trajectories. Not only does youth tend to start earlier and end later, but the transitions from childhood and into adulthood are increasingly fragmented. This results not only from an increasing discrepancy between formal age limits and young people's lived realities, but also from increasing discrepancies between different policy areas.

One of our first impressions, from reading the national report and from our two visits, was our difficulty in understanding whether there are any official definitions of youth in Hungary. The national report refers to the age band between 15 and 29 without giving a clear reference or reason. It may be motivated by the similar age bands of the EU Youth in Action programme, which plays a significant role in aspects of youth policy in Hungary, or of recent Hungarian surveys such as Youth 2000. In labour-market policies – again possibly following EU policies – "youth" are those aged 18-25 whereas in some other instances young people are equated with students. In terms of the criminal law, the age of criminal responsibility is 14. In other policy domains like health, child protection or combating poverty there are specific regulations up to the age of 18. Some services, mainly run by NGOs, applied their own age definitions, which lay between 6 and 34. Although there were debates about conceptualising youth at the time of the process of adopting a Youth Act, during our visits we did not have the impression of a wider debate on youth and its changing character. In contrast, there is a broad concern about and discussion of children.



In our encounters, youth was rarely addressed as a specific life condition with specific demands and needs, although of course young people were seen as affected by wider social conditions such as labour-market dynamics and poverty. In areas like these, youth appears to be negatively defined as those non-adults who no longer fall under child legislation. With regard to the distinction made in the European Union's White Paper on Youth (EC 2002; cf. IARD 2001), in Hungary the prevailing approach seems to be "youth as a problem", which means a focus on the problems that young people cause and/or experience; consequently this approach underlines protection and – in the case of "disadvantaged youth" – adaptation to labour-market demands.

An emphasis on young people as creative actors contributing to society, especially in informal and non-formal settings, prevails among youth NGOs – but more widely it is still weak. However, it needs to be kept in mind that, even in western European societies, where linear life-course structures did not persist as long as they did under conditions of state socialism and the planned economy, an understanding of youth as a distinct life condition and "as a resource" of society only evolved over time (Chisholm and Kovacheva 2001).

-----> 2.2. Recent developments of youth policy in Hungary

The ambiguity in understandings and concepts of youth as a distinct social group is probably reflected in youth policy in Hungary since the 1980s and may help to explain its development. Under the socialist regime, large organisations were closely linked to educational institutions and focused on providing leisure activities, especially youth tourism and sports, in addition to ideological education and leadership training. The national report (NR) gives a very informative picture of the period since the regime change by describing several phases of youth policy development. These phases implied changing competencies at government level for youth policy (currently held by a specialised unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour), especially with regard to the existence of a youth ministry or the location of specialised units or departments in different ministries, but each phase also produced different meanings and contents of youth policy (NR, pp. 172-91). In fact, every new government rebuilt youth policy structure, including the cross-sectoral co-ordination of youth policies at national government level, the changing role of *Mobilitás* (the main official service for youth affairs) and the involvement of youth organisations.

While the overall picture is one of discontinuity, this short history also includes positive experiences, such as the establishment of a second European Youth Centre in Budapest in 1995 and the foundation of *Mobilitás* as a service institution committed to the modernisation of youth work. Other measures – such as the creation of a Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1999 and the creation of regional youth offices – represented promising ambitions that failed to last. This was partly the result of the weakness of the civil youth sector, which suffers from the fact that former youth properties were privatised rather than used for the development of youth infrastructure by public or civil society actors.



It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that Hungarian youth policy since 1990 has been marked by two overarching themes: youth legislation and decentralisation (or regionalisation). As regards youth legislation, the Constitution refers to young people only in connection with education and training, and protection (Articles 16 and 67). So far there is no legal act that specifies public services related to youth (NR, pp. 150-57). This means that youth policy is not clearly defined as an obligatory public task with reliable mechanisms of resource allocation. It also means that priorities and procedures change constantly.

Consequently, the debate about (and struggle for) a Youth Act has been a connecting thread ever since the regime change. Previous attempts have not succeeded in getting parliamentary approval, and currently only certain youth organisations, especially the Children and Youth Conference, continue to pursue this objective. It remains to be seen whether this review process and the National Youth Strategy will constitute a turning point. A majority of those we spoke to referred to this situation in terms of a structural deficit, which impedes effective development and professionalisation of youth policies.

There were also some voices interpreting the failure to establish a new law as a waste of time and energy, waiting for legislation before starting to develop a youth policy infrastructure. In contrast, they argued, a youth policy culture – which could emerge from such an infrastructure – might be a prerequisite for political consensus. From this perspective the plan to strengthen an Integrated Youth Policy by implementing a National Youth Strategy in 2008 – the plan being based on two-year action programmes and being constantly monitored – appears to be a reasonable compromise; at least if it is based on a holistic view of young people and is understood as a means to move in the long term towards stable and reliable structures – which may require legal foundations. The current situation does represent a clear dilemma, which needs further debate and resolution.

As regards regionalisation and decentralisation, it needs to be understood that the introduction of local governments' self-administration was a key factor of the transformation after 1989, not only in Hungary but in most central and eastern European countries. Whereas the nation-state tended to be associated with the state socialist past, local governments were expected to be the source of the new democratic public (cf. Kirchner 1999). In practice this means that, since the regime change, wide-ranging tasks and responsibilities have been shifted from national to local level, which in Hungary includes municipalities and counties, whereas the regional level has so far played a minor role.

Among these decentralised tasks there are some which are mandatory, such as education or child welfare, while others – among which are youth policies – are voluntary. For these voluntary tasks, local governments can either use taxes they impose themselves or apply for tenders from national or European funds. Most local governments therefore complain that their local tax income is too low to provide youth policies in a relevant and sustainable way while at the same time the funds and procedures are complicated and – for the reasons mentioned above – in constant change.



In fact, at present, there is no clear picture where – and what kind of – youth policy provisions are in place. The setting up of regional youth offices by the Mobilitás youth service is one way to address this, though many actors are still not familiar with the new regional framework and there is no guarantee that this structure will last longer than previous attempts. Within this uncertain and fragile picture, the European Union (with the Youth in Action programme and the follow-up of the White Paper) and the Council of Europe, including the present review process, do contribute some stability and mainstreaming. Yet it needs to be asked if – and for how long – European top-down programmes can be an appropriate substitute for a home-grown, bottom-up youth policy infrastructure.

Obviously, the time since 1990 has been too short for re-conceptualising youth policy and re-balancing responsibilities across different levels. In fact, the overall challenge is much more complex than catching up with modernisation and democratisation according to Western models. Bayer and Jensen (2007) suggest replacing the one-dimensional perspective of “transition” (from ... to ...) with a globalisation perspective (cf. Laki 2007).

-----> **2.3. Challenges**

If understood as a cross-sectoral task, youth policy faces challenges beyond the key priorities indicated in the EU White Paper on Youth (EC 2002) – information, participation, voluntary activities and better knowledge of youth – and the organisation of extra-curricular youth work. Education and training, unemployment, health, housing and culture (among others) are seen as topics that a modern youth policy has to take on. Therefore this review of youth policy in Hungary follows a horizontal approach that is common in many European countries today – even if not all topics covered are currently leading themes of the department in charge of youth issues at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

Recent developments in Europe in general and in Hungary in particular indicate the growing importance of a strategy for co-ordinating education and employment policy. The national report points out that unemployment is a growing problem for young people in Hungary. The unemployment rate of those aged 15-29 rose between 2000 and 2006, and the rate for those aged 15-19 has shown the biggest increase. At the same time the employment rate decreased in the age group 15-29, particularly in the age group 20-24 (NR, pp. 58-65; see also section 3.2 of this report). The latter development indicates also the growing importance of higher education in the life of young people, as they remain in learning for longer rather than compete in the labour market. Regional differences in the unemployment rate, that also reflect the regional disparities in economics mentioned above, are a further topic to be reviewed in detail. Gender and minority issues have also to be taken into account.

The national report implies a mismatch between the current education system and the demands of the labour market. Accordingly Hungarian youth policy needs to reconsider the structure of schooling and the coherence of its content, on one



side, and the needs of the economy, on the other side. Among the critical themes for youth policy are the role of vocational schools, free choice in schooling and the effect that may be having on growing social segregation, the school drop-out rate and tertiary education. Here the cross-sectoral approach and the leading role of the ministry in charge of youth are of the highest importance. This review reflects in some detail current developments in education and youth employment.

Youth information, participation and active citizenship of young people are also important themes for any youth policy. Opportunities for participation of all groups of young people in society need to be provided at national, regional and local levels. In Hungary, students find a well-developed structure for participation via the local student councils. On the other hand, membership of young people in other representative bodies and NGOs is below the European average. Yet political participation outside formal organisations, political parties or trade unions – in “post-traditional” forms, such as demonstrations – has been quite popular in recent years. The big difference between the two major political parties has had a strong impact on politicising young people – without integrating them into the traditional bodies of participation. The development of active citizenship on a democratic basis is a main issue not only for Hungarian youth policy, but for European youth policy. Commonly it is stated that participation needs information in the first place. This review will therefore highlight topics in this area – NGOs, youth representation, youth work and youth information – especially the involvement of disadvantaged young people in political participation and in NGOs.

Youth tourism, sports and traditional culture have long been important in youth work and policy in Hungary. The national report shows that a large amount of funding is given to provide opportunities for youth tourism within Hungary, whereas only a low percentage of young Hungarians go abroad (NR, pp. 104-5). Hungarian youth policy has to face the challenge of making young people more mobile, more open to new experiences in Europe; the implementation of EU programmes is of high interest for the review team in this respect. Traditional popular culture, theatre and literature are important factors in youth policy from local to national level. Other forms of leisure activities – like youth cultural events – are also of considerable significance for young people. What is the reaction of youth policy to these developments and how is youth work involved in it?

Access to child welfare and family policy is important, not only because of the impact of demographic development on society, but also because Hungarian child welfare and family policy already has a strong and transparent profile – in contrast to youth policy, which is just developing. The linkage between these policy fields is of particular importance, since welfare is a mandatory task for settlements whereas youth work remains a voluntary commitment.

The prevention of risks, minimisation of risk behaviour and harm reduction – be it in relation to drug misuse, deviant behaviour, violence, addiction (also to new media) or debt – is a main issue for youth work in many European countries. Health promotion has become a leading topic in youth policy, especially given public health concerns about the transmission of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted

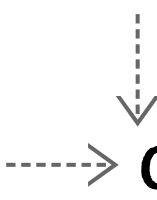


infections. In Hungary such issues will of course also be of increasing importance to youth policy and youth work in the future.

The Hungarian approach to prevention work with young people, especially targeted approaches and concepts, is of particular interest for the review team. The national report (NR, pp. 33-8) and World Health Organisation (WHO) surveys refer to the fact that accidents are the most common cause of death for those under 30, followed by suicides (even if the suicide rate has been decreasing strongly since the 1970s). The main risks to health are seen in tobacco and alcohol use, which is very common amongst Hungarian youth. Drug misuse is also, in the context of justice and crime prevention (as well as health), a topic that finds reflection in the evolving and broadening thinking about European youth policy. Psychological and mental health problems are an additional youth policy challenge within the health agenda. The system of justice for young people is, last but not least, another important topic in youth policy, especially in connection with prevention and re-integration.

There are various issues that cut through and across these important themes of youth policy in Hungary. The issues of diversity and discrimination have to be taken into particular account within Hungarian youth policy. Such approaches could provide the means to fight poverty and enable equal opportunities for different social classes. Furthermore, gender inequality and discrimination against sexual minorities or people with disabilities are topics in youth work, youth information and youth policy, along with the treatment of ethnic minorities.

With regard to the latter, the Roma are the biggest minority in Hungary, though the number of Roma is uncertain, because membership of this group is only revealed by self-classification, for the law does not permit schools or other institutions (such as employment offices and prisons) to keep data on the ethnic origin of individuals. It is estimated that the real number of Roma is two to three times as high as recorded. Experts see many problems that apply to all young people being experienced (or caused) to a higher degree within the Roma population. Issues of education, employment, unemployment, health, housing, crime and participation all have to be viewed and reviewed through the lens of equal opportunities, diversity and possible discrimination.



Chapter 3

Dimensions and domains of youth policy

This chapter presents the observations of the international review team on some key policy fields, observations that add up to a cross-sectoral picture of youth policy. The first focus of course lies on specialised youth policy, namely youth work and youth information. The second major area covered is education and employment. A third section addresses additional policy fields, such as justice, health, and child welfare. The fourth section considers cross-cutting issues: the challenge of combating poverty, the relationship between diversity and equal opportunities with a special focus on the Roma, and participation and citizenship. Specific recommendations follow each section or sub-section.



3.1. Youth policy development

As already indicated in Chapter 1, Hungarian youth policy has been characterised by a lack of continuity since the regime change. The result has been a lack of common understanding and a lack of reliable mechanisms for policy development and delivery. We will therefore give our view of the efforts to develop youth policy, rather than describe existing structures. The four sub-sections in this regard are: regionalisation, youth work and youth information, training and professional development.

3.1.1. Regionalisation of responsibilities, actors, finance and knowledge

Legal basis and responsibilities

The only existing legal reference to youth policy in the Constitution relates to education and protection. The role at national level is one of a development agent, whereas responsibility for developing and maintaining youth policy structures lies with local governments. Where it mentions their role, the constitution distinguishes



between mandatory and voluntary tasks. These differ according to the size of the municipality. For the smaller ones, some mandatory tasks are administrated at county level. In relation to children and youth, secondary education and child and youth protection are competencies of the county level. Yet, for the duties of child and youth protection, no clear mechanism of resource allocation is established. Several of those we spoke to mentioned that at present there is a debate whether the counties should be replaced by the regional level.

With the exception of education, youth policies fall under the voluntary tasks, which means that there is neither a legal obligation on local government nor an entitlement of young people with regard to youth policy.³ However, this does not mean that there is no practice on the ground. On the contrary, we got the impression that there is a broad range of activities and provision for young people. However, this is not always considered under a banner of “youth policy” and the picture of the youth sector remains fragmented.

Youth policy actors

Since 2006, national responsibility for youth policy has been with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. As there is no legal basis which defines and regulates youth policy, this task is laid down in a government decree allocating to the Ministry the responsibility for co-ordinating youth-related policies and developing specialised youth policies. Within the Ministry, a unit (currently five members of staff) in the department of equal opportunities deals with the development of youth policy. In practice, this means they administer funds, develop accredited youth worker training and supervise the work of *Mobilitás*, the operative arm of the Ministry.

The Ministry is also responsible for co-ordinating policies between ministries like education and training, and employment, and – at present – for drafting the national strategy in collaboration with an expert commission. However, there is currently no explicit inter-ministerial structure which would allow a mainstreaming process as suggested by the European Youth Pact (cf. Walther and Pohl 2005). Co-ordination is limited to consultation with the Ministry on all legislative initiatives of other ministries where young people may be affected.

3. As a reaction to the draft report and the presentation at the national hearing we received some further information and clarification from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. According to the Ministry, “the provision of youth tasks is a responsibility of local governments set forth in the Act on Local Governments”. Particular reference was made here to Article 8. Yet, in an English-language document issued by the Ministry in 2007, we did not find a single reference to youth provision or young people. The clarification provided by the Ministry also admits, however, that responsibility for youth tasks is actually being interpreted by local governments in very different ways. This conclusion is supported by the fact that responsibility for youth tasks is included in the general responsibility of local governments to respond to the needs of the population. This is further qualified by the precondition of sufficient financial resources and the existence of youth organisations to express young people’s needs.



On the national level another key actor is Mobilitás, the government's operative arm for national youth policy. In line with changes of political responsibility, it has been shifted from one ministry to another, including the Prime Minister's Office, and charged with different tasks (such as acting as the national agency for European youth programmes, and taking responsibility for drug prevention). Currently, it is an autonomous department of the National Employment and Social Office within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. It understands itself as an innovation centre for youth work with three strategic aims: professional development, the promotion of participation and active citizenship, and promoting social recognition for youth work and non-formal learning.

Mobilitás operates both on a national level and through seven regional offices. On the regional level it collaborates with the regional youth councils, which are appointed by the Ministry and are involved in distributing the National Children and Youth Fund (see below). On the national level, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is the mechanism through which local governments receive resources for their mandatory tasks. It also holds the competency in the fields of housing, sports and youth tourism, which are of relevance to youth policy.

In the context of formal delivery structures, the decentralised counterpart of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is local government. Some towns and cities (120-300 out of more than 3 100 settlements) have created the role of "youth desk officers" who manage youth-related affairs within the local authority in co-operation with other actors, especially non-governmental organisations and the regional representatives of the Mobilitás service. The low number of local governments with designated youth officers reflects not only the voluntary status of youth policy but also the large regional disparities in resources between cities and rural areas, and between western and eastern parts of the country.

Most youth-related provision is delivered by non-governmental organisations. Some are the youth branches of churches or larger organisations, while others have been founded more recently by particular interest groups or by young people themselves. In fact we did not come across any services run by public bodies. On the other hand, a large and increasing number of NGOs exists in Hungary – according to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, about 76 000 – but because of the funding system many of the organisations are believed to be dormant and no longer active, since only 54 000 NGOs answered the mandatory questionnaire on NGOs. Many of the organisations were funded to fulfil a certain need in the first place and did not survive after their original task had been fulfilled. The actual number of youth organisations and youth initiatives cannot therefore be estimated with any degree of confidence.

The co-ordination of youth organisations (and other bodies offering youth-related services and activities) reflects the discontinuity in Hungarian youth policy development. In each phase, various constellations existed that failed to survive a change in the government. According to representatives of youth organisations, the constant political changes have contributed to a high politicisation of youth



organisations; as a result, attempts to form a single umbrella organisation have failed. Currently the biggest umbrella organisation is the Children and Youth Conference (Gyermek és ifjúsági Konferencia, www.gyik.hu), but since 2003 its “coverage” has declined from 278 to 88 member organisations. The biggest single youth organisation is the national conference of students’ unions with 420 000 members (though it should be noted that membership is compulsory for students in higher education).⁴

Financing

The lack of continuity, along with the lack of transparent responsibilities and procedures, also affects the financing of youth policies. In sum, the following are the main sources of funding:

- a) the youth policy budget of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour,
- b) the national civic fund,
- c) funding by local governments’ own means,
- d) European funding, especially the Youth in Action programme.

a) Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

For 2007, the overall youth policy budget of the Ministry amounts to about 1.3 billion forints (HUF) – about 5.2 million euros – which is a decrease of 45 per cent compared to 2006. Major cost categories are the Zanka Child and Youth Public Foundations (29 per cent or 1.5 million euros), which operates a single, large-scale recreational infrastructure for children and youth summer camps (inheriting ex-Communist Party property); tasks related to youth policy, such as human resources, government programmes, youth festivals, community areas, youth tourist facilities and professional duties, which account for 36 per cent (1.9 million euros); and the National Children and Youth Fund, to which NGOs can submit applications for funding and which accounts for 22 per cent (1.2 million). Of this fund, 70 per cent is distributed through regional youth councils, and 30 per cent is distributed at national level.

4. As a reaction to the draft report and the presentation at the national hearing, the youth departments of the churches in Hungary and the Scout movement stressed their particular roles, referring to the fact that 10 per cent of those aged 15-29 belong to one of the churches, while 48 per cent say they are religious. Apart from non-formal education, the churches run several educational institutions, both kindergartens and schools. They also run adult education for the Roma minority, initiatives for young people with disabilities, and schemes to give young people the opportunity to carry out voluntary work. While these activities of course make a valuable and necessary contribution, from our point of view the mere fact of this statement reflects the present fragmentation of the Hungarian youth sector. During our first visit, we had been informed that the youth departments of the churches do not belong to the National Children and Youth Conference.



b) National Civic Fund (NCA)

Since 1996, what is called the “1 per cent Personal Income Tax Act” allows taxpayers to dedicate 1 per cent of their income tax to a registered non-profit organisation of their choice; this is then matched by the same amount of funding from the state budget. It has been administered within the framework of the National Civic Fund since 2004, following the 2003 Act on the National Civic Fund Programme. The whole budget of the fund totals 6 to 8 billion HUF (24 to 30 million euros) per annum. NGOs can apply, through thematic field-specific boards (“colleges”), to fund programmes operated and administered by representatives from the civil sector itself.

Pursuant to the 2003 Act, 60 per cent of the funds are earmarked for operational applications. There are no figures available for the funding going to youth organisations and/or reaching young people. Some respondents criticised the Fund for being exceptionally bureaucratic, thereby consuming a lot of resources of NGOs in lobbying for support through the Fund and applying for funding. It is also questioned whether the Fund is the right tool for achieving its declared aim, to put an end to the dependency of the civil sector on the state (Bullain et al. 2003).

c) Local government

Because of the lack of any overview of local youth policy provisions in general and local government budgets in particular, no precise information is available on how much money is spent on youth policy in the country.

Table 1: Youth policy expenditure of selected local authorities*

Place	Inhabitants	Youth Policy Budget		Main items
		Total amount	% of total budget	
Debrecen	200 000	800 000	0.4%	Youth policy fund, scholarships, events/festivals, prevention, youth information
Karcag	23 000	160 000	0.4%	Scholarships, camps, drug and crime prevention, prizes and awards, subsidies for cultural and sport-related youth organisations
Vámospércs	6 000	36 000	0.6%	Estimations of youth-related returns from subsidies to organisations in general and savings for a new community centre
Encsencs	2 000	6 000	0.5%	Subsidies for organisations, projects

* These are the review team’s calculations, based on approximate budget figures given in meetings.



Table 1 shows the answers we received during our visit to the city of Debrecen, the towns of Karcag and Vámospércs, and Encsencs, a small village 50 km from Debrecen, when we asked representatives of the local government for their total expenditure on youth-related issues, what these issues were in particular and the whole budget of the municipality. Extrapolating these figures (which of course are not representative) to all settlements in Hungary would amount to 40 million euros spent by local governments or 0.5 per cent of local governments' total expenditure (whereas the youth policy budget of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour represents 0.01 per cent of national government's total budget in 2007).

d) European Union

The European Commission's Youth in Action programme made available to Hungary a budget of 2.3 million euros in 2007. This was the country's second-biggest single source of funding for youth policy. For 2008, 2.8 million euros are allocated to Hungary, of which 250 000 euros are reserved for "youth initiatives", which means projects initiated by young people directly. Of course, the funding through the European Structural Funds is much more significant than the Youth in Action programme. For the period 2007-13 alone, the European Social Fund for Hungary is planned to invest a sum of 3.6 billion euros into an operational programme based on six priorities, in two of which young people are mentioned explicitly: employability and social inclusion (EC 2007a). It is unclear to what extent the development of youth work and youth information may profit from them or do so already. However, in some encounters it was mentioned that local and national authorities struggle to spend the total allocated share of Structural Funds in time.

Our estimates and the statements of various respondents pointed to a serious lack of funding for youth policy development, which has even worsened since 2006. The other noteworthy aspect was the way funding is distributed. In fact, the national report and experts met by the international review team expressed concern that a large part of available funding (according to some experts 90 per cent) for youth policy activities and measures is distributed through a tendering system – whether the funds are national, local or European (see NR, p. 205). NGOs concerned with youth issues may submit tenders to local governments, to the National Civic Fund, to the National Children and Youth Fund or to the EU Youth in Action Programme.

As a result, many practitioners complain that a large part of their working time is occupied by administrative tasks – or they refrain from applying because of what they assume to be lengthy and unclear procedures or because of lack of information. The most striking example was an NGO in a small town in the Northern Great Plain region, founded by 11 young men and women aged 18 to 22, who had to be trained by the regional Mobilitás office how to submit a formal application for funding – in order to organise a Santa Claus party for the youth of their town!

The staff of the regional offices of Mobilitás admitted that their energies are tied up by consulting and assisting NGOs with applications (while decisions are taken by the government-appointed Regional Youth Councils; before 2007 Mobilitás offices were also responsible for administering proposals). Paradoxically, in order



to fulfil another of their roles as development agents, where they are expected to play a more creative role by starting new initiatives, they have to mobilise other NGOs to submit their respective proposals to the various tenders. It seems that this funding mechanism will continue under the National Youth Strategy which will become operational during 2008.

Knowledge base

Given the diffuseness of the youth policy sector, a key interest of the review lay in finding out whether, to what extent and how knowledge was produced and used to support the process of policy making. The international review team met with the Child and Youth Research Department in the Institute for Social Policy and Labour. Apart from that, mention was made of the Department of Political Sciences in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (which authored the National Report), but nothing was said of the departments of Sociology and Social Psychology, in spite of the fact that relevant studies on youth and especially Roma youth are being carried out there (for instance, Kende 2007). In 2000 and 2004 youth surveys were carried out, and annual reports are made to Parliament on the situation of children and young people (which under the National Strategy will be adjusted to three-year intervals). In the meetings with experts, however, the international review team did not get the impression that these data were used systematically for youth policy development – and the team arrived at a similar view of higher education courses in youth worker training, which seem to be based more on education and psychological knowledge than on youth research (see below).

As regards youth work practice, the Ministry and Mobilitás see a need to spread information and knowledge to raise awareness of the value of youth work in society generally, as well as awareness of good practice in youth work. They do this by, for example, a “road show” on youth work organised by the Ministry, and a regular newsletter and a documentation centre (web database: www.mobilitas.hu) developed by Mobilitás, while a handbook for youth desk officers is also being developed.

According to youth work trainers, and from discussions with Mobilitás as the main training provider, the knowledge base of further training in youth work appeared to consist mainly of knowledge developed in the general framework of the Council of Europe’s human rights Kompass project and the European Commission’s SALTO network. It remained unclear how this knowledge is contextualised in relation to the situation of Hungarian youth. Sometimes the review team gained the impression that national policy makers, in their wish and efforts to develop and professionalise youth policy and youth work using apparently ready-made European tools, tend to devalue practical knowledge that actually exists on the ground – though it may not always be explicitly labelled “youth policy” or “youth work” (see below).

Regionalisation

At the national political level, the policy of regionalisation has two aims. First, it is meant to inspire local authorities to invest in youth-related infrastructure



and to train professionals in that sector. It encourages the smallest settlements to group together, to provide a larger range of services. In fact, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development emphasised that subsidies were increasingly tied to conditions of co-operation between small settlements. Second, regionalisation aims to even out regional disparities in socio-economic circumstances as well as infrastructure and services. Whereas local government representatives complained of restricted economic resources to draw on and the need to prioritise investment in economic infrastructure, the representatives of national ministries (Social Affairs and Labour, Education and Culture, Local Government and Regional Development) referred to the decrease in local governments' investment in culture, education and youth. However, apart from distributing the modest national funds through regional youth councils and decentralising the Mobilitás service as a development agency to organise training in the regions, no clear ideas were presented to reverse this trend.

In sum, setting up regional offices of Mobilitás and developing youth work training (see below) are steps which are no doubt necessary – but not sufficient for effective regionalisation of youth policy. Unless youth policy becomes a mandatory task of local government, mechanisms are needed which allocate more resources to youth policy issues, make them more easily accessible to the actors in the field, set up incentives to apply for these funds and/or make sure that they reach those regions and villages where no infrastructure exists so far. In this regard, it needs to be noted that specialised youth policy seems to be developed in a rather isolated way: there is little networking – with other actors or with policy areas that potentially overlap (such as child welfare, education, labour market, integration policies and regional economic development) – to mobilise synergies with other resources.

3.1.2. Youth work and youth information

As stated above, different services for young people exist at local, regional and national levels, as well as a number of youth organisations and NGOs, but youth work is understood in different ways. Youth work and youth affairs are optional, not compulsory, tasks of local authorities, following Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments; and they develop their own youth concepts according the needs and demands of their local population and the available financial resources. In the past there was a central budget earmarked for the delivery of youth affairs tasks locally; these funds could be used to employ youth workers and for development of community areas, but this form of funding no longer exists. Less than one tenth of the municipalities employ youth desk officers; and, for many of those, youth is one of several topics in their portfolio of responsibilities. Youth services locally are offered in very different forms to the target group, and numerous services work in parallel without co-operation.

The National Report (NR, pp. 157-9) states that young people cannot easily find appropriate youth services – not because they do not exist, but because the different youth services provided at local or regional level are too unclear,



and often even unknown. Among these services are youth information, youth community areas, outreach youth work, youth tourism, youth representative bodies and other youth NGOs. Besides these, there are public services for the whole local community that are available to, and in some cases used intensively by, young people – such as community houses, cultural centres or telehouses.⁵

The main forms of youth services at the local level are youth community areas. National and local authorities share responsibility for the provision of general education institutes, which include cultural and/or community centres and houses, as well as telehouses. The venues themselves are run by the local authorities or by organisations under a contract for general education. Because of this delegation and the voluntary status of youth work provision, there is no comprehensive definition of the conditions and prerequisites of youth community areas.

During our visits in Budapest and our tour through the Northern Great Plain region, we observed that local youth services (such as community centres, youth community areas, information offices) try to take care of many different needs of young people: leisure-time activities, participation, youth-culture offers, cultural activities, traditional culture, information and counselling. It was nevertheless obvious that – independent of the size of the municipality – various offers are not specially targeted at young people. It is questionable if these offers have a low-enough threshold⁶ for all young people – especially taking into account the distance and the scepticism of youth towards “official” administration. Moreover one has to take into account possible conflicts between the different user groups of the same public services. Furthermore it seems to be a main principle of local youth policy not to provide targeted offers for young people, but only to support youth initiatives if “constituted” groups of young people approach those with relevant authority in the settlements. As a result, “youth work” is done in many cases by young people themselves and not by professional youth workers.

One main problem to be highlighted in this chapter is the lack of a decent description of youth work in Hungary. The profession of youth worker is very often carried out by graduates of courses in cultural management; and youth work is not clearly distinct from social work. Also, a detailed job description can only be given for youth helpers; even local youth desk officers do not really have an occupational profile.

At the same time the linkage between youth work and non-formal/informal learning appears not to be recognised, so an important feature of extracurricular youth

5. Telehouses were first established in Hungary in the middle of the 1990s. The idea goes back to Swedish and Danish models, that villages should have a facility to provide technical support for future communal plans, to advance the village and to allow anyone to gain access to the information society.

6. Low-threshold approaches aim at easy access to institutions for the target groups, which clearly demands attention to obstacles that impede access. For young people, such obstacles include personal insecurity, inadequate information, building design and a lack of understanding of the institution’s role and purpose.



work is widely neglected. Non-formal education was mentioned in the national report mainly in connection with training for the labour market and culture. Referring to data from the ad hoc module of a 2003 labour survey on life-long learning, about 7 per cent of the people aged 15 to 34 were attending some kind of non-formal education (NR, p. 31), but it is not mentioned where this non-formal education took place. And 25 per cent of the 20- to 29-year-olds said that they visited “another institution disseminating information” (NR, p. 32), again without any mention of the institution.

Youth work emphasises non-formal learning – access to it and the value of it – and this ties in with a goal of *Mobilitás*: society’s recognition of youth work and its methodology is one of the strategic aims of *Mobilitás*. Only time will tell if greater recognition of youth work by society will at the same time lead to a higher recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Youth work

The main topics of Hungarian youth work follow European trends: leisure-time activities, participation and active citizenship, information, and mobility. Various youth NGOs present specialised offers in these respective fields.

Only a small proportion of young Hungarians are members of organisations. Only 13 per cent of those aged 15 to 29 say they are a member of any organisation. This is only half the EU15 average, but it lies in the average range of the 12 new member states (EC 2007b, p. 22). Out of these, the largest group are members of youth organisations (26 per cent) followed by members of sports clubs (23 per cent). All in all, about 3 per cent of young people are members of youth organisations.

Youth experts – researchers, policy makers and NGO representatives – observe a lack of activity among young people. Especially the role of organisations in contributing to the development of a feeling of belonging to a community is felt to be missing. Post-modern forms of communities have replaced the traditional forms of membership in organisations: youth clubs offer services for the young without requiring any form of membership so they can stay independent, and mobile youth services reach other non-organised youth. On the other hand, the engagement of young people in voluntary activities in Hungary is higher than the EU average: 22 per cent of the young people asked in the Eurobarometer survey claimed to be engaged in voluntary activities (EC 2007b, p. 28). This proves that new forms of communal activities apart from membership exist in Hungary.

Youth organisations and initiatives can tender for funds at local, regional or national level. The spectrum of NGOs dealing with youth issues covers everything from political organisations to environmental bodies, from religious NGOs to students’ societies. It is generally seen as a necessity that these NGOs form an umbrella organisation – a national youth council – to represent the interests of youth NGOs and as a partner for policy makers at national level.⁷ But alongside the frequent

7. For further details, see § 3.4.3 Cross-cutting issues: participation and active citizenship, pp. 67-70.



changes in the structure and location of youth policy within government, different umbrella organisations have also emerged. Youth bodies also get organisational support and know-how from the Regional Youth Services (RISZI), the regional arm of Mobilitás. Many youth organisations are also members of international umbrella organisations and can get support independently of Hungarian structures.

An important topic of Hungarian youth work is the promotion of mobility for young people, along with intercultural dialogue. On the one hand the European Union YOUTH programme (which preceded the current Youth in Action) enabled youth NGOs, youth initiatives and young people directly to go abroad, experience diversity and make contact with young people from other cultures. Evaluation of the YOUTH programme shows that it granted more than 700 applications for youth exchanges (though over 1 600 applications were handed in) and it funded 1 200 European Voluntary Service (EVS) projects in the period 2000 to 2006. On the other hand, youth tourism inside Hungary has always played an important role in youth policy. The Zánka Children and Youth Centre, for example, is a whole resort for individuals and youth groups that is used for excursions and holidays. This state-owned institution – soon to be reconstituted as a public benefit company – still offers, for a large number of Hungarian children and young people, their only possibility of a holiday (research shows that fewer than half of Hungarian young people can go away on holiday).

Mobility is also fostered by four different cards offering discounts on lodging and other mobility-related expenses: the Youth Hostel member card, the Euro<26 card, a special teacher card and the International Students Identity Card. The international review team got the impression that the Zánka Children and Youth Centre is mainly used for school trips and far more seldom for recreational purposes, and that the discount cards are for individual use and have only limited connections with out-of-school youth work.

Other important themes in Hungarian youth work are leisure activities and culture. The preservation of traditional culture (such as folk dance and music) is a main concern of many NGOs, though in contrast youth community centres often also offer a wide variety of youth culture opportunities – such as concerts, rehearsal rooms for musicians, walls for graffiti or skate parks. So youth work covers a wide range of cultures and allows active participation for young people. The youth centres, youth community houses and youth initiatives visited by the review team provided concrete evidence of this openness to the different forms of everyday culture. It also became clear that, particularly in small settlements, the primary task of youth community centres is to offer space for young people to meet friends, and opportunities to spend time away from home but not hanging around on the street. The main approach in local youth work seems to be to give youth the space they need, but not to use more elaborate methods to work with them. Youth work in this way is more like the provision of hardware rather than the software.

Youth information

The Hungarian youth information service has a long tradition and is constructed on European principles. The first youth information centre and counselling



point was established in 1984, in an underground passage frequented by young people, following a French example. In the 1980s, 18 offices were established and in 1990 they formed HAYICO (Hungarian Association of Youth Information and Counselling offices, www.hayico.hu), which functioned as a network of such centres and joined the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, ERYICA. HAYICO also signed the European Youth Information Charter. Partners of these youth information and counselling offices in providing information are Eurodesk, the European Youth Card Association (EYCA), the Youth Hostels and the European Youth Forum. The HAYICO network provides a general and personal service to young people. The information offered is free of charge for all young people. The information offices are open in the afternoon and early evening to maximise accessibility for the greatest number of young people – what we call “low-threshold” availability.

According to a representative of HAYICO, the most relevant topics for users of youth information services are work, training, tenders and programmes, hostels and leisure activities. Young people also ask for information on sports, public education, infrastructure, travel allowances, crises, mobility-related topics, NGOs and civil society, and the relation between the EU and Hungary. The three main areas where young people ask for counselling are labour, psychology and crisis. In the field of labour they ask for advice how to write a CV, advice how to find a regular or a summer job, but also advice on taxes.

The youth information and counselling offices are situated in the capitals of counties, in cities with county status and in Budapest. To reach young people in smaller settlements, there are information points run by other institutions. The workers in these information points receive special information from local institutions, or from HAYICO and Mobilitás.

Besides HAYICO, telehouses are the other main information providers for young people. Hungary has more than 500 telehouses and these are connected in a network. The idea of the telehouses is that community and information centres in smaller settlements should provide as much information as possible on the village and its surrounding area to the inhabitants. Since IT-based sources are of the utmost importance in telehouses, young people are the biggest user group of these services. Mobilitás offers information directly to young people, but also to NGOs and youth organisations centrally in Budapest and via RISZI regionally.

In the information offices, the main form of dissemination is still personal contact with the young users, but other ways of provision are also common – via telephone or internet as well as printed material. It is common to find central information sites for the networks or for Mobilitás on the internet, but also homepages run by different information offices and points providing general and regional information. Newsletters, printed or electronic, are also used.

Members of the international review team had the opportunity to visit the Mezon Youth Information Office (www.mezion.hu) in Debrecen, which is a member of HAYICO. The spacious setting provides general information at a counter, offers facilities for computer and internet use, has a wide range of information material



presented in different racks, and has a big room on the upper floor for television and for use as a gallery. At the time of our visit the place was crowded with young people, using the computers, browsing the information folders or talking to the information workers.

The three pillars of the youth information office are information, counselling and general services. The topics that are most interesting for young people are programmes and support, work, study and education. In the field of counselling, the youth information office collaborates with experts from different areas to provide help and advice for psychological problems, the law, careers and student rights. Examples of general services are the possibility of organising an exhibition and the option to order tickets for a concert. The place also functions as a training centre for NGOs. The Mezon Information Centre co-operates with the local Drug Reconciliation Forum, which provides information for young people, schools and teachers. The Forum deals not only with the prevention of drug misuse, but also harm reduction and crime prevention.

In Budapest, IRÁNYTŰ (www.iranytu.net), also a member of HAYICO, provided a contrasting approach. It is quieter, more settled, more office-like, less focused on youth culture and obviously – for these reasons – perhaps more inviting for adults. The services provided there are more or less similar to those in the Mezon Centre, but with a slightly greater emphasis on health issues. This institution also offers room for groups, and for young people to meet in a cellar club (pinceklub), which is in appearance a little bit closer to the contemporary tastes of young people.

A local youth information point visited by the international review team was Cseresznye (www.cseri.hu), situated in the seventh district of Budapest on the upper floor of a popular bar called Szimpla. Cseresznye is not a member of the HAYICO network, but it works with the network of local youth information points in Budapest. This small information point offers counselling as well as information. Additionally it offers a film club and language courses. Cseresznye is financed by the local authority to provide information and other services for young people. This facility is the closest to the lifestyle of a certain group of young people – from its location, a bar, to the setting of the office, where clients sit on big cushions.

The impression gained by the international review team from these examples of youth information and counselling offices and points is that a broad variety of approaches to young people exists. All the services aim for low-threshold offers to young people, to ensure maximum coverage – but inevitably different forms of provision are more appealing to particular groups of young people. Nevertheless, it was made clear that the needs and the demands of the young customers are always at the centre of information workers' concerns. Young people define which topics are of importance and information workers co-operate to meet the demands.

The aim for future development in the field of youth information has to be the coverage of as many young people as possible, with the opening of further information points. An intensive campaign should be considered to draw attention to the existence of online information services for young people. Mobile services and IT-based counselling offers will be needed in the future as well.



-----> **3.1.3. Training of professionals in the youth field**

The professionalisation of youth work through training was one of the main challenges mentioned by national policy makers. The international review team got the impression that nobody had an overview of the professional background of those actually working with young people; actors at national level spoke of the Hungarian youth sector as generally lacking in skills and knowledge. We were unable to discover either the subject matter covered in youth training or any details of the methods used in such training.

As mentioned above, youth work up to now has had no distinct professional profile. The same deficit holds for local youth desk officers, who also lack a decent occupational description – and therefore a clear training schedule. There is a traditional professional profile of “youth helpers” (similar to youth welfare officers), a concept which comes from social work, but there is another profile rooted in cultural work and community development (to which the new courses in Higher Education refer). At the same time, the director of a youth information centre in a district of Budapest presented herself as a French teacher who had studied books on youth and youth work, as well as the T-Kits developed by the Council of Europe training network. The most interesting aspect of this example was that in fact this youth information centre met high professional standards, in that it followed a low-threshold approach (see below). In most cases, the distinction between professionals and volunteers is difficult to determine while boundaries remain so blurred.

In Hungarian training policies, two different strands need to be discerned:

- 1) Youth work training is now offered in 12 higher education institutions, with 488 students enrolled in 2006. This training does not lead to a university degree, but a higher-level professional diploma. During the visit, we met two university representatives (from Pécs and ELTE Budapest) who presented their respective courses. According to our understanding, these courses are embedded in the educational sciences while they are also rooted in the disciplinary tradition of cultural work. Their curricula, however, vary between a more psycho-pedagogical emphasis and an orientation to social science and management. To a different extent, they include practical training, only part of which takes place in the field. Although most experts agreed on the need to standardise and upgrade training – and therefore welcomed the initiative as such – they expressed ambivalent views of these courses, views which were partly shared by the university representatives themselves. One critic referred to the absence of any connection between the training and the professional sector. There was a consensus that the qualification did not correspond to any demand in the labour market in the field of youth affairs. Some experts reported, from their experience as external examiners in final exams, that students appeared to have no idea of local youth work practice. Another comment was that students showed little interest in entering a youth work career, but wanted to move on to study proper degrees.



Representatives from further training organisations with experience in training related to youth work were critical that existing experience and expertise were not taken into consideration.

- 2) Further training is available for those already working in the youth field, whether as volunteers or employees of local governments and NGOs, and Mobilitás is probably the most important provider. Some of this training is partly formally accredited. We could not discover how many courses have been held so far, nor how many individuals have been on them. The courses that were described mainly reflect the programmes of the Council of Europe (mainly human rights and intercultural education) and the EU's Youth in Action programme (such as disadvantaged youth, project management, Roma, and young people with disabilities). As with the relation between national and European funding (see above), it seemed that European programmes – their main objective being to Europeanise local and national practice – had the function of filling a gap left by the absence of basic training. This is partly because most Mobilitás staff are neither specially qualified nor experienced youth workers. While this reflects the reality of the Hungarian youth sector and does not have to be a deficit in itself, it was surprising to hear rather negative comments about the professional quality of local youth work from actors who have neither distinct expertise nor actual knowledge of current practice. Mobilitás staff themselves expressed their discontent at having little contact with real practice, because they are tied to administrative office work.

However, a pilot programme, organised by the department for youth in the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labour and Mobilitás, together with Austrian partners, was presented to the international review team as a promising pathway inasmuch as it helped youth desk officers to develop youth action plans for their local contexts, bringing in new knowledge and competence without neglecting or devaluing existing expertise and resources. Nevertheless this training programme, run as a PHARE Twinning Light project, highlighted a problem of youth work in Hungary: the level of knowledge and experience found in basic youth work differs very much, since no basic training for the job is demanded in the first place.

Apart from this existing, larger training policy, one has to have a closer look at the informal education that is offered by NGOs to their members and voluntary co-workers. We learned that some NGOs in Hungary have their own training systems, often financed through tenders. It also became obvious that youth organisations do apply for European training for their personnel and volunteers. This international training may be run by the Council of Europe or inside the Youth in Action programme, but it may also be provided by an international umbrella organisation to which the NGO belongs. Political youth organisations also use the training offered by their mother parties. Furthermore, youth initiatives and NGOs apply for tenders to receive seminars and training specially tailored according to their needs, as was the case for the youth group in Vámospercs.



All in all, this “internal” training enables the staff and the volunteers to do youth work, but since a system of guidance, agreed standards and a procedure of accreditation are missing, the methods used in youth work can differ very much. If youth organisations or other people concerned with youth topics want to work in clearly defined fields – like prevention work, counselling, and social inclusion – the basics of fundamental methodological approaches need to be known by the youth workers.

Recommendations

The impression the review team got from youth work, from national to local level, is that regionalisation has a big influence on the diversity, but it also disrupts youth work at a structural level – in relation to methodology as well as the overall aims of youth work. The story we got out of the visits tells of very enthusiastic youth workers who are overburdened with the task of getting resources for their work and challenged to meet the needs and demands of the young people. We recommend structural changes of the funding system as well as a professionalisation of youth work as a whole:

- *Youth policy needs to become mandatory, especially youth work and youth information; this includes spaces for young people and sufficient professional staff but also a responsible role within local government (youth desk officers).*
- *The National Youth Strategy should aim at developing a legal framework which specifies the meaning, content and target of youth policy as well as the division of rights and responsibilities between national and local levels, and between public actors and NGOs.*
- *Aims and professional standards of youth work and youth information have to be defined and monitored; this includes aspects such as social disadvantage, gender and diversity.*
- *Youth work should provide spaces for leisure and cultural activities for all young people; youth information should develop clear links with professional counselling; youth work and youth information should be based on the principles of participation and non-formal learning.*
- *Clear occupation descriptions for youth workers, helpers and desk officers – including educational requirements and/or experience, their tasks and rights – have to be developed.*
- *Higher education and further training of youth workers have to be based on valid professional standards and occupational descriptions; sufficient training offer is required at regional level.*
- *Training should not be developed from the top down, but make use of, involve and validate existing expertise in practice at local level.*

- *The first pillar of funding – mandatory tasks – needs to be secured, especially salaries of sufficient professional staff, with the provision and maintenance of spaces and material (especially ICT); a second pillar of funding could be support of youth NGOs according to the number of members; a third pillar could be a tender system restricted to funding of projects.*
- *Funding of public actors and NGOs should be conditional on fulfilling standards or – in the transition period – to participation in relevant training.*
- *Mobile services of youth work, youth information and youth counselling have to be developed in order to reach out to small settlements.*
- *The exchange of knowledge between professionals needs to be extended and better funded; developing a database and spreading good practice (by Mobilitás) are steps in the right direction, but might be complemented by face-to-face exchange at regional level.*
- *A National Observatory of Youth, functioning as a centre of data collection and documentation on youth issues, could help to systematise and share different types of knowledge; Mobilitás could and should play an important role in such an Observatory.*
- *Society needs to recognise youth work as an investment in the future; the value of non-formal learning and voluntary work should be recognised and made visible, for example through certificates issued by the Ministry.*
- *Youth policy development needs to be linked with ongoing public administration reform.*
- *It is strongly advisable that the position of national youth policy in the government structure remains stable, with a high professional profile, represented by a senior administrator with high authority.*

-----> 3.2. Education and employment

Education and employment – and especially the transition from school to work – are policy domains which require a cross-sectoral understanding of youth policy. They are hugely relevant for young people’s lives and life chances. In Hungary, important reforms are under way within these policy domains. These demand reflection from a youth policy perspective.

3.2.1. Basic structures

School

In terms of international comparison of outcomes, Hungary scores slightly below average in PISA studies, while the rate of early school leavers is lower than the



EU average. Public expenditure on education in 2004 was 5.6 per cent of GDP, which is also slightly below the OECD average, though increasing (see OKI 2007; EC 2007c). The local authorities of settlements (or groups of settlements) are responsible for organising primary education, while secondary education is organised by the counties, and capital and tertiary education by the state. Public education institutions, operated by local government or other actors (churches, human service providers), receive a standard state subsidy for their students.

Primary education lasts for nine years and is organised within a single comprehensive school. Differentiation occurs at secondary level through three different pathways: the gymnasium offers general education and prepares for higher education; the vocational secondary schools combine general and vocational education, but also give access to higher education; and the vocational training schools (sometimes translated as “trade schools”) after two or three years provide vocational training certificates. Almost 100 per cent of pupils in each cohort progress to one of these forms of secondary education (OKI 2007, p. 48). Until recently, the first two years of secondary education were compulsory. Meanwhile, the school leaving age has been raised to 18 years in order to reduce early school leaving. This is not yet fully operative: the first cohort to be affected will be those currently in grade 7. Apart from this, it should be noted that Hungary is one of the European countries with the highest proportion of pupils taught in special schools (3.9 per cent in 2002-04; see Eurydice 2005, p. 130).

Altogether, the Hungarian education system can be depicted as rather selective, because differentiation occurs already during compulsory education while largely depending on the socio-economic background of the parents (cf. OKI 2007). Differentiation and selectivity have further increased since parents can choose autonomously the school for their children. Thereby, schools attended by children from poorer and Roma families risk becoming “ghetto schools” (NR, p. 35).

Vocational education and training (VET), whether by the school-based pathways in secondary education or non-school based options – mainly labour market training for unemployed job-seekers and tertiary vocational training (such as the university-based youth worker training) – is regulated by a National Register of Vocational Qualifications, which in principle allows for a modularised training. VET has only recently been restructured so that responsibility is now shared between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. While the former is responsible for the institutional aspects, the latter is responsible for adjusting the content to the demands of the labour market.

Labour-market entry

New labour-market policies were established after 1989 and have since been continually restructured and modernised to meet the requirements of the European Employment Strategy. Labour-market policies are administered on three levels: the National Social and Employment Office, seven regional employment offices and more than one hundred local job centres (see also NR, pp. 206-9). While the national level is responsible for setting the main direction, regional offices and local centres enjoy considerable freedom in applying and contextualising policy



instruments according to specific needs and demands. This includes particular vocational qualifications which can be developed with the local or regional economy.

With regard to unemployment, there are no specific benefit entitlements for young people unless they have been employed for at least one year. The Ministry explained the following procedure: if young job seekers register, there is first a period of guided job search in which they do not get any benefits; after this they are placed on training courses where they receive an allowance (about 120 euros per month). If they complete the course and remain unemployed, they are eligible for unemployment benefits which are at least 60 per cent of the minimum wage (156 euros per month). Apart from the unemployment benefit system, there are no individual social benefit entitlements but family benefits (see below).

A large share of labour-market policies and vocational training is funded through European structural funds which – as in many other central, eastern and southern European countries – play a key role in restructuring the system. If one compares expenditure on active labour-market policies (measures aimed at re-integrating the unemployed into the labour market) in the EU in 2004, Hungarian expenditure corresponded to 0.2 per cent of GDP, while the EU15 average lay at 0.6 per cent (no differentiation with regard to young people is available).

3.2.2. Recent developments and challenges in school-to-work transitions

Rather than focusing on the challenges to education and employment separately, it may be instructive to analyse developments in young people's school-to-work transition. It is important not to attribute current problems to the societal and economic "transition" from planned to market economy, but to recognise that the current process of individual transition to the labour market is much more complex than in the past. Inasmuch as markets, economies and nation-states are affected by Post-Fordist globalisation and flexibilisation, the "transition process" is blurred by moving targets such as the de-standardisation of life trajectories (cp. Laki 2007).

Youth unemployment

The present situation in Hungary is marked by a striking rise in the youth unemployment rate since 2001, a time when most EU countries and also new member states with extreme youth unemployment like Poland and Slovakia observed a clear decline. The unemployment rate for the 15- to 24-year-olds increased from 10.7 per cent in 2001 to 19.1 per cent in 2006, while total unemployment increased from 5.7 to 7.5 per cent (Eurostat – see Kailis and Pilos 2005). Asking for explanations we received answers under the following headings.

Economic development

While GDP growth rates increase steadily, some industrial sectors have started to leave the country, moving to cheaper production sites. It should be mentioned



that Hungary is one of the EU countries with the highest regional disparities in the labour market (EC 2007a, p. 28). Unemployment is concentrated in the eastern, northern and southern parts of the country. In the Northern Great Plain region, we were told of manufacturing firms which had left the region, reducing not only the number of work places but (significantly) jobs for the low-skilled workforce.

Employment rate

It was pointed out that employment is also increasing. Yet while the overall employment rate has risen from 56.1 per cent in 2001 to 57.3 per cent in 2006, this is not the case for those aged 15-24, where the employment rate dropped from 33.1 per cent to 21.7 per cent. One reason for this may be the rise in the age of retirement.

Higher education

Increased enrolment in higher education contributes to a decline in economically active young people, and thus the unemployment rate (the proportion of unemployed among the economically active) increases. However, the absolute numbers of unemployed youth (up from 51 800 to 64 100) and the youth unemployment ratio (proportion of unemployed among all 15- to 24-year-olds) have also increased.

Mismatch

The phenomenon of a lack of fit between education and employment, especially in foreign languages and ICT skills, is not specific to Hungary or transition economies, but an aspect of globalisation (cp. Castells 1999). Mismatch is also a factor in higher education, where many subjects are weakly linked to the labour market. However, the Ministry of Education did not see any legitimate possibility of channelling students into specific paths.

Mobility

Several respondents referred to the low spatial mobility of the Hungarian labour force both within and outside the country.

European Union statistics provide some insight into these patterns and issues – but they also raise further questions. For example, why is the increase in youth unemployment especially a female phenomenon? Between 2001 and 2006 there was a reverse in the gender distribution of youth unemployment: young women's unemployment rose from 9.5 to 19.8 per cent (in absolute numbers, from 19 600 to 28 800), while the unemployment rate for young men increased from 11.6 to 18.6 per cent (in absolute numbers, from 32 300 to 35 300; *Eurostat*).

Obviously, active labour-market policies are still struggling to get to grips with youth unemployment. The monitoring process of the European Employment Strategy since 2003 includes indicators of how many young unemployed have not benefited from preventative services (intensive counselling, job search assistance) or a new start (training, retraining, work experience, job, employability measure).



For Hungary, both indicators are at a rather high level and have increased since 2003 (EC 2007a, pp. 37-8).

None of those we spoke to on these issues seemed aware of these indicators or could give appropriate explanations. However, some individuals from the National Employment Office and a local job centre confirmed that staffing levels have been reduced – despite an increase in European funds.

Challenges in education

Most respondents associated transition problems and youth unemployment with disadvantaged young people, which generally means those with low skills (according to the director of the regional employment office in the Northern Great Plain region, 54 per cent of unemployed young job seekers do not have a secondary or vocational qualification) and Roma youth in particular (see also section 3.4). Therefore, problems in school-to-work transitions point to challenges within the education system, notably the following.

Early school leaving

Whereas more than 98 per cent of a cohort progress to secondary education, in 2006 only 82.9 per cent gained a secondary education certificate, which represented a slight decrease on recent years, though still above the EU average (EC 2007c, p. 58). Non-completion occurs especially in vocational training schools from which fewer students than expected progress into vocational secondary education. Although there has been a shift to general secondary education (the gymnasium) since the mid-1990s, vocational training schools are disproportionately attended by male students from lower social family backgrounds and smaller villages (NR, p. 37; OKI 2007, pp. 115-18).

Segregation

The National Report also points to increasing segregation in the education system. Pupils with a Roma background are more often concentrated in homogeneous classes. One reason is that students/parents have the right to choose in which school they enrol. This development is accompanied by a dynamic of increasing inequalities between schools with regard to teacher motivation, teaching quality, status and equipment. We had the opportunity to speak with teachers in a small village who confirmed that most Roma children actually managed to progress to secondary education. However, once there, the vast majority of them would very soon drop out. An even more acute aspect of ethnic school segregation is the over-representation of Roma pupils (one in five) among students who are diagnosed with special educational needs and are educated in special schools or in classes following special curricula (cp. OKI 2007, pp. 119-21). There they either do not get a qualification at all or it carries a strong stigma (see also section 3.4).

Poor fit

The noticeable increase in higher education reduces, but also postpones, competition at labour-market entry. Many respondents criticised the fact that studies were not fine-tuned to labour-market needs. It seems as if many students



use higher education primarily as a safeguard against being exposed to labour-market competition, the so-called “discouraged worker effect” (Walther and Pohl, 2005; NR, p. 38). Nevertheless, leavers from higher education appear to be affected less by unemployment.

Little awareness of non-formal learning

As in many other European contexts, the integration of formal and non-formal learning in a comprehensive lifelong learning policy is still more programmatic than implemented. In fact, apart from national policy makers and youth work trainers, the concept of non-formal learning seemed to be not widely known.

It seems, therefore, that the unfavourable development of the Hungarian labour market has two opposite effects: on the one hand, it weakens the motivation of those with lower school performance to continue in education and gain qualifications; on the other hand, more and more stay on in education without following specific career perspectives.

3.2.3. Current policy measures and reforms

The dysfunctional structures in the education system and the risks connected to limited labour-market entry of young people are high on the government agenda. A broad range of mid- and long-term reforms are under way, while measures have also been implemented to address current problems directly.

Education reform

In the education system the main declared aims are to close the gap between education and employment and to reduce selection and inequalities. This is to be achieved by modernising curricula and extending education at each end of the years of compulsory schooling.

Pre-school education is to be expanded,⁸ especially for children from disadvantaged families, to increase their chances of succeeding in primary school. However, to date, there is no significant increase in pre-school teachers and classes (OKI 2007, p. 52).

School curricula in foreign languages and ICT skills are to be modernised, though again with little evidence of progress in these directions so far (OKI 2007, pp. 81-2). While participation in Socrates and Leonardo exchange projects increases slowly but steadily, though still on a rather low level (Tempus 2007), the Ministry of Education would like to concentrate one school year on language learning. Reference was made to the need for modernising pedagogical culture and teaching methods towards a competence-based approach, especially in foreign language and ICT literacy. In addition a pilot programme already running aims at extending the competence approach to reading, mathematics and social skills. However,

8. According to clarifications of the Ministry after the national hearing, the Hungarian term translates as “nursery school care”, whereas the report *Education in Hungary* uses “pre-primary” and “pre-school” education (OKI 2007, p. 52).

a comprehensive system of measurement-assessment and quality management has only recently been introduced.

Increasing the compulsory school age to 18 will help to lower the proportion of early school leavers. However, we did not get clear responses on what will happen to those entering vocational training schools. The intention seems to be that they progress to vocational secondary education (OKI 2007, p. 56), but what about those who do not manage this transition?

The modernisation of VET is envisaged, first, by improving vocational training schools in terms of organising practical training in co-operation with market players in order to increase public recognition of this school type. Our questions on whether the system of vocational training schools should be seen as a dead end and consequently abolished were generally rebutted on the basis of the qualification needs of so-called disadvantaged youth. Second, regional integrated vocational training centres have been created in order to develop new qualifications and forms of training which meet the demands of the local economy. Training providers have been recruited through a tender programme. The process is backed by a joint responsibility for VET of the Ministries of Education and of Social Affairs and Labour (NR, p. 212). Third, the National Register of Vocational Qualifications has been reformed towards a more modularised and individualised approach (NR, p. 211; cp. OKI 2007, p. 50). We could not assess to what extent this has already been implemented and may lead to a flexibilisation of labour market entry. While modularisation is in line with an existing national lifelong learning strategy, the latter still does not reach out to accommodate informal and non-formal learning, at least not to the extent of including youth work as a relevant context and actor providing young people with soft skills. This might include also recognising voluntary work in youth work as work experience.

Reform measures addressing inequality and segregation in education and training consist, first, in scholarships for disadvantaged youth. The Provisions programme in 2006 supported more than 17 000 students with an average of 400 euros per year. Scholarships also constitute a major category of expenditure for local governments such as Karcag and Debrecen. Apart from family income, a key criterion of eligibility for scholarships is performance and talent. There has been criticism of the mismatch between national and local support measures, which are often not fine-tuned (NR, pp. 211-12). Second, the state offers textbook subsidy, free meals and help with public transport. This kind of support reaches a much higher proportion of pupils. In 2005 346 000 pupils paid a reduced fee for meals at school, and 717 900 (about 53 per cent) were eligible for free textbooks (EC 2007a, Annex 2.2; p. 42). Third, school financing mechanisms can be used in supporting schools which are predominantly attended by disadvantaged groups. In practice, however, local governments often allocate less funding to these schools. Together with the crowding-out effect resulting from free school choice (see above) this implies that the quality of schools with a higher share of disadvantaged youth continues to decline (cf. OKI 2007, p. 43). Fourth, some attempts are being made to counteract school segregation, such as monitoring how former catchment areas correspond to actual enrolment practices, supporting schools with a more



balanced recruitment of pupils, or even closing schools with a grossly unbalanced profile of students. Again, there were no tangible evaluation results available yet. Nor did we get an answer from any respondent at local and national level as to whether increased segregation might justify restricting free school choice. Fifth, also on the teaching level, measures have been taken to upgrade pedagogical programmes and introduce differentiated pedagogical methods.

Although the proportion of pupils taught in special schools is still high, since 2002 significant efforts and progress have been made in mainstreaming special needs education in normal schools. In 2005, 42 per cent of those with diagnosed disabilities were taught in the mainstream education system. However, apparently in many cases support is restricted to technical facilities rather than supporting specialised teaching. The Ministry has set up a commission to assess the potential abolition of the special school system (OKI 2007, p. 65; 120).

In sum, the main challenges facing the education and training system seem to have been identified and – at least at the programmatic level – addressed. However, we could not verify to what extent and in what way measures have been implemented and whether they produce the expected effects.

Active labour-market policies

Among active labour-market policies for young people, three seem most relevant: expanding the employment services, matching vocational training to market needs and improving the school-to-work transition.

The Public Employment Service, by opening new regional offices and local job centres, would potentially extend its reach to all job seekers (cp. EC 2007a).

For vocational training, there could be better co-ordination between education policies and labour-market policies at local level (see above). The number of regional training centres is to be increased and regional training networks established. Together with the modularised structure of the National Register of Vocational Qualifications, this may improve the fit between education and employment (NR, p. 212; OKI 2007, pp. 48-50; EC 2007a, p. 72). We cannot judge, however, to what extent this process has had any effect so far.

Several programmes address young people's school-to-work transition. One of the most important is the START programme for first-time job seekers. Companies who employ young job seekers benefit from a reduction in their social contributions (from 35 per cent to 15 per cent in the first year and 25 per cent in the second). Job seekers apply for a START card, which they present to employers when applying for jobs. Between October 2005 and December 2006, more than 44 000 cards were issued and more than 15 000 START card-holders employed (NR, pp. 206-9; EC 2007c). No information was available yet to determine to what extent these job seekers were employed additionally and how many replaced other employees, nor how many stayed in these jobs after the subsidy had run out (cp. Walther and Pohl 2005).

The programme One Step Ahead offers labour-market training for low-skilled job seekers. In 2006, 6 800 persons participated (EC 2007a, Annex 2.2, p. 28).



However, as the programme addresses low-skilled job seekers in general, no information is available on how many of these are young people and how many of them enter stable employment after completion of the training. Staff at a local labour office estimated that 50 per cent of job seekers participating in such schemes find a job subsequently, but only 15 per cent in the case of Roma youth.

Apart from national programmes, regional labour offices have the freedom to develop their own programmes and measures according to local needs. Although largely positive in their comments on the use of programmes and on their collaboration with the labour office (perhaps influenced by the presence of representatives of the labour office and job centre), representatives of training providers criticised a lack of flexibility, especially with regard to the participation of Roma job seekers (see also section 3.4). We also gained the impression that participants in schemes are selected by the labour office rather than choosing to attend individually. The motivation problems of job seekers, which were often referred to, can be explained by such a procedure (Walther 2007). While there are some programmes addressing self-employment and enterprise creation, we did not get sufficient information on whether regional economic development pays sufficient attention to economic sectors which contribute to a balanced social structure.

Recommendations

In general, we want to conclude with encouraging the actors involved to continue reform policies, in that the most critical aspects seem to have been identified. However, the division of responsibilities between national and local levels does not always seem to be clear, priorities may need to be fixed where policy objectives are in contradiction, and budgets need to be reviewed to ensure they are sufficient to make a difference. In particular, we advance the following recommendations:

- *Strengthen the fight against school segregation, even if this means restricting free school choice.*
- *Counteract the impact of social inequality and poverty on school performance and qualification level by widening access to scholarship programmes, especially by loosening the eligibility criterion for “talent”; debate should take place whether vocational training schools ought to be closed because they reinforce inequalities rather than reducing the mismatch.*
- *Recognise non-formal learning, so that especially disadvantaged young people pursue positive learning experiences and get better access to the labour market at the same time. Integrate formal and non-formal learning, both inside schools and through co-operation between schools, training and youth work. Voluntary work might be rewarded by easier access to relevant higher education and training, and programmes for unemployed young people might extend to youth work by providing work experience or voluntary work in the youth sector.*



- *Modernise VET by involving more economic actors, but also by building bridges between school-based and out-of-school training (in both directions) in the sense of a lifelong learning policy whereby individuals can build up individual learning biographies which are recognised by the labour market and the education system.*
- *Develop counselling of job seekers in the direction of biographical life planning, giving young job seekers the chance to choose between different offers of orientation, training or work experience to allow for identification and motivation.*
- *Include mobile provision of professional orientation, counselling and support.*
- *Flexibilise regulations of access to orientation, training and work experience offers, to facilitate integration of the transition to work with other biographical and social obligations.*
- *Improve the evaluation of education, training and labour-market policies, by including longitudinal and qualitative methods to deepen our knowledge of the effects of investment in matching education and training to individual biographies and local labour markets.*
- *Integrate labour-market policies and regional economic growth to develop the local economy by support for self-employment, enterprise creation and public employment, rather than prioritising volatile external investment. There is a need to combine incentives for enterprise creation with provision for training and activation.*

Arguably, the policy fields of education, training and labour-market guidance need a significant rise in funding. This may be partly achieved by better use of EU structural funds and rebalancing priorities.

-----> **3.3. Other relevant dimensions and domains of youth policy**

In the following subsections, we will deal with a range of policy domains that are equally important with regard to young people, but have been less central during our visits. We briefly document our impressions regarding Health, Justice and Child Welfare. It should be noted that we do not claim that this is a complete list of youth relevant policy domains. The selection is determined by the persons we met and the information we received.

3.3.1. Health, health promotion and risk-prevention work

Youth policy understood in its horizontal approach also has to take the health situation of young people into consideration, especially ways to promote health and how to manage health provision – both in accordance with health policy.



Health policy for young people is developed through co-operation between three ministries: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and the Ministry of Health. In the Ministry of Health there is no special department for youth health policy, but a background institute – the National Institute for Child Health – is in charge of commenting, suggesting and developing methodological guidelines. The Ministry mainly co-ordinates and harmonises the work. The department for youth policy in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has no direct impact on health issues, but the Ministry’s responsibilities include drugs policy and prevention of drug abuse. The Ministry of Education co-operates with the Ministry of Health about the school health-care system.

There is an elaborate health-care and protection system for children and adolescents up to the age of 18, but no comparable system exists for (young) adults, which creates a challenge in the transition to adulthood. Primary, secondary and tertiary care are organised at municipality level. Primary prevention for children is provided mainly through health visitors (for families, pregnant women and children up to the age of 6) and the school health system, but there is considerable variation in the ratio of paediatricians to children in different regions. Most of the human resources in school health are not engaged full-time in this system, but do their work in school alongside other professional health responsibilities. Important actors in the field of primary health care are general practitioners, among them the family paediatricians.⁹ The health-protection system for adolescents focuses on specific diseases that have shown a strong increase in the last decade. These are connected to orthopaedic problems, eating disorders (obesity, anorexia), allergies, nutrition and mental health. For this reason a multidisciplinary outpatient clinic model was established in 2006.

The main risk factors for the health of young people are seen as alcohol and tobacco use. This is confirmed by the WHO’s Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) studies that show an early average starting age for alcohol (~14) and tobacco (~13.5) among young people in Hungary. Illegal drug use is also considered as a problem for youth health, but not to such a degree as “legal” drugs. Nutrition behaviour and inactivity are also considered factors that have to be addressed in order to improve the health of young people. HIV/AIDS is in Hungary not a considerable problem for children and adolescents: overall there are about 1 000 cases of AIDS registered in Hungary, and estimates of HIV prevalence put the figure at about three times more. Reports from paediatricians suggest that fewer than 100 cases of HIV/AIDS exist in the population of children and adolescents – and most of these cases are “imported” rather than transmitted within the country. Other sexually transmitted infections, however, have increased recently though they are still not (yet) so numerous as to be considered problematic.

9. Following the national hearing in Budapest on 13 February 2008, we received information that three quarters of children aged 0-14 and half the adolescents aged 14-18 receive their primary care from paediatric specialists.



National programmes to improve adolescents' health have started recently; they focus mainly on the above risk factors. The National Programme for Infants and Child Health aims, among other things, to improve the school health system by increasing the number of people working in it and by improving teachers' health-care skills. The Programme also recognises the need for significant improvement in health education in schools, especially in vocational schools.

Within the framework of the national strategy "Making Things Better for Our Children" (Parliament 2007a), the main focus lies on breaking the cycle of poverty by a policy of fighting disadvantage. Measures in this field include updated health information, attitude forming, and supporting people with disadvantages. A quality improvement of public food supply is also part of the health-promotion policy.

The National Public Health Programme also highlights nutrition and aims to improve the food quality in school canteens, where unhealthy food and drinks are not allowed any more. Every school now has to have a health plan, the catering in schools is inspected by public health authorities and new meals have first to be approved. These measures are commendable but expensive, and in the end parents have to cover the additional costs.

In the field of health-risk prevention, drug abuse – of legal as well as of illegal drugs – is the most tackled topic, whereas the problem of accidents is more or less neglected. Yet, given mortality rates and injuries through traffic accidents, this theme will also become a main field for prevention work in the future.

On the question of drug use, there is reasonable co-ordination between the different ministries responsible. A drug co-ordination committee exists, co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Health, which involves different ministries and NGOs. At the local level, there are drug reconciliation groups involving all competent actors, such as doctors and health visitors.

After the change of regime the problems connected with drugs and drug misuse became more visible. The lifetime prevalence rate of drug use has doubled since the 1990s, and the use of cannabis is especially high. Experts in Debrecen also reported that the use of amphetamines is rising, though the use of hard drugs like opiates does not appear to be a significant problem. It was stated, however, that nowadays a young person in secondary school could get any drug without any problems. These developments have clearly required new policy measures and, since 2000, there has been a national strategy to combat drug misuse. This is based on four pillars: treatment, prevention, decrease of supply and the commitment to co-operation at local level to meet specific needs. As a result, local action plans are developed and implemented through local forums.

Drug ambulances and health centres that are low-threshold have been established for drug addicts. A drug-abuse outreach service also exists, but only 35 per cent of the assumed number of drug abusers have attended it. Nevertheless, there are commitments to persevere with a low-threshold approach for young people, to



motivate those struggling with problems and to escalate them to services of higher level. In general, the health sector would be the last place a young drug abuser turns to; hence the focus has to be on training health professionals, making them more open and able to provide early intervention. The National Addiction Institute is developing new forms of services to meet the specific needs of different groups at risk. For example, the development of cannabis outpatient care is planned.

Other institutions, such as churches, are involved in drug prevention as well, and there are special tenders for NGOs to develop projects for prevention work, like thematic camps or youth festivals. Many of these prevention programmes take account of the influence of lifestyle and behaviour on drug abuse. Nevertheless the co-operation with youth NGOs in this field could be strengthened. Harm reduction is an approach in prevention work that has only recently been implemented.

As discussion with members of the Drug Reconciliation Forum in Debrecen indicated, primary prevention in this field is as much needed as secondary and tertiary prevention. The approach of members of the Drug Reconciliation Forum is to work with schools to reach as many young people as possible for primary preventative measures. Its members also do information and prevention work at (youth culture) festivals. The Forum's prevention work is not restricted to drug prevention but also covers HIV prevention, crime prevention and a youth telephone helpline.

The telephone helpline is run as a peer-education project: 40 young people, working in the organisation voluntarily, deal with about 8 000 calls per year. The most important themes mentioned by the young callers are love, drugs, school, family and crisis. This again emphasises the importance of youth health-policy measures in the field of mental health.

Recommendations

The developments in the health sector showed very promising approaches both in health care and in prevention of health risk, yet there is potential for improvement:

- *Too many separate actions are not co-ordinated in any structured way. It seems important to develop a health strategy for young people that takes possible actors and partners into account. Co-operation between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education should increase, following the example of the drug-prevention working group.*
- *There is also a need to strengthen co-operation with youth organisations and other relevant NGOs in the field of prevention, harm reduction, risk competencies and health promotion. Here the co-ordination of information, training of staff members, methodology and implementation should be addressed. The involvement of schools in health promotion should not be narrowed; the role of health visitors and teachers in schools remains central.*



- *To develop targeted as well as integrated approaches to health promotion and risk prevention, more research on the health situation of young people is needed, including minorities and less advantaged youth. In this regard, reliable methods of assessing young people’s health condition are important, combining objective data on health and subjective data on well-being.*

3.3.2. Youth justice

The international review team learned about criminal behaviour and administration of justice in relation to young people in three contexts: a meeting with the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, a visit to a prison which had a dedicated section for young offenders, and dialogue with a police officer responsible for local youth crime prevention.

All indications suggest that, in its approach to youth justice, Hungary is moving in a purposeful and positive direction, through it is predictably limited in the pace of progress by scarce financial and human resources. The age of criminal responsibility is 14. Below this age, those who break the law are dealt with by the child-welfare system. Above this age, however, there is no specific provision for young offenders, except in terms of some detail around probation intervention and in terms of separation from adults during imprisonment.¹⁰ There are, however, current moves to amend the Hungarian Penal Code to enable separate structures and procedures for juvenile offenders aged 14 to 18. One intention – among others¹¹ – is to establish a separate law enforcement agency for juveniles.

A commitment to crime prevention was made in 2003, at the same time as a reform of the probation service. There is now a crime prevention commission, which is an inter-ministerial committee. This can be obliged to appear before parliamentary committees. Its focus has been on the development of practices of early intervention, based on a capacity to “sound the alarm” and “spot the warning signs” when young people first come to the attention of the police. Though there

10. Though these were the impressions gained by the review team during the visits, the Hungarian authorities, namely the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, wished to emphasise that the Hungarian Penal Code deals with the criminal law of juvenile offenders (aged 14 to 18) in a dedicated chapter.

11. Following the national hearing in Budapest on 13 February 2008, we received clarification that the intention of the reform is indeed to establish an independent criminal justice system for juveniles: “The reform aims to set up an independent public prosecutor’s office and court for juveniles, and to strengthen the independence of the juvenile penitentiary organisation, already independent in part. The actual key content motive of the reform, however, goes way beyond the reorganisation of institutions. Its essence is to merge the specialist knowledge and experience of various professions dealing with the prevention and handling of children and juveniles becoming criminals and victims, to create conditions for flexible criminal law interventions corresponding to the situation” (comment of the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement on the draft version of this report).



are concerns about worsening levels of youth crime – which is mainly property and other acquisitive crime, judging by consistent statements made to the review team on various occasions that this constitutes about 80 per cent of all youth crime – there is a desire within the administration to depict offenders as more troubled than troublesome, and to attribute their offending behaviour to family and social background. Hence the priority given to preventative practice and, within that, to young people who break the law.

Beyond supervision work, the probation service is concerned with reintegration, reparation, mediation and, increasingly, processes of restorative justice. The review team learned that the budget to support community crime prevention amounts to some 9 billion HUF, of which about one third is directed at young offenders, to finance programmes such as victim support and projects in schools.¹² There has been an evolving crime prevention service in Hungary since 1990 and we were told – and impressed – that there is a “youth route” in police training that allows those trained in social pedagogy/teaching to undertake fast-track training at the police academy to join the police. It was conceded that those police officers who work in the crime prevention service are the most “civil” part of the police: they do not investigate or detect crime, but instead research and seek to understand local profiles of youth crime in order to develop an appropriate preventative response.

There are four custodial locations for young offenders,¹³ accommodating some 700 young people aged 14-21, typically serving sentences of three to four years or more (usually for offences including robbery and violence). Inevitably, we were told that the regime is designed to ensure that “these offenders never come back” but – throughout the world – it is well known that reconviction rates after custodial sentences remain stubbornly high, even when the custodial regime is of a decent standard. It was clear that the standard of incarceration, even of young people, left much to be desired – in physical conditions, staff ratios and relationships, and programmes of activity. Nevertheless, from the institution visited by members of the international review team, it was equally clear that there was deep interest in adapting and improving the quality of the prison experience, not least by enhanced education.

Indeed, of the 140 or so young people imprisoned at the time of our visit, some 100 were engaged in education, either by compulsion (being of school age) or choice. The education block has recently been painted, there is a computer room with 15 Daewoo computers and those in learning have been allocated to four separate classes based on an assessment of their education levels. They are expected to be learning for at least six hours a day, and there are plans for a dedicated

12. In fact this money comes from EU funds distributed over a seven-year period, as the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement sought to clarify.

13. These are prisons. Prison authorities are still managed by military structures and the staff hold military ranks. However, many delinquent young people are held in corrective educational institutions managed by the public administration and supervised by educators, but the international review team did not learn any more detail about these.



education team as well as more vocational training through measures such as a farming scheme. The Commander of the prison was clearly eager to occupy his charges through education, employment and recreational activity: “The more we keep them busy, the less harm they will do!”

These are commendable initiatives, but we were concerned about a number of issues. Though the ratio of teachers to young prisoners is, at 25/30:1, very favourable compared to the “ordinary” position in Hungary (70:1), the ratio of custody officers to the young people is very low. On each of the two landings, there are just five staff, including the supervisor. This does not allow for much more than surveillance and containment, rather than the development of any more productive engagement and relationships. This is particularly of concern as many young prisoners rarely receive visits from their families: the distances are too great and there is no framework of assistance.

The other matter was the extent to which Roma young people were disproportionately represented in the prison system and, indeed, in the criminal justice system. As in other youth policy areas where this issue was explored, we were told that the prison was not allowed to keep registration data on the ethnic composition of young people. It was argued, perhaps rather disingenuously, that “ethnic minorities are a minority here: it is absolutely mixed, just like anywhere else”. From what we saw, this argument was not convincing. In other countries, the disproportionate presence of certain minority ethnic groups inside the criminal justice system has produced careful reflection and scrutiny: to establish the balance between possible systemic discrimination and the greater propensity of those from more disadvantaged communities (including ethnic communities) to break the law.

Recommendations

In conclusion, there is much that is encouraging and already operational within the embryonic “youth justice” system. The move towards further separation of provision for 14- to 18-year-olds is also to be commended. There are glimpses of progress and development in custodial regimes, though these are clearly still under-resourced in their infrastructure, staffing and capacity to improve visiting and family support. Nevertheless, small steps in the right direction have been taken and more are being considered. There are some immediate issues that might be addressed:

- *Exploring the possibility of support from a charitable foundation for improving learning infrastructure in the education block.*
- *Experimentation with a “personal officer scheme”, whereby officers are given dedicated responsibility for a group of young people: to help maintain contact with families, to support release or to support “moving on” and transition to the adult prison system.*



- *Analysing the ethnic composition of young people in prison, and more broadly in the criminal justice system, to see whether similar situations result from different offending profiles and histories.*
- *Connection to leisure-time and non-formal educational programmes in the community to give young people in the early stages of their offending careers the opportunity to consider more positive and purposeful directions in their lives.*

3.3.3. Children’s rights and the child welfare system

Children’s rights

Hungary ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. Since then, Hungary has submitted the required periodic reports on implementation of the Convention’s principles in 1991, 1996 and 2003, and a defence of its reports in 1998 and 2003. The next report will be prepared for 2012. The reports were welcomed by the UN Committee as very critically describing the real situation in Hungary and being therefore a usable basis for development. Ensuing legislation has led to a wide-ranging system of child and youth welfare being established. Since then, there has been a major effort to promote the best interests of children and young people by all available means.

There is one ombudsman responsible for scrutiny and enforcement of children’s rights. Beyond this office, two institutions have been set up to enforce and protect the rights of children and young people in particular fields: education and child protection services.

The education ombudsman and its office was established in the Ministry of Education in 1999 for the education-related protection of the rights of students and pupils, professors, teachers and parents. Its task is to deal with school-related problems, like violence or injustice in schools. In the beginning parents were the biggest client group, but 70 per cent of complaints are now from children. Recently the increase and change in physical violent behaviour is seen as the biggest problem. To inform pupils about this office, it moves three days a year to each region and holds information events where young students are involved as counsellors. Every student can receive information on the existence of the institution and on the help line, which can be reached by dialling the “green number”, through which they can contact the office. In some schools child protection administrators provide information about this issue, but it is not an obligation for schools to do this. Nevertheless, such deeper information is clearly needed since experts we met during our visits reported statistics on violence in families, saying that several thousand children are abused.

Child-protection system

Child protection overlaps with youth policy in several respects: first, those between 10 and 18 are covered by both child and youth policies, and in fact the



de-standardisation of youth biographies suggests that boundaries are more and more blurred; second, some key aspects of youth policy such as non-formal learning should be seen as relevant also in child welfare, while some young people over 18 might need child welfare services. The Child Welfare Act was adopted 10 years ago and is based on the principle that children and youth form a resource rather than a problem. In general the target group of the law is children and young people up to 18 years of age, with possibilities for further action for the age group 18-24 when leaving foster families or child institutions.

The department for child and youth protection, located in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, is not only responsible for child and youth protection, but understands itself as a guarding and guiding authority for implementing the rights of children. The implementation of measures of child welfare is, in contrast to youth work, a mandatory task of the local authority in each settlement, though the requirements are drafted at national level.

The main concerns of the department are the child welfare system, a child protection system and support for families, and the implementation of international agreements. Of the welfare system, the review team got the impression that a well-grown network of institutions can take care of a high number of children in Hungary. About 10 per cent (200 000) of children receive help from the child welfare system. There are 5 000 foster families, and 500 homes and other institutions for children, in addition to toddler schools and temporary homes for children and families.

In the field of safeguarding, the responsibility of the department is not only child protection but support for families, via assistance to parents and children, for instance, but also via basic financial support for families in need. Moreover, young adults coming from foster homes are given financial support to help them set up an independent existence, up to a maximum per individual of over 1.5 million HUF (about 6 000 euros) per annum. Beyond that, there is a signalling system (municipalities must provide information on precarious living conditions of young people, to social work and guardianship authorities) to get information early enough to help families, and especially children and young people, with special measures.

Child protection is arguably a measure to help all children and young people to have equal opportunities; removal from families is invariably for reasons of abuse or neglect that clearly, at minimum, would impair individual development and, at worst, might threaten life.

One problem that was routinely identified by our respondents was the lack of a consistent and integrated child policy: only policies on special issues exist (child poverty, child health), and there is not even an action plan for implementation of the UN Convention. Another very challenging task is to get all the institutions involved to act more from a sense of the child's rights – and less in the interest of the institution itself.



As mentioned above, for children who use child protection services, an independent representative for their rights does exist: the Public Foundation for Child Law. If children are taken away from their families, a representative of this foundation is present at the forum where the decision is taken, to check the legitimacy of the action. Another task of the foundation is to represent before a court those children in institutions or whose parents are not able to represent them.

Recommendations

The department for child welfare is in charge of the implementation of children's rights, co-ordinates support of children in need, and is also responsible for child protection. The different measures established in these fields – good and valuable as they are – seem not to be as well adjusted and supportive of each other as they could be. We recommend therefore:

- *Draft a strategy of how the involved institutions can stay in contact and support each other.*
- *The target group needs to be given further information directly, on the rights of children, their protection and the institutions and organisations concerned.*
- *The issue of violence in schools needs further consideration: on the one hand, the existing function of the Ombudsman's office and the green telephone line need further publicity, but on the other hand preventative interventions should be developed (e.g. focused on issues such as emotions and affective education, empathy and communication).*

3.4. Cross-cutting issues

In this section we want to deal with some cross-cutting issues which cannot be restricted to a single policy domain, but affect young people across a broad range of policy areas: first, poverty and social policies related to poverty; second, diversity, equal opportunities and discrimination – especially with regard to the Roma; and third, participation and citizenship of young people.

3.4.1. Combating poverty of families and children

In 2007, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a national strategy called “Making Things Better for Our Children”, which acknowledged that the problem of poverty was particularly concentrated and acute for children. Indeed, in 2004, although 14 per cent (below the EU average of 18 per cent) of all households in Hungary had an income lower than 60 per cent of the median income, 19 per cent of households with children and 36 per cent of those with three children or more were in this situation (Parliament 2007a, Table 1; NR, p. 87). The Central Statistical Office's poverty line corresponds to the minimum pension level and affects 28 per cent of



households. Considering the fact that GDP per head is only 65 per cent (in terms of purchasing power) of the EU average, and social expenditure at 21.6 per cent of GDP is also clearly below the EU average, one should take the Statistical Office's definition seriously – for, if average income is low, a relative poverty line may distort the picture considerably.

The national report supports such a view in two respects: first, it refers to the measurement of welfare-deficit indices, which are a more complex indicator of quality of life than income poverty, and by this measurement many more families are affected, but again those with more children are affected more (NR, p. 93); second, it refers to survey results that show a majority of young people aged 15-29 think they are worse off since the regime change (NR, p. 28).

One key factor in the structure of poverty is regional disadvantage, which means disparities between economically strong and weak regions (basically the West against the rest of the country) and disparities between urban and rural areas (see also section 3.2). In fact, GDP per capita in Budapest is more than three times higher than GDP per capita in the least developed county – Nógrád, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (NR, p. 20). Furthermore, the phenomenon of poverty is connected to disadvantage resulting from ethnic origin, inasmuch as members of the Roma minority are particularly affected by poverty (see below).

What are the structures and measures intended to combat poverty? The main documented reform in family policy is the restructuring of various monetary subsidies – individual social assistance, means-tested child-protection benefits and tax relief for families with children – into a single family-allowance system, based on household units rather than individuals. Parents staying at home to care for children under the age of 3 are entitled to benefits equivalent to the minimum pension level of (about) 107 euros. Apart from this newly established system, there exists a universal, tax-funded child allowance which differentiates between number of children and family status (a slightly higher amount in one-parent families). The minimum rate is 47 euros for a two-parent family with one child (MISSOC 2007, pp. 83-92). Services in kind concern subsidised meals and free textbooks in school, but with different thresholds of eligibility. In 2005, 346 000 pupils paid a reduced fee for meals at school, and 717 900 (about 53 per cent) were eligible for free textbooks (EC 2007a, Annex 2.2; p. 42).

One focus of the current awareness of poverty is the inheritance of poverty in education. The national strategy acknowledges that in 86 per cent of poor families the head of household has less than secondary education, while at the same time poverty is a strong predictor for the next generation's underachievement in school (Parliament 2007a, Table 2; cp. OKI 2007, p. 116). However, if one compares these numbers with the number of scholarships for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (see section 3.2), these appear to be rather negligible. In fact, the criteria of eligibility in local and national programmes still seem to focus as much on promoting talent as on reducing inequality.

The national strategy is not a single operational programme, but a cross-sectoral outline for policy development. It sets out a more comprehensive and long-term



approach (until 2032), addressing families with children through six key priorities: employment, income, housing, education, services and health. In each of these areas, policy recommendations are made and connected to indicators for potential monitoring (Parliament 2007a).

The special attention paid to families with children is also reflected in the specific role of the Association of Large Families, an NGO founded in 1987, based in 300 settlements and six regional centres, and representing 15 000 member families. It serves as a lobby group for families with (at least three) children, especially poor ones, while at the same time providing services such as the redistribution of food (in collaboration with the World Bank), legal assistance, and camps and excursions for children and families, but also organising self-help at local level. Another central mission is the promotion of family values. In many of our encounters – with policy makers, but also with other NGO representatives – the association was mentioned as one of the most important actors and partners in social policy measures. Recently, a youth branch has been founded, which combines specific leisure activities with recruiting and training peer leaders. Peer activities include drug prevention. Another activity in this area is the dissemination of Council of Europe materials on youth participation and the establishment of youth centres. From our limited information and contact, we got an ambivalent impression, varying between the positive orientation to youth issues of a traditional family NGO and a somewhat paternalistic approach towards young people.

In sum, it is obvious that the focus on poverty relates to families and children, but not to other young people, despite the fact that the poverty rate in the 16-24 age group is about 17 per cent and thus above the average (OKI 2007, p. 14). Where reference is made to poverty and youth, it is rather that current disadvantage in the school-to-work transition is explained by poverty-related deficits in childhood – but not to their current life situation. While this implies that important aspects of young people’s lives and life chances are being neglected, it corresponds to and reflects the lack of a youth perspective in Hungarian society and politics.

In the relationship between regional disparities and youth policy development, the focus lies on regionalising youth policy and youth work rather than on promoting equal opportunities through youth policy. This would require a redistribution of resources and positive action on infrastructure development, but policies have so far been limited to subsidies for single activities or talented pupils, through the tender system mentioned earlier (see section 3.1).

At the same time, the focus on children and families contributes to a distinction between the “deserving” poor (especially large families) and the “undeserving” poor (individuals of working age). Current trends in social policies (not only in Hungary) may be interpreted as simultaneously activating individuals and re-moralising the family (see Goul Andersen et al., 2005). The family becomes crucial for inter-generational reproduction (declining fertility rates, imbalanced pension systems) and for the generation of human capital, and it is more and more used to buffer the curtailment of individual welfare rights.



Recommendations

Although poverty is being addressed by policy measures from a youth policy perspective, some recommendations can be made:

- *Decouple the close connection between combating poverty and family policy, to strengthen young people’s individual autonomy and reduce problems resulting from compromising between education and training on the one hand and subsistence needs and family obligations on the other. International comparison shows that individual welfare entitlements for young people in the transition from school to work, as in the Nordic countries, lead to earlier economic independence.*
- *Individual welfare entitlements may serve as an incentive to get in contact with job centres, though they should not be used as sanctions if young people do not accept existing job offers or training measures; the objectives of welfare should be autonomy, self-esteem to engage in the transition to work, and trust in public institutions.*
- *Add poverty to the agenda of youth information, in both directions: assisting young people in getting access to resources for independent living, but also informing policies on aspects of poverty among young people, using data emerging from their requests for advice.*

3.4.2. Diversity, equal opportunities and discrimination: the case of Roma youth

As mentioned already, the issue of poverty is very often related to the Roma minority, whose situation can be addressed in terms of disadvantage but also in terms of discrimination or even racism (cp. EC 2004b). Unfortunately, we did not manage to meet representatives of the Roma community directly during either of our visits, so our opinion has been formed by discussion with non-Roma respondents and by international publications on relevant issues.

The disadvantage of the Roma population can be traced through virtually all policy domains. While the National Roma Strategy refers to (un)employment, education, housing and health as prime objectives (Parliament 2007b), one may add recognition as a more general and fundamental principle which requires more reflection, attention and political enforcement. Recognition – according to contemporary debates on diversity (see Titley 2004) – requires striking the balance between identifying, naming and addressing ethnic inequalities and discrimination, and simultaneously addressing the population in question as individuals and citizens with equal rights. The dilemma of recognition appears immediately at the level of simply raising the Roma issue for – officially, in Hungary – there is no ultimate means of identifying a person as Roma. The legal restriction to self-definition reflects the history of stigmatisation and discrimination experienced by the Roma; but it also restricts the possibility of addressing their needs in a targeted way.



Statistically, the microcensus of 2001 shows a population of about 190 000 Roma, which would be less than 2 per cent of the whole Hungarian population. However, individuals are not obliged to identify themselves as Roma; and many people, for various reasons, typically fear of stigmatisation, prefer not to do so. According to estimates based on social surveys and school statistics, the Roma population is between 600 000 and 800 000. School statistics, however, suggest a much greater figure. Here an environmental approach is applied, rather than self-reporting: reliance is placed on teachers as a source of information and their way of ascribing pupils and students as being Roma (Babusik 2004). According to this methodology, 11 per cent of children of school-leaving age in 1999 were Roma (OKI 2007, p. 119).

On the level of policy discourse, however, this approach is rejected for denying the right to personal data protection. As a result, there is no reliable knowledge base to develop targeted policies. A report for the EU's Social Inclusion Strategy criticises governments for this interpretation of personal data protection as undermining policies for equal opportunities. According to the EU data protection directive, there is no restriction on gathering aggregate data on distinct groups (see EC 2004b). Hungarian policy makers, including the Roma unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, explained that the dilemma is dealt with by addressing disadvantaged areas – which are likely to coincide with disadvantage from ethnic background – rather than specific groups or individuals. This ambiguity in dealing with the Roma issue needs to be kept in mind when discussing the life situation and life chances of young Roma.¹⁴

Describing the Roma situation is difficult, in that their disadvantage seems to have accumulated like a vicious circle, where the origin and fundamental cause cannot readily be identified. Health and housing, education and employment, discrimination and poverty all work together in usually negative relationships while also giving way to sub-cultural coping strategies. An interesting point, however, is that various analysts refer to a deterioration in the situation and circumstances of the Roma since 1989 (Babusik 2004; Kertesi and Kézdi 2005). This is mainly due to the breakdown of manufacturing industry, where most Roma were employed as unskilled workers. When these Roma returned to the Northern and Eastern regions, the better-off (non-Roma) families in these settlements moved to the bigger cities and/or richer regions, leaving the Roma more or less among themselves.

Nowadays the majority of Roma live in small settlements in those parts of the country which – as has been shown above – are affected more than the average by economic decline, poverty and lack of infrastructure. At present, the Roma can be

14. This was repeated as a comment to the draft international report. In fact, the situation of the Roma is seen primarily as one of social disadvantage, though there is a consensus that the Roma face also ethnic discrimination. However, the department for the integration of the Roma (in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour) prioritises addressing these issues separately by social policy measures on the one hand and anti-discrimination legislation on the other.



seen as the most disadvantaged group in the labour market: in some settlements, hardly any inhabitant of working age is regularly employed. The Parliament Resolution (68/2007) on the Roma Inclusion Strategy is based on the estimate that fewer than one third of Roma men and one sixth of Roma women between 15 and 64 had income from regular work, while undeclared, informal work plays a major role, though this is as yet not quantified (Parliament 2007b, Annex, p. 1; cf. Kertesi and Kézdi, 2005). This deterioration in employment is reflected by an increase in poverty. In 2003, 80 per cent of the Roma lived below the poverty line (OKI 2007, p. 16; cf. EC 2004b).

This means that Roma people are affected by all the detrimental consequences of poverty, such as bad health (reflected by life expectancy 10 years below average; cp. Parliament 2007b, Annex, p. 1), bad housing conditions and low education. However, before dealing in more detail with education, another important factor needs to be addressed: poverty is accompanied and reinforced by segregation. Not only are the Roma concentrated in poorer regions, but more and more live in isolation from the wider society, which is reflected by lack of access to services and infrastructure including public transport to the nearest larger town (NR, p. 144). This increasing segregation reflects the fact that the Roma are also confronted with discrimination and racism from at least some proportion of the wider society. According to a recent survey, only a minority of the total population sees the integration of the Roma as advantageous for the whole of Hungarian society (OKI 2007, pp. 129-30).

That integration seems less likely today than one or two decades ago is also visible in education. On the one hand the attendance and success of Roma children in school, especially in secondary education, declines with age. About 42 per cent of Roma children attend kindergarten,¹⁵ almost 90 per cent get the school-leaving certificate from primary school (compulsory education), but only about 5 per cent achieve the secondary education certificate. This is because the majority enter vocational training schools, which do not lead to any recognised school-leaving certificate. Many of them also drop out before the end of the course (NR, p. 146; OKI 2007, p. 119; Parliament 2007b, Annex, p. 1). Kertesi and Kézdi (2005) explain the widening ethnic gap in schooling (between Roma children and others, in the transformation process) by the increased unemployment and poverty in Roma families, thereby arguing against ethnic and cultural ascriptions of disadvantage of Roma children.

In fact, primary teachers and the mayor of a small village in the eastern part of the country explained to us during a meeting that in fact all Roma children completed primary school and progressed to secondary education (a vocational training school), which however was not in the village itself but in one of the nearby towns (10-20 km away). Once there, however, they would “of course” drop out very soon – the girls becoming pregnant and marrying (and thus becoming eligible

15. We received correspondence conveying a very different perspective, suggesting that a significant number of Roma children were denied access to kindergarten education and that “infrequent attendance was a widespread problem among the poorest Roma children”.



for social or family benefits), the boys “doing nothing”, which was generally a euphemism for either working in the informal economy or engaging in criminal activities, or both. According to the representative of the Roma unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour such assumptions are half true and half stereotypical prejudices. We were provided with survey data indicating that the birth rate of Roma women between 15 and 19 years of age is six times higher than that of the total female age group, although slight decreases in recent years can be observed (Kemeny et al. 2004).

There were some explanations why certain labour-market policy measures fail to reach and include Roma in moving into regular employment. A first point was raised by a worker in an NGO providing pre-vocational education and training for unemployed job seekers, with half of the participants coming from a Roma background. According to her, the young Roma she had met actually were keen to enter the labour market in proper jobs. However, she explained that the integration programmes were not flexible enough to allow any compromise between the Roma way of life and the logic of the policy measures. For example, young males tend to appear in and participate in groups where there is a need to convince the group leader, and this implies a specific pedagogical approach. Another example was young Roma with partners and/or children who need space and facilities while they are engaged in the training process.

Not only labour-market policies but also education measures are characterised by the attempt to “educate” Roma in the Hungarian culture and way of life, rather than think in terms of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Although Roma culture has been included in the mainstream school curriculum, there are no links between such initiatives and other measures of inclusion. We found little evidence of a willingness to share resources and opportunities, while at the same time respecting different cultural norms and practices. For example, reference was made to assistance for Roma self-employment. At the same time such measures seemed not to be linked up with strategies of regional economic development, which is dominated by industrial parks to attract foreign investment. In fact, we never heard of regional development plans that focused on sectors, branches and professions that would be open to Roma, nor that Roma representatives were involved in drafting such plans.

These examples show that, apart from the poverty cycle undermining educational ambitions, the Roma face active discrimination. This is reinforced by segregation in a number of senses. First, the right to a free choice of school has led to an increase in so-called “ghetto schools” in which classes are formed exclusively or almost exclusively of Roma children, while a low proportion of Roma is the prime factor for non-Roma parents when choosing schools outside the catchment area for their children. In fact, since the mid-1990s there has been a growing number of such homogeneous schools – both Roma and non-Roma (NR, p. 146; OKI 2007, pp. 129-30). In schools with a majority of Roma, not only is the turnover among teachers higher, contributing to a decline in teaching quality, but also local governments seem unwilling to invest appropriately in these schools to prevent this decline. In many cases, local governments even renounce the national funding



reserved for school development. According to the Ministry of Education, in such cases closure of schools may be the only solution. However, we have no evidence to what extent such measures have been adopted in reality.

The second way of segregation is to split Roma and non-Roma children to form homogeneous classes within the same school. The third way is the false diagnosis of Roma children as disabled, with the consequence of sending them to special schools where they are heavily over-represented. The ratio of children registered as having disabilities in Hungary (5.9 per cent of primary school population) is double the European average (2.5 to 3 per cent). In contrast to many other countries, Hungary maintains a system of separate special schools for children with “mild mental disability” and the OECD has recommended this should be phased out because it is this system which is used to segregate Roma children (OKI 2007, p. 121).

There are policies in progress to counteract these trends and increase the proportion of Roma youth in mainstream education. For example, there are scholarship programmes for those who make it into secondary education, as well as inclusive education programmes to re-integrate Roma children from special schools into mainstream education (OKI 2007, pp. 121-4). However, so far, these programmes – like their predecessors – have not been very effective. Here, a mechanism may be operating (this has also been noted in the EC report on Roma in the EU) by which national (and European) integration policies are often undermined by a lack of commitment of local government (EC 2004, pp. 40-41).

Interestingly, a study on the biographies of young Roma in the higher education system – which is one of the few accessible attempts to really understand the Roma – showed that such success stories had not been made possible through the help of official measures of inclusion. Instead, they had had informal resources or had been supported by “atypical” representatives from institutions or NGOs. Nevertheless, they had still had to face the risk of alienation from the milieu of origin and had to invest enormous efforts to make it alone (Kende 2007).

Many documents like the Roma Inclusion Strategy refer to the need to involve Roma organisations and Roma minority self-government. It remained unclear to us what minority self-government implies and what competencies it has. The fact that a document on the Hungarian system of local government does not mention such a body at all suggests that its competencies are limited and its function is more representative and consultative (cf. Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development 2007).

The same appears to be the case with youth policy, and especially youth work, though we had few opportunities to get any information in this respect. Reference was made to the involvement of Roma organisations in setting up initiatives for young people at local level. *Mobilitás* also mentioned that working with Roma was one topic of further training that they organised. However, we did not come across any such examples or experiences. In a small village, we were told that Roma youth were no longer welcome at a community centre for which a local NGO had received funding from the settlement government. The reason given was conflict between Roma and other young people because of the “Roma way of life”. We were also



told that in principle Roma young people could apply for funding for their own initiative or project, but only if they first established a proper association. The mayor rejected the idea of targeted integration policies. In his view, policies were integrative *per se* inasmuch as they addressed all local citizens: the same rules and procedures applied to everyone.

This attitude appeared to us a rather general phenomenon: representatives of the majority and/or authorities showed some understanding of the structural disadvantage of the Roma, and there were distinctive approaches to the Roma. But, if the latter did not respond to these offers in the approved and expected ways, the majority representatives often reacted in terms of (even personal) disappointment, withdrawing the offers and calling the Roma unco-operative. This was usually ascribed to the Roma culture and way of life¹⁶ which was presented almost as a natural given. We never came across an interpretation accepting the “typical Roma way of life” as a coping strategy, which has evolved over time in interaction with the majority.

The relationship between majority and minority appeared to be one of deep mistrust and – though we did not meet or hear the expressions of Roma representatives – the majority was waiting for the minority to show their trustworthiness as a precondition of further offers of integration. It is especially this fundamental attitude which requires changing and, in our view, this demands some powerful political signals and measures to overcome deep-rooted prejudice and absence of exchange and dialogue. It was also obvious that – though qualitative studies on the orientations, perspectives and experiences of the Roma themselves do exist (e.g. Kende 2007) – current debate, including among national policy makers, does not show a willingness to really understand the motivation of the Roma individuals behind acts which are not in conformity with the majority norms and which do not comply with policy measures intended to be an integrative offer.¹⁷

16. Although this may be the dominant perspective, we were told of a small group of progressive individuals (writers, film makers, academics and journalists) who have worked and are working closely with Roma to challenge these views and portray more diverse and culturally impressive lifestyles.

17. In reaction to the international report, the department for integration of the Roma (in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour) suggested removing all phrases that “imply the ‘differentness’ of the Roma” because difference undermines the focus on disadvantage and discrimination, and issues of cultural identity and social policy should not be confused. We consider this contradicts not only the above-mentioned distinction between ethnic discrimination and social disadvantage, but also the fundamental principle of managing cultural diversity on which the Council of Europe’s campaign “All different, all equal” relies. In contrast, all identity theories confirm that cultural and social aspects are inseparably linked in individual identities. Identity and social integration are two parts of one process, in that integration depends on a subjective feeling of being integrated. We believe in the serious will of the Hungarian Government to invest considerable efforts in integrating the Roma. Our concern is that some measures are limited in effect because they are not taken up by the Roma themselves, and this is because they do not see how to reconcile the measures with their everyday lives and identities.



Training and employing Roma teaching staff in schools (though the numbers remain very small) and teaching Roma culture in school are important steps, but they are obviously not sufficient to bridge the gap which has developed over time. The fact that the situation has deteriorated recently needs to be taken as a sign that the current situation is not “natural” but contingent on political will and influence.

Recommendations

Making recommendations with regard to the Roma issue is difficult and delicate. It is difficult because of the complexity of blurred relations between cause and effect, and delicate because of the high moral sensibilities it invokes.

- *On a general level, it seems crucial not to use statistical problems or data protection as excuses for a lack of positive action. Clear political support for anti-segregation policies needs to be signalled, along with a commitment to punish any form of discrimination; this also means modifying legal tools so they are usable for those concerned. The risk of stigmatisation inherent in a targeted approach needs to be monitored and balanced; as Pat Parker, an African-American poet, put it: “The first thing you do is to forget that I’m Black. Second, you must never forget that I’m Black”.*
- *An improvement in trust on the part of the majority is needed to break the vicious circle of mutual mistrust.*
- *This implies accepting that Roma people do things differently, rather than waiting for them to adapt to a “normal” way of life. In contrast, more spaces and means are needed for the Roma to articulate their needs and interests, and their understanding of living together. Identity and social integration need to be seen as interlinked and this applies as well to social policy and anti-discrimination policies. At the same time, the majority need greater understanding – helped by research and dialogue – to see the Roma “way of life” as a coping strategy that has evolved over time in interaction with the majority.*
- *Existing efforts to involve Roma representatives and groups in policy making need to be strengthened. This includes accepting types of association and representation other than those formally acknowledged and prescribed at present.*
- *With regard to education, efforts against segregation in school need to be strengthened, possibly by restricting free school choice or by balancing its effects; by increasing scholarships beyond a mere promotion of talent towards a redistribution of chances; by strengthening the integration of special needs education into mainstream education and monitoring the practices of “false diagnosis”; and by increasing the number (and status) of Roma teachers.*



- *With regard to unemployment, more flexibility is needed in training and employment measures to make them relevant for the young Roma concerned; at the same time, regional economic development needs to identify niches in the economy and labour market which are not yet subject to mechanisms of segmentation and discrimination, which could be developed by and/or together with the Roma.*
- *With regard to youth work, intercultural elements should be included in youth-worker training on all levels, but at the same time reserving youth-policy resources to provide spaces and opportunities for Roma youth to develop their own styles and practices. If there are enough “safe spaces” the chances of intercultural dialogue become much easier.*

3.4.3. Participation and active citizenship

The participation of young people, providing opportunities for them to get their opinion heard and influence their living conditions, has been a main issue of youth policy for many years. Since the 1970s, the Council of Europe Youth Directorate has focused on this topic and it is also a central theme of the European White Paper on Youth (EC 2002). Understanding youth work as lobbying for young people and representing their interests is a long-standing tradition in European youth policy. Lately, active democratic citizenship and the involvement of (young) people in political life have also become a leading theme of policy. This tendency is driven partly by the fear of growing extremism and partly by an ever growing distance of people from the political institutions of the state, like political parties, and from democratic participation, which is most evident in decreasing participation in elections. It is a declared aim of youth policy to encourage young people to identify with democracy by offering opportunities for political participation with the chance to learn about democratic methods.

Participation and active citizenship cannot be narrowed down to youth work and membership in youth organisations – even if these are important pillars in that respect. All fields of young people’s lives should be open to active influence by those affected, and not just for passive consumption of whatever is on offer. One has to analyse young people’s involvement in many different fields if one is to get an insight into the nature and challenges of youth participation, not just in the main domains of children and youth policy or by examining participation in institutionalised forms of active citizenship (such as elections).

In Hungary young people from the age of 18 – or younger if they are married, which is possible after turning 16 – are allowed to participate in elections at local, regional or national level. The Hungary report on youth participation to the European Commission, in relation to the youth White Paper, shows that young people (under 25) are slightly under-represented in the group of all voters: 17 per cent of all eligible voters are young. The percentage of young candidates on the other hand provides a picture of policy as the territory of older people: only 2.51 per cent of all candidates for parliamentary elections in 2002 were younger than 25.





Membership of youth organisations and/or political parties is an essential part of involvement in public life – but it is not the sole indicator of participation. The Eurobarometer showed that in Hungary about 13 per cent of young people belong to an organisation, but only 3 per cent are members of youth organisations (EC 2007b). In Hungary, there is an important difference between NGOs established only to take part in the tender system for financing activities and projects, and NGOs based on real, individual, voluntary membership. It explains why there are so many NGOs (many of them dormant), yet so few young people engaged with them.

To fulfil the need of representing the interests of all young people in a country, the typical practice is that membership-based youth NGOs form an umbrella organisation that functions as a National Youth Council, which in turn contributes as a partner in policy making. Such a National Youth Council is a useful asset for government on youth issues. Until now, however, in Hungary, there has not been a consensus among youth NGOs regarding an umbrella organisation. The two biggest umbrella organisations – not accepted by all youth NGOs – are the Children and Youth Conference (GyIK), which has 88 member organisations, but had 278 in 2003, and the National Conference of Students' Self-Government (HÖÖK). Because of the influence of politics in the youth field, and the fact that Hungary at present seems highly polarised in politics, unity among youth NGOs has proved elusive. The current debate on a new funding system for youth organisations – following a scandal about policy-related funding (special patronage) – and on the development of a sustainable national youth strategy, which has to be independent of the specific interests of political parties, may lead to the establishment of a national youth council based on more widespread acceptance.

Nevertheless, at the regional level, umbrella organisations of youth NGOs already exist and provide successful support to their members and an accepted representation of young people.

At local level, participative structures do exist in Hungary though it is not mandatory for local authorities to involve these structures in the decision-making process. Examples of such platforms for the voice of young people include:

- local children and youth parliaments, elected by the children and youth of the settlements, representing their interests and organising everyday programmes and projects;
- local student self-governing bodies, representing elementary and secondary school pupils with regard to school-related issues, but only to a small extent at the local political level;
- children and youth interest-reconciliation forums/councils,¹⁸ which deal with youth issues by sustaining a dialogue between local authorities, the civil sector and young people.

18. These forums or councils must not be confused with Regional Youth Councils, which are not representative bodies, but are established by the Ministry. See also section 3.1 on Youth policy development.



It is a declared aim of policy makers to involve young people in the decision-making process, but they often fail to find appropriate partners. Generally it is felt that young people are not engaged enough in organised forms of participation – which are understood by most people as the only possible forms of participation.

Examples of young people's participation in everyday youth work were witnessed by the international review team on several occasions. The teenager parliament in the region of Bük is one example of a local self-organised group of young people that represents the interests of local young people. It co-operates strongly with the local economy, but with an emphasis on ecological and environmental issues. The involvement of this group in local decision-making processes does not have a legal basis, but is seen to produce mutual benefit and satisfaction on both sides. Another example of involvement and participation by young people was the group VIP (Vámospércsi Ifjúsági Programszervezők) that formed a representative body of young people in Vámospercs to offer new possibilities for leisure activities, organise cultural events, and to help disadvantaged young people. The involvement of young people at the youth centre in Encsencs was a third example.

The participation of students in the higher educational system is regulated by legislation, which provides the structure for influencing the management of single institutions and, through the umbrella organisation HÖÖK, comments and proposals on any issue of higher education in Hungary can be made. A further means of involvement of students in educational issues is the Ombudsperson for education rights. All parties in education – students, teachers or parents – can file a complaint with the Ombudsperson if they feel their rights have been violated. A similar approach can be found in the child-welfare system, where a foundation stands in for the rights of children and young people living in institutions (see above). For information purposes both institutions work close together with young people, using methods of peer information but also involving young people in the development of communication and information strategies through the Internet.

The political situation in Hungary, which was often described to us as particularly conflictual, regularly brings people, as supporters of the government or the opposition, onto the streets: demonstrations have been a common sight in Budapest for some years. It was mentioned by a number of respondents that this development also influences the politicisation of young people. Young people demonstrate for their rights and for their convictions even if they are not members of any political organisation.

The adoption of public space by young people, in the form of cultural and lifestyle expression, can be observed throughout the country: graffiti sprayed or scratched in every second village and along the railway tracks, skateboarders on the streets – youth culture is very vivid in Hungary. The reaction of local authorities suggests some acceptance of these cultural expressions: in most cases the approach was to try to talk to these people, identify their needs and try to respond positively.

These new, unorganised and non-traditional ways of participation are gaining more and more importance among young people, and the authorities – from local to national level – need to recognise them as expressions of demands and to respond to them, in some way at least.

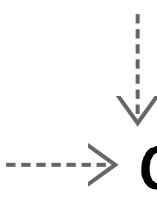


Recommendations

Youth participation is a main concern of Hungarian youth policy, but the review team noticed some areas that merit further attention and debate. First, the implementation of guidelines already existing at European level – like the Revised Charter on Youth Participation¹⁹ – should be considered a primary task. Furthermore, the review team recommends the following:

- *Facilitate the development of a national body representing youth organisations, and decouple youth issues from party politics and potential political change. This will not only allow the involvement of youth organisations in decision-making processes, but will also provide an opportunity for international networking. The involvement of young people in decision-making processes is a priority issue. In many countries, representative bodies of young people and/or youth organisations are already involved in these processes. The review team noticed with some surprise that in Hungary, though many youth organisations exist, few young people are members of them. It still is on our wish list to have a national youth council – which would also represent young people in Hungary at international level – but to represent the interests of young Hungarians this approach is necessary but not sufficient. New ways to get in contact with the biggest possible number of young people are needed; regular consultations at the local level could be one way to deal with this task.*
- *It is of high importance that local, regional and national governments actively require young people’s involvement when important decisions relevant to young people’s lives are to be taken.*
- *Meaningful participation needs commitment, ability and skills from both sides – young people and adult structures of authority. Information brochures sent to local authorities, schools and youth institutions may help those in authority with ideas on how to implement successful participation, encourage them to initiate effective projects and inform young people about their opportunities. Special training on active citizenship may also be very useful for both sides.*
- *Active citizenship is more than membership of organisations; and it is more than using given structures. Participation in public life relates to many aspects of young people’s lives. It is the task of those in authority to take the new forms of participation into account.*
- *The direct influence of young people in relation to their everyday lives should be fostered. But, even if participation structures are present and accessible, one should not expect all young people to become involved in policy making. Disadvantaged young people in particular first need to have more opportunities for their personal development and social circumstances (schools, jobs) before they are likely to become more active in broader community life.*

19. Council of Europe (2003): *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.



Chapter 4

Conclusions and general policy recommendations

We want to conclude the report by reflecting on actual or potential policy trends. First of all, we want to express our recognition of the fact that in most policy areas concerning young people, key actors have already identified the main problems and have undertaken or are in the process of undertaking steps to address them.

- *A first line of progress we would like to mention is the determined political will to strengthen youth policy and contribute to stabilising and professionalising the youth sector. In this regard, we want to underline the commitment shown and the efforts made in establishing training for youth workers, at the levels of higher vocational training and further training. Implementation of the National Youth Strategy (which, unfortunately, we could not take into consideration owing to the different timing of the two processes) has the potential not only to give stability to the whole sector but also to reinforce a societal discourse on youth and youth policy.*
- *Another point we would like to advocate is that problems like poverty, inequality, discrimination and segregation are spelt out – in professional debate and official documents – and addressed by policy strategies. This is true for both education and social policies. Thereby different actors have the possibility to contribute to a societal discourse by collecting and disseminating relevant knowledge and information, by raising claims and by developing solutions.*
- *In areas such as health and justice, relevant preventative and harm-reduction approaches have been outlined and initiated, which reflect awareness of the difficulties and risks, and show the determination of the actors involved not to accept an unsatisfactory status quo.*



- *With regard to the school-to-work transition, the strategy of modularising vocational education and training (VET) merits particular mention. Restructuring the National Qualification Framework is a far-reaching step in terms of reforming the link between education and employment, one which could also help to overcome social inequalities reproduced by current VET structures. This is even more relevant in that joint national responsibility for education and labour-market policies for VET is reflected by regional vocational training centres, which can respond to specific individual and economic training needs. Competence-based school curricula are another important step in this direction.*

While the aforementioned developments deserve acknowledgement and encouragement, because they reflect an appropriate policy analysis of the social condition of young people in Hungary, their success is not self-evident but depends on a variety of factors, some of which are general and cross-cutting, while others are domain-specific. Some preconditions for effective youth policy and implementation are essentially procedural, whereas others imply nothing less than a paradigm shift:

- *Funding is clearly a basic requirement. In this regard we want to stress a number of points. First, in most areas, funding needs to be increased to guarantee full coverage, reaching out to all young people, and to guarantee quality by attracting well-qualified professionals. Incentives for young people are also sometimes needed to overcome social divisions and inequalities. Second, there are questions about the mechanisms of distribution. We want in particular to suggest differentiating between public expenditure that guarantees youth policy infrastructure and running youth work activities, on one hand, and a tender system dealing with time-limited and specific projects and initiatives on the other. Third, we feel that the Hungarian authorities at national, regional and local levels should seriously consider introducing general grants to child and youth organisations, thus promoting membership-based youth NGOs. This would be an important step in developing civil society and democracy in general. A fourth recommendation on funding would be to use European structural funds also to develop youth work. This can be justified because of the place of non-formal learning in a lifelong learning strategy and also because a developed youth sector may be seen as a potential labour market segment.*
- *If the National Youth Strategy is to make any difference, it needs to help create structures and mechanisms that are stable enough to survive political change. Not surprisingly, many interpret the recent past in terms of the need of a Youth Act. While we would not say that a legal framework is the only way to achieve reliability and stability, the lack of a consistent youth policy culture and tradition makes it difficult to imagine how continuity in youth policy development can be established without a legal basis. A minimum starting point would be to spell out objectives related to youth policy and clarify the division of responsibilities between local, regional, national and European levels.*



- *At the horizontal level, youth policy needs to be strengthened by implementing clear mechanisms for co-ordinating different policy sectors and actors within an integrated youth policy. The National Youth Strategy may contribute to mainstreaming youth policy (as is recommended by the European Youth Pact) if it is furnished and empowered by a committed political mandate. An integrated youth policy is clearly a prerequisite for determining coherent policy priorities, where single objectives might otherwise have different implications and consequences. For example, in education, free school choice on the one hand and anti-segregation policy on the other appear to contradict each other.*
- *An integrated youth policy is only likely to be effective with strong partners from civil society. While there are many NGOs in Hungary, their position in society does not appear to be very strong. To rectify this position, we propose the following measures. First, the membership of organisations might be increased by providing incentives (such as exempting membership fees from income tax) or rewarding the active involvement of volunteers (e.g. through the official recognition of voluntary work). Second, access to funding (both the Children and Youth Fund and the National Civic Fund) needs to be made easier and more transparent. Third, the implementation and financing of the representation of NGOs (by a national umbrella organisation) might be changed by loosening the bond with the Ministry (and government) and subjecting it to public control.*
- *With regard to policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, we suggest not only increasing efforts but also widening the rationale. We suggest that social security and redistribution measures move from family-based payments to individual welfare entitlements. As regards the distribution of scholarships for disadvantaged pupils and students, we recommend broadening the criteria of eligibility from a current focus on “talent” towards a perspective of broadening life chances (including the chance that hidden talent may become visible).*
- *An issue that unequivocally requires a paradigm shift is the management of diversity, especially where the Roma are concerned. This implies the courage and sensitivity needed for positive action and at the same time sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to change measures that are proven to reproduce stigma. In all policy areas concerned, from education to labour market, welfare, culture, health, housing and youth policies, it needs to be acknowledged that social integration and social cohesion do not mean that a minority is included in the systems of the majority. In contrast, diversity requires the recognition of different identities and the negotiation and co-ordination of different practice. It seems high time to break the vicious circle that results from waiting for “the others” (the Roma) to prove their trustworthiness. This means not withdrawing support where it is either refused for being insufficient or irrelevant, or (mis)used (which means adapted to their own needs and situation), but to engage in dialogue for improving the efficacy of public measures.*



- *In all these areas, we think that a broader knowledge base is needed, which includes scientific knowledge and professional expertise as well as local and grassroots knowledge.*
- *Such a knowledge base needs to be combined with spaces for dialogue between the actors involved – and those who are not yet involved, especially young people themselves, whether they are organised or not. In fact, such spaces need to be open rather than formalised, and they need to be made attractive in order to nourish a culture of participation. All these aspects may contribute to broaden, differentiate and deepen a societal dialogue on youth in general and to empower those actors who are committed to developing youth policy in Hungary in particular.*

In this report we have concentrated on challenges and areas where we see potential for improvement. This is by no means to neglect and devalue the political will and eagerness of those working with young people or the variety of measures already in place. We hope that those actors in the field who are committed to providing young people with better (but equal) opportunities for growing up can make use of our observations and take them as a sign of our “critical complicity” in contributing to the development and implementation of youth policy in Hungary.

Appendix 1

Programme of the first visit of the international team (11-14 September 2007)

Tuesday 11 September

- 9.00-10.00** Welcome of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, State Secretary for Equal Opportunities, Ms Edit Rauh
- 11.30-13.00** Meeting with representatives of various sectors of the Ministry and the authors of the Hungarian Youth Policy Report, Mr Tibor Gazsó and Mr László Laki
- 14.30-16.30** Presentation of the units of the Ministry involved in youth affairs (drug prevention, child and youth protection, employment and vocational training)

Wednesday 12 September

- 9.00-11.00** Ministry of Education and Culture State Secretary, Mr János Szüdi, Head of International Department, Mr Zoltán Loboda, and their staff
- 11.30-13.00** Ministry of Health, Representatives of the National Institute of Child Health, Director Ms Zsófia Mészner, Deputy Director, Ms Éva Mramurácz and Ms Anna Aszmann
- 14.30-16.30** Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development State Secretary, Mr Sándor Bujdosó and his staff

Thursday 13 September

- 9.00-11.00** Director, Mr László Földi
- 11.00-13.00** Meeting with representatives of youth organisations: Child and Youth Conference, National Union of Students, Association of Large Families and different churches
- 14.30-16.30** Meeting with representatives of professional youth service and training organisations: Hayico, Hungarian Youth Hostel Association, Mobilitás National Youth Service, Zánka Public Foundation and Teaching centres for youth-worker training: Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, and European Social Fund National Agency, Public Service Company, Institute for Social Policy and Labour



Friday 14 September

- 9.00-11.00** Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour State Secretary
Mr Gábor Csizmár
- 11.00-13.00** Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, Special Commissioner on
the Crime Prevention Strategy, Ms Katalin Gönczöl
- 14.30-16.00** Closing discussion with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour,
Ms Edit Rauh, State Secretary of equal opportunities

Appendix 2

Programme of the second visit of the international team (5-10 November 2007)

Monday 5 November

- 15.30** National Employment Service Deputy Director, Ms Adrianna Soós
17.00 Cseresznye Youth Information and Counselling Service

Tuesday 6 November

- 8.30-9.30** Department of Social Dialogue and Civil Connections, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Head of Department, Mr István Nemoda
10.00-11.00 Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, Head of Department of International Affairs, Ms Rita Gergelyné Laczkó
11.30-12.30 Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour State Secretary, Ms Edit Rauh
12.30-14.00 Lunch break
14.00-15.00 Commissioner for Educational Rights, Commissioner Mr Aáry-Tamás Lajos, and child rights expert, Mr Endre Bíró
15.30-17.00 Group 1: Mobilitás National Youth Service, Mr László Földi
Group 2: Juvenile Custody Institution in Tököl
18.00 Representatives of the Committee on Youth and Social Affairs of the Hungarian Parliament

Wednesday 7 November

- 8.30- 10.30** Departure to Karcag from Budapest
11.00 Visit of the Karcag Youth House
11.45-12.45 Lunch with the mayor of Karcag, Mr Sándor Fazekas
13.00-14.30 Official meeting with the mayor and his staff
14.30-15.40 Departure to Debrecen (Regional Youth Service)
16.00-17.30 Group 1: Debrecen Employment Office
Group 2: Mezon Youth Information and Counselling Service and the Drug Reconciliation Forum
19.00-20.00 Dinner
20.00 Visit to the Más-Mozaik cultural organisation, with reception



Thursday 8 November

- 9.00-10.30** Deputy mayor of the city of Debrecen: Mr János D. Halász
- 10.30-11.30** Departure to Nyírbátor
- 12.00-13.00** Lunch
- 13.00-13.30** Departure to Encsencs
- 13.30-15.00** Meeting with the representatives of a local youth association and the mayor in the local youth centre
- 15.00-16.00** Departure to Vámospércs
- 16.00-17.30** Meeting with a local youth organisation and the mayor
- 17.30 -18.00** Return to Debrecen
- 18.00-19.00** Discussions at the Regional Youth Service
- 19.30** Departure to Budapest

Friday 9 November

- 9.00-11.00** Meeting with youth organisations of political parties in Hungary
- 11.30-13.00** Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Roma Integration Department Deputy, Head of Department, Mr István Szirmai
- 14.30-15.30** Visit the Iránytű Youth Information and Counselling Service
- 16.00-17.00** Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, State Secretary, Ms Edit Rauh

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- to identify components which might combine to form a harmonised approach to youth policy across Europe; and
- to contribute to a learning process in relation to the development and implementation of youth policy.

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