

Youth policy in the Slovak Republic



Youth policy in the Slovak Republic

**conclusions
of the Council of Europe
international review**

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Executive summary

1. The international review of the Slovak Republic's youth policy was undertaken by a group of international experts from the Council of Europe, Directorate of Youth and Sport. The main sources of information for such a review included the following:

- i. the National Report prepared by the Department of Children and Youth in the Ministry of Education;
- ii. documents and information booklets provided by individuals and organisations;
- iii. two study-visits by the international team in November 2004 and February 2005 during which meetings were held with representatives of various ministries, government departments and youth organisations; and
- iv. a literature and website search undertaken by the members of the review team.

The programme of the two visits was scheduled in a thorough manner and the team was treated with such courtesy that it felt it could discuss all the issues that were raised with ease and confidence. All the participants in the various discussions and presentations held were well prepared and very kindly responded to all the queries and clarifications that members of the review team had. A special word of thanks is due to the interpreters who filled their role in a most professional manner.

2. The Slovak Republic is a country with a very rich cultural and historical background. Its political history is marked by events of particular importance both for its own people and those of neighbouring countries. It is a country of minorities and it is bound to face the challenges that such a situation presents. The republic is one with a short history of independence but which, in a short time, managed to put into action a number of reforms which led to the process of building a new nation and to its membership of the European Union.

3. The Ministry of Education, through its Department of Children and Youth, took the initiative to launch the formulation of a youth policy based as much as possible on the democratic values promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Union. In its efforts to produce a strong foundation, a number of structures, domains and organisations were roped in for a series of consultations, discussions, fora and conferences with the aim of incorporating the needs, views and aspirations of as wide a representation as possible. Central Government supported the initiatives taken and members from the community of researchers were involved in providing data that could be used to underpin the rationale for youth policy directions.



4. As a result of this strategy, two very important documents were published: *The Concept of State Policy towards Children and Youth in the Slovak Republic to 2007*, http://www.minedu.sk/DIEN/DaM/NYP/2005_Conception_of_State_Policy.pdf and the Ministry of Education's National Report. These two documents served to set the scene for the review of the policy by the international group of experts. They also served to highlight three particular issues that were considered of utmost importance for Slovak society, namely, decentralisation, transition from school to work and the Roma minority.

5. Notwithstanding the invaluable preliminary work done over a number of years, the review team could not ignore some misgivings. The Department of Children and Youth is not only the driving force behind the development of the youth policy. It looks as if it dominates the whole scenario and, in consequence, everything is bound to go back to Education for approval. As much as it is important to have a particular agent to push for improvement, change and achievement, it would be wiser for the Department of Children and Youth to play a less robust role. The suggestion was made for a Ministry for Youth.

6. The implementation of a decentralisation process is in itself a benefit to the promotion of initiatives at local level. However, the process will not succeed if those involved are not trained to assume the responsibilities that come with such a strategy. It has been noticed that the delegation of power to municipalities has, for the time being, created more problems than it solved. This is a slow process, which requires the full support of central government at all levels, particularly human and financial resources and the early implementation of the Charter of Self-Government.

7. The problem of preparation for the world of work and of unemployment is not unique to the Slovak Republic. The efforts made to provide the necessary tools to the young and not-so-young unemployed are commendable. However, they seem to be hampered by a dose of inequity between urban and rural areas, and between the mainstream population and Roma minorities in particular. This is not to say that any discriminatory actions are being taken. It is only to point out that the problems of the labour market cannot be resolved without investment where investment is most needed, either by providing Action Plans without covert obstacles for the uncertified unemployed or by limiting, because of financial restrictions, the autonomy of municipal employment bureaux.

8. The situation of the Roma minority in the Slovak Republic is a problem within a problem! Neither history nor mainstream society's attitude nor Roma's own culture are conducive to an easy way out of the situation. A large part of the Roma population is concerned with poverty, segregation and exclusion from education, employment and decent living conditions. Perhaps the way forward is to go that extra mile to avoid misconceptions, labelling and biases by creating more opportunities for genuine participation in civil society's domains at local and national level, by implementing the many proposed commendable projects and laws as a matter of urgency and by acting on the recommendations made by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

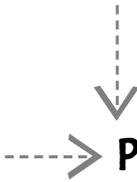
9. The state of affairs regarding youth research and youth work training in the Slovak Republic is as promising as it is in need of a strong dose of re-thinking. The republic can boast of a very strong and creditable community of researchers and youth work volunteers. At the same time, it is not clear at all what use is being made of the youth researchers' dossier of young people for the purpose of having an evidence-based youth policy. Nor is it clear what is being done to provide the youth



work market with trained youth workers and youth leaders. In this regard, non-formal learning is the main victim.

10. Youth policy cannot solve the problems facing young people in the Slovak Republic. Youth policy is there to safeguard, above all else, the principle that young people are a resource and not a problem. It is there to promote, in an integrated approach, young people's participation in society as active citizens, to protect them from abuse, to promote the recognition of the non-formal method of learning skills and competencies, and to promise a safe environment in terms of health, leisure, housing, justice, education and employment, amongst others. It can do this by being proactive rather than reactive to contemporary issues and by developing measurable objectives and clear performance indicators.





Preamble

The International Youth Policy Reviews organised by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe follow the recommendation of Ministers at their meeting in Luxembourg in 1995. These policy reviews have the following objectives:

- to improve good governance in the youth field of the particular country reviewed, by creating a dialogue and better co-operation between the government, civil society and research;
- to contribute to the body of youth policy knowledge and development of the Council of Europe; and
- to make contributions to the greater unity of Europe in the youth field and to set standards for public policies in the field of youth (European Steering Committee for Youth, CDEJ, Council of Europe 2004, p. 11).

In a more specific manner, international reviews attempt to identify those components of youth policy which help to inform an approach to youth policy across Europe and to contribute to a learning process about the development and implementation of youth policy (CDEJ, Council of Europe 2003b, p. 16).

Before the actual review commences, a formal request by the country concerned, in this case the Slovak Republic, is made to the CDEJ for inclusion in its intergovernmental programme of activities. The international team of experts appointed for this particular review was made up as follows:

- Peter Lauritzen (Secretariat), Head of Youth Department, Directorate of Youth and Sport, Council of Europe
- Bjorn Jaaberg Hansen (CDEJ), Chair
- Anthony Azzopardi (researcher, Chair Research Correspondents), rapporteur
- Andreas Walther (IRIS), youth researcher
- Alexandra Raykova (Chair FERYP – a European Roma organisation), expert
- Dietrich Baenziger (Advisory Council)

Prior to the choice of the group of experts, Mr Lauritzen would have held discussions with the Slovak authorities with regard to the detailed contents of the National Report and the method of analysis. Consideration is given to any special requests made. In this case, the review team was asked:

- i. to look into the situation of employment and participation;
- ii. to look into the situation of Roma youth and, more generally, the minority issue; and
- iii. to assess the last ten years of development of a young nation and the European identity issue.



These three requests were then further elaborated and more finely tuned during the first visit the review team made in the first week of November 2004. At its first meeting at the Ministry of Education, the team was informed that the three main fields of interest for the youth policy developers were:

- decentralisation and participation;
- the transition from school to work; and
- the Roma phenomenon.

However, in view of the wholistic approach required for the development of a policy, other issues, such as education, non-formal learning, health, housing, active citizenship and social cohesion are also made the subject of the ensuing discussions.

The draft National Report (NR) of the Slovak Republic was made available to the team during the second visit (14-20 February 2005). An updated version was delivered by electronic mail on 8 April 2005. The NR usually provides the initial basis for the generation of questions and considerations about the youth policy. It is not, therefore, intended for review or analysis by the team. However, together with *The Concept of State Policy towards Children and Youth in the Slovak Republic to 2007*, published by the Ministry of Education following Resolution 1213 of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the international team was able to form its initial impressions and reactions. Other material put at its disposal and the numerous exchanges that took place during the two visits helped the group of experts to better understand the context in which the youth policy was developing.

Therefore, this commentary on the findings of the Slovak Republic National Youth Policy Review Team of the Council of Europe is based on the information collected during the two visits that the review team made to the republic. Prior to the visits a number of documents were forwarded through electronic mail by Mr Jan Sipos and his colleagues, particularly Ms Maria Bonova, from the Ministry of Education. Information about the Slovak Republic's location, population, history, language, state, government and culture was sought through access to a number of websites. This was considered essential before engaging with a foreign milieu with the responsibility of commenting and deliberating on the understanding, development and implementation of a youth policy. The knowledge and culture gap that exists, and which cannot be completely closed, between the developers of a national youth policy and its foreign reviewers, is a matter of major importance in the reading of this text. Of course, a significant narrowing of the gap developed during the two visits thanks to the excellent arrangements made by the organisers of our visits. Not only was the team provided with more documents aimed at increasing our acquaintance with the local context, but opportunities for formal presentations, discussions, informal meetings and observations were given due consideration. Prepared and spontaneous replies to our innumerable questions were given in a very satisfactory manner, though often punctuated by the need of interpretation of the Slovak language into the English language. The total of ten days, constituting the two visit periods, were characterised by a string of meetings from early morning to late afternoon or early evening. The intervals dedicated to lunches, dinners and drinks were considered as brief moments of welcome relief. Overall, not much could have been changed in the programme of the two visits. The team was treated with utmost courtesy and what follows is being presented with reciprocal feelings.

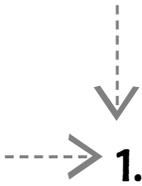
The report is purposely on the short side: it is meant to be read, reflected upon, discussed and acted upon. Hopefully it will also provide an impetus for a better under-



standing of youth, for an amelioration of the open method of co-ordination, and for the production of a model of youth policy that reflects the aspirations and democratic values of a great nation on the threshold of the 21st century.

The report is divided into six main sections. Following an introduction to the Slovak Republic in Section 1 and to a distinct and workable framework for youth policy development as promoted by the Council of Europe in Section 2, Section 3 will discuss the delivery essentials of youth policy. The three fields of interest earmarked by the host authorities, namely, decentralisation, transition from school to work and the Roma phenomenon and the means to support considered fundamental for appropriate implementation procedures are discussed in Section 4 and Section 5 respectively. Whichever the context and whatever the circumstances, youth policy needs to be able to respond in a thorough and practical manner. Youth policy responses to the changing needs of the Slovak Republic in general, and to young people, in particular, are discussed in Section 6. This section is then followed by a brief section including final remarks, recommendations, a bibliography and relevant appendices.





1. Introduction to the Slovak Republic

1.1. The Slovak Republic is located in Central Europe, south of Poland. It is landlocked by Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. It lies in a temperate climatic zone and most of its territory is rugged and mountainous. The estimated population in July 2003 was 5.4 million, with a population density of about 110 per sq. km. About 85% of the population consists of ethnic Slovaks. The rest of the ethnic composition consists of Hungarians (10%), Czechs (2%), Roma (1.7%),¹ Ruthenians and Ukrainians (0.7%), Germans (0.10%), Poles (0.10%) and others accounting for 0.4% (International Student's Guide to the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 17).

Almost 60.3% of Slovaks declare themselves to be Roman Catholic, while 7% belong to the Evangelical Church, 3.4% to the Greek Catholic Church, 2% are Calvinist, 0.6% Orthodox Christians, 6.2% Protestants, 1.6% Reformists and 18.9% without denomination (www.slovakia.org/sk-facts.htm).

The Slovak Republic is a multi-party republic in which the President is Head of State. Executive power lies with the unicameral National Council, which consists of 150 members elected on the basis of proportional representation to serve 4-year terms.

1.2. The political and historical background of Slovakia is steeped in monarchical controversies, political and cultural domination, ethnic conflicts and accelerated political and economical developments.

Throughout the early centuries, Slovakia's history was linked to the Hungarian kingdom and the Austrian Habsburgs, up until the early twentieth century. This period ended with the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Twenty years later this republic split, under pressure from German control, only for the Czech and Slovak states to reunite in 1945. In 1948, the February Revolution led to a communist coup d'état. Twenty years later (1968), a new strand of socialism was introduced only to end with the Prague Spring and the demise of reform by the Soviet army. Democratic reforms became a reality in 1989 when Soviet influence collapsed with the "velvet revolution" and Czechoslovakia once more became free. A final peaceful separation into Czech and Slovak republics occurred on the first day of 1993. Eventually Slovakia joined NATO, the United Nations and the Council of Europe and then became a full member of the European Union on 1 May 2004.

1. The European Commission (Brussels, 2005) names the Roma as the largest ethnic minority at 7% of the population (http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2005/jan/jrspsi_2005_annex_en.pdf).



1.3. Throughout all this time, a number of issues concerning border limitations or changes, minority groups and language dominance became political balls for Czechoslovakia and its neighbouring countries, particularly Hungary. The “game” was also extended to include political parties in the new Czech and Slovak republics, and international institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The cultural and political lives of Slavs, Hungarians, Jews and Roma became the centre stage for tough, and sometimes undemocratic, reactions and debates among the political leaders of neighbouring countries, or between political leaders and minority group activists within any one single country. A number of laws were enacted. One faction considered these as essential for social and political order, while the other considered them as obstacles to integration and to the aspired autonomy and self-determination of a particular minority group. For example, the issue over the use of the Hungarian language by the Hungarian minority in Slovakia took a great number of twists and turns before a form of cordial agreement was reached. The same applies to the civil status and societal acceptance of Jews and Roma, in particular. Throughout, it was a question of one side finding the other uncompromising, unable to adapt, oppressive or anti-social.

Fortunately, with the passing of time, legislative reforms made by the Slovak National Council, or inspired by Council of Europe and European Union regulations, have created a less antagonistic milieu among the main actors.

1.4. Developments and radical changes do not occur without ripple effects on the economy and the foreign policy of a nation, for example. Much of Slovakia’s industrialisation took place during the Communist era (1948-89). On gaining independence, the Slovak Republic was faced with a dearth of modern industry and employment opportunities because the main products had been weapons and other military equipment. It was decided that a fundamental conversion to a competitive market economy would lead to an improvement of the Slovak economy. Much has been achieved notwithstanding the slow return of state-controlled enterprises to private ownership. A boost in foreign trade helped the growth of the gross domestic product and the decline of the budget deficit. All developments seem to indicate that now the republic “has begun to write its own economic history”.

As regards foreign policy, the Slovak Republic can now claim to have good relations with neighbouring countries and with international institutions.

One of the major developments in this sphere was the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation by the prime ministers of Slovakia and Hungary in March 1995. The treaty reaffirmed the Slovak-Hungarian borders, and it contained mutual agreement with regard to the protection of rights of ethnic minorities in either of the two countries. Such a treaty and others on a different political level led to the maintenance of links with previous partners such as Poland, Ukraine and Hungary. In the process, however, new ventures were established with Germany, France, Austria, Italy and the United States of America, among others. Export commodities range from machinery and transport equipment to chemicals, while economic aid from EU structural adjustment funds have further contributed to the improvement of the Slovak economy. Yet, despite a generally positive outlook, unemployment at an average of 17% remains one of Slovakia’s major problems.

1.5. With this brief background scenario, indicative of a firm commitment to democratic reform, economic stabilisation, privatisation and globalisation strands, a



consideration of the impact on Slovak youth will lead to the main focus of this report, namely, an outsider's critical review of Slovak youth policy.

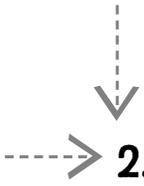
The inevitable difficulties that Slovakia has to face include the issue of nation-building in a newly independent country. As such, the Slovak Republic is short of a modern history of autonomy, of the existence of plurality and of the processes that arise under the conditions of a market economy. Consequently, it has to deal with new conditions of socialisation and, particularly, with changes in the composition of the youth social group – from a homogeneous entity of the socialist social structure into a social aggregate of individuals.

A re-thinking of the role of the state, where youth organisations are rooted in civil society rather than in state-party structures, needs to be undertaken. The most obvious dispute that arises here is one of influence, intervention and ownership. Firstly, there is no place, in a democratic, market-orientated society for a paternalist, single-strand base. Secondly, young people are well aware of where competencies and responsibilities, including their own, lie and so their full and genuine participation in civil society as active citizens cannot be ignored or covertly diminished by any means. And, thirdly, in terms of “the universally proclaimed aspiration for an integrated youth policy” (Williamson, 2002, p. 20), joint ownership is an indispensable ingredient.

The implications that emerge here include the level and width (broadness) of competencies and responsibilities. While state influence and intervention, in terms of legal, administrative and financial support are generally accepted, care must be taken to avoid a “no-go” situation where young people do not see the relevance and credibility of a policy which they aspire to co-own.

The international group of experts reviewing the youth policy of the Slovak Republic have, in a mild manner and within the constraints of the short visits they have undertaken, understood the overall, generic feeling among the discussion participants, that reform and development are the universal priorities of the country. All participating respondents displayed a vibrant preoccupation with their recent colonial past. They are still carrying the burden of sovietisation, with the result that years of achievement have been almost forgotten. As foreign observers, it was important for us to understand that Slovakia is still struggling to overcome the phenomenon of total state control and that decentralisation is not an easily accepted process. Consequently, an aura of reactivity prevails whereby ideas, structures, initiatives and discourse are all geared towards reacting against past mishaps, present uncertain developments and possible future repetition of past experiences. Both positive and not-so-positive outcomes have emerged.





2. European youth policy – background to the review

2.1. The review of the national youth policy of the Slovak Republic is the twelfth in a series of reviews undertaken by various international groups of experts from the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe. Starting with Finland in 1997, the review schedule proceeded to the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Malta, Norway and Cyprus. Each one of the reviews is usually preceded by the publication of a national report from the country concerned, and then followed by an international report from the respective group of experts. A public hearing of both reports in the capital city of individual countries was introduced with the review of the Lithuanian youth policy. A final presentation of both reports is then made to the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe Youth sector is thus equipped with a robust body of experience supported by an equally impressive set of publications aimed at improving youth policy formulation and implementation. Apart from the national and international reports and ensuing discussions, key texts, indicating the road towards better co-operation between government, civil society organisations and research, towards improved consolidation and dissemination of democratic processes and towards a cogent set of aims, objectives and policy indicators, have been published regularly. While special reference should be made to the seminal European Commission's White Paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth* (2002), among others, one cannot fail to mention Williamson's synthesis of the first seven policy reviews, *Supporting Young People in Europe* (2002), the Final Report on Youth Policy Indicators (Council of Europe, 2003a), and Siurala's *European Framework of Youth Policy* (2004). These three recent works, besides underlining the need for a re-thinking of what is to be understood by a coherent, contexted and practical youth policy aimed at promoting young people's active citizenship and non-formal education, also provide a substantial amount of material related to good practice, critical reflection and the elaboration of conceptual issues.

In a synoptical manner, the following text is intended to provide ground material for policy formulation and implementation in the form of challenges to abstract ideas, to the refinement of ambitions and to the potential danger of overlooking policy gaps.

2.2. The complexity revolving around the formulation of a youth policy stems directly from the term "youth" itself. Defining youth has almost become a nightmare for researchers who attempt to place their findings at the disposal of policy-



makers. Although historically youth could have been associated with biologically- and psychologically-determined phases of life, this construct has gradually become dated. The multiple contexts in which transitions from one phase to another take place have become as complex as the multitude of diverse situations in which young people find themselves. Talk of linear transitions, dependent living and timed passages through the formal education system, for example, has now become *passé*. The same applies to the categorisation of young people by age, by employability or by a perceived class distinction. Young people's own life concept refuses adaptation to any one category (du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

In contrast with the above, young people today have to face the battle between socially-constructed ideas and their own distinct aspirations and expectations. However, neither social constructions nor individual aspirations develop in a vacuum. So that, any attempt to create a public youth policy must take into consideration the relationship that exists between the two issues. For as Freire and Shor (1987, p. 18) put it: "Is it young people's thinking that makes society like it is now? Or is it society becoming a certain way that creates preoccupation among young people?"

In order to attempt to reach a compromise between these two queries, one needs to specify what "young people's thinking" in terms of rights, obligations, needs and aspirations is in the light of evidence produced by researchers, past experiences and contextual variations. Moreover, the reactions of society to young people's shaping of their own milieu and the realities emerging from a society that has become more and more heterogeneous, individualistic and knowledge-centred cannot be overlooked in the face of issues such as inter- and multi-culturalism, globalisation, lifelong learning, unemployment, violence and health hazards.

The lessons learnt and the evidence produced to date through the organisation of seminars, network meetings, advisory missions and policy reviews by the Council of Europe have produced a distinct and workable framework for youth policy formulation.

2.3. In view of the relationship that exists between young people's thinking and society's reactions, one of the main principles that governs a public youth policy is that of integration. An integrated youth policy is one that supports the cross-sectoral view through which a co-ordination of youth issues is maintained and a "better account of the youth dimension in other policy initiatives" (European Commission, 2001, p. 5) is ensured. This matter is further endorsed by one of the proposals in the declaration of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in Thessaloniki (2002) where it was stated that "youth policies should have a cross-sectoral dimension". Such a criterion would act as a precautionary measure against the possibility of youth matters becoming the focal point of one particular public domain, such as education or employment. Nevertheless, the need for a co-ordinating authority (driving force) is not here being dismissed, since such an authority would facilitate the "open method of co-ordination" among the main actors in the realm of a youth policy, that is, government and non-government domains, and young people themselves.

The concepts of integration and co-ordination are, therefore, seen as applicable at both institutional and grass-roots level. At the institutional level one would then expect the involvement of a wide spectrum of ministries, such as, "Education, Employment, Health, Housing, Social Protection, Family Policy and Child Protection, Leisure and Cultural Policy, Youth Justice and Environment" (Council of



Europe, 2003b, p. 7). At the grass-roots level, one would expect the observance of those priority themes listed as “packages of opportunity and experience”, namely participation, active citizenship, non-formal learning, information and access to new technologies, health services, housing, paid work, sports and outdoor activities, and safe and secure environment, mobility, justice and youth rights.

2.4. A second principle that underlies the understanding and implementation of a coherent and cross-sectoral national youth policy concerns the development of specific legislation. The role of the state, the establishment of appropriate structures and trust in the rule of law are as sustainable as the legislative support they garner is adequate. Regulating mechanisms, transparency in terms of rights and obligations, definite criteria for funding, accountability and political commitment are fundamental pre-requisites. The drafting of specific laws – separate from other legislation – will contribute towards making the active participation of young people less nebulous and more reassuring of political will. Legally-supported structures help to inculcate in young people and in NGOs a respect for the rule of law as a transparent contributory factor of democratic principles. On a national level, such an approach would also eliminate the lack of institutional link that may be perceived to exist between the state and local and regional levels. It would also become possible to eliminate the diverse and perhaps divergent views at different levels, thus giving young people in all areas no cause for concern about equal opportunities. The same applies in the area of budgetary considerations. By knowing who is financing what and how the co-funding of programmes and projects operates, young people will have a clearer view of the concepts of organisation and association.

2.5. The reliability or otherwise of a conception of a national youth policy depends largely on a robust and relevant research base. The understanding of youth phenomena, whether these concern trends or living conditions, for example, cannot just rest on popular perceptions or on yesteryear’s definitions. The ever-changing social, political and economic conditions of society require of policy makers, researchers and practitioners an engagement with reality. At the core of this triangle lies the importance of up-to-date research findings, research into practices, and policy makers’ consideration of the most recent available data. In brief, the call is made for an evidence-based youth policy – the evidence emanating from current research work, the dissemination of good practice and the contextualisation of findings within the particular milieu in which the policy is being developed.

2.6. As the saying goes: “The proof of the pudding is in the eating!” Since recipes for puddings vary according to traditions and according to the skills and flair of the cook, the reaction of those eating it tells a lot about its flavour, the ingredients used and the method of cooking.

Perhaps an analogy may be created here with the implementation and delivery of a youth policy. Each and every country has its own traditions and value systems, and each one views youth matters accordingly. State policies are organised with the aim of tackling particular issues in accordance with the perceived needs and problems of the various categories of social actors present. Structures are created at a variety of levels in the hope that the implementation of policies moves as smoothly as possible. And, at established intervals of time or as particular events occur, the policies are reviewed and evaluated sometimes in a consultation process with the electorate and sometimes only at administrative level.



If the analogy may be extended further, a youth policy may stand its ground or otherwise during and after the implementation process. Having established the core requirements of integration, co-ordination, funding, priority themes and the genuine participation of stakeholders, the establishment of a youth policy turns out to be a dynamic process. In the implementation stage, the actual delivery of “goods” brings to the fore those elements that constitute the “hard core of youth policy” (Siurala, 2004, p. 12). Questions will be asked about:

- i. the objectives of the policy (clear?, opportunity-oriented?, learning-centred?);
- ii. the interpretation of its effectiveness (does it reach all categories of young people?);
- iii. the identification of “opportunities and experiences” for young people (lifelong, formal and non-formal learning, etc.);
- iv. the sharing of competencies and participation levels (including youth organisations and young people);
- v. the funding of projects and the financial support for youth organisations;
- vi. the reliability and commitment of domains/ structures responsible for the conservation of a cross-sectoral youth strand in all other policies;
- vii. issues that are universal and cross-cutting (information, participation, active citizenship, equality of opportunity, access and inclusion);
- viii. the identification of gaps (lack of resources and a skilled workforce, appropriate consideration for and inclusion of minorities, etc.);
- ix. the efficiency and effectiveness of legislative support;
- x. the relevance of the whole project in terms of the most recent research findings.

If the youth policy is to stand its ground, answers will have to be provided. The Council of Europe suggests the application of criteria to act as indicators for the assessment of a youth policy. In collaboration with all the stakeholders/ beneficiaries involved in the establishment process, it is suggested that indicators are developed concurrently with the objectives. A list of fourteen indicators is provided in the publication *Experts on Youth Policy Indicators – Final Report* (Council of Europe, 2003a).

The next section of the report will focus on the delivery essentials of youth policy, that is, on the function of national and local structures and their contribution to the development of a cross-sectoral youth policy, with a particular emphasis on issues of participation, autonomy and non-formal learning.





3. Delivery of youth policy



3.1. National and local structures

According to the National Report (NR) of the Slovak Republic (pp. 16-22), there is a number of structures which are meant to contribute towards the development of the Slovak National Youth Policy.

The Ministry of Education, through the Department of Children and Youth, is responsible and is also the guarantor for the implementation of the policy. Although it assumes the role of secretariat, it delegates the responsibility of implementation to IUVENTA which, in turn, co-ordinates and organises a number of activities. The ministry chairs the Government Council for Children and Youth – a council that has an advisory role and that is responsible for “the grant making policy of the ministries focused on children and youth” (NR, p. 17). The NR claims that other ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and the ministries of Health, of Interior Affairs and of Culture, also contribute towards this aim.

The international review team had the opportunity to meet representatives from a number of national structures. Although some limitations observed by the team have been listed in the NR on pages 23-24, the review team has obtained some insights, from participants in discussions, which cannot remain undisclosed.

i. A rather preoccupying situation emerges from the fact that, on more than one occasion, the team was told that the Government Council of Children and Youth is not functioning as intended. Not more than three or four meetings a year are held and it appears that the Council has no power to activate systems.

ii. It is encouraging to note that, in the Slovak Republic, there is a specifically identified “driving force” for youth policy development in the shape of the Ministry of Education. The National Report (p. 16) lists the expected functions of the Department of Children and Youth. It appears that, not only does this Department “push” for the implementation of the youth policy initiatives, it also initiates activities, prepares and supports programmes and proposes research action. The impression that the review team got is that everything goes back to Education, leaving little space for the autonomy of other actors.

iii. All the other ministries claim co-operation among each other and with the Ministry of Education. Although they all engage in policy development in terms of welfare, health, environment, employment and cultural services targeted towards young people, there are still a number of conceptual challenges that require concrete and visible co-operation and co-ordination. For example, the integration of education, social work, and child and family policies is not clear-cut quantity.



fact, the suggestion for the need of a Youth Law has been made by more than one participant. Such a law would help in the creation of a platform for all concerned to discuss and implement in a wholistic and efficient manner.

iv. While the Ministry of Culture attempts to leave no stone unturned (organisation of national events, support to amateurs, special discounts, etc.) in an effort to promote and support cultural activities, it is still faced with one unpleasant fact. The review team was told that it is very difficult to find sponsors for cultural events. The ministry itself lacks the financial means to support all the activities and, consequently, a large number of applications for assistance has to be rejected. The figure of 20% (600 out of 3 000) was mentioned for successful applications. At the same time, the point was made that no precise statistics are kept with regard to the grant system.

v. Environmental matters in the form of education programmes and projects – in schools and universities, for students and teachers – co-operation at international level (e.g. Life Nature project), fieldwork and the publication of environmental material are the major concerns of the Department of Public Relations in the Ministry of Environment. Young people are seen to be supportive of environmental issues, yet a considerable number is still perceived as not being interested in anything “thus leading to drug addiction, for example”. A rather strongly-worded conclusion, but one which may lead to a re-thinking on the issue of tackling this subject in a non-formal manner. As things were described to the review team, environmental awareness is being promoted in a comprehensive, yet too formal, manner.

vi. Formal and statutory provisions are in place when it comes to dealing with unlawful acts/ criminal offences by both legally responsible youth (15 years of age) and those below this age limit. The Ministry of Interior works in conjunction with the police, parents, social workers, the Education sector, NGOs and other ministries in its efforts to control or prevent crime. Young people’s own views on such an important aspect of life are not in place, given that the new Law of Prevention of Crime is still at the discussion stage – the year 2006 being earmarked for completion. The review team would have liked to learn something about domestic violence, bullying in schools and lifestyle crimes – issues which should be addressed as youth policy issues.

vii. A pattern, similar to that in many EU countries, is developing in the Slovak Republic with regard to alcohol consumption, smoking, drug misuse and abuse, eating habits and sexual precocity, all at an early age. Aware of this situation, the Ministry of Health is at the forefront in its efforts to educate and prevent. It targets schools (students and teachers) and parents, it co-operates in ESPAD and it campaigns against excesses and in favour of healthy and low-risk overall behaviour.

Three preoccupying situations emerged from the discussions held:

- first contact with risk-taking behaviour occurs during leisure time;
- research shows that leisure time is not organised; and
- financial support for leisure-time centres or youth clubs is lacking.

The review team was not in a position – mainly due to time constraints – to verify all these perceptions. However, it will not hesitate to recommend that the youth policy development programme needs to consider in earnest (i) the role of the non-formal sector (youth clubs, leisure centres, peer educators) rather than concentrate solely on the formal sector; (ii) an effective and transparent financial support system to the non-formal sector; and (iii) the re-visiting of priority risk behaviours:



what tops the list? Is it the abuse of medicinals or that of tobacco and alcohol? Is it prevention or harm reduction that is required more?

viii. IUVENTA is a non-profit government organisation directly run by the Ministry of Education. The information obtained by the review team about this organisation (through an information sheet, two discussion meetings, an interview with a Ministry of Education official, and a visit to one of its two huge properties) reveals the prominent role it is expected to fulfill with regard to support services, research and the development of youth work. IUVENTA also had the task of co-ordinating the NR.

The review team cannot but condone the invaluable work performed by this entity. However, two questions remain unanswered:

- What use is being made of the two properties owned by IUVENTA given that, firstly, the team was informed that IUVENTA is now specialising in youth service, information and training activities and, secondly, that “the building is not used for youth work, only for administration”! (meeting 15 February 2005)?
- What level of prominence is being given to non-formal learning, that subject so closely associated with youth work?

ix. The Youth Council of Slovakia (RMS) is, in one of the officials’ own words, “not well known enough” and its main concern is that many people still “talk *about* but not with young people” [emphasis made by respondent]. These two statements succinctly interpret the review team’s own understanding of the situation. As much as the Council is actively involved in various activities of service and advocacy (NR, p. 17), both in the Slovak Republic and within the European Youth Forum and CDEJ, it is not clear at all (a) to what extent it is independent of the government and how free it feels to express views divergent to those of the authorities; (b) what active role did the Youth Council take in the preparation of the National Report and the development of the youth policy apart from commenting on the draft edition; (c) how representative of youth organisations is the Youth Council (of 41 organisations? – NR, p. 17; or 36 organisations? – interview with Council official, 14 February 2005; or 20 organisations, plus 9 observers and 2 partners? – *Youth Council of Slovakia*, pp. 32-51, published with financial support of the Ministry of Education); and (d) what the level of involvement of NGOs is, when the state does not have a policy on how to work with them.

x. The Slovak Youth Foundation is an independent foundation, which governs its own property. It has the enviable task of distributing funds generated from its property. The foundation supports various institutions which provide specific services to “non-clubables”, to youth organisations which have special needs, to the professional development of volunteering and to training programmes for youth leaders (NR, p. 19). The review team was unable to determine how funds are distributed, that is, on what criteria financial support is given. Although the NR refers the reader to the website www.nds.sk for further information, there is only a Slovak version of the contents and so this important issue remains unsolved.

xi. There appears to be a rigid institutional separation between different actors concerned with youth, which is especially visible with regard to young people’s transition from school to work. The review team was given the opportunity to visit the Bureaux of Employment, Social and Family affairs in Kosice and Presov. Confirmation of procedures for enhancing the employment prospects of the unemployed was obtained during the discussions held in these two localities. Major



issues, such as training schemes, unemployment benefits, job opportunities and the Roma case, will be discussed in Section 4.

However, a few more concerns emerged:

- better co-operation is expected between the Ministry of Labour and that of Education;
- the Ministry of Economics is perceived as unwilling to give efficient financial support;
- the labour market does not function as it should;
- state budget restrictions are tough; and
- local bureaux are not autonomous – a centralised system still prevails in this sector.

xii. Two regional leisure centres were visited: Mikado (planned) and Hemerkova Street (not planned) in Kosice. In Kosice there are 16 such centres, which are organised at three different levels: city, regional authority and private. The city and regional authority centres are financed by the local authority, while ministries support the private ones. Financial support depends on the number of “children” attending (money per head). The Mikado centre has no official statute, and young people do not participate in the running of the centre and they do not have any special responsibilities. The age range of the members is between 6 and 15 years as defined by law, while those in charge do not have a specific youth work background training. The centre opens between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., from Monday to Friday. Regret was expressed for lack of legislative support for the non-formal learning – in terms of life-skills training and use of leisure time – taking place.

As much as such details may appear not particularly relevant to youth policy matters, they still go far enough to raise questions about the opportunities being missed by young people with regard to the learning of those soft skills that non-formal learning promotes, namely, genuine participation, experiential learning and autonomy, among others. Moreover, the financial support system may not be defined clearly enough. The review team was informed that about 200 to 250 young people attend during the week (i.e. about 50 per day), although attendance usually amounts to 14 or 15 as evidenced during the team’s visit.

Admittedly a number of misunderstandings or misinterpretations still prevail as a result of the transition period Slovak society is going through. Some clarifications need to be tackled with urgency, for example: youth workers cannot be considered as pedagogues; non-formal learning is concerned with lifelong learning – it is an indicator for democratic processes in education, and it provides possibilities for emancipation and participation.

3.2. “A good education is required for a good job” (Office of the Government Commissioner for Romany Issues, 3 November 2004) – a statement that clearly implies the need for a thorough understanding of a wholistic approach to education.

In order to attempt to visualise better the Slovak Republic’s request to the international team to include the field of transition from school to work in its review, this statement can be compared and contrasted with another one made by an official from the Department of Children and Youth, Ministry of Education, namely “the Slovak Republic does not understand the meaning of the concept of non-formal learning/ education – but it is being practised” (3 November 2004).



On the one hand, the implications derived thereof include the importance being attached to work on curricular reform, the reform of university education and further education, the preparation of a Law on Education and a Law on Sport. Coupled with these issues, one may include the establishment of school offices which provide, amongst others, for the education of new competencies/ responsibilities with the help of specialised persons. “Education consultants” are also found in schools meeting pupils and their guardians with the aim of supporting young people’s transition to work.

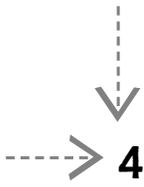
On the other hand, one cannot, as yet, obtain a concrete reply to the question: “Is non-formal learning happening?” For if non-formal learning is happening, the autonomy of NGOs in particular is sacrosanct and any form of contractual ties is to be avoided. This does not seem to be the case yet in the set-up of the Slovak Republic’s realm of education outside the formal system. A key player in this respect is IUVENTA, a non-profit government organisation which is directly run by the Ministry of Education (Information leaflet). Other youth organisations – such as the Slovak Youth Foundation, the National Youth Council and the Children of Slovakia Foundation – are involved in providing a variety of services to youth organisations and individuals, in presenting the needs of young people to the state and in participating in national and international platforms. However, a common strand of complaints runs along the lines of lack of support in terms of human and financial resources – elements which tend to dent their autonomy to a high degree. Moreover, “the State has no policy on how to work with NGOs” (Slovak Youth Council, 2 November 2004) so that, although “[non-formal learning] is being practised” – IUVENTA “acts as the National Agency for the EU YOUTH programme and it implements the project EURODESK” – the availability of money for youth work, the genuine participation of young people in society and the role of youth clubs/organisations in youth policy development are not yet in place.

It appeared that a rather formal understanding of education prevails whereby “non-formal education/ learning” is being considered as based on a course system rather than consisting of arranging open learning situations in which individuals have scope and freedom to make choices and decisions.

The international review team appreciates the fact that, in a relatively short period of time, clouded as it is by transition dilemmas, a complex network of structures has been formed with the aim of developing an integrated youth policy. However, in addition to the limitations listed in the NR on pp. 23-24, one needs to accept that the concepts of co-ordination, co-operation and co-management are still not fully grasped. The question of who is responsible for youth still begs. Moreover, as much as the issue of decentralisation is a priority for the Slovak Republic, there seems to be a serious lack of autonomy for a number of agencies because everything seems to be predicated on the Ministry of Education and everybody seems to be waiting for somebody else to decide.

The major implication that needs to be tackled is that which concerns a stronger distribution of genuine participation in decision-making processes, a clearer strategy for establishing funding procedures and a robust overhaul of the place and value of non-formal learning. The implementation of laws defining youth work, financing, co-funding procedures and NGOs are considered as pre-requisites.





4. Youth policy – the main challenges

4.1. Decentralisation

As outlined in Section 1 of this report, the state administration of the Slovak Republic underwent gradual changes under various monarchical forms. These were eventually replaced by state bodies and institutions of the Czechoslovak Republic. With the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic in 1993, a progressive renewal of administrative powers started taking place.

As from 1 January 2004, the state administration is reflected on central level. The central bodies have lower levels created on regional level. The number of regions is identical to the number of self-administration territorial units. “There are now 8 regions and 2770 municipalities” (Consultant for the decentralisation of public administration, Government Office, 5 November 2004). Between both levels of local self-administration (municipality and superior territorial units), there is no relation of superiority or subordination

(http://www.vlada.gov.sk/decentralizacia/dokumenty/vniznansky_en.rtf).

The almost dramatic changes in state administration that occurred at the beginning of 2004 led to the distribution of a large number of competencies from state level to municipalities and superior territorial units. The aim had been that of increasing the active participation of local authorities, promoting efficiency and improving the quality of state administration. Here one finds a reflection of the Slovak Republic Government’s acceptance of the concept of decentralisation. As a relatively new democracy, the Slovak Republic tuned in to a radical transformation of the broader political, social and economic systems.

Decentralisation entails the transfer of authority and responsibility of public functions from central government entities to subordinate or quasi-independent government organisations or even the private sector. This process holds promise for improving the delivery of services, as citizen participation and accountability tend to enhance the responsiveness of public policies. However, there is no standard model of decentralisation or a single route towards local governance. The context, timing and sequence of decentralisation are the result of political processes. Strategies of decentralisation can be gradual or swift, partial or comprehensive. There are also limits to decentralisation as a strategy. Any relaxation of direct control or authority introduces the possibility of dissent or division at critical moments. Which brings the focus of this section to one of the main interests of youth policy developers in the Slovak Republic.



Throughout the series of meetings the international review team had with the various ministries, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the Youth Council of Slovakia and others, either the issue of decentralisation or its ancillary concepts of participation (both in terms of decision making and action taking) and co-ordination were made the subject of interpretation and enquiry. While on the Slovak side the issue was interpreted according to its perceptions and convictions, the review team sought to obtain clarifications and specifics directly related to youth policy formulation. A frequent reply to questions for clarification of the current situation as well as to future prospects was: “as you know, we are in the process of de-centralisation, so it is very difficult to give you a precise picture”. The review team had the impression that this was not only the case for external observers, but also for those directly and internally involved in the process.

The main thrust of the decentralisation process seems to be focused on education and finance. Parallel reforms are taking place in that:

- i. while the Department of Children and Youth within the Ministry of Education has taken the role of co-ordination between ministries and the role of Secretariat, the financing of youth policy has been transferred to local authorities and regional offices (Department of basic and pre-school education, 2 November 2004); and
- ii. while the Association of Towns and Communes of Slovakia (ZMOS) is burdened with the task of representing the interest of its members and with the task of reviewing and expressing its opinion on laws concerning fiscal decentralisation, one senior official stated that “fiscal decentralisation does not have an impact on young people” (ZMOS, 5 November 2004).

The international review team was here faced with what seemed to be a contradiction of terms. In the first place, if local authorities and regional offices are responsible for financing youth policy, it is not clear how young people, those who matter most, are not affected by such a move. And, although the transfer of competencies from state level to lower levels is at the centre of Slovakia’s conception of decentralisation, the state “still holds the management of youth policy” (2 November 2004). The review team noticed a reluctance on several levels, but especially on that of the Ministry of Education and IUVENTA officials, to steer the decentralisation process in a more proactive manner. The function of the national level seems to be interpreted in terms of guidance and assistance for the local and regional levels in terms of developing up-to-date principles of youth work and of providing further training both to grant-receiving organisations and to representatives and workers in regional and local youth centres. Often the picture was drawn that financial responsibility had been decentralised and now the national level should wait for a demand from local and regional actors for collaboration. It appeared that a former top-down approach has been replaced by a vacuum of responsibility and communication with the national level remaining the most powerful actor while its contact with and response from the local and grass-roots level is being dried out.

The active participation of local authorities and others in the education sector seems to be measured in terms of curricular reforms, the organisation of out-of-school activities by religious organisations and other third-sector organisations (Division of further education..., 2 November 2004). However, small communes are also responsible for the clustering of schools with a small number of pupils,



teachers may be employed directly by schools as a result of the legal status they have been given and steps are also taken for imparting education for new responsibilities. Moreover, according to the Chair of the National Slovak Republic Parliament (Committee on Education, Youth and Culture), there is “an enormous problem with money”, “there is no integral system in charge of youth” and “investment in education is so important” (2 November 2004). So much so that, for example, a voucher system was introduced in schools whereby parents could “buy” a place for their children in a school club or in a leisure time centre.

The Association of Towns and Communes was rather against the voucher system. However, since the state has decided to introduce and adopt it, the Association has not yet formed a concrete opinion notwithstanding the fact that negative feedback has not been lacking. Since the system is in its first year of application, the Association is considering this year as a “test period”. Not so the Slovak Youth Council which considers the system as a negative way of financing activities and as a creator of an “exclusivity club”.

Mention of “exclusivity” is apparently not limited to the school sector. Further insight into the discussions held with ZMOS leads to the need of further clarification on the perception of the decentralisation process being enacted. The statement made by a member of the representative group regarding the fact that the fiscal decentralisation process does not have an impact on young people was elaborated to include three important elements. Firstly, the distribution of competencies between state and higher authorities, and between state and towns and villages implies that it is up to the lower levels to deal with children and young people – as long as this is done according to the law. Second, central power has not dealt with youth policy as such and, consequently, the revision and creation of such policy takes a long time. Initiatives in this regard are taken by the Ministry of Education. Third, although it is not generally done, local authorities are free to decide whether or not to have a youth policy!

As a result of the situation just described, the international review team understands stated concerns, such as “decentralisation leads to problems – people are not yet ready to manage the life of communes” and “many, many years are required for the acceptance of decentralisation”. As far as youth policy development is concerned, the major implications emerging in this regard include the availability and accessibility of financial resources for NGOs, the participation levels of young people and their representatives in the formulation of the National Report and of the policy itself, and the problem of co-ordination among ministries, NGOs, regions and communes.

The international review team understands that, at this stage, the “vertical structures” (Williamson, 2002, p. 41) of youth policy:

(a) revolve around and converge on the Department of Children and Youth within the Ministry of Education. This ministry is responsible for the education policy and the youth policy.

Question: Does youth policy fall exclusively under the Education domain? Does everything go back to “education”?

(b) are concerned with the fiscal decentralisation plan scheduled for January 2006. The outlined plan expects that municipalities and the greater territorial units will rely mainly on personal income tax for funds (Miklos, I., Finance Minister, reported in *The Slovak Spectator* by Pisárová, Vol. 10, No. 15).



Question: What strategies are being considered for reaching consensus on a Law of Financing NGOs? Is there a policy on how to work with NGOs? How will paid education influence youth policy?

(c) are concerned with delegating and devolving youth policy development.

Question: How is consistency of response to all young people, wherever they live, being ensured?

4.2. The transition from school to work

Young people's transition from school to work is only one aspect of their lives – lives which follow their own logic and progress according to their own rhythms. It is important to recognise that young people are actively trying to shape their present and future lives, although constrained within economic, social and cultural conditions. Thus, there exists a relationship between the structural and the subjective/biographical perspectives. This relationship is central and it moves dyadically with the relationship between system integration and social integration. For example, as much as the education system ultimately aims at the social integration of young people in particular, young people can only integrate into society at the behest of the system. This situation arises from the fact that education is often considered to be the seat of learning only in its formal mode. The formal system of education, pre-occupied as it is with meritocracy, is unable to provide for its own drop-outs, for those who are simply indifferent to its methods and aspirations, and for those who are academically challenged.

Seen from a different point of view, the formal system can be considered as an ideal partner to the non-formal strand of education/ learning. An integrational approach to economic, social, educational and employment policies will also help those individuals who fail in the formal system. Otherwise, these “failures” will be left stranded in the unemployment pool even though they may have obtained skills (soft skills) and experiences through family trades, youth organisations, voluntary work, training schemes or even through peer learning.

The three-legged stool upon which the success of this strategy rests comprises education policy, employment policy and social policy. So that it should not be beyond common understanding that youth policy on its own cannot solve labour-market problems. The participation of young people in this market depends so much on the learning opportunities created in the pre-world-of-work market, that is, the formal system of education; in the provision of an environment that strikes a balance between flexibility and security, that is, the formal recognition of non-formal education/ learning; and in the labour market itself.

“Unemployed young people in the age bracket of 15-24 represent 37.2% of the total number of unemployed persons. Almost 90% of them still live with their parents.” (Ministry of Education in co-operation with IUVENTA, 2003, p. 18)

According to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family the percentage of unemployed youth is decreasing as a result of the services career advisers offer to schools. Accepting the fact that, when a young person becomes unemployed, s/he also becomes disadvantaged, the ministry has introduced individual action plans. However, apart from the difficulty to implement this tool in a way on a large scale involving all unemployed, for the time being the focus lies on getting in touch with all individuals rather than on plans tailored to the needs of the individual. The scare

options of such action plans, amongst others, include work experiences for graduate students. It has been recognised that there is a mismatch between the education system and the demands of the labour market. Consequently the ministry also promotes programmes that would help assess the needs of the labour market. Second action plans are also being elaborated in close co-operation with the Advisory Council. Benefits and incentives are available for the unemployed and those at poverty level, and for activation initiatives, respectively.

It is worth quoting at some length from the draft report “State Policy related to children and youth in the Slovak Republic” (Iuventa/ Ministry of Education, 2004, Section 6, unpaginated):

- i. “There is also an unwillingness of employers to employ the perpetual job applicants”;
- ii. “The position of the labour market ... is also caused by the low educational structure of applicants and in some situations also by the unwillingness and passive approach of employers”;
- iii. “Young people are often disadvantaged ... the reason is not only the deficient [sic] of practical experiences, but it is also their professional training that does not meet the labour market’s requirements; and
- iv. “The part of young population is constantly preparing for the career without the knowledge of labour market requirements”.

There seems to be a contradictory view on the reasons and structures of youth unemployment. On the one hand, the analysis of a mismatch is related to the need and in fact ongoing reform of education. On the other hand, reference is made to the low qualifications of the young unemployed, although the rate of early school leaving in the Slovak Republic is among the lowest in the EU 25 (EC, 2005).

The discussions that the international review team had with regard to un/employment were carried out in a number of different localities. Apart from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the opportunity to discuss this issue was taken up both in Kosice and Presov.

Overall, there seems to be a huge lack of co-ordination among the labour market policies, youth policy, education and training policy, economic and regional policy and other social policy sectors such as housing and public transport, where the latter is considered to be relatively very expensive.

Among the issues highlighted, one finds a clear dichotomy between the re-training of low-qualified persons and the support extended in the consequent job search and the certification of such training schemes. Where re-training courses are not certificated, the possibility of improving the individual’s labour-market possibilities is minimal, if not nil. Certification only follows work experience – something which is unattainable by the unemployed. Currently the situation is aggravated by the fact that funding available for individual cases is restricted by rather low ceilings. One young man explained that the re-training measure he underwent was not sufficient to improve his employment opportunities significantly because it was neither certificated nor was it compensatory for his lack of work experience. In order to become eligible for a further certificated training measure he needed work experience – which, however was impossible for him to get without a training certificate. Consequently, the longer-term unemployed will find themselves completely on their own in search of a job – given that support for self-employment is given only to those with secondary education.



However, on the other side of the coin, one finds that work experiences are available for those who follow the graduate practice programme – which appears to be a reasonable solution to the high qualification level of school leavers which is undermined by lacking work experience. But the number of places in the programme is much too small to make any significant effect. The funding that goes with this programme is quickly exhausted since employers, who take trainees, profit from some compensation as does the trainee.

The team was informed by two graduate practice trainees that they feel they were being used as cheap labour without being either instructed or trained for a possible regular employment at the end of the six-month training period. This reveals that both the young people and the employers involved lack professional guidance.

There seems to be a variety of reasons for the overall dull picture. Firstly, it seems that re-training is often not organised according to labour-market needs but rather to the courses training organisations offer. In this regard, the comment was made that one can “easily” explore what the needs of local companies are. However, if there are no prospects for job opportunities or for prospective investment, both local and foreign, then it would not be practical to follow such a line of action. The only ray of hope respondents could see in this respect was the promise of having industrial parks established in the area.

It appears as if the fact that increasing employability of job-seekers and policies aimed at creating employment opportunities are not well co-ordinated. The review team did not find any evidence that economic reforms in terms of tax reduction or allocation of foreign investment were connected to ongoing educational reforms or labour-market policies. The management of the labour-market policy appeared to be characterised by waiting for the effects of foreign investment and education reform while concentrating on short-term measures in the meanwhile.

Secondly, one has also to concede that the pressure applied by the European Commission in the framework of the European Employment Strategy for policy changes may be impeding effective results because of the haste with which countries in transition, like the Slovak Republic, are expected to take new policy measures.

Employment bureaux, on the other hand, were seen to act conscientiously in the interest of job-seekers, school-leavers, short- and long-term unemployed and Romas. The latter are regarded as coming from different social backgrounds, and often with minimal education qualifications. In this regard a programme for the training of community social workers has been launched. But again, the bureau has to support these workers since most of them are also unemployed.

There is then the added problem of counsellors who are included in the team that advises job-seekers and who are involved in the development and monitoring of individual action plans for those unemployed for more than three months. Apart from having to cope with about 150 unemployed persons each, counsellors do not have specialised training – though assisted by a psychologist – and, consequently, quality standards tend to suffer.

The situation is such that employment officers in Presov saw no other possibilities than to send the young unemployed to the west of the country or even abroad. Reference has also been made to the use of the European Employment Service (EURES). However, due to the limitations existing in a majority of EU states, this implies a considerable devaluation (or waste) of human capital as young people



holding post-compulsory qualifications or even university degrees embark on precarious careers in the hotel or catering sector in Western tourism areas based on short-term contracts.

The foregoing indicates the need for the verification of two important terms arising from the issue of preparation for the world of work. The terms “employability” and “employment prospects” tend to be used alternatively. However, one needs to make a distinction. Employability, as understood by EU institutions for example, denotes the importance of (i) improving training, (ii) introducing guidance, information and support measures to help people during their transition to work, and (iii) activation-based programmes (Serrano 2001). If training needs to be improved, and guidance, information and support are considered essential, then one can interpret the situation as being clouded by young people’s lack of skills – technical, procedural and behavioural (motivation and aptitude). However, employment prospects cannot rest solely on young people’s compendium of skills. The prospects of finding employment rest also on the demand for workers, on measures geared towards economic development and on the even distribution of jobs. Not to mention, of course, those skills expected of young people transiting from school to work, that is, motivation and aptitude from the employers’ side.

There is no doubt in the minds of the review team that the initiatives taken so far by the Slovak authorities are those that one expects to find at the threshold of a developing programme. Needless to say, much more needs to be done. Weaknesses and lacunae will have to be addressed in an urgent and efficient manner. Apart from the need for the more robust integration of policies, mentioned earlier, it is suggested that participation, in the form of social and civil alliance with system structures and with the strategies formulated, is of the essence. The young unemployed, prospective employees, state corporates, trade unions, employers and training organisers should be encouraged to share the responsibility of connecting the biographical and structural aspects of training programmes and employment strategies. Their agenda should include: new forms of investment in both capital and skills; encouragement and assistance for self-employment and entrepreneurship; “the breakdown of barriers between formal and informal learning”; improvement in the provision of subsidies, care facilities, access to information and counselling; and the use of recent research findings.

4.3. The Roma phenomenon

The Slovak Republic is a country of minorities. Exact figures regarding the number of members in the ten ethnic minority groups in the republic are hard to come by, because some individuals do not declare their belonging to a particular sector during a census. This seems to apply mainly to Roma minority members. The percentage of Roma population varies from 1.7% (census 2001 in Ministry of Education: National Report 2005, p.134) to 4.8% (census 1989 in Ministry of Education: National Report 2005, p.137) to 7% (European Commission 2005). The highest concentration of Roma communities is found in eastern and in the southern districts of central Slovakia. There are approximately two thirds of the Roma living in these areas (Office of the Government Commissioner for Romany Issues, “Comprehensive Development Programme for Roma Settlements”).

Due to their low level of education and extremely high unemployment rate, the Roma are often exposed to social inequalities and exclusion. The implications in this regard

include issues of participation, education, un/employment, discrimination and racism (http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2005/jan/jrspsi_2005_annex_en.pdf). The request made by the Slovak authorities to the international review team for consideration of the Roma phenomenon was thus fully justified.

The first indication one gets of the great concern about the Roma issue in the Slovak Republic is the presence of the Office of the Government Commissioner for Romany Issues. This office co-operates closely with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Construction and Development and with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. It is an office divided into different sections dealing with un/employment, housing, education and training, health and culture. Another major problem that this Office deals with concerns the standardisation of the Roma language.

The discussions held with members of this office served to highlight the facts that the Roma minority is considered as an ethnic/social minority afflicted with lack of education, rampant school absenteeism, extremely high unemployment rates (nearing 100% in eastern Slovakia), high criminality levels in terms of little thefts, lack of hygiene, electricity, gas and water, lack of accommodation, the taking over of private land for the building of huts, and overall negative perception and attitude by the majority of the Slovak population towards this ethnic group. The main consequence of this scenario has led to the dominating and often repeated view that the majority of Roma are “demotivated” and “strongly isolated from the mainstream”. As pointed out earlier, efforts to combat this situation are on-going and, yet, positive results at grass-roots level are still conspicuous by their absence. In practical terms, participation and representation in the local autonomous bodies is only symbolic or even not accepted. And, “other political parties don’t help profiling the Roma political subjects and more or less only pretend a possible co-operation and sometimes they even misuse it to increase their preferences” (National Report, 2005, p. 139).

The task of improving or even reversing this unfortunate situation is gargantuan. Neither history nor the majority of citizens’ opinions nor the Romas’ own inherent or maybe the so-called “fulfilling prophetic attitude” are favourable to an optimistic solution to the situation. Not a small number of improvements or corrections need to be made, notwithstanding the initiatives already taken or are being planned for the immediate future.

The international review team has it from a number of actors in the field that the situation of Roma is being seen as particularly problematic.

- i. Specific statistical data or follow-up evaluations of programmes/projects are not available. A number of case studies have been undertaken, but qualitative data are still missing and the implementation of a number of strategies may still be only on paper.
- ii. Roma’s participation levels in decision-making processes is claimed to be on a good level, “but it needs to be higher and we work to make it better”, although the vast majority “do not have access to the internet and to newspapers”. Moreover, for example, Roma youth organisations are presently not even represented on the National Youth Council, probably because they “don’t have the money to pay membership fees”.
- iii. The reduction of social benefit levels in the context of reforming social and labour market policies has been referred to by some respondents as a clear measure related to the Roma population, especially with regard to ceilings for the number of family or household members. In a situation of full unemploy-



ment among Roma in certain areas – while one acknowledges the reason as being the reluctance of Slovak employers to employ Roma – this is likely to worsen the situation of poverty. Inasmuch as this can be interpreted as a refusal of citizenship, it is highly unlikely that motivation for work can be achieved in this way.

- iv. Although there exists no discrimination in education, segregation in more than one form exists. Accommodation for habitation and for schooling purposes near the mainstream population is missing. Many Roma are in special schools with the consent of their parents and “so they receive special treatment”. In some cases there exist special schools in Roma villages, but no regular schools, and public transport to the next regular school is either marginal or non-existent.
- v. The Slovak state policy on housing does not discriminate adversely in any way and there is a specific allowance for towns that build homes or flats for Roma. Yet the housing situation for Roma in Kosice, for example, was described as a “ghetto” with 600 flats for 6 000 people!
- vi. Roma people are not able to benefit from activation plans in the employment sector due to lack of qualifications. Some of them have not even finished basic school. It is already very hard for a less-qualified person to obtain financial or certification support for re-training, and self-employment is restricted to those with secondary education.

The opportunity given to the international review team to visit Lunik IX and to meet representatives of Romintegra 7777 in Kosice proved to be an eye-opener in more ways than one. The practical side of the scenario described above was highlighted through the activities under way and through the hands-on experience of the actors involved in the project.

As the name “Romintegra” implies, one could feel the efforts undertaken to integrate the work of the primary school in the location and that of an association dedicated to work with Roma youth. The school premises are made available to the two Roman Catholic priests, also members of the school staff, who started Romintegra 7777 in 2003. They managed to obtain financial support to repair the premises, from the Youth Foundation of Slovakia and from the city of Kosice. Their aim was to organise extracurricular activities along three lines of action, namely (a) children need education, (b) adults need work, and (c) everybody needs education for values. Fifty Roma are employed with the association, which carries out its work mainly after school hours – activities which range from sport to cooking to music/drama clubs to computer techniques, and which are supported by education vouchers. The school premises are also available during weekends. It was obvious in this regard that what should have been taken on by the state has eventually become the domain of a church-related organisation. While this not only implies a lack of service, it also means a selective way on the basis of specific religious and cultural norms, something which does not correspond to modern principles of managing cultural diversity (CDMG, 2002).

Close to the school one finds blocks of flats which are meant to accommodate the Roma community. The appearance of these blocks does not leave much to the imagination as regards their state of maintenance and as regards the overcrowding that was clearly visible from the outside. Groups of school-age children were seen playing in the open spaces between the school and the residential area, although the time of our visit coincided with school hours.



Schoolchildren who complete their primary education may then move on to secondary school. Since most of the inhabitants of the area are known to be in a difficult financial situation, a number of allowances for books and even food is made available. Yet, due to the fact that no allowances are made available to Roma who want to go to secondary school, due to the high cost of transport and due to most parents who do not consider education as important, only a small percentage make it further than primary education. In brief, the children living in this area have been described as being “socially deprived”.

The overall situation was described to the team as being made worse as a result of:

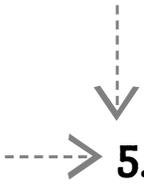
- i. the inefficiency and low level of education of some of the local administrators;
- ii. a serious lack of youth leaders – these being often replaced by parents “who care for their children”; and
- iii. the “small steps” taken by the state, not measuring up to the acute needs of the area.

Given the overall, though succinct scenario just described, the international review team acknowledges the efforts being made by various domains in an attempt to dilute, and possibly dissolve completely, the tension that exists between the Roma ethnic minority and the mainstream social actors. However, the team cannot condone a glaringly contrasting situation: the relaxed rapport that exists with other minority groups, in contrast with the clear inability of the mainstream society, at all levels, to disconnect the “Roma issue” from the “Roma problem”. The team strongly suggests that reference be made to the Recommendations listed in the Third Report on Slovakia, adopted on 27 June 2003 and published on 27 January 2004 by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The recommendations for further action, for stronger response and for rapid adoption of laws, are still valid.

Both our observations and those mentioned above give evidence of a situation which is characterised by mutual distrust and prejudice. Given the current social and economic situation, improvement requires an advance of trust and recognition on behalf of the Slovak society and its institutions towards the Roma. In the team’s view, the first step required is the nurturing of a mentality that recognises Roma as Slovaks, that accepts otherness, that refutes a paternalistic approach to solving problems and that accepts responsibility where lacunae or irregularities are identified.

The removal of obstacles, both overt and covert, that hinder the Roma from genuinely participating in civil society is a top priority. Their representation at all levels needs to be strengthened or introduced and their social conditions in rural areas more than in the urban environment must be equal and equivalent to those of the mainstream inhabitants. Without claiming a thorough knowledge of all the causes that led to the prevailing situation, the review team does not hesitate to suggest urgency in monitoring and assessing the implementation of programmes prepared for the Roma and to increase public awareness in relation to this minority. The team believes that this is the challenge facing the country and, in more specific terms, the youth policy.





5. Supporting youth policy development

Section 2 of this report presented a framework for the basic ingredients required for the development, implementation and delivery of youth policy, as suggested by a group of expert reports from the Council of Europe. Within this framework, however, a more comprehensive list of issues and considerations exists. Sections 3 and 4, in fact, respectively discussed (i) the function of some of the relevant structures that have been established for the purpose of policy delivery and (ii) the three particular fields of interest earmarked by the host country for reviewing by the international review team. In the process of these two discussions a significant number of minor and major issues and concerns have emerged – matters that provide evidence of good quality planning, of lacunae that require urgent attention and of problems that are endemic to the particular context and which cannot be solved with the stroke of a pen.

There are, however, other critical dimensions which need careful consideration, and on which this section will focus.

Supporting youth policy development is not an issue of micro dimensions. It is, rather, an issue which incorporates enlisting the support of a big number of key gatekeepers and stakeholders. Politicians, professionals and young people are the main actors in this scenario. While politicians are basically responsible for the production of a particular strategy, such as the decentralisation process discussed in Section 4, professionals and young people are particularly responsible for the delivery of the policy. The overriding element is that of adaptation to the context in which youth policy is being developed. Adaptation, however, does not include the elimination of any one particular essential element or the replacement of one by another. That is, elements such as human and financial resources, youth research and the training of professional workers cannot, in the opinion of the review team, be, at all costs, left out of the equation. Expert advice and the experience gained from the previous eleven policy reviews vouch for this opinion.

5.1. Human and financial resources

This matter pervades the whole process of youth policy development. While human resources are logically indispensable for all forms of activation of the policy – development, implementation and delivery – financial resources are, in the end, the backbone on which all functions rest. It is clear to all gatekeepers and stakeholders of youth policy in the Slovak Republic that the financial resources for its development are not adequate and for all intents and purposes – as evidenced in



most, if not all, other countries – will never be. However, it would not be out of place to point out that, whatever strategy politicians employ, the availability of finance goes hand in hand with it. For example, the hidden agenda behind the launch of the fiscal decentralisation process in the Slovak Republic was to motivate municipalities to put limited resources to good use, to provide services and to plan to consolidate what is already on offer. However, the danger of small municipalities being isolated surfaced and, consequently, more money was lobbied for them. The suggestion was made that small municipalities might join forces – a process envisaged to take up to five years. And, though the option of merging has been available by law since 1990, action only started eight years later. The situation further complicates itself when municipalities seek their revenue through income taxes.

With regard to this situation, the review team was informed that the Charter of Self-government was never implemented in full and that municipalities are only up to 10% autonomous!

The story goes on ... to include other occurrences such as the tax being collected by individual municipalities is not earmarked for leisure time centres at all; a high percentage goes to schools, leaving these centres to battle their way through on token financial means. Perhaps, one respondent's claim that "at this stage, only the theoretical aspect of autonomy persists" is valid and true.

-----> 5.2. Youth research

Paragraph 2.5 in Section 2 made reference to the need for an evidence-based youth policy, where evidence should find its genesis in current research work.

So complex have young people's changing conditions and transitions become, that it is more and more difficult for youth researchers to convince policy makers of the appropriateness of their findings. Yet the principle that underpins one of the main purposes of research, namely, "Research is as valuable as it influences policy and practice" cannot be negated or rejected. When policy making is based on conventional and sluggish assent to popular remedial action, it loses much of its substance. As Nias (1972, in Thorp, 1987) put it: policy should be formed and informed by practice and by the genuine participation and competent influence of those whose task is to provide a better understanding of issues, namely, researchers.

It can be stated that the international review team had four main sources of information regarding the situation of youth research in the Slovak Republic: (a) a meeting with representatives of the research community; (b) a comprehensive presentation of the research findings as compiled in the National Report; (c) the National Report itself and (d) one or two informal meetings with individual researchers. In the process of discussing other issues with various groups, the issue of research was also occasionally raised.

In view of these four (or five) sources, the impressions that the review team gained included the following:

- i. in the Slovak Republic there is a very strong and robust team of first-class researchers, some of whom have also gained international recognition;
- ii. the National Report lists a group of researchers who had the task of evaluating the report. It also gives a thorough description of research findings about, among others, young people's interest in politics, volunteering, mobility and young people and the EU;



- iii. the financial benefits for scientists and researchers in the Slovak Republic are not satisfactory. The Ministry of Education has established a programme of doctoral studies within which young graduates are involved. And, there are also government programmes intended for young researchers and graduates under the age of 35;
- iv. although, on the initiative of the Ministry of Education, a journal – *Youth and Society* – was established in 1995, “there is no specialised institution about youth studies”. Work done in the 1960s by the pioneers was cancelled in the 1970s by political forces and to date “there is no organised research on young people”. “Youth research was better under communism”;
- v. “research is not reflected in policy”;
- vi. it is “very wrong for the problematic of youth to be placed with the Ministry of Education” and “there should be a special ministry for youth”;
- vii. individual entities, such as universities and institutes, have initiated or conducted research on leisure activities, health, values, drug consumption, people with special needs, etc. However, the concept of non-formal learning is not yet accepted by university researchers;
- viii. IUVENTA – the right hand of the Ministry of Education – conducts research as requested by government; and
- ix. “the National Report is just a long description of research findings. It does not analyse situations in a critical manner”.

As pointed out in the Preamble and in various parts of the report, the review team could have been hampered in its interpretation of events either due to lack of time or means to confirm or otherwise what it was told or due to information being passed on “second-hand” by the interpreters. However, the list of impressions and comments given above indicates to a large extent a mixture of perceptions and conceptions, which could have emanated either from a language/ interpretation problem with concepts or on actual uncertainty about how things are in fact being done.

A number of questions remain unanswered:

- How is youth research organised in the Slovak Republic?
- What are the main areas of responsibility at present?
- How are ministries using the research being produced?
- How can a youth policy contribute to modernisation and identity formation, for example, if current youth research is not the basis of the policy’s formulation?

-----> 5.3. Youth work training

The delivery of youth policy depends largely on the effective engagement of professionals and young people. While the former may be represented by warranted individuals and statutory organisations, the latter may be included with NGOs with a variety of orientations such as, political, philanthropic, sport or religious. There is, of course, a large number of young people who do not belong to any organisation. According to the National Report, less than 10% of young people are represented by youth organisations (N.R., p. 159).

Taken as a single cohort of people engaged in working with young people, one can identify four categories of youth and community workers:



- i. Professionals who have undertaken advanced training in specific services and who are certified for their professional competence. They have public recognition. Among these, one may include psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and teachers;
- ii. Para-professionals who have no advanced training and who are not constrained by professional requirements, such as codes of practice or ethics and membership of a professional association;
- iii. Pseudo-professionals: those who are self-proclaimed youth workers with no training and no constraints; and
- iv. Volunteers who may fall under an organisation or who give service on an individual basis – with a no-profit, no-personal-gains attitude and with a big dose of enthusiasm, hope and optimism.

The knowledge gained by the review team in this regard relates to the engagement of professionals in the realms of education, employment, health, environment and minority issues. Volunteerism pervades all aspects of youth and community work. Thus, youth and community work in the Slovak Republic depends heavily on the contribution of volunteers. And, if working with young people outside the formal system of education is the major thrust towards non-formal education/ learning, then practitioners in this field are expected to be able to deal with the complex needs of young people. Needless to say, this requires of the worker personal, group, communication and helping skills, and as clear an understanding as possible of youth-related issues such as popular culture, delinquency, the media, sexuality and addiction. It does not seem fitting that the opportunities for non-formal learning are offered or provided by practitioners whose preparation does not match that of other professionals.

However commendable the work of volunteers is, there is no escape from the fact that quality work results from the acquisition of professional training based on a solid body of knowledge and an enhanced vision of autonomy, authority and accountability.

This aspect of youth work is conspicuous by its absence in the Slovak Republic – a situation which is not uncommon in a number of European countries. The debate on what kind and amount of training prospective youth workers should be given is on-going. So is the debate on the formal recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal learning. However, one must also draw the attention of the relevant authorities in the Slovak Republic that much progress has been made in this regard through the joint efforts of the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

The most worrying concern for the review team is the implication that originates from some of the statements made about non-formal learning during discussions. Throughout, the concept of non-formal learning has been relegated to the status of learning through leisure activities and formally-organised extracurricular work, mainly because those involved in youth work see themselves as “pedagogues”.

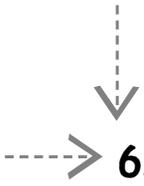


The recommendation is being made for the re-location of youth affairs outside the formal education system, for the establishment of youth work training schemes adaptable to the specific context in which youth work in the Slovak Republic occurs, for the promotion of research projects in the area of non-formal learning and for the inclusion of non-formal learning principles as key issues in the youth policy.

Reference to the literature produced by the Council of Europe and the European Commission needs to be made constantly; and youth organisations encouraged and supported in attending training sessions held in the youth centers in Strasbourg and Budapest.

Finally, and as a synopsis of what has been highlighted in this section it needs to be recognised that supporting youth policy through adequate human and financial resources, through evidence-based policy directions and through the availability of professionally-trained workers is equivalent to promoting active citizenship – “the hard core of youth policy”.





6. Youth policy response

Some of the key domains and issues of youth policy have been made the subject of this report so far. The issue of integration and of co-ordination, the need for specific legislation and for evidence-based directions, together with the main challenges facing the Slovak Republic policy makers, were dealt with in the process of reporting what was learnt during the two visits made in November 2004 and February 2005. Comments and recommendations are spread throughout as a means to critical reflection and in a spirit of co-operation and better understanding of the aims and objectives of a youth policy.

Of course, a number of issues could not be explored because of time constraints and also because of the dynamic nature of the review process itself. The report may or will eventually be to some extent superseded by amendments and new developments in legislation and structures. A reading of the review team's views, together with a reading of the National Youth Policy Report of the Slovak Republic, would give the reader a global and wholistic picture of the state of affairs.

However, in order to complete this review, a final commentary is being made on youth policy's response to the formation of new identities that the Slovak Republic in general and young people in particular, are undergoing and will continue to undergo following the present transition period towards a fully-fledged democracy. "It is not so much a question of 'who we are' and 'where we come from' as it is a question of 'what we might become', 'how we have been represented' and 'how that bears on how we might represent ourselves'" (Isin and Wood, 1999, p. 16).

The relevance of this point lies in the relationship that exists between identity and citizenship. While the former carries social and cultural weight, the latter carries legal weight and it controls civil, political and social rights and obligations. The problem that surfaces in this relationship emanates from how new identities will fit in or will be located in a society that promises to give a new look to the laws that regulate rights and obligations.

Moreover, with the formation of new identities, the element of fragmentation will emerge. Young people do not carry as much social and cultural weight as adults do. Nor do they have the same kind of weight in society. So the new nation that is being built comprises a diversity of identities that may have – or rather will have – different perceptions of what are their rights and obligations.

It is for this reason that the key concept of active citizenship has a major role in the European model of youth policy. A lot of learning has to be done for people to associate successfully with civil society.



Two questions beg: What is the impact of transition and modernity on youth policy? and How can youth policy cope with young citizens who are faced with a background of a paternalistic adult society in a modern emancipatory milieu?

The answer to these questions may be provided by the Council of Europe and European Commission approach to youth policy development. This is not the same as suggesting that youth policy can provide a universal remedy to all issues. It is more a question of commitment towards youth policy's response to the signs of the times.

-----> 6.1. integration

Youth policy's first response to the two above-mentioned questions is that it attempts to present a common front against any form of fragmentation. As already indicated in Section 2, it is essential to have an integrated youth policy whereby responsibilities are shared equally between the relevant domains, rather than having one domain or other dictating what needs to be done. An exploration of the dominating role of the Ministry of Education has already been done, and now is the time to explore how youth-related concerns should be taken into account in other policies as well. As soon as issues in employment, health, environment and equal opportunities, for example, are referred back to one particular domain, young people will be perceived as being a problem that needs particular attention from a mother or father figure. On the other hand, dealing with issues in full consultation with young people through their representatives and in some cases even individually, the issue of young people as a resource will emerge. Thus, the first step towards integration is genuine participation – an element that helps to start young people into association with civil society in real terms.

One particularly important area of youth policy that may be used as an example for this argument is housing. The review team was given a detailed and comprehensive description of the relevant ministry's task of dealing with this issue. There is no question about the commendable efforts being made for the solution of the housing problem in the Slovak Republic. Benefit schemes and various forms of support are on the ministry's agenda. Yet, the review team was informed that "the system does not focus specifically on young people" and that "political decisions are not properly controlled", as a result of which the State Fund is almost depleted; and that no specific information is available regarding how young people are living – as they wish? or are they conditioned to stay with their family?

This is not the place to discuss at length the cause of one issue or the effect of the other. However, what emerges clearly from this information is the lack of opportunity young people have if they decide to leave home for reasons of independent living, study or employment.

In brief, it can be seen that, at one and the same time, issues of access to housing, mobility, youth rights and 'away from home' arise – all of which are listed as part of the core package of learning opportunities and experiences promoted by the Council of Europe.

-----> 6.2. Proactivity

In order to maintain and consolidate the principle of integration in youth policy, there is also the need for taking a proactive rather than a reactive stance. This is much easier said than done. A society like the Slovak Republic, that is in a transi-



tion period, that had to take drastic and accelerated economic and social measures, and that has only recently become a partner in a wide circle of European countries, cannot be expected not to react to issues it considers as problems in modern society. However, while at the stage of developing a modern youth policy, this same society cannot escape the fact that it also has the responsibility to create new social dimensions that help form a new-look nation. By not getting trapped in the “where we came from” attitude, the Slovak Republic can turn to a proactive stance.

The review team was repeatedly told that things were better organised before 1989, that unemployment was almost inexistent and that the vast majority of young people belonged to one organisation [but not “or other”!]. This may be interpreted as the result of a situation in which the country lacks a history of independence and in which roots are embedded in state structures. Not so in a modern society conditioned to a market economy and a vibrant process of individualisation, independence and competency-seeking environment.

Proactivity can take many forms and can also be located in a number of situations. Participation levels, representation on committees, promotion of self-responsibility, and support (moral and financial) for project initiatives are some of the forms through which young people’s competencies can be explored and nurtured. The review team’s experience in this regard was rather negative.

For example, young people’s participation in the administration of leisure time centres is nil; young people are not represented in employment bureaux; there is not enough space – if any – for Roma to benefit from activation plans, due to lack of qualifications; and young people are often perceived (or just labelled?) as “demotivated”. Nothing was heard about the promotion of entrepreneurship skills – skills which may contribute to the easing of the problem the labour market in the Slovak Republic is experiencing.

As general as these perceptions may appear, they are still indicative of society’s inability to take necessary risks and to promote equality and equity at all levels. A youth policy cannot solve problems, but it can promote values for citizenship education through participation – that is, through engagement with civil society in a responsible manner.

-----> **6.3. indicators**

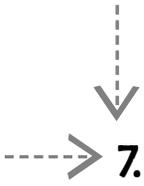
It is not enough for a youth policy to include aims and objectives, to prepare the establishment of structures, to encourage implementation, to be proactive and to promote active citizenship concurrently. Objectives need to be measurable in terms of performance indicators and quality criteria. The success or otherwise of pre-meditated action depends to a large extent on measured results of performance, through statistical information, through qualitative research findings and through constant feedback.

There was not enough time for the review team to discuss in some detail the situation in the Slovak Republic with regard to these elements. Both the National Report and respondents during meetings provided the team with an array of statistical information. Although some of the information given can be classified as dated due to the time lag involved between the data collection process and the publication of results, an inkling about youth education, young people and leisure time, health and family relationships, for example, could be obtained.



However, there was never a mention about policy indicators or quality criteria. As much as the occasion to obtain such information may have been missed, it is worth recommending to the Slovak authorities to make reference to the Council of Europe publications on the formulation and implementation of youth policies (Council of Europe 2003b: CDEJ 2003/16) and that on youth policy indicators (Council of Europe 2003a: DYS/YR/YPI 2003/1).





7. Final remarks

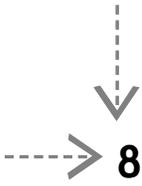
Where do we go from here?

Both the Council of Europe international team of experts and the policy makers in the Slovak Republic have learnt a lot from this encounter. There is much more to be learnt on both sides.

The “foreigner’s eye” of the expert team probably did not have enough time to focus as accurately as it would have liked to on youth policy needs. Its expertise and its commitment to provide assistance and to advise were its main tools in attempting to assess conditions in the fairest way possible. When it praised the efforts made, this was to the credit of those respondents who provided selfless contributions to the discussions held and to the work that they performed behind the scenes and prior to the review team’s visit. When it identified lacunae or strands of failure or misconception, this was the result of its courage to face challenges to the country in general and to youth policy in particular. And, when the team failed to address particular needs or when it appeared to misunderstand concerns and problems, this was due to problems yet to be overcome on the road to promoting a youth policy model of the highest standard.

The policy makers’ response to the review team’s assessment should be a lesson in itself. Perhaps the ball can be thrown into their court! Youth policy’s concern about lifelong learning, through formal, non-formal and informal education, can be taken on as the route to achieving a better understanding of young people’s fundamental needs. It would certainly benefit youth policy makers to register the team’s praise and criticism in the spirit that it was given. They can consolidate what they set out to achieve by harnessing more resources, by synergising more efforts and by gradually filling in identified policy gaps.





8. Recommendations

In addition to specific recommendations made throughout the text of this report, the International Review Team would like to submit the following:

8.1. The dominant, though necessary, role of the Department of Children and Youth within the Ministry of Education should be politically strengthened to become a Secretariat for a new Governmental Co-ordinating Committee with representation from the relevant ministries responsible for child and youth policy elements, and having a solid political anchor. The advice of national and local entities, the Youth Council, NGOs and young people should be sought regularly.

8.2. The process of decentralisation in the financial and education fields needs re-visiting in terms of a more concrete and practical vision of what autonomy and self-government are. Restrictions and obstacles for differently-sized municipalities need to be corrected to avoid unnecessary divides between small and large, urban and rural.

8.3. Participation in all quarters and at all levels needs to be direction-, equity- and competency-based. Tokenistic representations do not qualify for genuine and autonomous participation. This strategy applies particularly to NGOs, such as the National Youth Council, and to the Roma minority.

8.4. Employment training programmes and activation plans are expected to lean more towards social integration than to system integration. While the application of current schemes is to be consolidated, obstacles – in the form of lack of recognition of experiences and insufficient funding – must be removed.

8.5. Entrepreneurship skills training needs a considerable boost.

8.6. All forms of covert inequities affecting minorities, Roma and others, do not do justice to a democratic set-up. Proposed measures should be acted upon with urgency.

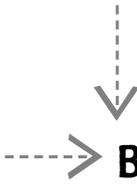
8.7. Non-formal education and learning, as a distinct form of learning and complementary to the formal strand, requires prioritisation among the basic components of youth policy.

8.8. The same applies to training programmes for youth and community workers and youth leaders.

8.9. The drafting and implementation of laws clearly defining financing and co-funding in relation to youth work, or a more comprehensive Law on Youth, should be taken in hand sooner rather than later.

8.10. The community of researchers should be engaged in a more visible and tangible manner. Their contribution to evidence-based youth policy is of the essence in today's fast-changing life trajectories.





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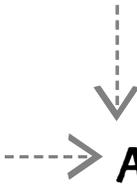
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Appendix i



Programme – 1st visit

Monday 1 November 2004

Arrival.

Tuesday 2 November 2004

Ministry of Education: welcome, basic information on Slovak youth policy, on the process of preparing the National Report, on education, sport and leisure activities.

National Council of the Slovak Republic/Parliament: Committee on Education, Youth and Culture – state youth policy and legislation.

Youth Council of Slovakia and youth organisations/ foundations.

Wednesday 3 November 2004

Government Office: minority issues, European integration.

Ministry of Construction and Regional Development: housing.

Ministry of Culture.

Ministry of the Environment.

Thursday 4 November 2004

Ministry of the Interior: negative social phenomena, crime, volunteering.

Ministry of Defence.

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family: family, employability, substituted tutorial education.

Meeting with researchers in the field of youth policy.

Friday 5 November 2004

Ministry of Health.

Saturday 6 November 2004

Departure.





Appendix ii



List of participants – 1st visit

Tuesday 2 November 2004

Ministry of Education

Zdenko Krajčír, Ladislav Haas, Department of Basic and Pre-school Education

Igor Gallus, Department of General Education

Mária Príkopská, Department of Vocational Education

Ladislav Szabó, Department of Education of National Minorities

Miroslav Chudý, Mária Tekelová, Department of Special Training and Education

Mária Paráková, Department of Education in Church and Private Schools

Katarína Ondrášová, Department of Training and Education of Roma Communities

Peter Plavčan, Ľubica Škvarková, Department of College Education

Dušan Kulich, Department of Further Training

Karol Korintuš, Division of Further Training, Children and Youth and Conceptions of Regional School Funding

National Council of the Slovak Republic/Parliament: Committee on Education, Youth and Culture

Ferdinand Devínsky, Committee on Education, Science, Sport and Youth, Culture and Media – chairman, Delegation of National Council of SR in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – member

Beáta Brestenská, Committee on Education, Science, Sport and Youth, Culture and Media – member, Committee on Economy, Privatisation and Entrepreneurship – member, Delegation of National Council in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – leader, Delegation in the Assembly of West European Union – member, Delegation in the Parliamentary assembly of NATO – substitute

Youth Council of Slovakia and youth organisations/ foundations

Kuštek Martin, Amavet

Čaučík Marián, eRko – the Christian Children Community Movement



Štasselová Lucia, Children of Slovakia Foundation
Erdelyiová Rúth, Behrříková Zuzana, the Slovak Youth Foundation
Šikulincová Gabriela, Regional Youth Council of Bratislava Region
Blaas Peter, Mucha Emil, Gavornříková Katarřna, Lenčo Peter, Škoda Pavel, Dikant Rastislav, Youth Council of Slovakia
Štochmal Martin, the Ladislav Hanus Fellowship
Lauko Rastislav, YMCA in Slovakia – the Young Men’s Christian Association
Dobiáš Michal, the Association of Information and Counselling Centres for Young People in the Slovak Republic
Gombala Ján, the Association of Christian Youth Communities
Pajan Patrik, Domka – The Association of Salesian Youth
Ján Šřipoš, Mária Bónová, Katarřna Haršányiová, Department of Children and Youth, Ministry of Education
František Hegedüs, Director of Iuventa
Ľubica Sobihardová, National Review project, Iuventa
Jozefřna Jamrichová, Beata Banhegyiová, Development and information division, Iuventa

Wednesday 3 November 2004

Government Office

Viliam Zeman, Office of the Government Commissioner for Romany Issues

Ministry of Construction and Regional Development

Pavol Giller, Department of Housing Economy

Ms Holičová

Ministry of Culture

Štefan Zima, Magdaléna Ševčíková, Department of the Extension Service, Division of Cultural Heritage

Daniela Kuhnová, Department of Culture of Disadvantaged Groups, Division for Minorities’ Cultures

Ministry of the Environment

Janka Dulayová, Dáša Harčová, Public Relations Department

Dagmar Rajčanová Centre of Environmental Education and Promotion of Slovak Environmental Agency, Banská Bystrica

Ľuboš Čilag, Department of Environmental Education and Training of the Slovak Environmental Agency in Banská Bystrica

Katarřna Klapáková, Department of Public Relations and Co-operation with Non-Governmental Organisations



Lucia Fančová, Member of the Steering Committee for the Elaboration of National Review, Department of Science, Research and Training and Education

Thursday 4 November 2004

Ministry of Interior

Jozef Halcin, Office of the Minister of Interior

Olga Plišňáková, Division of Public Administration

Oto Konrád, Department of the Order Police of the Police Forces Presidium

Hana Babincová, Office for the Fight against Organised Crime

Mária Pšenáková, Office of the President of Police Forces

Ladislav Vajzer, Peter Kraus, Department of General Delinquency of the Police Forces Presidium

Ministry of Defence

Kříž, Uljan, Boris Slodička, Vavřík, Jakubec

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

Jana Kostanjevcová, Director of the Department Responsible for Family and Child Welfare

Nadežda Šebová, Ivana Mrazková, Monika Straková, Department for Family and Child Welfare

Pavel Kaňka, Anna Botošová, Department of Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination

Jaroslav Kováč, Director of the Social Policy Strategy Department

Mária Rybárová, Eva Hesecková, Katarína Pribullová, Department of Social Policy Strategy

Daniela Kalužná, Director of the Employment Strategy Department

Zdenka Daněková, Department of Employment Strategy

Jana Rajdlová, Social Policy Institute

Meeting with researchers in the field of youth policy

Zlatica Bakošová, Pedagogy Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University (UK), Bratislava

Peter Ondrejko, Dean, Faculty of Social Work and Nursing UKF, Nitra

Eva Poliaková, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Social Work and Nursing UKF, Nitra

Rastislav Bednárík, Centre for Studies of Work and Family

Marcela Bielíková, Department of Youth Research, Institute of School Information and Prognosis (UIPŠ)

Marianna Pétiová, Department of Youth Research UIPŠ

Laura Gressnerová, State Institute of Vocational Training



Ernest Fundali, Faculty of Pedagogy, UK Bratislava

Zita Bad'uríková, Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy, UK Bratislava

Vladimír Repáš, Director of the National Institute for Education (ŠPÚ)

Kinga Horváthová, Faculty of Pedagogy, UK Bratislava

Vladislav Rosa, Chief School Inspector, State School Inspection

Dagmar Kopčanová, Research Institute of Psychology and Pathopsychology of Children

Jolana Manniová, Faculty of Pedagogy, UK Bratislava

Michal Vašečka, Programme Director of the Institute for Public Affairs

Ľubica Sobihardová, Iuventa

Friday 5 November 2004

Ministry of Health

Klára Frečerová, Ministry of Health, Division of International Relations

Nadezda Stowasserová, Eugen Nagy, Health Care Strategy Department

Peter Letanovský, Public Health Department

Herbert Charvát, European Affairs Department

Katarína Hulanská, Jana Nováková, Elena Morvicová, Jana Hamade, Public Health Agency

ZMOS and deputy responsible for decentralisation (Association of Towns and Communes of the Slovak Republic)

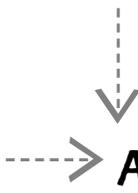
Jozef Turcány, Vice-President of ZMOS and Mayor of Turčianske Teplice

Anna Mihalíková, Expert on municipality education of the ZMOS office

Ol'ga Gáfriková, spokeswoman

Jaroslav Pilát, Consultant on the decentralisation of public administration, Government Office





Appendix iii



Programme – 2nd visit

Monday 14 February 2005

Arrival.

Tuesday 15 February 2005

Department of Children and Youth, and IUVENTA.

Visit to the MIKADO leisure centre in Košice – meeting with representatives from the leisure centre, regional youth council, and youth.

Wednesday 16 February 2005

Visit to the employment office; meeting with unemployed youth and representatives from the Academy of Education (retraining) more orientated on the Roma issue, 10.00 youth.

Meeting with the representatives from regional and residential municipality and student parliament.

Visit to Lunik IX – meeting with representatives of Romintegra 7777 working with Roma youth; meeting with Roma youth.

Thursday 17 February 2005

(Prešov)

Meeting with representatives from regional youth NGOs.

Visit to the employment office and meeting with unemployed youth.

(Lipany)

Visit to the Modra Torysa community foundation; meeting with regional volunteers [cancelled].

Friday 18 February 2005

(Bratislava)

Meeting and with representatives from the ministries.

Saturday 19 February 2005

Internal meeting.

Sunday 20 February 2005

Departure.





Appendix iv



List of participants – 2nd visit

Tuesday 15 February 2005

Meeting with representatives from Department of Children and Youth, and IUVENTA

L'ubica Sobihardová, National Review Project, Iuventa

Jozefína Jambrichová, Development and Information Division, Iuventa

Ján Šípoš, Mária Bónová, Department of Children and Youth, Ministry of Education

Wednesday 16 February 2005

Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Košice

Ol'ga Ivančová, Academy of Education, branch office in Košice

Igor Sivý, Elfa, Ltd Košice

Vladimír Cirbes, Regional Information and Counselling Centre in Košice

Zuzana Záraská, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Košice, Active Labour Market Measures and Project Management Divn

Albert Harcar, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Košice, detached office in Košice IV

Marta Uramova, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Košice, detached office in Košice I

Alena Hikkerova, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Košice, Information and Advisory Services Division

Office of the Košice Self-Governing Region

Mária Kokardová, Ján Špak, Office of the Košice Self-governing Region, Department of Education

Matúš Háber, Municipality of Košice, Division of Social Affairs and Culture

Michaela Laurincová, Information Centre of Košice, Municipality of Košice, Division of Social Affairs and Culture

Magdaléna Martinove, Gabriela Kuglová, Municipality of Košice, Division of Education



Zuzana Tkáčová, Student parliament

Pavol Mutafov, Mayor of Košice's town district Západ

Lunik IX

Jozef Červeň, Association Romintegra7777

Viera Šotterová, Elementary school Ľ. Podjavorinská in Košice

Hemerková Leisure Centre 28

Ivan Kimák, Hemerková Leisure Centre 28

Erika Munková, Regional Centre of Youth – Hemerková Leisure Centre 28

Thursday 17 February 2005

Meeting with youth NGOs in Prešov

Katarína Albertyová, Regional Youth Council of Prešov, Domka

Marta Hanečáková, Stará Ľubovňa Leisure Centre, local consultant, youth programme

Juliana Hajduková, Slovak Association of Nature Protection in Prešov, SAIA n.o. Prešov (non-profit organisation)

Ľubica Halasová, SAIA, n.o. Prešov

Ladislav Šandor, Student Association for Political Sciences

Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Prešov

Otília Urbanová, Katarína Čorejová, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Prešov, Mediatorial Services Section

Mária Horská, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Prešov, Information and Advisory Services Section

Jana Kučová, Bureau of Employment, Social and Family Affairs in Prešov, EURES Section

Friday 18 February 2005

Viliam Zeman, Office of the Government Commissioner for Romany Issues

Daniela Kalužná, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family – Department of Employment Strategy

Ľubomír Okrúhlica, Chief Expert for Drug Dependencies, Ministry of Health

Jaroslav Kling, Expert for Economic Development

Emil Mucha, RMS (Slovak Youth Council)

Jozefína Jamrichová, Development and Information Division, Iuventa

Ján Šípoš, Department of Children and Youth, Ministry of Education



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The international review process was established to fulfil three distinct objectives:

- to advise on national youth policy;
- 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.

The Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe embarked on its international review of national youth policies in 1997. The Slovak Republic, at its own request, is the 12th country to be the focus of an international review. This report includes information gathered by the international review team as well as its analyses and recommendations concerning the development, perspectives and challenges for the future of youth policy in the Slovak Republic.

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