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Council of Europe

Youth policy advisory mission to Georgia

26 to 28 September 2019
Tbilisi and Rustavi

Final report of the advisory mission delegation¹



¹ The opinions expressed in this report are the responsibility of the advisory mission delegation and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe or its member states.

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The photograph on the cover shows the members of the Council of Europe delegation, members of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, and representatives of the Youth Agency of Georgia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Council of Europe Youth Department's set of youth policy assistance measures to member states and further to the request of the national authorities of Georgia, a youth policy **advisory mission** was organised on 26-28 September 2019 in Tbilisi and Rustavi.

This advisory mission was organised at a crucial time for shaping the youth policy agenda of Georgia: youth issues were transferred from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports to the Prime Minister's Office, where a new Youth Agency was set up at the end of August 2019. The aim of the mission was to provide advice to the competent national authorities on the drafting of a new participatory youth policy.

The Council of Europe delegation met with national stakeholders in the youth field and visited two municipalities to meet with local politicians, government officials, young people and youth organisations. The delegation also met with members of Georgia's Sports and Youth Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. The Parliament is now playing a big part in reforms since the country became a parliamentary constitutional democracy following reforms in late 2018. A working group of this Committee is taking the lead on reviewing the government's current youth policy and setting the direction for the new one. Once the group has produced a 'concept note', it will hand over to the Government's Youth Agency which will develop an implementation strategy and a series of time-limited action plans. The Parliamentary Committee will maintain an oversight role.

Ambition and motivation for engaging young people in the policy development process are high amongst state agencies and civil society and whilst there are significant challenges, there are opportunities too to strengthen youth organisations and initiate some kind of youth participation mechanism.

The main **recommendations** made by the advisory mission to the national authorities on behalf of the Council of Europe are to:

1. ensure the process to develop the youth policy (Parliament) and strategy/action plan (Youth Agency) is a participatory, evidence-based, cross-governmental process with clear timescales, responsibilities, realistic and relevant activities, identified milestones, indicators and review mechanisms, as well as effectively co-ordinated, both vertically (from national to local) and horizontally (across line ministries);
2. strengthen the capacities of national and local youth organisations to enable them to support and facilitate opportunities for young people to self-organise and take part in public decision-making;
3. ensure young people and their organisations understand their role, as well as the concepts (participation and what it entails) and processes involved, and include them in monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the youth policy;
4. develop an understanding of participation and build capacity of both decision-makers (civil servants) and young people;
5. map the population of Georgia's youth to identify the different groups in order to engage with all based on their different needs and realities, especially young people with fewer opportunities;
6. establish communications systems and structures that can provide young people across Georgia with access to language-friendly, on- and off-line information on the opportunities to participate, youth services and on their rights. In the longer term, the delegation recommend the Youth Agency work with ERYICA to develop youth information services in line with the European Youth Information Charter.

INTRODUCTION

The national authorities of Georgia invited the Council of Europe to advise them on the development of a participatory youth policy, in line with the Council of Europe's standards. The youth policy advisory mission was organised under the aegis of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and was part of the package of [assistance measures to member states](#) in the field of youth proposed by the Council of Europe. The advisory mission took place on 24-26 September 2019. The Council of Europe team of international experts comprised a member of the [European Steering Committee for Youth](#) (CDEJ), a member of the [Advisory Council on Youth](#) (CCJ), a representative of the [European Youth Forum](#) (YFJ), an expert in participatory youth policy who was also the rapporteur, as well as a representative of the Council of Europe secretariat (members of the delegation are listed in Appendix 1).

Over the three days, the hosts arranged a series of meetings with stakeholders. On Day one, the team had an opportunity to ask questions to stakeholders from the National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia (NCYOG), youth organisations, government officials, international and national NGOs, the youth workers association and local experts. On Day two, the delegation were able to meet with representatives of two municipalities (Tbilisi and Rustavi), local NGOs and some young people. Later in the day the delegation visited the Georgian Parliament to meet with two parliamentarians from the Sports and Youth Issues Committee. On Day three, the delegation met with senior officials of the Youth Agency to discuss initial findings and clarify any points remaining. Appendix 2 details the full programme. This report provides a summary of the discussions and sets out the advice and recommendations of the Council of Europe delegation.

OVERALL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE YOUTH POLICY ADVISORY MISSION

The Georgian government wishes to develop a new youth policy and engage young people in that process. The government wants to take account of recent changes in the country and better align its policies on youth with current and emerging priorities and challenges in light of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. In order to meet the aspirations of young people in the country and enable them to make their full contribution to national development, the government understands that innovative, participatory and evidence-based approaches are required. Long-standing challenges in Georgia include youth unemployment, gender inequality and a low level of civic engagement.

The overall **aim** of this advisory mission was to provide advice to the Youth Agency on the development of a participatory youth policy for Georgia based on the Council of Europe's norms and standards. To be participatory, young people and their organisations should be engaged in designing the policy, as well as in its delivery and evaluation.² The policy should also promote and protect the rights of all young people to participate in public decision-making. Therefore, advice was requested on two related aspects:

- How to support and enable young people's participation in the drafting, delivering and evaluation of a new youth policy.
- How to develop a youth policy that encourages and supports young people to engage as active participants in aspects of community life and public decision-making.³

The **objectives** of the youth policy advisory mission were to:

1. Clarify with the authorities and key stakeholders expectations for a participatory youth policy, especially at local/regional level, and get an overview of their role in designing, implementing and monitoring the new youth policy;
2. Identify challenges experienced with the current youth policy and to developing a new one at local and national levels;
3. Examine how to improve youth participation in national youth policy, notably based on Council of Europe standards.

² For the Council of Europe, youth policy should aim to provide "young people with the opportunities and experiences that support their successful integration into society and enables them to be active and responsible members of their societies, as well as agents of change" ([Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#)).

³ The term 'public' decision-making is used to describe policy-making and decision-making concerned with the design, delivery and evaluation of public services.

BACKGROUND

Georgia adopted a national youth policy in 2014. The policy is comprehensive in its intent and relates to youth aged from 14 to 29 in four strategic directions: participation; education, employment and mobility; health care; and special support and protection.⁴ The Georgian government adopted an Action Plan for the Youth Policy (2015-2020) with more than 200 programmes. At the time of the advisory mission, the National Youth Policy and the Action Plan were undergoing an evaluation by the competent authorities. The plan now is to develop a successor youth policy strategy to run from 2020-2025 which more accurately reflects the realities of young people's lives in Georgia.

The Parliament of Georgia is now playing a big part in reforms. Under its new Rules of Procedure, the Parliament possesses the tools to improve oversight of the youth policy-making process through its Sports and Youth Issues Committee. A working group of this Committee, with technical assistance from UN agencies, led by UNFPA Georgia, is taking the lead on reviewing the government's current youth policy and working on the development of a new youth policy concept 2030, which will become the main document determining youth policy development in Georgia for the next ten years. Once the Parliament of Georgia has adopted the "youth policy concept 2030", it will hand over to the Government's Youth Agency to develop the above-mentioned strategy and a series of time-limited action plans. The Parliamentary Committee will maintain an oversight role scrutinising the implementation of the new youth policy. The Council of Europe delegation were advised that the priorities for the Committee are to:

- Ensure a strategic approach towards the youth policy of the state at national and local levels;
- Support youth work;
- Promote the active participation of young people in the social and economic life of the society;
- Promote education, training and employment of young people;
- Support young people with special needs.

Alongside the Committee, the Georgian government are exploring ways in which young people can be engaged in these developments, at all stages in the process. They are also keen to use the opportunity to expedite the setting up of sustainable structures for youth participation and are looking to civil society, the private sector and international and local organisations to assist in this. The Government of Georgia are also keen to ensure that the new youth policy meets the Council of Europe's standards and guidance on best practice.⁵

In August 2019, responsibility for youth policy was switched from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports to the Prime Minister's Office and the Youth Agency was created. This is seen by stakeholders as positive. However, there are concerns that the Government is not stable. At the time of the advisory mission, Georgia's third Prime Minister since 2018 had just been appointed, regular demonstrations are being held outside the Parliament building and national elections are scheduled for October 2020. Society is described as politically polarised, including young people who are represented on both sides – the Opposition and the Government. An important objective for the new youth policy is to contribute to addressing this polarisation.

Georgia holds the presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (27 November 2019 to May 2020) and "strengthening democracy through education, culture and youth engagement" is one of the priorities. A second youth policy advisory mission will be organised in 2020 to provide assistance for the conceptual development of the new youth centre in Kutaisi.⁶ Finally, the Council of Europe will launch a new action plan for the country for 2020-2023 that aims to bring Georgia's legislation, institutions and practice further into line with European standards in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, thereby supporting the country's efforts to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member state. This youth policy advisory mission is part of the preparations for the section on "*promoting participation and diversity, youth for democracy*".

⁴ [National Youth Policy Document of Georgia](#) (2014).

⁵ See for example: Denstad, F.Y. (2009) [Youth Policy Manual: how to develop a national youth strategy](#). EU/CoE Youth Partnership.

⁶ At the request of the Youth Agency, the focus of the mission has been changed to providing assistance for the development of the National Youth Strategy 2025.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

In preparation for the visit, the Council of Europe secretariat liaised with the Youth Agency to refine the objectives of the mission and to design a programme that would enable the Council of Europe delegation to learn about the realities in Georgia in a short space of time. The programme allowed the delegation to gather perspectives from key state agencies, civil society and young people – about the challenges, the opportunities and the background. The hosts crafted a packed, varied and interesting agenda. Everyone was very generous with their time and opinions and willingly answered questions honestly and constructively in an effort to help the visitors understand the context in which a new participatory youth policy is to be developed.

On Day one of the programme, the team met with a large group of different stakeholders (see Appendix 2): representatives of the Youth Agency, the president of the National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia (NCYOG), representatives of international NGOs, and a number of local youth experts.

The newly appointed Head of the Youth Agency, Revaz Charkviani, outlined its role, explaining that the agency had recently moved to the Prime Minister's Office with a slightly increased budget.⁷ The government is recognising the key role young people have to play in transforming Georgian society and wants to harness that energy. However, the Council of Europe delegation were advised that whilst there is strong motivation to move forward, there are also big gaps. For example, youth work is undeveloped, there is little or no culture of citizen participation. The role of the new Youth Agency is to bring all the stakeholders together to elaborate and implement the National Youth Strategy 2025 which will be based on the Youth Policy Concept 2030 designed by the Parliamentary Committee – co-ordinating efforts horizontally (across government) and vertically (between national and local/regional government).

THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO PARTICIPATORY YOUTH POLICY

Overall, participants determined that there was a low base from which to start. Apart from one forum held only once a year, youth organisations have not really been involved in policy making, no information had been provided on past policy proposals and there are few structures and channels whereby young people can get involved in policy development or public decision-making more generally – especially in the regions. On a more positive note, one representative of the Youth Agency estimated that there are 500-600 registered youth organisations in Georgia of which he estimated 150 were active.

The Youth Agency gave some insights into why the implementation of the existing youth policy had run into difficulties including the difficulty in getting buy-in horizontally across government. It was also reported that while there is a very active protest movement in Tbilisi at present, the country does not have a tradition of giving people space to have a say. Others noted that the current protesters were generally from higher education with the means to organise and that most young people in the country are facing such practical, day-to-day difficulties they are not in a position to engage with government and take part in developing youth policy. One participant revealed that over a third of young people in the country were not in education, training or employment.

It was agreed that, as well as looking at strategies to engage young people in meaningful dialogue, work was needed on developing competences amongst public administrators at local and regional as well as national levels. The Youth Agency advised that there is somebody appointed at municipal level who is responsible for youth, but they are also responsible for a lot of other things including sport, culture and gender inequality. There are few youth workers and few youth councils to stimulate and nurture the dialogue. There have been some recent efforts in 14 municipalities to establish new youth centres but stakeholders concluded that the issue is more about finding ways to engage young people in safe and purposeful conversations than building youth centres. Schools are seen as a key resource – and opportunities to collaborate with education should be explored – for example with clubs attached to high schools.

As discussions continued, there was support from local experts for government action that builds the capacity of youth organisations operating at national, local and regional levels including those who work (or those who are well placed to work) with young people with fewer opportunities. Stakeholders want the new youth policy and supporting documents to include some measures and adequate review

⁷ In 2019, the total budget allocated to the three governmental organisations responsible for youth policy development was 7,5 million GEL, in 2020 the budget of Youth Agency is 5 million GEL. In 2018, the total budget allocated for above-mentioned organisations was 4,2 million GEL.

mechanisms to help drive implementation. The absence of such arrangements is seen as a flaw of the current youth policy (2014), contributing to implementation problems.

PLANS TO DEVELOP A PARTICIPATORY YOUTH POLICY AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

To inform the development of the new youth policy, the Youth Agency have plans for a national survey asking young people about their priorities. The UN-led work on establishing a Youth Index should also help the government more accurately assess need and plan services to meet those needs. The Parliamentary Committee's working group is consulting young people on the 'concept note' it is preparing. Two consultation events are planned in different parts of the country. There are also plans to resource the National Council of Youth Organisations to co-ordinate a 'structured dialogue', ie some form of youth participation mechanism. This is to be decided by the Parliamentary Committee, the Youth Agency and the UN agencies.⁸

Discussions continued to clarify and expand upon both the opportunities and the challenges ahead. In a round-up discussion with members of the Youth Agency at the end of Day one, the Agency emphasised the importance of the delegation determining clear recommendations which can be implemented at a national and local level.

PARTICIPATORY YOUTH POLICY AT A LOCAL LEVEL

On Day two the delegation visited two municipalities to learn about the challenges and opportunities for supporting and encouraging youth participation at a local level. The early morning was spent with government officials and elected politicians in Tbilisi City Hall and then, after a journey of around 30 kms, the team met the vice-chair of Rustavi City Assembly, Nino Kavtaradze, who is also a member of the Georgian delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and of NALAG,⁹ and some senior officials from the municipality. After lunch the delegation met with representatives of some local NGOs, and members of the local youth council in the American Corner.¹⁰ The details are included in the programme in Appendix 2.

Both municipalities advised the delegation of a number of initiatives they are running to encourage and support young people to participate in developing and implementing youth policy. However, in Tbilisi the majority of initiatives described seemed to be about funding large-scale building projects – youth and community centres around the city – without asking young people what they need. There was one exception, a programme which awards money to over 100 youth initiatives selected by a panel of young people and experts. Young people are encouraged to garner signatures for their ideas and to then upload them on to the city council's website as proposals for the panel to consider funding.

In Rustavi, the city council has a long-term development plan which aims to actively involve young people, recognising how important they are to the municipality. The city council has very recently established a **youth advisory council** to advise it on the setting and spending of the proportion of the Council's budget set aside for the youth council. The youth advisory council has met twice so far to consider the problems young people are facing, their priorities for action and the budget. The youth advisory council has 20 members – two from a students' union, eight from NGOs and the remainder from an open call. Selection is by the city council and partner NGOs. None of the NGOs involved represents minorities and there was some concern expressed about reaching out specifically to different groups and discriminating positively. The municipality representatives were unaware of the composition of the youth population – who is under-represented or excluded. A mapping exercise was suggested followed by the implementation of support measures.

⁸ A number of UN agencies, including the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are providing technical assistance to the Parliamentary Committee in taking forward the development of youth policy. They have recently reviewed the 2015-2020 Youth Policy Action Plan and provided recommendations on co-ordination mechanisms and a new youth dialogue platform, to support the development of a new Youth Policy Concept (2030), and to elaborate its monitoring framework (Youth Index).

⁹ National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG).

¹⁰ The "American Corner" is a United States Department of State-sponsored initiative, they serve as regional resource centres for information and programmes highlighting American culture, history, current events, and government. The one in Rustavi also runs youth activities.

Both municipalities have action plans to take forward the national youth policy in specific and concrete ways. With some caveats, not least the allocation of government and donor-led funding, the representatives from both municipalities indicated good co-operation between them and the national government. They look forward to increased de-centralisation which, the delegation was advised, is now part of the Georgian government's general approach. It was however recognised that this was all much easier for them than for municipalities in the regions because they were in or near the capital. When asked what the three greatest challenges were to participatory youth policy in Georgia, the Head of the Tbilisi City Municipal Department of Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Affairs drew attention to the financing of education and the need to stem the emigration of young people. In Rustavi, the Vice-Chair of Rustavi City Assembly and the Head of Culture, Youth and Sport Development highlighted a local problem of industrial pollution compounding a similar problem of emigration with young people leaving Rustavi for the city of nearby Tbilisi.

After lunch the delegation were able to meet with some **young people from the youth advisory council**. These were accompanied by representatives of local NGOs in Rustavi, including NGOs involved in running the youth advisory council. The members of the youth council explained how they are talking to other young people to try and learn and understand about the issues and concerns of young people in Rustavi and then making sure those issues are considered when determining how their proportion of the budget is spent. The NGO facilitator explained that the advisory council is at an early stage of development. They have had two meetings – decided on how to work together, appointed a leader, a secretary and other officers; and agreed a structure for how to make decisions.

The young people said that **the biggest problem** they faced was the lack of non-formal education/learning. They would like opportunities to improve their skills and develop their talents. They would also like to complement their formal education with more support with developing life skills. They valued their opportunity to learn such skills through the youth advisory council initiative and through other NGOs.

The NGO members said the problem was around the lack of spaces available for young people to access informal and non-formal learning. The advisory mission visit took place at one such space – the American Corner in Rustavi. One young person said he valued the availability of Wi-Fi and technology in such spaces. The delegation asked about school parliaments or councils and learnt that such structures are not commonplace in Georgia. One young person was positive about how his school encouraged active citizenship in other ways. The delegation also learnt that there is a tradition of youth camps which continues. Some are run by the municipality, some supported by Georgia's Scouting movement.

When asked **what would you like to change**, the young people who spoke said they wanted more spaces such as those that have '*events, movies, a place to talk, share and co-operate*'. They also want exchanges and additional learning opportunities. Another young person wanted more opportunities to visit job seeker sites online and get support for preparing for job interviews. NGO spokespersons explained that accessing information about most things on- and off-line can be difficult for young people. It's hard to find out about opportunities or just to get advice and access someone they feel they can talk something through with.

SPORTS AND YOUTH ISSUES COMMITTEE OF THE PARLIAMENT OF GEORGIA

The team's last fact-finding visit was to the Parliament of Georgia to meet with Irina Pruidze, and Davit Oboladze, members of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee. Ms Pruidze chairs the working group that is developing the first stage of the youth policy development process. Ms Pruidze is also a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and vice-chair of the Sub-Committee on Children, and she has a strong background in international youth organisations.

Ms Pruidze explained that the special Parliamentary working group on Youth and Sport initiated the proposal to put the Youth Agency directly under the Prime Minister's direction. The working group is assisting the Committee to review the current policy and develop a new 'concept note' on youth which will be adopted by the Parliament. She confirmed that, once adopted, the Youth Agency will develop the policy, the strategy and the action plans in line with the approach set out in the 'concept note'. The Parliamentary Committee on Youth and Sport will then monitor and help to drive implementation.

The working group includes NGOs, UN agencies, the Youth Agency, parliamentarians and other partners. They are also keen to involve young people to find out how they see their future and what their priorities are. They have made a good start organising hackathons in the east and west of the country and by opening an on-line consultation. Members of the working group will travel around Georgia in the

coming weeks meeting young people, officials and politicians in the local municipalities. The aim is to have the Youth Policy Concept 2030 prepared by the end of January 2020 and approved and adopted at the beginning of the spring session of Parliament.

The delegation learnt that the working group have recently received the report of the UN agencies who conducted a review of the implementation of the current Youth Policy and Action Plan. Some of the key findings of this report were shared and Ms Pruidze indicated the initial responses from the working group, as follows:

- Implementation has been hampered by poor co-ordination – both horizontally (across the different functions of government and numerous public services) and also vertically (between national, regional and local government and with civil society). Going forward there is a need for better, smarter planning – where activities are designed to meet specified objectives and goals with milestones and indicators to help track impact and lessons learned.
- The report recommends establishing better co-ordinating mechanisms and a structured dialogue, or form of youth participation mechanism with young people. There is a commitment to invest in and strengthen the National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia (NCYOG) for this purpose. There is a need to improve the formats for the dialogue to make it meaningful. The working group recognise that now commitments are needed from both decision-makers and from young people as well as training and capacity building for both.
- Leadership has been problematic. The Parliamentary Committee's working group chaired by Ms Pruidze is determined to change that, bolstering political support for addressing youth issues strategically and operationally and strengthening overview and scrutiny to hold the government to account for delivery.
- Resources of course also remain a challenge but Ms Pruidze is hopeful that forthcoming budget allocations will support the Youth Agency to lead the delivery of the new youth strategy from 2020.
- There is a need to tackle the huge variation between the realities for young people in the City of Tbilisi and in the rest of the country especially the regions. There is strong political will within Georgia to de-centralise power and strengthen local government which should lead to more robust policy implementation. More resources need to be allocated to municipalities and local youth organisations need to be strengthened and refreshed. Ms Pruidze indicated these as the priorities rather than the call for more physical centres and infrastructure developments.

The Parliamentary working group is actively cultivating a positive vision – trying to ensure that other ministries understand that progressive youth policies can generate important human capital that benefits the country. The message is that empowering young people is important for Georgia and its transformation. There is strong political support – not least because youth issues feature in the Association Agreement with the European Commission and in the standards and instruments of the Council of Europe.

Finally, the meeting touched briefly on a few other topics:

- Whether the Committee thought there was a need for legislation to protect recent gains in political support and to protect young people's right to participate in policy development. There was no appetite for legislation at this time.
- The youth policy self-assessment tool will assist the Parliamentary Committee with its monitoring functions.
- The importance within the Council of Europe's standards and norms of adopting an inclusive approach to youth participation from the outset. This requires more outreach and reflection to find the means and the ways of engaging young people from all backgrounds and circumstances, from vulnerable groups and those with fewer opportunities.

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a final session on Day three, the delegation were able to clarify a number of outstanding points with representatives of the Youth Agency, in particular the different roles and responsibilities within the policy development process. The delegation were able to share some initial thoughts with senior

representatives of the Youth Agency and test out some ideas on recommendations to gauge how useful they might be.

The delegation's analysis is that the Georgian government and the Parliament are set to develop youth policy with contributions from young people. Efforts are underway, but they are starting from a low base line. There are many challenges but there are also opportunities, not least with the commitment, motivation and energy of officials in the Youth Agency, Parliamentarians, youth organisations, local government and lots of individuals. The analysis now refers back to the objectives of the advisory mission.

OBJECTIVE 1

Clarify with the authorities and key stakeholders the expectations for a participatory youth policy, especially at local/regional levels, and get an overview of their roles in designing, implementing and monitoring the new youth policy.

The delegation were able to clarify with the authorities and key stakeholders the expectations for a participatory youth policy at both a national and to some extent a local level. As the summary of the discussions illustrates, there is a clear linear path to developing the next suite of youth policy and strategic planning documentation and a clear aspiration to engage young people in that process. The delegation were initially confused about who actually will be driving the implementation of the new youth policy as opposed to 'co-ordinating it' but we now understand that the Youth Agency will drive implementation (under the direction of the Prime Minister) with the Parliamentary Committee providing oversight. The delegation also learnt about the current moves within Georgia towards de-centralisation and the expansion of the role of Parliament. The co-operation between the government and the Parliament of Georgia on the new youth policy is laudable and the delegation are encouraged to see competent, committed and solution-orientated stakeholders located at the all-important interconnections. There are high expectations on the Youth Agency and it has much to do to improve both vertical and horizontal coordination of youth policy so it makes a difference to the lives of young people. The ongoing role of the Parliamentary Committee in scrutinising and overseeing implementation will be invaluable.

OBJECTIVE 2

Identify challenges experienced with the current youth policy and to developing a new one at local/regional and national levels

Throughout the mission, stakeholders gave the Council of Europe delegation a very honest and forthright appraisal of the problems they experienced with implementing the current youth policy and the challenges they were facing developing a new one. The main problems with implementation to date had been a lack of support across government; budget reductions; poor co-ordination – across government and between national and local government and civil society; a lack of capacity, especially at a local and regional level and numerous obstacles to engaging young people (including unemployment, a lack of trust and insufficient support for youth organisations). The current youth policy looked good on paper although the absence of milestones and success indicators made it difficult to review progress against the goals or objectives, and adapt plans accordingly.

The Parliamentary Committee and the Youth Agency now seem set to learn from these experiences. Going forward, the decisions to move the Youth Agency to the Prime Minister's Office and for Parliament and Government to work alongside one another with complimentary roles looks promising, especially as political stability is far from assured. A range of challenges remain to developing the new participatory youth policy the most prominent of which are summarised below.

- A range of social and economic issues present real challenges. Youth unemployment is high (in 2018 it was at 26.6% compared to 12.7% overall). Gender inequality is a big issue and there is no tradition of youth engagement. The delegation was advised that it has not been part of Georgian culture to give space to people to have a voice – especially young people. It is not uncommon for parents to think that for their children to get involved in extra civic activities is a waste of time.
- Policy transfer from national to local is a problem. There is a shortage of competences at a local level especially in the regions where there is limited knowledge of youth policy in the municipalities and in civil society. There are few 'youth workers' as such and poor communication between municipalities and youth organisations. Youth organisations have not

been well supported or encouraged – especially in the regions or those working with minority groups.

- There are real challenges when it comes to informing young people and raising awareness of their human rights, active citizenship and opportunities to get involved and take part in decision-making. Human Rights Education (HRE) is not part of the school curriculum and there are no youth information channels as such. Access to the internet is non-existent in rural areas. There is a pilot project establishing a youth worker in six high schools but generally there are few youth workers to inform young people. When meeting with young people and their NGO support workers, the delegation were rather dismayed by the paternalistic attitude of some of the NGO workers.
- Engaging young people who have fewer opportunities to take part is a challenge everywhere. All governments need to be continually working at 'reaching out' in myriad ways, learning and reflecting on what approaches work, for whom. The first stage is to identify and try and understand the different experiences and how they are influenced by geography, religion, sexuality, race, gender, language, migration, disability and the intersections of all of these characteristics. While the Youth Agency have gathered some information about the demographics of the youth population of Georgia, there is a need for more research on which to base future planning.
- The amount of resources required is a challenge. The Georgian Government is committed to resourcing the new youth policy and also to allocating resources to municipalities as part of a general move towards de-centralisation. The lack of co-ordination amongst international aid agencies results in funds not always being spent on what is most needed. For example, many international agencies funding entrepreneurship but no funds for Human Rights Education.

OBJECTIVE 3

Examine how to improve youth participation in national youth policy, notably based on Council of Europe standards.

Moving the Youth Agency into the Prime Minister's Office presents a major opportunity to improve youth participation in national youth policy. It should help the Youth Agency find ways to establish a cross-sectorial approach, co-ordinating responsibilities for implementing the different parts of the strategy with relevant ministries and governmental bodies. The commitment and support of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia sounds hugely positive. There are already plans in place for the Youth Agency to engage with municipalities, and for government to increase slightly spending on youth policy predicated on laudable aims that see education and young people as key to the future and addressing the current challenges facing Georgia. There is a buzz, an excitement with many motivated individuals in the state agency, the Parliament and in youth organisations and the National Council of Youth Organisations. Expectations are high – the new Youth Agency is going to make a difference!

There is a long journey ahead – putting in place structures and mechanisms for youth participation will not solve everything. There is much to be done to shift the culture in order to better encourage and support stage agencies and civil society to engage young people from different backgrounds meaningfully in developing, executing and evaluating government policy.

The Council of Europe delegation sees many opportunities and makes a number of recommendations for consideration. The focus of this advisory mission is on youth participation but the delegation firstly wish to stress the need for:

- an evidenced-based approach with the youth policy and strategy based on the needs of young people documented through research;
- a systematic approach with the strategy including clear goals, objectives and measures which are closely linked to quality indicators or benchmarks. There must be clarity about which ministries are responsible for different areas to be addressed.

The Council of Europe/European Union Youth Partnership manual on how to develop a national youth strategy provides useful advice based on experiences from other countries in the Council of Europe.¹¹

¹¹ Denstad, F.Y. (2009) [Youth Policy Manual: how to develop a national youth strategy](#). EU-CoE Youth Partnership.

The Council of Europe's Self-assessment tool for youth policy provides a useful set of quality benchmarks for youth policy based inter alia on recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers (or, where appropriate, on texts adopted by other relevant Council of Europe bodies).¹² The advisory mission also invites the lead agencies to take note of the Quality Standards in Youth Policy developed by the European Youth Forum (YFJ) to guide this kind of policy development. There is a Standard on Participatory Youth Policy that is particularly relevant to the mission. See the YFJ's [Toolkit on Quality Standards for Youth Policy](#).

Youth participation in the development of the new national youth policy and other policies (on a continuous basis) has to improve. The youth policy will fail if young people do not have a voice in its design and implementation.

The advisory mission delegation encourages the Youth Agency to build on what they have in place and strengthen the National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia and then, through them, build the capacity of youth organisations working at local and regional, as well as, national levels. European standards and norms emphasise the importance of building up from the grass roots, developing understanding of the day-to-day lives and experiences of young people and establishing opportunities for young people to participate meaningfully. That way, it is more likely that young people will get, and stay engaged. The delegation suggests that a specified proportion of the additional resources and support given to youth organisations should go to organisations that are able to work with young people who have fewer opportunities.

The delegation recommend that, in tandem with the strengthening of youth organisations, efforts should also be targeted on building capacity amongst decision-makers (in municipalities as well as at a national level) to ensure that public administrators are up to the task of engaging young people in a meaningful dialogue on youth policy and its implementation.

HOW MIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE YOUTH POLICY?

Provisions for how exactly young people will be involved in developing and implementing the youth policy should be multi-faceted and involve online and face-to-face engagement. Youth organisations could be brought together with the Youth Agency team at local, regional and national events to discuss priorities and objectives for the new youth policy. Furthermore, they should be empowered to ensure that they can include and consult as many young people as possible in their own work in order to be representative and to channel youth needs and ideas in this process. The Youth Agency could organise roundtables in schools and colleges or at extra-curricula activities. Surveys could be conducted through popular and accessible online platforms. The [Revised European Charter on the Participation of Youth People in Local and Regional Life](#) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe explores ideas and tools that can be used by local and regional authorities to enhance youth participation. The Charter also reviews the sort of structures and support that should be established in order to involve young people in processes where they can identify their needs, explore solutions, make decisions that affect them, and where they can plan actions with local and regional authorities on an equal footing. The Charter illustrates how youth participation takes many different forms. The Council of Europe Youth Department's manual "[Have your say!](#)" was produced to support local and regional authorities, youth organisations and young people who want to give young people a real say for a meaningful democratic youth participation.

The delegation suggest that the priority for the Georgian authorities has to be finding practical and inclusive ways to engage young people in safe and purposeful conversations rather than the building of more youth centres. Schools are a key resource – and the Youth Agency should further explore how they can collaborate with schools and local resource centres. Sustainability is key and government should look to institutionalise the provisions that work best, in order to sustain youth engagement through the implementation of the national youth strategy.

¹² Council of Europe (2018) [Self-assessment tool for youth policy](#)

When setting up activities to support youth participation, it is important for agencies to take steps to make sure these opportunities are meaningful. When there is no follow through or discernible impact, young people are likely to feel increasingly distrustful. The following 'pre-conditions' for participatory activities with young people should guide practice:

- Provide easy and understandable information that enable young people to make informed decisions. Information should make it clear what decisions are influenceable.
- Provide support and time for young people to choose to be involved. Young people have the right not to get involved.
- Be inclusive! Provide a range of opportunities and support for young people in different circumstances – including young people from minorities and vulnerable groups – through local NGOs and youth organisations and through schools.
- Listen and value young people's views, experiences and ideas. Take them seriously and value their contribution.
- Ensure the activity is a good experience for young people – work with them in safe, fun and enjoyable ways.
- Make sure that decision-makers listen to young people's views and opinions and feedback to young people how they have been taken into account.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

A final note on inclusion. The Council of Europe's standards highlight the importance of adopting an inclusive approach to participatory youth policy development from the start.¹³ Inclusive participation means ensuring that young people from all backgrounds and circumstances can take part and influence decision-making. It means taking account of the social, economic and cultural backgrounds of young people who get involved in activities and taking additional affirmative measures to promote and support the participation of those who are frequently excluded or face particular barriers to getting involved.¹⁴ A user-friendly guide published by the Council of Europe provides guidance on practical steps national authorities can take to improve **all** young people's access to rights.¹⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main **recommendations** made by the advisory mission delegation to the national authorities on behalf of the Council of Europe are to:

1. Ensure the process to develop the youth policy (Parliament) and strategy/action plan (Youth Agency) is a participatory, cross-governmental process with clear timescales, responsibilities, realistic and relevant activities, identified milestones, indicators and review mechanisms, as well as effectively co-ordinated, both vertically (from national to local) and horizontally (across line ministries);
2. Strengthen the capacities of national and local youth organisations to enable them to support and facilitate opportunities for young people to take part in public decision-making;
3. Ensure young people and their organisations understand their role, as well as the concepts (participation and what it entails) and processes involved, and include them in monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the youth policy;
4. Develop an understanding of participation and build capacity of both (civil servants) decisionmakers and young people;
5. Map the population of Georgia's youth to identify the different groups in order to engage with all based on their different needs and realities, especially young people with fewer opportunities;
6. Establish communications systems and structures that can provide young people across Georgia with access to language-friendly, on- and off-line information on the opportunities to participate, youth services and on their rights. In the longer term, the delegation recommend the Youth Agency work with ERYICA to develop youth information services in line with the [European Youth Information Charter](#).

¹³ See for example: [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2016\)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on young people's access to rights](#) and [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2015\)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#).

¹⁴ SALTO Participation and Information Think Tank (2019) [A seat at the table for everyone. Promoting inclusive youth participation through the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#). ¹⁴ Council of Europe (2016) [Taking it Seriously](#).

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE ADVISORY MISSION

The Council of Europe delegation comprised the following five members:

Matej Manevski

Advisory Council on Youth, vice-chair of the Programming Committee on Youth

Zdenka Maskova

European Steering Committee for Youth, Bureau member

Liva Vikmane

European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Anne Crowley

Expert/rapporteur

Joanne Hunting

Youth Department, Council of Europe – head of delegation.

APPENDIX 2

PROGRAMME OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S YOUTH POLICY ADVISORY MISSION TO GEORGIA, 24-26-SEPTEMBER 2019

Tuesday 24 September 2019

- 09.00-09.30 **Transfer to the meeting space** – Address: 6 Giuli Chokhonelidze Dead End, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 09.30-11.00 **Opening, welcome and objectives**
Facilitator: Nato Antia
- 09.30-09.50 **Welcome address from the Georgian authorities**
Revaz Charkviani, Head of the Youth Agency
- 09.50-10.00 **Welcome address from the host organisation**
Ketevan Chachava, Founder of “Sector 3”
- 10.00-10.30 **Introduction of participants**
Tamta Utiashvili, Youth Programme Manager, Save the Children
Zura Mirzikashvili, Youth Programme Manager, Save the Children
Gvanca Zhgenti, Head of Youth and Volunteer Development Department, Georgian Red Cross
Nino Tsulaia, Chairperson, National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia
Ketevan Chachava, Sector 3
Irakli Zhavanadze, Youth Workers Association of Georgia
Gubaz Koberidze, Chairperson, Youth Workers Association of Georgia
Giorgi Kakulia, local expert
Ekaterine Tsvariani, local expert
Nika Bakhsoliani, local expert
- 10.30-11.00 **The youth policy advisory mission: objectives and expectations**
The objectives of this mission and expectations
The Council of Europe support programme to member states and youth policy standards
Joanne Hunting, Youth Policy Division, Council of Europe
- 11.00-11.20 *Coffee break*
- 11.20-13.00 **Youth policy and youth participation in Georgia**
Some questions to guide the discussions:
 - What is a participatory youth policy?
 - How to establish a process of genuine dialogue and empower young people to play an active role in the definition of the youth policy?
 - How to promote youth participation and ensure the structures are meaningful and not tokenistic?
 - Who are the main stakeholders in developing a participatory youth policy?
 - How to ensure decision makers and policy makers implement the youth policy?
- 13.00-14.30 *Lunch*
- 14.30-17.00 **Youth policy and youth participation in Georgia (continued)**
- 16.00-16.20 *Coffee break*
- 17.00-17.30 **Preliminary conclusions from the first day**
By the Youth Agency

- 17.30-18.30 **Overview of the political and social situation in Georgia**
Vahag Muradyan, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tbilisi
- 18.30-19.30 **Meeting of the members of the Council of Europe delegation**
- 20.10-21.30 *Dinner*

Wednesday 25 September 2019

- 08.45-08.55 **Transfer to Tbilisi City Hall**
- 09.00-15.30 **Youth policy and participation in practice at the local level**
Meetings with decision-makers and people responsible for the development of youth issues to see how local self-governments are supporting youth participation and the mechanisms in place at local level.
- 09.00-10.30 Meeting with:
 - Irakli Gvilava, Head of Tbilisi City Municipal Department of Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Affairs
 - Gogi Chikovani, Head of Education and Youth Affairs Division at Tbilisi City Municipal Department of Culture, Education, Sport and Youth Affairs
 - Kakha Abuladze, Director of Tbilisi Youth Center Unions
 - Giorgi Chakvetadze, Chairperson of Sports and Youth Affairs Commission at Tbilisi City Municipal Assembly.
- 10.30-11.30 Departure to Rustavi (~30km)
- 11.30-12.30 Meeting with:
 - Nino Kavtaradze, Vice-Chair of Rustavi City Assembly
 - Gegi Liparteliani, Head of Culture Youth and Sport Development Centre of Rustavi
 - Giga Jgharkava-member of Rustavi City Assembly
- 12.30-13.45 *Lunch – (at Friends Lounge Bar)*
- 14.00-15.30 Transfer to American Corner Rustavi
Meeting with members of the local youth advisory board and local NGOs including:
 - Giorgi Maglaperidze, Rotary Rustavi International
 - Anabel Chkhartishvili Head of NGO, IMPULSI”
 - Ana Elikashvili, Head, Local Youth Council
 - Marita Chachava, Local American Corner
 - Liana Charkviani, Head, Rustavi Centre for Civil Engagement
- 15.30-16.30 **Transfer to the Parliament of Georgia**
- 16.30-18.00 **Meeting with representatives of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia**
 - Irina Pruidze, Member of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee
 - Davit Oboladze, Member of the Sports and Youth Issues Committee
- 19.00-21.30 City Tour and Dinner

Thursday 26 September 2019

- 08.45-09.00 **Transfer from hotel to Innovation and Technology Centre**
Host: Mariam Lashkhi, Deputy Head of GITA (Innovation and Technologies Agency of Georgia)
- 09.00-10.00 **Meeting of the members of the Council of Europe delegation**
- 10.00-11.00 **Exchange of views between the Council of Europe delegation and the Youth Agency**

Feedback from the advisory mission, preliminary recommendations, next steps Youth Agency:
Revaz Charkviani, Head of the Youth Agency
Kristine Kapanadze, Deputy Head of Youth Agency
Kartlos Karumidze, Youth Research and Analysis Department of Youth Agency
Pati Mumladze, Member of the Youth Agency
Badri Patariaia, Member of the Youth Agency
- 11.00-13.00 **Meeting of the members of the Council of Europe delegation**
- 13.00-14.30 *Lunch*
- 19.30 *Gala Dinner*