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REVIEWS ON YOUTH POLICIES AND YOUTH WORK IN THE COUNTRIES OF **SOUTH EAST EUROPE,** **EASTERN EUROPE & CAUCASUS** **- ARMENIA -**



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1. Introduction

Background and Aims

National Youth Policy has a more than 15 years of history (dating back to the year of 1995) in Armenia and has passed a series of transformations and developments following the socio-economical transformations of our newly independent Republic. It is important to note that the development of the youth policy was always going in hand with the development of youth sector in general and in most of the cases it was initiated, developed and motivated by and with the YNGO sector and student organizations.

Despite the very hard first period following the breakdown of the Soviet Union and proclamation of the independence due to the long lasting effects of disastrous earthquake in 1988, a severe military conflict with the neighboring Azerbaijan till 1995 and economic blockade of Armenia in early 90s, the youth sector and youth policy have started to emerge and have been in the focus of attention of the Government being a high priority in the agenda of the state policy since 1995.

Now the developments and transformations are still in process and a lot of policies, mechanisms and programmes are created in Armenia in youth policy sphere, but the principle of co-management first introduced in Armenia by the youth sector of Council of Europe has been always in the core of the decision making mechanisms and is becoming more and more accessible and transparent year by year.

But it is also necessary to state that one can have perfect mechanisms but the lack of competence and motivation to participate, even the ideal mechanism will not be able to effectively function. In this regard it is necessary to mention the lack of motivation of young people and YNGOs to participate in decision making processes, which is sometimes also connected with the lack of awareness and the shortages of the youth information system in Armenia.

However, we can state that the National Youth Policy in Armenia is now days one of the most dynamic and steady grounded youth policies in Eastern Europe and Caucasus region. The first National Youth Report in CIS was developed in Armenia and the first Youth Policy Review of Council of Europe was also realized here. In 2009 a new series of reforms has been initiated in youth policy sector the successful completion of which will bring the National Youth Policy one level up in its development, making it more accessible, transparent and efficient.

This Review is a part of country reviews on youth policies and youth work in the countries of South East Europe, Eastern Europe and Caucasus initiated by the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.

The aim of this Review was to analyze the current situation of the youth policy and youth work in Armenia, to brief the situation of young people, current challenges and youth policy answers to them, as well as to identify the trends of development of the National Youth Policy and youth work in the country.

Methodology of the Review

The main method of the research was the desk research on several open sources of information available about the country, young people of Armenia as well as the available policy and program documentation on various aspects of National Youth Policy and youth work.

The foundation of this reviewing process was based on the National Youth Report prepared by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in 2005-06 and the National Youth Policy Review by the Council of Europe realized in 2005. Besides this, the whole body of the normative acts, strategies, concepts, work plans and programmes regarding youth policy and youth work was also carefully studied, systematized and presented in brief in the Review.

Statistical data from the Armenian Statistical Service Yearbooks and several international reports (Eurostat Statistical Book “European Neighbourhood: a statistical overview” (2009), MDG Reports of World Bank (2009), and UNDP National Human Development Report “Migration and Human Development; opportunities and challenges” (2009) are also used to update the information which was available in the National Youth Report.

Challenges of the study

There were three main challenges for the realization of the presented reviewing process.

The first and the most important one is the weakness of youth research institute in Armenia. The idea of development of National Youth Report in 2005, was a result of the simple fact that there was almost no factual data on the situation of young people living in Armenia, and there was no possibility to even talk about developing evidence and research based youth policy in the country. There was a scarce set of fragmented research documents on some aspects of youth situation and youth work, but it was absolutely impossible to draw systematized conclusions based on them. Now we have the National Youth Report (2006), but still the data obtained in 2005 is not updated which is a serious challenge, especially taking into consideration the rapidly changing situations in the country. Sometimes it is hard to get information from official statistical agencies, as they tend not to have age-specific data bases and the other challenge is also the differences between the official statistical data and expert analyses on the socio-economical situation of the country.

The second major challenge the diversity of the young population in Armenia (rural and urban, capital and other cities, active and non-organized, etc.) which combined with the lack of research data is creating difficulties in presenting an overall situation of young people, especially taking into consideration the small volumes foreseen for this section of Review.

And the last main challenge was the reforming and transformation process that started in 2009 and continued till now in the youth policy sector. Even in the course of writing this Review there were some major changes happening in the structures of youth policy and mechanisms of its realization. The All-Armenian Youth Fund entered restructuring process, and it is not clear yet what will be its status. The State Not-for-Profit Organization “Center for Organization of Youth Activities” is still in the process of restructuring, and a new structure is in the process of creation which will have a wider mandate. The Council of Youth Affairs was restructured in 2010 and still is developing its work plans, working groups and codes of conduct. The Financing Scheme of the YNGOs from the state budget has gone through a radical reform (development of Online Grants System) in mid 2010 and is now in a beta-testing phase. All these transformations were realized during the preparation of the Review, which was making a rather hard task to present the “current” situation.

2. Executive summary

According to the State Concept on Youth Policy (1998) the youth is defined as the citizens aged 18-30 and according to the National Statistical Service (2009) the number of young people living in Armenia is 905.2 thousand people which accounts for 27.9 per cent of the population. The ratio between male and female is accordingly 49.4 and 50.6 per cent, and the ratio of urban and rural youth is accordingly 62.2 per cent to 37.8 per cent. Armenia is a mono-ethnic country 96 per cent of the population are ethnic Armenians. Throughout centuries Armenian Apostolic Church had the role of shaping traditional Armenian families and transferring them the Christian education. Even though most of Armenians consider themselves Christians (officially 95 per cent of Armenians are Christians), a limited number of young people actively practice religion today.

Armenia is a quite old country with a tremendous heritage of cultural and spiritual traditions. Cultural involvement from early childhood has always been an integral part of upbringing in a traditional Armenian family. Promotion of Armenian cultural and spiritual values and patriotic education are one of main priorities of youth policy in RA.

Being a country with almost 100% literacy rate (99.4 per cent), the respect for education and strive for academic excellence is one of the key elements of upbringing. The higher educational sphere of Armenia is currently undergoing a number of reforms due to participation in Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process to which the country joined in 2005. It is interesting to see that young people have started to take part in educational programmes implemented by methods of non-formal education, which seem to some extent help young people develop some skills they need to get a job. However, the questions of recognition of non-formal education still remains open both by state bodies as well by the employers.

The major challenges Armenian youth is facing now are the high level of poverty (20.4 per cent of poor and 3.1 per cent of extremely poor) and unemployment. The high rate of youth unemployment (55.9 per cent as of 2006) is connected not only with the hard socio-economical situation of the country but also with the inconsistency between education system's products and the requirements of the labor market. Therefore, having 56 per cent graduated young people not working with their profession is not surprising.

In 2007 Armenian State had 1.4 per cent of its GDP as share of total public expenditure on health, which is rather low; however the RA Constitution guarantees state medical care and service for its population. Life expectancy at birth is 73.8 which has a tendency to go up. The fertility rate in Armenia is 1.4 children per woman, whereas the natural increase rate per 1000 population is 4.2 and this number seems to be gradually increasing. It is interesting to see that only 43.5 per cent of young people in Armenia consider themselves as "fully healthy". The vast majority of young people

(70.5 per cent) are not involved in any kind of sport activity. Even though promotion of healthy lifestyle is one of the priorities of the State Youth Policy Strategy for 2008-2012, there is quite much to be done also in practice.

For a landlocked country with limited natural resources the human capital is of a primary importance so the youth policy was one of the priority spheres of state policy since early 90s. Armenia proclaimed independence in 1991 and in 1995 the youth policy sphere was formed in the Government structure and a Youth Department dealing with this sector was created in the framework of the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs. The effective implementation of the youth policy was requiring a normative base so in 1998 the “Concept on State Youth Policy” was adopted by the Government, which is till now the main document regulating the National Youth Policy in the country.

It is important to note that the principle of co-management was introduced in Armenia since 2000, when the first Council on Youth Affairs was formed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on 50/50 bases composed of representatives of youth non-governmental structures and state bodies dealing with youth affairs. Since that time this important principle has been practiced with relative success throughout all the major processes of National Youth Policy development and implementation.

There are various types of youth structures operating in Armenia, the major ones among them are YNGOs, student self-government organizations and youth wings (branches) of political parties. Last times there are also some youth groups which select the type of “foundation” for their organizations, as this is also giving a possibility to realize direct economical activities to provide their organizations’ sustainability. There are more than 3000 NGOs registered in Armenia of which around 50 per cent are youth NGOs or work with youth. A National Youth Council is created in Armenia in 1997, which is now uniting more than 60 YNGOs, student self-government organizations and youth wings of political parties. Since 2004 the National Youth Council of Armenia is a full member of European Youth Forum.

Since 2007, the main state body responsible for development and implementation of the National Youth Policy is the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs with its Department of Youth Policy.

Till 2010 the ministry was realizing its youth activities through State Non-for-Profit Organization “Center for Organizing Youth Activities” created in 2002. The aim of this Agency was the organizing and implementation of the projects and activities to foster the state youth policy. It was also managing the process of providing grants to youth NGOs from the means of State Budget. This structure by the time of preparation of this report is undergoing a process of restructuring.

Since 2006 the “Center for Organizing Youth Activities” has created a Network of Regional Youth Centers in all of the regions of Armenia. The Centers serve as local hubs for regional youth

initiatives. They are equipped with computer centers with internet access, training halls and all the necessary equipment for realization of own initiatives as well as supporting the initiatives of the YNGOs and youth groups from the given region.

One of the major accomplishments in the sphere of regional youth policy was the establishment of the office of a Youth Affairs Specialist in each regional government center (“Marzpetaran”). The involvement of local self-government in regional youth policy is still somehow weak, but there are already some positive examples of development of local youth policies and work plans which gain support of local self government bodies.

The Government of Republic of Armenia also created the “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation in 2001. The aims of this Foundation were to develop the cooperation of youth from Armenia and Armenian Diaspora living in other countries as well as to contribute to the development of international cooperation in general. It is operating an international youth center in the resort town Taskhkadzor, which is providing accommodation to various local and international youth programs realized by the Ministry and various NGOs.

In 2004 with support of UNICEF the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs with participation of a wide range on YNGOs have developed a “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2005-07”, which was the first such kind of document trying to systematize the work done in this sphere and to set some strategic aims and indicators.

One of the major outcomes of this process was also the revealed lack of the youth research in Armenia, as a result of which also in 2005 the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in cooperation with YNGO sector and with support of UNDP have realized a serious research process and have developed the National Youth Report of Armenia which was published in 2006. It was one of the important milestones on the National Youth Policy in Armenia, as till that point there were only a few fragmented and partial research works on youth, and with preparation of this National Youth Report, the history of youth research has started in Armenia. But even having this important document which is the main bases of this Review as well, it is necessary to note that the youth research in Armenia is still quite underdeveloped.

The next document of Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-12 was prepared by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, followed by development of the Work Plan for the Years 2009-12.

Three interesting new structures/mechanisms were developed recently in 2009-10. One was the renewed Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister, where for the first time since 1998 a transparent and public mechanism of nominating representatives from NGO sector was introduced. The second was the development of an unprecedented Online Grant Application System of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, which will dramatically increase the transparency of public expenditures and accessibility of the state resources to the youth NGOs of different parts of

Armenia. A Youth Information Portal (www.youth.am) was also launched in 2009 which started a new concept of ICT based youth information scheme.

The serious pitfall of the National Youth Policy sphere in Armenia is the absence of the systematized evaluation of its effectiveness. Fragmentary evaluations are made by state structures, YNGOs and the Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister, but a structured and periodical mechanism of Youth Policy evaluation and assessment needs to be developed. Nevertheless, now the priority spheres, work programs and indicators are set in the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” and it should be possible to develop appropriate evaluation mechanisms (once year according to the Work Plan for the years 2009-12).

In “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” four priority spheres are set as follows; a) to provide quality education possibilities for young people according to their aspirations and abilities, b) to improve the employment and assist to creation of new job possibilities, c) to improve the social-economical situation of young people, and d) to promote healthy lifestyles amongst youth and to promote their spiritual-cultural and patriotic education.

The preparation of the Work Plan of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” was done in a form of an intensive cross-sectorial dialogue, so starting from that point on there were concrete actions planned to be realized in cooperation of different state and non-governmental actors. For example a State Program “Accessible Flat to Youth Families” was launched in social sphere in 2009 in cooperation of multiple state agencies, as well as there are other cross-sectorial programs with the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Social Issues etc.

In 2006 “State Concept on Non-Formal Education” was adopted by the Government, which was one of the major achievements of non-formal education sphere in Armenia. The Concept is defining this type of education, presenting its principal characteristics as well as defining the priorities of this sphere in Armenia. It is foreseen that in the years 2011-2012 an Action Plan on Non-Formal Education development will be also developed and launched. A “Training for Trainers” Long-Term Training Course was also designed and started in 2010, which will be realized on annual bases till 2012.

Since first years of National Youth Policy in Armenia, international cooperation and partnership development were amongst the highest priorities. The cooperation with the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe was one of the first examples of a structured dialogue in the youth policy sphere with international organizations and the National Youth Policy of the country have benefited a lot from this cooperation.

Another important actor in promoting international dialogue of Armenian YNGOs and young people in general is the European Commission. Armenia is involved in European Neighborhood Policy

Initiative. Rather active is the cooperation in the framework of Youth in Action Programme of European Commission (“YOUTH Programme” in the years 2002-2006). The YNGO sector expects that the Eastern Partnership initiative of the EC will open up even more possibilities for young people in Armenia to develop cooperation with their colleagues from EU countries.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has also a number of bilateral cooperation agreements with the Governments of other countries, through which also some bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes are realized. A more structured cooperation is also realized in the framework of the CIS Club of Youth Ministries, which has an action plan and supports cooperation of state and non-governmental actors in youth sphere.

3. Situation of Youth

3.1 Definition of youth

According to the State Youth Policy Concept Paper adopted by the Government of Armenia (Decree 798 dated December 14, 1998) youth is defined as “citizens of the Republic of Armenia at the age of 16-30 and/or foreign citizens at the age of 16-30, who do not have Armenian citizenship, but their presence in the Republic of Armenia imposes certain responsibilities of respective state bodies”. The Concept names also youth NGOs and young families as targets of National Youth Policy.

Although the age group is defined concretely which is helping the policy formulation process a lot, but as also noted in the Council of Europe’s Armenian National Youth Policy Review, the further analytical definitions of various sub-groups of young people are lacking in this early document, and according to this document young people living sometime in quite different socio-cultural realities (e.g. urban and rural youth, young refugees, migrants etc.) are “put in the same box”, which is in a way reflecting also the way youth policy was dealing with its targets in Armenia. Only recently the youth policy is starting to become more targeted, and for example youth from the regions (“marzes”) of Armenia and especially youth from remote rural communities is becoming a priority target for it.

There was and is a serious debate on political level about the necessity of having separate “youth policy” and opponents are often pointing to the further specialization and the necessity of having separate policy spheres for children women, elder people etc., if the youth is a separate policy subject. But since 1995 the youth policy sector is firm in its positions and the National Youth Policy is becoming more and more well-defined, gaining more mechanisms structures, clear guiding principles and becoming more transparent and effective.

3.2 Key figures on young people

According to the Yearbook of 2009 of National Statistical Service the number of young people in the country is about 905200 which makes 27.9 per cent of Armenian population. According to the official statistics there is slightly more female than male young people living in Armenia (accordingly 457800 and 447400), but in reality the number of young men living in country is much less as considerable amount of legal and not-legal work migrants leave the country for seeking jobs in other neighboring countries (mainly Russia) and the number of young men actively taking part in social life is even less if taking into consideration that all of the young men have to serve in

regular army for two years, so huge part of the young male population is permanently out of regular social life.

Armenia is a mono-ethnic country 96 per cent of the population are ethnic Armenians, and the rest are other ethnic minorities (Russians, Yazidis, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Jews, and others). Ethnic minorities enjoy an atmosphere of tolerance in Armenia. According to the results of the National Youth Report there are no special problems regarding ethnicity in Armenia, so in the scope of the National Youth Policy youth from the ethnic minorities are treated together with other young people and no special strategies are foreseen for them.

Nearly half of the population of Armenia lives in Yerevan, so the ratio of urban and rural youth is also distributed accordingly (563400 urban areas and 341800 rural areas). 62.2 per cent of young people live in urban areas and the situation of urban and rural youth is very different. Until late 90s the national youth policy was mainly a youth policy for the capital, but since 2006, after the creation of the Network of Regional Youth Centers regional youth become a primary priority for the youth policy. Now for the years 2010 and 2011 projects concerning youth from regions of Armenia are amongst the top priorities of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

3.3 Living conditions and situation of young people

The most recent data available on the situation of young people of Armenia is provided by the National Youth Report of Armenia (2006). During its preparation the working group has revised the available body of research available on young people in Armenia and realized that there is almost no knowledge base for formulation of a evidence-based youth policy. So the decision was not to follow the regular practice of other European countries, which prepare National Youth Policy Reviews, but to prepare a wide-scale research paper on general situation of young people in the country. So in 2006 the National Youth Report was developed and published.

Here we will bring a brief extract from the National Youth Report enriched with more recent data when available. For more detailed information the readers of this report are advised to consult the National Youth Report itself, as well as other cited documentation.

Culture

Armenia is a quite old country with a tremendous heritage of cultural and spiritual traditions. Cultural involvement from early childhood has always been an integral part of upbringing in a traditional Armenian family. Promotion of Armenian cultural and spiritual values is of a great importance to Armenian state bodies as well as NGO sector and educational institutions. RA State

Youth Policy Strategy for 2008-2012 states the promotion of spiritual-cultural and patriotic education as one of main priorities of youth policy.

Even though overall youth cultural life has been intensively developing these last years (increased number of local and international cultural events, slightly increased number of leisure facilities and a quite large number of young people involved in various cultural organizations and groups), the level of youth cultural participation in Armenia (especially in regions) is still not sufficient. The reasons behind are quite different: starting from simple indifference towards cultural expression and lack of appropriate education finishing with lack of required facilities.

It should be mentioned that today youth in Armenia is still divided into two groups with quite different realities: the youth living in the capital and the youth living in regions. Unfortunately the cultural activities in Armenia are mostly available for young people in the capital, who also themselves contribute quite much to the creation of more cultural possibilities, whereas regional youth often does not even have appropriate facilities enabling them to organise at least their own cultural life. Lack of cultural life in most of the regions is one of the main reasons for rural youth to dream of leaving their home. Often young people (especially in regions) choose not to participate in cultural events due to their difficult social conditions and the only remaining link to cultural life is TV and radio, which, unfortunately do not succeed in providing either quality entertainment or education, on the contrary are actively involved in promotion and distribution of low-grade culture.

According to survey of musical preferences carried out for the National Youth Report (2006) to the question "What kind of music do you prefer to listen to?" 20.2 per cent of Armenian young people said "Foreign pop music" which was the most popular answer, 19.0 per cent went for "Russian pop music", whereas the third popular answer with 17.2 per cent was "Armenian rabis". Obviously according to this survey youth prefers to follow pop culture, a quite significant part of it is kin on "rabis" style of music, "which is basically a low-grade blend of different styles of eastern or western music, on the one hand, and ethnic music, on the other; being a type of imitational." Even though no statistics was found after 2006, we should add that rock and underground culture has also started to gradually enter the circles of young people these last years.

It is also worth mentioning that Armenian young people have not been able to be exposed to larger cultural experiences out of the borders of Armenia due to their social-economic conditions, however with the eligibility of Armenia to participate in different European youth programmes has opened up some opportunities for a broader cultural participation and intercultural endeavors.

Education and Training

Armenia is a country with almost 100% literacy rate (99.4 per cent), it is a country where respect for education and strive for academic excellence is one of the key elements of upbringing. However, the proportion of GDP invested in education in Armenia is 2.8 in 2007 which is rather low compared to most of the ENP countries. (Eurostat, 2009) Armenian educational system is nowadays greatly challenged to harmonize itself with the existing labor market in the country and propose its young people competitive education.

Over the last years the education system of Armenia has undergone few structural reforms and now has the following main components: pre-school education, general secondary education (elementary, middle, and high schools), primary vocational education, secondary vocational education, higher education, post-higher education, and specialists' training and qualification improvement institutions.

Once coming to the final years of secondary education (as it is compulsory in the country), many young people are faced with a situation where they need to take a decision about their future profession without even understanding the nature of this or that profession, its connection to the country's current labor market, etc. Also it is important to note that the level of accessibility to next phases of their education depends on type of education and institution they choose.

Primary vocational education and secondary vocational education (which seems to be „awaken from long sleep”) is more accessible in terms of entry conditions as well as tuition. 13.9 per cent of the surveyed young people considered vocational education fully accessible, while 43.5 per cent considered it rather accessible and only 7.3 per cent considered it completely inaccessible. (National Youth Report, 2006) Meanwhile higher education is not accessible to Armenian youth, 80 per cent of surveyed young people think that prior knowledge acquired in a secondary school is not sufficient for succeeding entry exams of a higher educational institution and private tutoring courses are needed. (National Youth Report, 2006) However, Armenia reported the largest average annual increase in the number of students in the first stage of tertiary education since 2000 (10.1 per cent per year). The number of students in this level grew in Armenia (with 7.6 per cent per year) at higher rates than in the EU-27 (5.7 per cent per year). (Eurostat, 2009) As for post-higher education, it appears to be even less accessible than higher education.

The higher educational sphere of Armenia is currently undergoing a number of reforms due to famous Bologna process the country joined in 2005. Even though quite some attempts are being made for meeting the objectives of the process, however a longer time will be required first to have full understanding of the nature of the proposed changes and second to shape the will to change such conservative sphere as education system.

We should also mention a challenge that is present in all types of post-secondary education. After the collapse of Soviet Union Armenian educational institutions inherited a quite rich amount of

professional literature which is though by now outdated. As there is practically no quality publishing of professional literature in Armenian, students are obliged to learn foreign languages for using foreign literature and improve their skills in self-education.

Even after passing through all the required stages of the education, not too many young people are positive about getting employed with the profession they acquired in an educational institution which once again speaks of a missing link between educational institutions and labour market.

It is interesting to see that more and more young people have started to take part in short training-courses or other educational programmes implemented by methods of non-formal education, which seem to some extent help young people develop some skills (like effective communication, teamwork, time management, project management) they need to get a job. According to the State review in 2009 of National Youth Policy by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, 70-80 per cent of events organised both by state bodies and NGOs have the nature of non-formal education. However, the question of recognition of non-formal education still remains open both by state bodies as well by the employers.

Employment & Entrepreneurship

Youth unemployment (defined as unemployment of the active population younger than 25 years of age) is quite high in Armenia (55.9 per cent as of 2006). It is affecting more than half of the young active population in Armenia. These figures also show differences between the female and the male youth unemployment rate (female youth unemployment rates are higher - 63.4 per cent than male youth unemployment rates – 50 per cent). (EuroStat, 2009)

The problem of unemployment does not begin when a graduate young person is faced with an obligation of having a relevant work experience (often of at least 2 years), the problem starts far before when a graduate of a secondary school has almost no assistance in quality professional orientation and is mostly led by parents and fashion trends in choosing his/her future profession. Therefore, having 56 per cent graduated young people not working with their profession is not surprising.

Even though Employment State Services in Armenia have foreseen several mechanisms (e.g. unemployment benefits, professional orientation and counseling, training courses, etc.) the quality of these mechanisms, is far from being efficient. According to the National Youth Report only 4.2 per cent of the surveyed young people knew about the training courses provided by the Employment State Service, which means that young people in Armenia have a quite low level of awareness on these support mechanisms and their labor rights in general.

Another issue not be missed on this topic is the need for mentality shift. 75.5 per cent of the surveyed youth considered that “the state should provide employment to its citizens.” (National Youth Report, 2006) This is a heritage of Soviet Union education system and a serious problem of the present education system. Back in Soviet times, graduates did not have to worry about their future job as they were appointed to a job right away, the system collapsed 20 years ago but the mentality is still somewhat there. The lack of sense of initiative as well as quite many obstacles connected with establishing own business (including taxation policies and country high corruption rates) result in not too many young people practicing entrepreneurship in Armenia. Despite of these facts, several private and incubator foundations (e.g. EIF) as well as well-established businesses are developing different programs to encourage young people for their own start-ups.

Youth unemployment is one of the main reasons of emigration. Young people, especially the ones having a higher education and professional ambitions choose to look for the continuation of their educational path (mostly post-higher education) and then career opportunities abroad (mainly in the EU and US), whereas young people with vocational or only secondary education (mainly rural youth) look for employment solutions mostly in Russia and Eastern Europe.

However, youth employment and creation of job opportunities for young people is one of the main priorities of National Youth Policy for 2008-2012, it is also a priority for number of governmental and non-governmental institutions. “Youth Professional Orientation Center” state not-for-profit organization was established by the Ministry of Labor and Public Affairs in 2006. A number of NGOs as well as business started to address this question by opening their own youth training centers.

Health, Well-being and Sport

In 2007 Armenian State had 1.4 per cent of its GDP as share of total public expenditure on health (Eurostat, 2009), which is rather low, however the RA Constitution guarantees state medical care and service for its population, though number of issues are in need to be considered more carefully by the state. Low public awareness on the importance on own well-being is one of these issues. It should be noted that number factors have been constantly affecting the health state of the whole Armenian population in general and young people in particular (e.g. devastating earthquake of 1988 which still shows its consequences both in physical as well as mental health, 1988-1995 on-going conflict and war with Azerbaijan, difficult social-economic conditions due to closed borders with two out of four country’s neighbors, economic blockade, etc.)

Life expectancy at birth is 73.8 (Yearbook of 2009 of Armenian National Statistical Service) which has a tendency to go up. The fertility rate in Armenia is 1.4 children per woman, whereas the natural increase rate per 1000 population is 4.2, this number seems to be gradually increasing.

It is interesting to see that only 43,5 per cent of young people in Armenia consider themselves as “fully healthy”. (NYR, 2006) Armenian young people, however, address a doctor only in case of emergency and generally do not consider practicing a healthy lifestyle as a must. According to the same report the majority (69.3 per cent) of the youth do not visit health care institutions at all. Visiting health care institutions is often replaced by consulting family members and friends, sometimes also doctors that somehow are related to the family.

Medical care system cannot be considered accessible to young people either. Most of them don't even know that state grants them the right of free medical care (only 31.7 per cent of young people do so). 38.3 per cent of the youth consider state free of charge medical services not really affective, whereas 16.2 per cent of the surveyed youth considered that they were completely ineffective, 18.1 per cent found the services to be effective and only a very small part 7 per cent considered them very effective.

Compulsory health insurance is not provided by the state, though the insurance policies have started to be implemented in other spheres (e.g. vehicle insurance is obligatory in Armenia starting from January 1, 2011), which might mean that there might be some changes in public health sphere as well. Some big businesses (e.g. telephone operators) and some international organizations already have contracts with health insurance companies and offer health insurance to their employees.

Quite serious health topic among Armenian youth is sexual health. In 2005 there were 5 per cent of females aged 15-24 using condoms, whereas the figure for males was 68 per cent. In general the topic of sexual health is rather a taboo topic in Armenian culture. Young people learn about reproduction and sex mainly from peers, printed media and Internet as often this topic is not even discussed in Armenian traditional families. Even though recently Ministry of Education and Science has introduced obligatory course on “Health Lifestyle” (which also includes sex education) in secondary schools, still many teachers are reluctant to explore these topics in a youth-friendly way with youngsters. Lack of proper knowledge thus certainly leads to unwanted pregnancy (followed by much more frequent abortions than before), STIs, and HIV.

In 2008 prevalence of HIV of females aged 15-24 was 0.1 and 0.2 among males of the same age group (MDG Report 2009). On April 1, 2002, the Republic of Armenia Government adopted decree 316 approving the National HIV/AIDS Prevention Program. One of the main objectives of the Program is to prevent HIV/AIDS and STIs among adolescents and the youth. The first HIV case in the Republic of Armenia was reported in 1988. As of February 28, 2006, 390 HIV cases have been reported in Armenia, of which 370 are among Armenian citizens. (NYR, 2006) As we can see in the same report young people are really in the core of the epidemic (76.5 per cent of people living with HIV is in the 20-39 age group), and 40 per cent are in the 16-30 age group. (Data from the

National HIV/AIDS Prevention Center of the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Health, February 28, 2006.)

Another worrisome health issue in Armenia is the tuberculosis. Considerably more than a half of the cases of the disease found in 2000 were among the population aged 15-39. (NYR, 2006) Nowadays the Ministry of Health has a national program against tuberculosis and cure of this disease is free of charge in the country.

As it comes to other forms of unhealthy lifestyle, interestingly the vast majority of the youth are fully aware of the harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs (62.7 per cent, 62.1 per cent, and 61.1 per cent, respectively). (NYR, 2006) Drug and alcohol abuse are not considered to be a serious threat among youth as the society itself has its social mechanisms to self-regulate this issue. It is interesting to note that during Soviet Union Armenia was one of the rare countries that never had so called „vitrezvitels” (special agencies dealing with young people) even though alcohol is at heart of festival cultural in Armenia. At the meantime, smoking becomes a very big problem among young people.

The vast majority of young people (70.5 per cent) are not involved in any kind of sport activity. Even though promotion of healthy lifestyle is one of the priorities of the National Youth Policy for 2008-2012, there is quite much to be done also in practice. However, we should mention that some of Armenian political parties (e.g. „Prosperious Armenia”) are actively involved in numerous sport programmes encouraging Armenian youth to choose healthy lifestyle and get involved in sports. Number of different NGOs are also providing young people with range of different programmes on healthy lifestyle, however most of them have pure informative nature and often do not succeed in bringing a desired culture change among youth due to also lack of facilities (especially in regions). Getting involved in physical activities is also quite costly which means not too many young people are able to afford it. In spite all aforementioned obstacles, small part of youth (mainly the one with higher education and stable job) start to participate in some non-traditional physical-spiritual activities like yoga, which seems to be developing in the capital.

Youth Mobility

Armenian government does not have any discount programs on public transportation either for students or for young people in general. The exception is free-of-charge university buses available for students residing in areas out but close to the capital.

After the collapse of Soviet Union (where travelling around the “world”=“borders of Soviet Union” was not very difficult) Armenian young people just like youth of most of the post Soviet Union countries have a wider “world” to practice its international mobility in yet very limited possibilities to do so. “76.8 per cent of the respondents of the survey conducted for purposes of this National Youth Report expressed their wish to travel abroad: while a decade ago, very few of the respondents would have mentioned vacations and tourism as the purposes of such travel, 32.6 per cent of the respondents mentioned vacations and tourism, while 39.1 per cent cited economic motivations. The survey also showed that 71 per cent of the respondents had been unable to travel abroad since turning 16, despite their desire to do so.” (NYR, 2006)

If we try to understand the reasons for such a big percentage of young people willing to travel but not being able to do so, we should first think of means of mobility available for young Armenians. Being an average young person willing to move around his/her country, s/he will first of all be challenged with closed border with one great gateway-Turkey, which means crossing by land and reaching Turkey in 30 minutes now takes 2 full days going all the way through Georgia to reach Turkey. Going close to the border of Azerbaijan is not even under discussion, as the entry of Armenian citizens to the country is restricted. An alternative to land traveling is travelling by air which is first quite expensive for Armenian youth and second often complicated due to the visa regime of most the countries they would be interested to travel to (e.g. EU or US).

Remaining a privilege to a still quite small part of youth, international youth cooperation is one of the ways to facilitate youth mobility. However, young people of Armenia still face numerous problems with getting visa even for events organized by EC or CoE and often do not get official reasoning for visa refusals even after adoption of new Code on EU visas. Young people committed to go for long-term voluntary services (e.g. “European Voluntary Service” of “Youth in Action” program of EC) are in particular hardship of this issue.

However it is necessary to note as well that the since late 90s there are always budgetary means in the Ministries dealing with youth affairs (currently the Ministry fo Sport and Youth Affairs) for suupporting the international Mobility of youth workers, young leadres and talented youth. The Ministry upon possibility is supporting participation of young people in various large-scale international youth events (e.g. UNESCO Youth Forum, various events of the Council of Europe, World Youth Conference etc.) and include youth leadres also in the official country delegations. With the itroduction of the Travel Grants Scheme in the Online Grants System in 2010 this opportunity will be accessible to even more YNGOs and youth structures.

Youth Participation

The issue of youth participation needs a separate and thorough research, as it is in the bases of all the other processes. The National Youth Report was specially addressing this topic, but the data from there is not enough to draw final conclusions, also taking in account that the situation in the country rapidly changes and new phenomena are appearing such as the social networking through electronic media, changes in the political landscape etc.

As cultural and economical participation are discussed in other section of this Review, here we will mainly address the situation with the social and political participation of young people in Armenia.

The social participation of the young people is mainly realized through various types of YNGOs, student self-government organizations, youth clubs and informal groups. Since Soviet times there are also trade unions operating in the country but they are not active at all and simply fail in realizing their functions.

Although the YNGO community and other structures of youth civic participation are numerous it is necessary to state though that the majority of young people in Armenia are still in the group of so-called non-organized youth, the participation of which is limited to the leisure time activities, cultural participation and participation in economical activities (job and/or entrepreneurship). This is maybe a result of the general mistrust of society towards the NGO sector and its negative image as “grant-eaters”. According to the National youth Report only 7.2 per cent of the youth trusted NGOs. This indicator is somewhat higher than the respondents’ trust in political parties and trade unions (5 per cent and 6.4 per cent, respectively), but still is extremely low.

The participation of the students in their self-government organization (student councils and student scientific societies) is rather high. According to the survey of the National Youth Report 35 per cent of the surveyed students were members of a SC or a student club and 39.5 per cent reported having participated in an event organized by the SC or a student club. It is also important to note that according to the Law on Science and Education it is obligatory that in all of the decision making bodies of the Higher Educational Institutions the student body must have 25 per cent of the votes. It was a very important achievement, but since the political and civic awareness of young people is not very high in Armenia in general, this mechanism is last times a subject to a number of political speculations of political powers of Armenia, and instead of practicing their right to participate and through it lobbying the interests of student-body, in a lot of cases this mechanism is turning out to be another way of “using the students” for this or that political power’s plans.

The other sphere of participation is the political participation of young people. Here we do not have updated data and it is important to note that the figures of youth political participation that we have from the National Youth Report of 2006 are certainly lower than the situation now, as the level of political activity of youth have apparently risen since the time of survey. However the National

Youth Report was stating that only 3.6 per cent of the youth belonged to a party and only 5% trusted any party.

The data of the Report was showing that only 37.5 per cent of the youth have participated in any political election and moreover only 11.4 per cent of the youth had ever participated in demonstrations and other protest actions, while 88.4% completely rejected this form of political participation, considering it ineffective or simple adventurism.

This situation with civic and political participation is creating serious problems with the functioning of all the National Youth Policy mechanisms aimed at raising the level of participation of youth in decision making processes. Even the perfect mechanisms can not work properly when not backed up by a high level of motivation, competence and activism of the target groups. So one of the major aims of the National Youth Policy should be raising the trust of young people in National Youth Policy, in various types of social and political participation and rising of their awareness on the available mechanisms and possibilities.

Leisure and Lifestyles

After the collapse of Soviet Union, existing infrastructure facilitating youth leisure, pastime and especially sports involvement has equally collapsed. Some of “Pioneer Houses” existing back in those times are now being re-executed as “hayordats tner” (“Armenian houses”) under the management of Armenian Apostolic Church. Almost all villages had “Village Clubs” having some facilities (meeting halls, small cinemas) that brought young people of the village together during soviet times.

Speaking of youth leisure and lifestyle in general, we should again remember of speaking about two different groups of young people living in Armenia. While youth in the vibrant capital has quite some options of pastime (starting from hanging out in numerous cafés, clubs and discos, going to a cinema, concert or theatre, ice-skating, bowling, surfing the Internet, attending different types of social events and gatherings, getting involved in some sport activities), there are not too many options (in some regions even none) to choose from for regional young people.

6.4 per cent of surveyed young people visited café or bar on a weekly basis, while 12.8 per cent visited cinema or club several times a month, 48.2 per cent of youth went out to a concert or a festival several times a year, whereas 66.6 per cent never went to a disco. (NYR, 2006) These figures are proving that due to many problems (starting with facilities and financial restrains to cultural and social obstacles) organization of pastime and leisure activities is far from being fully accessible to many young people both in the capital and out of it.

Therefore, young people of both groups often spend their free time watching TV, listening to music, surfing the internet (mainly social networking) and reading (reading, however is getting less and less popular among Armenian young people in general) as cheaper alternatives for leisure. According to National Youth Report survey carried out in 2006 the main forms of entertainment for Armenian youth are the television (30.5 per cent), music, and reading (28.2 per cent and 18.1 (per cent).

In 2006 the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs started the establishment of regional youth centers in every region of Armenia. These centers were to help the ministry make state youth policy more accessible to regional youth and raise the level of their participation in youth policy processes. These centers practically provide young people of regions the possibility to organize various types of youth activities in the physical spaces equipped with training halls, computers, Internet, TVs, some with projectors. Having minimum equipment, however, does not seem to be sufficient in providing quality youth events to the rural youth. In 2009 - 2010 the staff of these centers was trained in the framework of a long-term project foreseen by the memorandum of understanding between OSCE and the Ministry to improve the quality of the youth events provided and to reach out more rural youth.

A survey carried out for National Youth Report in 2006 has revealed that about two thirds (67.2 per cent) of young people did not consider that they could effectively organize their own entertainment, this figure is rather telling, although we should not forget to mention about few youth movements starting to be formed which often start as a leisure activity but sometimes reach social activism.

We should also mention that until their marriage (in many cases also after) most young people in Armenia live with their parents both in the capital and especially regions. Their lifestyles thus often have to be accorded with the rules of the family (e.g. curfew, friends circle, places of attendance, personal relations, balance between individual and family time, between studying and leisure etc.)

Human and Youth Rights

Armenia does not have as separate legal framework (e.g. law on youth) for young people and all the rights of young people are regulated by laws and codes of respective spheres (e.g. Law on Education, Labor Code, Family Code, Law on Military Duty etc.). A necessity of separate law on youth is supported by 67.9 per cent of youth aged 25-30, followed by the 16-18 and 18-25 age groups (64.8 per cent and 61.2 per cent, respectively). (NYR, 2006)

Every person who has turned 18 and does not have citizenship of the Republic of Armenia may apply to receive such citizenship, if he has permanently resided in the Republic of Armenia during the last three years in accordance with the procedure defined by law, can clearly express himself in Armenian, and is familiar with the Republic of Armenia Constitution. (Constitution of the Republic of

Armenia). Also, any citizen of Armenia who has turned 18 and wishes to change his/her citizenship may apply to the state to refuse his/her Armenian citizenship and acquire the citizenship of another state. It should also be mentioned that after a quite long process of negotiations, Armenia passed a law on dual citizenship.

The Constitution of Armenia also gives the education right to its each and every citizen. Let us remind here, that secondary education is compulsory in Armenia. Everybody also has the right for higher education or vocational training, which, though, has to be acquired on competitive bases (the state scholarships are available to students with academic excellence in all state educational institutions).

According to Armenian Law on Military Duty, 16-18 is the pre-conscription and 18-27 the military conscription age in Armenia. The duration of state compulsory military service is 2 years. Alternative service is also available by law to young Armenians and it takes 3 years to complete.

Even though employment rights of young people are assured by the Constitution and Labor Code, many young people are unaware of their rights and responsibilities and often do not practice them (one of the most common situations is the youth employment without any contract). Constitution prohibits to recruit minors under the age of 16 in full-time employment. For workers that have reached age 18, the shortened duration of work time shall be 36 hours per week.

According to Family Code of Armenia, the young woman willing to enter a legal marriage has to be at least 17 and the young man at least 18 years old.

Lower smoking age in Armenia is 18, whereas there is no lower alcohol use age.

Official voting age in Armenia is 18. According to Electoral Code, any Armenian citizen willing to be elected as a community mayor must be at least 25 and at least 21 for being elected as a councilor. An Armenian citizen having electoral rights residing Armenia for last five years and having the Armenian citizenship for at least five years is eligible to be elected as a member of the Republic of Armenia National Assembly.

As for the membership in non-governmental organization, the respective law on Non-Governmental organizations state that "A minor who is between 14 and 18 years of age and has not been declared to have full legal capability in accordance with the procedure defined by law may become a member of a non-governmental organization on the basis of his application, subject to the written consent of his legal representative."

Any Armenian citizen who has turned 18 may be a member of political parties, according to the Law on Political Parties.

Social Inclusion

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Despite the small size and homogeneity of the population of the country, there are several different groups of population whose level of integration to the general society is quite low.

Physically challenged people are the first in this list. A survey has showed that only 4 per cent of respondents considered physically challenged people integrated, while 32.6 per cent had difficulty answering, and 40.1 per cent considered them not integrated. (NYR, 2006) One of the main reasons for these people to be hindered is the inaccessible environment for them. First of all this concerns the public buildings and streets. The question of inaccessibility gets even more complicated when we come to the education of this group. Exclusion out of education system in the beginning shapes the future problem of unemployment and naturally excludes them in further phases of public life in general. RA Ministry of Education and Science has been implementing programmes of inclusive education in several Armenian schools for about 10 years already. However, the social treatment towards this kind of people has not changed much, people mainly consider a physically challenged person “ill” usually just pity him/her, they don't see him/her as a full member of society they live in.

According to National Youth Report (2006) in 1988 – 1994 Armenia was faced with the accommodation a total of about 419,000 refugees and forced migrants (360,000 refugees from Azerbaijan took refuge in Armenia, about 48,000 persons were deported to Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh and the Shahumyan District, another 11,000 Armenians immigrated to Armenia as a consequence of conflicts surfacing in other parts of the former USSR.), which is a considerable number for Armenia (about 12% of the population). Starting from mid-1990s, when it became clear that the safe return of Armenian refugees to their old homes in Azerbaijan was impossible, the Republic of Armenia adopted a policy of integrating refugees to the existing society. However, according to more than 57 per cent of surveyed young people consider that refugees are different from locals in terms of their mindset and lifestyle. (Armenian State Youth Strategy 2008-2012)

Values, Attitudes and Religion

Traditionally, the main social institute shaping the views and values of young people in Armenia is the family. The value system of Armenian youth shaped in family and later on in school is largely influenced by christian values promoted in a state whose nation is believed to be the first Christian nation in the world. Another cornerstone of the upbringing is the patriotic education. As it was already mentioned before, many young families do not separate from their parents and children education is also highly influenced by grandparents. Even though there is a tendency (especially in the capital) of progressive youth willing to move out once married, the results of a survey made just

in 2006 show that 95.1 per cent of surveyed young people do not consider this separation to be right, as they find it important for children to live with their grandparents while they growing up, they receive "love that they cannot receive in either school or kindergarten". (National Youth Report, 2006)

According to a survey universal values prevailing among Armenian young people in 2006 are: humanity (36.4 per cent), kindness/kind-heartedness (31.4 per cent), honesty/integrity (33.0 per cent), patriotism, (22.8 per cent), spiritual-cultural values (22.2 per cent), interestingly, though, young people tend to neglect other important values (liberal-mindedness (0.9 per cent) and justice/lawfulness (0.5 per cent)), which may be due to the still-evolving perceptions of these words in general. (NYR, 2006)

While gender roles and gender issues itself is a separate topic, it is quite connected to the values and attitudes of Armenian young people today. Being on the intersection of Asia and Europe both geographically and mentally, young people today are faced with a challenging situation: on one hand there is a try to maintain Armenian family traditions (i.e. patriarchal traditions), on the other hand roles of both genders are obviously changing due to the modern life.

Soviet regime, its collapse, integration processes with the west, raised mobility and modernization of life in general certainly have their influence on the value system of young people. Being influenced or inspired by examples of different foreign movements, some part of Armenian youth tends to get organized in different groups/organizations sharing certain values (e.g. rockers, vegetarians, bikers, etc). Recently there have also been some non-traditional subcultures noticed to be starting to be present among Armenian youth (e.g. Emos)

While many different currents influence the choices of Armenian youth, it is important to talk about the main institution having undeniable role in preserving Armenian identity. Throughout centuries Armenian Apostolic Church had the role of shaping traditional Armenian families and transferring them the Christian education. Even though most of Armenians consider themselves Christians (officially 95 per cent of Armenians are Christians), a limited number of young people practice religion today. It is also interesting to see that according to the results of a survey, most of the surveyed young people (56.3 per cent) do not have any expectations from the church and the main mentioned expectation was preaching from the church. (NYR, 2006) However, if one goes to a church on any Saturday, s/he might witness number of young couples having their spiritual marriage in a church as they seem to appreciate traditional meaning of it.

As of January 1, 2006, the following religious organizations were registered in Armenia: four traditional churches (the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Eastern Nestorian Church), four protestant churches (the Evangelists,

the Baptists, the Pentecostals and the Adventists), six religious charitable organizations (The Ecumenical Movement, Judaism, Paganism and Zoroastrianism).

4. Youth policies and youth work

4.1 Institutions, actors and structures

The youth sector and the non-governmental/governmental sectors dealing with youth and youth policies are quite diverse. There are concrete state structures exclusively dealing with youth policy, other state structures which deal with youth on an indirect manner, a huge number of YNGOs and NGOs dealing with youth affairs, a number of international organizations and their Armenian branches realizing youth programs, as well as various types of local self-government organizations realizing activities for youth.

According to the data provided by the Ministry of Justice during the National Youth Report preparation in 2005, there were more than 3000 non-governmental organizations registered in the Republic of Armenia, nearly half of which are stating themselves either as youth NGOs or organizations which have the youth as one of the main target groups. This big number of NGOs and YNGOs operating in a country with 3.2mln of population may seem ridiculous, but the situation is clarified when researching in a more detailed manner their actual activities and the level of functioning.

The matter is that it is quite easy to register an NGO in Armenia. The main laws regulating the process of registration and functioning of NGOs is the Law on NGOs and the Civil Code of Republic of Armenia. One must have three people interested in becoming founding members of the organization, a minimal package of documentation (e.g. Statutes of the organization, data on the founders, minutes of the founding assembly and an application letter with the request of registration to the State Registry Agency) and some small state fees which all together make something around 50 Euros, and they can register an NGO. The process takes one or two months depending on the fact if the NGO gets registration immediately, or they could have some mistakes in documentation package and they need to make corrections and to reapply.

So a lot of groups of young people register organizations having some interesting ideas, but due to the serious lack of knowledge on the basics of NGO operation the registration is becoming the one and only work of the majority of the organizations. The Ministry of Justice regularly “cleans” the data base from obviously non-functional organizations, but this happens once in some 5 years and in a meanwhile there is a bulk of registered organizations of which only some 30-40 per cent are truly operational (on different levels of activity).

Till late 90s the majority of NGO work was done in the capital and there were a few youth NGOs operating in regions (“marzes”) of Armenia, but the last years the youth work and youth policy development is quite active in regions, also as a result of the prioritizing of regional youth work in the National Youth Policy framework. The regional youth centers of the Ministry of Sport and Youth

Affairs also contribute to the activation of the youth work in regions, but also there are some well developed regional NGOs, which realize civil society empowerment programs for new organizations and initiative groups, which is contributing to the raise of the quantity and quality of youth work in regions of Armenia.

Last years some of the international organizations operating in Armenia also contribute a lot to the community development processes, creating youth clubs and centers which serve as empowering agents in regional youth work development. In particular World Bank, various UN Agencies, OSCE, Eurasia Foundation, AED, World Vision and some other agencies are quite active in promoting community development in regions of Armenia.

The main umbrella organization for the youth NGOs, student organizations and youth wings of political parties in Armenia is the National Youth Council of Armenia (NYCA). This association was built with three main functions; a. to serve as a mediator between the youth NGO sector and state bodies of Armenia; b. to serve as a mediator between the youth sector and international/European youth structures and represent Armenian youth in there; and c. to contribute to the empowerment of the youth sector in Armenia.

There were two tries to found a National Youth Council in Armenia. The first one was actually initiated on a top bottom manner in 1995, when the leaders of ruling party by that time (All-Armenian Movement) have invited the active youth and student organizations and told them that in other European countries there is such a “nice tradition” of having an umbrella organization so it is good to have one in Armenia as well. The idea was nice so all the organizations involved started the preparation of the founding assembly, which took place and naturally after a hard race the president of the National Youth Council was elected from the same ruling party (the president of the youth wing).

But as half of the founding members immediately dropped out and the newly elected president was not able to mobilize the rest of the members and to make the organization functioning, it was just forgotten till 1997, when a new founding assembly was gathered by another group of organizations (mainly from those which have dropped out during the first assembly). This time the presence of the ruling political party was much less (only as a consultative party) and a new National Youth Council was formed and registered. Here there was a small challenge which has brought to some problems afterwards. It was the heritage of the first general assembly where there were three very different types of organizations youth NGOs (individually registered bodies), student self-government bodies (without registration, parts of universities) and youth wings of political parties (without registration operation in the frameworks of respective political parties). As the student sector was formed somehow even before the NGO sector (the first type of youth self-organizing after the breakdown of Soviet “Pioneer-Komsomol” scheme), it was quite strong and it was not

reasonable to leave them out from the National Youth Council. And the youth wings of political parties were already “in the club” so it would be not nice to leave them out as well, so the decision was to go to a great compromise and to take all of the different actors.

There were a lot of changes and developments since those times, but till now the National Youth Council remains a conglomerate of a huge variety of organizations which is raising the level of inertia and not letting it function normally. The youth NGO sector has developed quite much after it, and now outside the National Youth Council there are a lot of very active organizations which do not wish to join this umbrella as they do not see much sense in it. It is traditionally consulted during the nation-wide processes, but the expertise outside and inside is very different, and sometimes some specialized NGOs in various fields can have heavier “say” during the decision making than the big umbrella composed of more than 60 organizations.

Summarizing we can state that there is a need of serious structural and strategic reform, which will give a possibility to transform this very important actor of National Youth Policy sphere to a serious partner for state organizations and a powerful empowering agent for its member YNGOs.

However, the National Youth Council is now composed of the aforementioned types of organizations (YNGOs, student self government bodies and youth wings of political parties). It has more than 60 members and is a full member of European Youth Forum since 2004. It has an office in Yerevan and there are some allocations foreseen in the state budget for sustaining its administration and organizing some activities.

The main state actor dealing with youth issues is the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Republic of Armenia. The government has started to implement youth policy since 1995, so now the youth policy sector has already some 15 years of history. It is important to note that one of the advantages and maybe somehow also a disadvantage of the youth sector was the parallel development and synergy of the youth NGO and state youth sectors in Armenia. A structural reform was realized in the Government in 1998 - the “youth affairs” domain was separated and the post of the deputy minister of Youth Affairs (in the ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs by that time) was created with serious lobbying efforts of the youth NGO sector and student organizations. And since that time there were almost no exceptions when the deputy minister did not have a student organization or a youth NGO background.

In 1995 in the framework of the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs a “Department for Youth Affairs” was created which than renamed to “Youth Policy Department” which is now the main state structure responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of the National Youth Policy. The Department is under the direct supervision of the Deputy Minister of youth affairs and works in close cooperation with YNGO sector and partner international organizations.

It is symbolical that the first training course organized by the Assistance Programme of Council of Europe in 2002 was the “50/50” Training Course for youth workers and civil servants working in youth sector with an aim to promote the co-management principle. In 2000, under Decree 734 of the Prime Minister of Republic of Armenia created a Youth Affairs Council under the Prime Minister. The Council operated till 2009, where the youth NGOs and representatives of state structures were involved according to “50/50” principle. The state sector was represented by the deputy ministers of the ministries which have cross-sectorial policies regarding youth (Ministries of Health, Culture, Education, Defense, Justice etc.) and the youth sector was nominated by the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs (Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs since 2008). The main aims of this Council were; to provide consultations on youth policy issues, provide a platform for cross-sectorial and inter-sectorial cooperation of various state and non-state actors and to support to the implementation of youth policy in Armenia.

In 2009, the work of this Council was evaluated and the procedure of the non-state actors’ nomination was considered non-sufficiently transparent and inclusive, so in 2009 a new procedure was developed for formation of this Council. In mid 2009 an open call to nominations from youth NGOs was launched with set criteria and a new staff of the Council was selected from these nominations by the Staff of the Prime Minister. The Council now is composed of 15 NGO representatives and 15 representatives of the ministries responsible for various aspects of youth affairs. The Council is headed by the Prime-Minister of the Republic of Armenia. The deputy to the head is the Deputy Minister on Youth Affairs and the General Secretary is from YNGO sector. The council meets at least three times a year and in between the meetings it works through various working groups created from its members and external experts from non-governmental sector. There are Working Groups on Youth Policy Development, Promotion of International cooperation, Regional Youth Work, and some others are in the process of formation.

Under Decree 520 (dated June 11, 2001), the Government of Republic of Armenia has decided to create the “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation. The aims of this Foundation were to develop the cooperation of youth from Armenia and Armenian Diaspora living in other countries as well as to contribute to the development of international cooperation in general. With support of Diaspora donors (“Lincy Foundation” of Kirk Kirkorian) an international youth center was created in the resort town Taskhkadzor, which is providing accommodation to various local and international youth programs realized by the Ministry and various NGOs. This Foundation has started the realization of annual Intercultural Festivals, which in 2007 received one of three consolation prizes of Council of Europe’s Young Active Citizens award competition. The Intercultural Festivals are now one of the major periodical events of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the number of national groups involved in it is growing year by year. Foundation is also realizing two periodical annual training courses ”Intercultural Learning and International Youth

Work” and “European Youth Policy, Structures and Programs” as well as various other programs of lower scale.

Since 2002 a State Non-for-Profit Organization “Center for Organizing Youth Activities” was operating by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs with an aim of organizing and implement projects and activities to foster the state youth policy. It was also managing the process of providing grants to youth NGOs from the means of State Budget. This structure by the time pf preparation of this report is undergoing a process of restructuring. It will become part of a larger State Non-for-Profit Organization serving a bigger number of State Agencies and not only the youth policy sector. But during its functioning the “Center for Organizing Youth Activities” has realized a very important project which has contributed quite a lot to the development of regional youth work in Armenia. In 2006 the “Center for Organizing Youth Activities” has started creating a Network of regional youth centers in all of the regions of Armenia. The Centers serve as local hubs for regional youth initiatives. They are equipped with computer centers with internet access, training halls and all the necessary equipment for realization of own initiatives as well as supporting the initiatives of the YNGOs and youth groups from the given region. In 2009-2010 with support of OSCE the Ministry has realized an empowerment program for the staff and volunteers of the Centers, where the participants were trained in the fields of organizational management, volunteer recruitment and management, strategic planning, non-formal education etc. The youth centers have staff and coordinators appointed by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, but they have also advisory Boards where local YNGOs, representatives of local self-government and international donors active in given region are involved.

It is necessary to note that although creation of this Network of Regional Youth Centers was a very important step towards development of regional youth work and policy, it is absolutely not sufficient to cover the needs of all young people from rural areas, as the centers are located in regional central cities and not many young people from distant villages have access to those facilities. It is foreseen though that the process of establishing youth centers will continue and the coverage on the centers will be gradually extended as the first pilot phase has been evaluated as very effective.

One of the major accomplishments in the sphere of regional youth policy was also the instruction of the Prime Minister released in 2004, according to which the office of a Youth Affairs Specialist was introduced in each regional government center (“Marzpetaran”). The involvement of local self-government in regional youth policy is still somehow weak, but there are already some positive examples of development of local youth policies and work plans which gain support of local self government bodies. E.g. the youth NGOs of Sevan with the support of Strong Society Foundation have developed a “Local Youth Policy of Sevan city” and the Work Plan was supported by the local municipality. This good practice is now in the process of replication in two other municipalities and

it was reported also during the meeting of the Youth Affairs Council under the Prime Minister to develop a more structured approach towards this important topic.

The Commission in the National Parliament responsible for youth affairs is the Education, Science, Culture, Sport, and Youth Affairs of Commission. It is mainly dealing with legislative acts connected with young people and the last five years they work on a Law on Youth which is in a constant process of changes and developments and was once again returned for further revision by the Prime Minister at the end of 2010. The National Parliament also created a modeling consultative body called Youth Parliament, which is composed of the representatives of Youth NGOs and youth wings of political parties and it is regularly following the sessions of the Parliament and giving its feedback on the legislative acts. It serves a school for young political leaders as well as provides a platform for hearing the voice of young people when developing new legislative acts.

There was another Youth Fund which was created by the Government of Armenia in 1998- All-Armenian Youth Foundation”, but during the time of preparation of this report it has entered a process of restructuring and this restructuring will be possibly summarized by mid 2011. It is worth to note though that according to National Youth Report (2006) “During 1998-2006, the Foundation has carried out youth projects worth about 600 million Armenian drams; moreover, it has, through university foundations, subsidized tuition discounts of about 8 million drams for excellent students from socially-vulnerable families”.

Another type of youth structures is the youth wings of political parties. These are not registered as separate organizations, but operate in the framework of their respective parties. The research of the national youth report have shown that only 30 of the registered political parties have some kind of youth structures, and amongst them only some 5-6 are really active and visible. In general taking into consideration the low level of ideological preparation in all the political parties, being member of a youth wing of political party in most of the cases (with rare exceptions) means a wish to receive support for their future career organization or receive some dividends when the party will have success during the elections.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union the first bodies of youth self-government created were the student organizations. In all the main universities in Yerevan and in some regional universities two types of structure have been formed in 1993-1995. In the National youth Report they are defined as follows:

a. “Student Councils (or student parliaments, student associations) are elected self-governing representative bodies of students of Higher Education Institutions. They ensure the students’ participation in the governance of their institution, advocate students’ rights, provide social assistance, support educational, scientific, and spiritual projects, and facilitate the organization of pastime activities.”

b. “Student Scientific Societies are voluntary, representative, and elected bodies of students and post-graduate students (young scientists) of Higher Education Institutions. Their main goal is to facilitate the scientific, creative, and spiritual development of students.”

It is important to note that besides protecting student’s rights, organizing events and projects, student self-government organizations have a very important role in decision making on the levels of their respective universities. In 2000 the role of the student councils as a body ensuring students’ participation in the governance of the Higher Education Institutions increased, as clear arrangements were foreseen by the Republic of Armenia Law on Higher and Post-Higher Education (Articles 15 and 17). It followed the Republic of Armenia Law on Education (Article 28(10)), which clearly stated a minimum 25% quota on students’ participation in the administration bodies of the Higher Education Institutions. Now most of the student organizations have budgetary allocations in the budgets of Universities and organize their activities according to their work plans. There was a negative tendency of “politisation” of student councils in the last years, but it is receiving very negative feedback from the society and the student-body itself, so hopefully this tendencies will stop and the student self-government will re-gain its status as a non-political platform for student self-expression and participation.

In 1994 an All-Armenian Student Council was created to serve as an umbrella organization for student self-government organizations, but soon after the creation of the National Youth Council of Armenia it became not very active.

4.2 Context of youth policies and youth work

4.2.1 Youth policy

The Youth Policy of post Soviet Armenia is counting back to the year 1995, when the Youth Affairs department was created in the structure of the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs. Department has started to operate in almost absolute institutional, infrastructural and methodological vacuum, as by that time the whole legacy of Komsomol was stigmatized as evil and wrong and everybody was trying to start anything anew. And actually it was needed to start most of the things anew as the logics behind a Communist ideology based youth policy and a youth policy of a new independent Republic was totally different.

To understand the logics behind the youth policy of the early 90s as well as now days National Youth Policy scheme it is important to have a basic idea about the geopolitical situation of the country and the historical period when the youth policy was shaped and developed.

Armenia is a landlocked country which has borders with four other countries. Being a Christian country (90 per cent of the population proclaim themselves belonging to Armenian Apostolic Church) it is situated on the borders of Europe and Asia. The three bordering countries are Muslim countries (Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey) and with two of them Armenia is in different types of conflicts. In 1988-1995 Armenia was in war with neighboring Azerbaijan because of the conflict around disputed territories of Nagorno Karabakh. With Turkey the diplomatic relations were stopped during the war with Azerbaijan, and with this country Armenia has disputes regarding the Genocide of Armenian people committed by Turkish state in 1915.

So the youth policy has started to be shaped during the ceasefire with Azerbaijan and till now the conflict is not resolved and the patriotic upbringing and military preparation of young generations are one of the most important features of the youth policy. This necessity is coming especially obvious when observing constant and extensive military propaganda held by Azerbaijani State in all mass media and educational institutions day by day during the last decade. So regardless of the fact that Armenian State and Armenian nation are against military solution of the conflict with neighboring country and do whatever is possible for peaceful regulation, it is necessary to be also prepared for possible escalation of the conflict.

It is also necessary to note that the geopolitical situation of the country is making the intercultural learning and rising of the intercultural and inter-religious sensitivities one of the highest priorities in any case. Armenia has historical partnership with Russia which is supporting our country to be sustained in this hard geopolitical surrounding, but Armenia is also expressing a serious interest towards European Integration and cooperation. Since 2001 the country is a member of the Council of Europe and during the last five years it is actively cooperating with European Union in the framework of European Neighborhood Policy Initiative.

Another important feature of the country which needs to be considered when studying its youth policy is the socio-economical situation of Armenia. Armenia has very scarce natural resources, and the whole economical potential was nullified after the breakdown of Soviet Union, as the planning of Soviet economy was based on sometimes even artificially extended synergy between different parts of the Union, where almost nothing was produced from A to Z in one single country. A wild uncontrolled process of privatization has put a full stop mark on the remainders of Soviet economy in the country. So now the country is showing rather good results in economical development. The average annual growth rate of GDP (constant prices) according to the Statistical Book by Eurostat "European Neighbourhood: a statistical overview" (2009) was 12,6 per cent by 2008.

But still the poverty and unemployment (and especially youth unemployment) are the major challenges for the country. According to the 2009 Yearbook of Armenian Statistical Service 20,4

per cent of the population is poor and 3,1 per cent is extremely poor. This cannot not affect youth which is the most vulnerable situation amongst the other social groups. Youth unemployment according to Statistical Book by Eurostat (2009) for the young people aged from 15-25 by the year 2006 was 55.9 per cent. This situation is also connected with the gap between education system and labor market. Armenia is part of Lisbon Process and Bologna Declaration since 2005 but till now it is failing in completing its obligations regarding the percentage (70 per cent) of the students working according to their professions after finishing their education.

Another important problem also connected with the economical situation is the housing of young families. In Armenia a lot of young people delay creation of new families as the prices for housing is far from their capacities. However it is mostly a problem for urban youth, as according to the National Youth Report youth from rural areas do not consider this as a major problem, as there the traditional way of living with the parents in parental house is still practiced as a major scheme.

All this challenges have resulted in a twofold situation, when the youth policy in Armenia is on one hand one of the highest priorities of the Government, but on the other hand the resources available are certainly not enough to cover this extent of the problems, which is making a correct prioritizing and careful planning a must.

The establishment of the youth policy sphere in Armenia in 1995, followed by accepting by the Government a State Concept on Youth Policy in 1998, which is the main and only political document on youth policy till now.

There were a number of attempts of developing a Law on Youth till that time, but in 2009 another draft was called back by the Prime Minister from the National Parliament, as it was not enough practical and its too declarative nature was not appropriate to the serious challenges young people face now in the country. The decision was to start a serious public discussion and realize research process, as well as to involve the YNGO sector in preparation of a new document, which will be reflecting solving the real needs.

But the absence of a specific Law on Youth do not stop the youth policy sector to function and to develop, as since 2004 with support of UNICEF the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs with participation of a wide range on YNGOs have developed a "Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2005-07", which was the first such kind of document trying to systematize the work done in this sphere and to set some strategic aims and indicators. During the preparation of this document though it was clear that there is a major lack of research base to organize this process on an evidence based manner, but it was also known by that time that in 2005 the Ministry with support of UNDP will start a serious research process to develop the National Youth Report of Armenia which will be ready on 2006. So the Strategy document was prepared, but as a transition point it

was stated in it that in 2006 when the National Youth Report will be ready, this Strategy paper will be revised and a new one will be developed taking into consideration the findings of the Report.

A huge work was realized in 2005 and finally the National Youth Report was published, which is one of the important milestones on the National Youth Policy in Armenia, as till that point there were only a few fragmented and partial research works on youth, and with preparation of this National Youth Report we can state that the history of youth research has started in Armenia. This research was covering the whole spectrum of the spheres of life of young people and provided a source for the preparation of the next version of Youth Policy Strategy.

The next document of Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012 was prepared by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Unfortunately the Youth Policy Department have realized the preparation work of this strategy paper on its own, without consultation with YNGO sector, and only after the approval of this Strategy by the Government an invitation was made to YNGOs to join the process to prepare the Work Plan for this Strategy. However a number of major NGOs of youth field joined the process of preparation of the Work Plan for the Years 2008-2012 and it was approved at the end of 2008.

A big achievement was the two renewed structures/mechanisms that were developed recently in 2010. One was the renewed Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister, where for the first time since 1998 a transparent and public mechanism of nominating representatives from NGO sector has introduced. And the second was the development of an unprecedented Online Grant Application system of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, which will dramatically increase the accessibility of the state resources to the youth NGOs from different parts of Armenia, especially from the regions. As well as the process of selection of the grant awards is now made by anonymous individual experts and both the applicants, selected applications and the award criteria are now available publicly. It is important to note also that the application process and reporting after the completion of the project are also done through online system and the whole report together with all the photo material (required) and financial documentation will be presented publicly, which will greatly minimize the possibilities of abuse and corruption risks.

The serious lack of the National Youth Policy sphere in Armenia is the absence of the systematized evaluation of its effectiveness. Fragmentary evaluations are made by state structures, YNGOs and the Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister, but a structured and periodical mechanism of Youth Policy evaluation and assessment needs to be developed.

Anyway now the priority spheres, work programs and indicators are set in the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” and it will be possible to develop appropriate evaluation mechanisms, as in the Work Plan for the years 2009-12 it is clearly stated National Youth Policy

monitoring measures should be periodically realized by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and representatives of YNGOs.

The aims of the Youth Policy Strategy set in the aforementioned paper are:

“To improve the living conditions of young people and the level of their education, to promote healthy lifestyles, to organize their leisure time and to develop the level of their social and political participation”.

In “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” four priority spheres are developed:

- 1) To provide quality education possibilities for young people according to their aspirations and abilities,
- 2) To improve the employment and assist to creation of new job possibilities,
- 3) To improve the social-economical situation of young people,
- 4) To promote healthy lifestyles amongst youth and to promote their spiritual-cultural and patriotic education.

4.2.2 Youth work

The situation with youth work in Armenia is a bit contradictory. On one hand there are a number of people which work with young people on professional bases and according to their qualifications can be considered as youth workers. On the other hand the terms “youth work” and “youth worker” are never mentioned/defined in any of the political documents regarding the National Youth Policy. So in reality we can see a number of specialists working in this sphere, but they are politically invisible.

Similar situation was with the non-formal education sphere, until 2005, when the “State concept on Non-Formal Education” was developed and adopted by the Government. This situation is certainly creating difficulties regarding the definition of quality standards for youth work and is creating possibilities for double standards and low quality services.

In a couple of Universities a new profession is introduced recently in the faculties of Sociology, which is called “social worker” and somehow it is close to youth worker, but anyway the current situations is requiring a more systematized approach in this field, as the situation in youth NGO work is far from the one in 1995, and now the issues of quality and recognition are much more important.

4.2.3 Youth research

The sphere of youth research is also new to Armenian youth policy sphere. It was first time in 2004, during the process of development of “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2005-2007” when the first time the lack of a solid body of youth research was mentioned and highlighted.

It was the time as well when the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs together with some experts from NGOs were starting to work on the development of the National Youth Report. The first idea was to develop a National Youth Policy Review, based on a couple of good examples from other European countries which by that time had already developed similar reports (Finland, Romania, Netherlands etc.). But the search of the available research materials on the situation of young people in the country have shown that in general there is almost no youth research on this topic as well as there are no organizations/institutes dealing with this topic. So the initial idea was modified and it was decided that there would be a large-scale nation wide research on general situation of young people and the youth policy situation will be only part of this research.

In 2005 the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs, with support of UNDP have realized a serious research process which have taken almost one year, as a result of which the National Youth Report (2006) was produced.

A group a 17 researchers and policy makers was formed and an independent sociological organization “Socium” Public Opinion Research Center” was also contracted to realize this exercise.

The goal of the research was to study and seek solutions to urgent social, economic, spiritual, cultural, legal, and political issues faced by the youth. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were set for the survey team:

- Determining the extent to which the youth are aware of the state youth policy;
- Revealing the values and attitudes of the youth and the prevalent trends of change therein;
- Assessing the real level of youth occupation;
- Identifying the intentions of the youth to migrate and the reasons behind such intentions;
- Determining the health problems of the youth and their awareness of the harmful effect of drugs, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually-transmitted infections;
- Determining the extent of youth civic participation;
- Revealing the youth’s attitudes to negative phenomena present in different walks of social life; and
- Identifying the problems affecting youth education, leisure, and entertainment.

The research was realized using a wide range of sociological methodologies, including survey with questionnaires of 1000 young people (0.012% of the target group of 840000 young people living in Armenia by that time) as well as expert interviews and focus groups. As a result a more than 170 pages document was produced which is available also in English.

Although this huge research created a good base for development of youth research institution in Armenia, we should state that it is still underdeveloped, and as the data produced in 2005-2006 is coming gradually outdated it is extremely important to develop ways to sustain this process and to

assist creation/development of organizations/groups working on constant updating the research base on youth issues. The National Youth report contributed a lot to the development of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” its Work Plan as well as to the individual works of various YNGOs. The whole analytical part of the Strategy paper is 90 per cent based on the materials of the National Youth Report.

Here it is necessary to note that in 2011 it is foreseen to update the National Youth Report and there are appropriate budgetary means provided in the Work Plan of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for this task.

4.3 Legislation and provision of youth work

The only normative document approved by the Government by now is the “State Concept on Youth Policy” adopted in 1998. It was developed by the Youth Department of the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs and serve as basis for the National Youth Policy.

The general aim of the Youth Policy as stated in the Concept is as follows:

“To provide socio-economic, legal, political, spiritual, cultural and organisational conditions and guarantees for social realization of the youth and for using their creative power for the benefit of the society most completely (Government of the Republic of Armenia (2005, p. 3).

The Concept is also stating the main principles on which the National Youth Policy should be based:

- 1) Integration of interests of the State, society and individuals in the development and implementation process of National Youth Policy;
- 2) Provision of direct participation of young citizens in the development and implementation of policy and separate youth related programs and the whole society;
- 3) Provision of State Guaranteed minimal social services for the health care, trainings and employment of young people;
- 4) Increase the patriotism among young people, introduce national values, and promote educational, spiritual and physical education;
- 5) Prioritize public initiatives for funding of youth related entertainments and projects rather than the activities of State bodies and entities.

Here it is necessary to stress the principle 5, according to which the youth and YNGO initiatives and programs have a higher priority in comparison with State initiatives in the appropriate spheres. This is a principle on which also the State Grant Program to youth NGOs is operating. As only

YNGOs were able to apply to the Grants Program, during the second meeting of Council of Youth Affairs in 2009 the Prime Minister has assigned to the Council and Ministry to work out mechanisms which will give a possibility to the student organizations (which do not have a legal status) as well as to informal groups of young people (especially from remote rural areas) to apply to this system and to get their initiatives funded.

The Concept is also stating the three main targets of National Youth Policy, which are; a) young people aged 16-30, b) youth organizations and c) young families.

Since 2003 there were a number of initiatives to develop a Law on Youth. Unfortunately most of the initiatives were coming from various political parties, and the main approach was to exploit this topic for non youth related political reasons. There was never a proper consultation organized with appropriate social and political stakeholders before drafting the Law, and as a result all the documents were receiving a negative feedback when entering public debates. There were two types of draft Laws in general. One type was simple declarative documents, which were defining a couple of concepts but not providing solutions to any of the challenges that youth faces in Armenia. The other type was a more sophisticated documents, which were providing a lot of practical solutions and mechanisms, but the realization of the foreseen mechanisms was always far out of the possibilities of the poor budgetary means available for youth issues.

So the general scheme which was repeating time to time since 2003, and the last version was in 2010, was that one of the political parties or leaders was developing something without real knowledge of the sphere and without mobilizing a social support from NGO and state youth sectors, it was entering the National Parliament agenda, then after severe critics from NGO and political spheres it was going back to the author for further revisions. In the end of the 2010 another version of the Law on Youth was discussed and called back by the Prime Minister because of its declarative nature and not sufficient reasoning and evidence behind.

4.4 Strategies, Programmes, Action Plans in youth work and non-formal education/learning

Youth Policy Strategy and Work Plan

As mentioned in previous sections the first Strategy on Youth Policy was developed by the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs with the support of UNICEF in 2004. It was the first case in the history of new independent Armenian Republic when the State, international organization and the YNGO sector were working together to develop a Strategy paper for youth policy. However it was also a

hard task to realize as there was a lack of experience in this sphere as well as the research base on youth issues and the situation of young people was almost absent by that time.

After the development of the National Youth Report in 2005-2006 a new version of the Strategy was developed by the Youth policy Department of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Unfortunately the YNGO sector was involved in the process only on the phase of developing a Work Plan for this Strategy document, but anyways this version was one level up compared to the version of 2004 as it was based on the research base of the National Youth Report.

The “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12”, accepted by the Government in September 2008 was providing a more sophisticated vision on the priorities and working directions of Youth Policy than the Concept of the Youth Policy developed in 1998. According to the Strategy the State should implement the National Youth Policy:

- 1) Strengthening the social partnership with political organizations, youth NGOs and organizations working with youth,
- 2) Deepening cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of youth with other state agencies,
- 3) Developing European and international cooperation in youth policy field and other related spheres,
- 4) Improving the legislative base on youth,
- 5) Keeping the youth policy Strategy and Work-Plan flexible and dynamic, being able to address the changes in social environment.

The Strategy is also stating that the National Youth Policy and the actions of the State on the level of youth should be implemented based on the following principles:

1. Cohesion of the interests, rights and responsibilities of the State, society and youth and other citizens in developing and implementing National Youth Policy.
2. The equality of the rights of the subjects beneficiary to the National Youth Policy,
3. Publicity and transparency,
4. Accessibility of the state assistance,
5. Program approach towards the realization of the National Youth Policy,
6. The equality of possibilities to youth and youth organizations in participating in the development and implementation of National Youth Policy

The Strategy was also presenting the main working directions of the Youth Policy Strategy, on which the further Work Plan for the years 2009-2012 should be developed. The following are the working directions:

- 1) To raise the level of systematization in the realization of the National Youth Policy and to develop the legislative and other normative base regulation the youth sector.
- 2) To develop the cooperation with youth organizations and state assistance to their activities.
- 3) To provide possibilities of youth cultural participation, to assist their educational and scientific activities and to support the organization of meaningful leisure time activities.
- 4) To research the socio-economical challenges that young people face and to develop measures and state programs directed to their solution.
- 5) To realize programs supporting the patriotic upbringing of young people, to rise their social and political awareness and the level of their participation.
- 6) To realize a youth policy in the regions of Armenia (through supporting the Network of Regional Youth Centers, creating other youth centers and organizing development programs in rural and border areas).
- 7) To create means for youth full self-realization and to provide state assistance to talented youth.
- 8) To provide means and mechanisms for youth information.
- 9) To develop international and all-Armenian cooperation.

The Work Plan for the years 2009-12 was developed based on this Strategy paper. The working group developing the Work Plan was composed of the representatives of the State bodies responsible for youth policy (Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, its Youth Policy Departments and the State not-for-profit Organization “Center for organization of Youth Activities”), representatives of the other State agencies responsible for cross-sectorial youth policy spheres (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Social Welfare) and a number of YNGOs from various spheres.

The “Work Plan 2009-12” is stating the concrete activities priority by priority, setting indicators for the assessment of the realization of this activities, naming the actors/stakeholders responsible for the realization of the activities as well as pointing to the budgetary sources from which the activities will be funded.

Another important feature of the work plan is that it is not including only the measures to be realized by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, but some 40 per cent of the activities planned are of a cross-sectorial nature. Here we can name measure directed to the harmonization of the educational system of Armenia according to the requirements of Bologna Process, various programs directed to the rise of the level of employment of young people as well as measures planned to be realized with the Ministry of Health directed to promotion of healthy lifestyles, health education and HIV/AIDS prevention.

It is also important to note that the first time it is stated that the State structures are obliging to realize annual monitoring processes of the effectiveness of the National Youth Policy together with the representatives of YNGOs. But unfortunately it is also necessary to state that such a monitoring was not realized in the year 2010, but having the appropriate statement in the Work Plan is already an important milestone, and in 2011 a detailed monitoring will be realized in combination with the renewal of the National Youth Report which is planned for this year.

Youth Information

Until the year 2004 there was no state system of youth information in Armenia. The National Youth Report (2006) is showing that the main sources of information for young people were the television and radio (accordingly 89 per cent of the respondents cited television, 49 per cent the radio, 35.5 per cent books, and 25.5 per cent the print press as sources of information). In 2005 the situation with the accessibility of ICT was also quite low. The data of the National Youth Report was showing 54.8 per cent of the respondents were stating that internet is not accessible for them and 60.6 per cent of respondents were not using computers at all. But here it is necessary to state that after the boom of the social networking systems, the situation is dramatically changed and the access to ICT is now much higher than during the survey in 2005. Though the ICT is mainly used as a communication tool and the information component of it is still not very popular.

The National Youth Policy has started to work in the sphere of youth information since 2005, when a youth newspaper (“New Perspectives” which in 2006 was renamed to “We”) and a youth TV program “Generation of Independence” have been launched. The newspaper was delivered also to the regions and distributed through the Network of Regional Youth Centers. Besides this there was a web page developed by the Youth Policy Department of the Ministry – www.youthpolicy.am, which was providing information on the recent developments of National Youth Policy in Armenia.

In 2010 all three projects were completed and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have launched two new programs. First was a new TV program “Comma” which has started to be broadcasting on National Television (“Generation of Independence” was broadcasted on another TV channel which was not accessible in part of rural areas), and a bilingual (Armenian and English) information web portal www.youth.am was developed, which is a part of an all-Armenian information portal to be developed till 2012. The information portal will have the information component which is already present in Youth.am portal, will have an information block on various aspects of youth policy and programs provided by the Ministry and YNGOs as well as will have social networking tools and the Online Grants System as its part (which is already launched in 2010).

The Network of the Regional Youth Centers also serves as an information dissemination network. All of the centers have libraries, which are used not only by the Ministry, but also a lot of International organizations use these facilities to disseminate their information products. UNDPI has its UN corners in the Centers developed in cooperation with Armenian UN Association. OSCE World Vision and other organizations also use these centers as information disseminating hubs during their various campaigns (anti-trafficking, HIV/AIDS prevention, human rights awareness etc.). With opening of new community youth centers this Network will reach more young people and will be able to realize more sophisticated youth information programs.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a rather new concept for Armenian youth sector. During the Soviet time there was a concrete volunteering culture but it was anchored with concrete ideological background and accordingly it was collapsed after the end of Soviet Union. Since early 90s there were almost no structured volunteering schemes in the country. And only during the last decade the volunteering tradition is starting to develop. There are now three main types of volunteer activities that are active in Armenia. One is the volunteering of young people in YNGOs. Here the level of awareness of youth workers is quite low and very few of them can distinguish the volunteering in their organizations from being members of the organization. Only recently after introduction of the European Voluntary Service of European Commission in Armenia (in 2004) youth workers and youth leaders has started to reflect upon the issues of volunteerism and it is also positively affecting the quality of local volunteer work. Accordingly last times accepting volunteers from various European countries as well as sending there volunteers from Armenia through European Voluntary Service is becoming another notable sector in volunteering.

And finally there is a specific scheme for the volunteers with Armenian origin from Diaspora coming to volunteer projects to Armenia, where they get acquainted with the country, their cultural heritage as well as contribute to various community development projects. Amongst them the most popular ones are the programs “Depi Hayk” (“Towards Hayk”) “Armenian Voluntary Corps” “Erkir ev Mshakujt” (“Country and Culture”) and “Birthright Armenia”.

In 2010 a “Low on Volunteering” have been started to be developed, which is addressing some challenges that the volunteering sector faces in Armenia. It is now in intensive process of public debates and hopefully will be adopted in 2011.

Major Regular Youth Events

The tradition of organizing repeating periodical events is rather new to Armenian National Youth Policy. Actually it is only after 2005 that we can name a bunch of regular repeating events. Before

this period the programs and projects realized were mostly of one-time nature. The following project can be described as periodical ones, although there were sometimes breaks in the course of their realization.

All-Armenian gathering “Baze” (“Falcon”) – Since 2002-2010, the huge youth gathering has hosted over 6000 young people aged 18-30. The gathering brings together youth from all over Armenia and Diaspora who compete in different categories of sports, culture, art and intellectual games. There are also various cultural programs and meetings with political leaders of Armenia realized during the program. The event is organized by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

“Intercultural Festivals”- The first festival of this set of organized in 2006 by “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation in cooperation with “International Center for Intercultural Research, Learning and Dialogue”, then the event was gradually gets a larger extent and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs took it under its patronage. The main aim of this international festival is promotion of Intercultural Learning and Culture of Peace among young people of different nationalities.

“School of Young Leaders”- is one of the major projects of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and has an aim of discovering and developing a new generation of young leaders, to raise their knowledge and competences. The school is quite popular and since its establishment in 2006 it has had more than 550 students. Many prominent figures of different spheres (politics, business, science etc) have been guess speaking in this school.

Training Courses of PAYICF - “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation in Cooperation with “National Pool of Trainers” and “Intercultural Center of Intercultural Research, Learning and Dialogue” has organized two annual thematic training courses for youth leaders and youth workers from various parts of Armenia since 2005. The titles of the training courses are “Intercultural Learning and International Youth Work” and “European Youth Policy, Structures and Programs”. Every year more than 60 young people take part in these training courses. Both training courses also have their appropriate educational manuals.

All-Armenian Youth Forum – from 2003-2009 “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation organized a big annual gathering of youth from representing different organizations of various communities of Diaspora and Armenia. The main aim of this gathering was to develop ways of cooperation between Armenian youth living in different countries.

Awards of the Prime-Minister for Achievements in Youth Work - since 2001, the Prime Minister issues decrees by which annual awards are bestowed upon young people and the presidents of youth organizations that have made a remarkable contribution to public, political, cultural, and other non-governmental work in the country during the year.

“Training for Trainers” LTTC – “Center for Organization of Youth Activities” on behalf of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in cooperation with “National Pool of Trainers” has launched series “Training for Trainers” long-term training course in 2010. This course, designed for youth workers and leaders to acquire deeper knowledge on theory and practice of Non-Formal Education, is composed of 3 consecutive phases and takes 8 months to complete. The Work Plan of 2009-2012 foresees 50 participants yearly for this training course.

Cultural Programs for Youth Serving in Army – “Center for Organization of Youth Activities” organizes number of visits of students to young people undergoing their military service. These visits usually include different cultural events and entertainment (often with the direct participation of Armenian pop star and folk groups).

Annual YNGO Forum and Fair – To promote cooperation between Armenian YNGOs, “Center for Organization of Youth Activities” organizes annual Forum and NGO Fair, where current trends and challenges of YNGO sector are discussed. The Forum also includes different kind of thematic workshops as well as three day long NGO fair gives an opportunity to more than 100 participant YNGOs to present their activities and create new partnerships.

Non-Formal Education

The concept of non-formal education was first introduced to Armenian YNGO sector in early 90s during the participation of YNGO leaders and youth workers in the training courses of Council of Europe. In those times the word education in the country had one and concrete meaning, which is academic/formal education system, provided by various state and private educational institutes. During the first training course organized in Armenia by the Assistance Programme of Council of Europe in 2002, even the representatives of the National Youth Council and various major YNGOs were not comfortable at all with “all these games” and were skipping part of the sessions because of the feeling of discomfort. It is interesting to note that the most active protestors afterwards became most active promoters of usage of non-formal education methodology in various spheres.

There was a strange situation in the country where a lot of YNGOs (and not only YNGOs) were organizing several training courses, using the toolbox on non-formal education, but the concept itself was totally invisible in official documentation and normative bases of National Youth Policy. In 2005 when the first conference on non-formal education was organized in Armenia by the National Pool of Trainers with the support of Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs, there were already a number of recognized trainers in Armenia (part of them members of the Trainers Pools of Council

of Europe and European Youth Forum) working for various national, European and international structures. During the conference the idea of development of a Conception on Non-Formal Education was initiated.

In 2005-2006, with initiative of a couple of expert organizations from YNGO sector, the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Education has developed the State Concept on Non-Formal Education, which was one of the major achievements of non-formal education sphere in Armenia. "The Concept of Non-formal education in the Republic of Armenia" adopted by the RA Government decree N50 of December 14, 2006, was for the first time defining this type of education, presenting its principal characteristics as well as defining the priorities of this sphere in Armenia.

The main principles of state policy in the sphere of non-formal education according to the Concept were;

- 1) Participation of the structures offering educational programs in the sphere of non-formal education in the development and implementation of the state policy on non-formal education,
- 2) Assurance of accessibility, competition and publicity in the sphere of non-formal education,
- 3) Adoption of inter-supplementing principle of the formal and non-formal educational systems (non-formal education system is not inclined to supersede the formal education system)

The Concept was also stating the objectives of state policy in the sphere of non-formal education as follows:

- 1) Elaboration of mechanisms assuring the quality of the non-formal education (quality of the structures offering non-formal education, the quality of the specialists of non-formal education and the quality of trainings/courses),
- 2) Increase of awareness of the society of the non-formal education system,
- 3) Stimulation and encouragement of the usage of the innovative approaches and methods in the non-formal education sphere,
- 4) Assistance to the international mobility of the people participating in the non-formal education programs,
- 5) Assistance to the application of the non-formal education methods in the formal education institutions.

As the Concept was the first suchlike document and obviously there would be a need to synchronize the other legislative acts with it and also to start some concrete actions on the priority spheres identified, the Concept was stating also the Primary measures to be taken after the adoption of the Concept. Based on this Concept, the authorized State Bodies, in cooperation with

appropriate non-governmental organizations should develop an Action Plan for the years 2008-2013 aimed at the development of the non-formal education sphere and to present it for adoption to the Government of RA by the end of the fourth trimester of 2007. Unfortunately the development of the Action Plan was passed to the Ministry of Science and Education and it is delayed till now. But during the development of the Work Plan of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” the representatives of the two Ministries and YNGO sector experts have discussed the situation and a decision was taken to include the development of the Action Plan in the Work Plan for the years 2009-12, as well as start the measures recommended in the Concept.

A “Training for Trainers” Long-Term Training Course was designed in 2010, which will be realized on annual bases till 2012 (and maybe farther if needed). One of the indicators of the Work Plan of the Youth Policy (2009-12) is that “each year 50 youth workers will pass the “Training for Trainers” LTTC and will be able to deliver training courses in their respective communities in various spheres of youth work”.

There are also some awareness raising measures planned to promote the “Training for Trainers” courses (to provide maximal participation of youth workers in them) as well as to raise the general awareness on the concept of non-formal education in general. Another two priorities mentioned in the Concept are the issues of quality in non-formal education and its recognition mechanisms. And in these two spheres also some concrete measures will be developed and realized till 2012.

4.5 Strategies in cross-sectorial policies

Till late 90s the cross-sectorial element of the National Youth Policy was not very well developed in Armenia. The only platform of the cross-sectorial dialogue was the Council on Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister of Republic of Armenia, but it had rather a form of sharing information, results and challenges on youth issues.

The preparation of the Work Plan of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years 2008-12” was done in a form of an intensive cross-sectorial dialogue, so starting from that point on there were concrete actions planned to be realized in cooperation of different state and non-governmental actors.

In social sphere one of the most challenging issues is the housing of young families. In 2009 a State Program “Accessible Flat to Youth Families” was launched in cooperation of multiple state agencies such as Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Finances, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, Ministry of Regional Governance and the Ministry of Municipal Construction. This State Programme is providing support to young families (the summary age of the couple lower than 60) to receive long-term loans for buying flats with percents lower than those in regular market of the loans. This programme is now in testing phase and other schemes are also under discussion, such as dedicated construction of new buildings for this purpose in Yerevan and regions of Armenia.

Together with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Science and Education various programmes are planned in promoting healthy lifestyles amongst youth in general and students in particular as well as preventing and combating HIV/AIDS. These programs foresee publication of educational materials, organization large-scale campaigns as well as work with mass media for awareness rising on the aforementioned topics.

In the sphere of education and training the Ministries of Science and Education and Sport and Youth Affairs will work together for the reparation and implementation of the “Action Plan on Non-formal Education”, which will provide the development of this sector, its synchronization with other sectors of education as well as will provide awareness rising measures for its higher quality and recognition.

Youth in the Army is one of the biggest target groups of the National Youth Policy. Since 1998 The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs together with the Ministry of Defense organizes visits of young people and students to the military units situated in various parts of Armenia alongside with cultural programs for the young people serving their regular military service in there. In the Work Plan 2009-12 it is also foreseen that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Science and Education will organize various types of educational and sports programs for youth, students and youth serving in the army aimed at promotion of national heritage and their patriotic upbringing.

As the youth unemployment and lack of job opportunities for young people are one of the major challenges for Armenian youth, there are several programmes planned in the Work Plan 2009-12 together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Amongst them it is necessary to mention the involvement of the Network of Regional Youth Centers in the activities aimed at decreasing youth unemployment, namely creating data bases of youth seeking for jobs in the Regional Youth Centers, organizing job fairs in the Centers as well as organizing job orientation career days using the facilities of the Centers. Together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Ministry of Economy it is planned to organize consultations for professional orientation, training courses to promote creation and management of SMEs, developing village tourism as well as promoting various types of self-employment.

4.6 European and International dimension

Since its first years international cooperation and partnership development were the highest priorities of National Youth Policy in Armenia. The cooperation with the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe was one of the first examples of a structures dialogue in the youth policy sphere with international organizations and the National Youth Policy of the country have

benefited a lot from this cooperation. The first visit paid by the Director of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe in 1998 and following three Training Courses organized in Armenia by the Assistance Programme of Council of Europe have helped to shape the bases of the youth policy of Armenia, to prepare new generation of youth leaders as well as helped Armenia to firmly accept the principle of co-management in the youth policy sphere.

The last visit of the newly appointed Director of the Youth Directorate in 2010 have given a chance to look back and to evaluate this more than 10 years of cooperation with Council of Europe and design new possible ways of cooperation and partnership. In 2010 Armenia also officially joined the Partial Agreement on Youth Card. Armenia has also permanent representative in the European Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) of the Directorate of Youth and actively takes part in the activities of this structure. Two Armenian trainers are also members of the Trainer's Pool of the Council of Europe.

The National Youth Policy Review realized by the experts of Council of Europe in 2006 is one of the most valuable external evaluations of the National Youth Policy in Armenia, and its recommendations serve till now for improving some mechanisms and systems in youth policy and youth work.

Armenia also actively participates in the agenda of Council of Europe regarding the Human Rights Education. "Compass" and "Compassito" manuals are translated to Armenian and various training courses popularizing these educational tools are organized in Armenia. During the "All Different-All Equal" campaign the national committee has also organized a number of activities dedicated to the campaign.

National Youth Council of Armenia is also active in international youth sector. In November 2004 it became a full member of the European Youth Forum and takes part in the activities of the European umbrella organization.

Another important actor in promoting international dialogue of Armenian YNGOs and young people in general is the European Commission. Armenia is involved in European Neighborhood Policy Initiative and in 2007 the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in cooperation with YNGOs have developed some actions to be involved in the Armenia-EU Action Plan. But actually nothing from the planned measures is realized till now.

Rather active is the cooperation in the framework of Youth in Action Programme of European Commission ("YOUTH Programme" in the years 2002-2006). Here Armenian YNGOs and youth groups have started to participate since 2004, when with the support of SALTO EECA Resource Center the Network of Multipliers of Youth in Action Programme in EECA countries have started to disseminate information on the programme and promote it in Yerevan and regions of Armenia. Now according to the SALTO EECA Resource Center's Evaluation Reports on Action 3.1 and

Action 2, Armenian YNGOs are ones of the most active in the Eastern Europe and Caucasus Region.

It is also necessary specially to note the support of the SALTO EECA Resource Center which has organized a number of quality information and training events for youth workers from Armenia, published information materials as well as till now supports the Network of Multipliers of Youth in Action Programme. SALTO EECA RC have also organized a Study visit to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in 2008 with the aim of introducing the local youth work realities to the partner organizations from EU promoting the cooperation with EECA region. Another study visit to Armenia is planned by SALTO RC in 2011.

The YNGO sector expects that the Eastern Partnership initiative of the EC will open up even more possibilities for young people in Armenia to develop cooperation with their colleagues from EU countries.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has also a number of bilateral cooperation agreements with the Governments of other countries, through which also some bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes are realized. The framework of these bilateral agreements is gradually enlarged year by year, and new formats of cooperation are developed. A more structured cooperation is also realized in the framework of the CIS Club of Youth Ministries, which has an action plan and supports cooperation of state and non-governmental actors in youth sphere.

The ministry also has a Memorandum of Cooperation with OSCE, in the framework of which a capacity building program was realized for the Network of Regional Youth Centers in 2009-2010. The Network also cooperates with UNDP with which they have established UN corners in the libraries of the centers. It is also necessary to note the past cooperation with UNICEF and UNDP, which accordingly supported the development of the “Youth Policy Strategy 2005-08” and the “National Youth Report” (2009).

4.7 Budget/Funding

Supporting the initiatives of YNGOs and assuring their participation in different phases of Youth Policy implementation is today one of the main priorities of the state bodies in charge of Youth Affairs in Armenia. It should be mentioned that since 1997 there has been a special separate budgetary line dedicated to the issues related to young people in the state budget of Armenia. It is important to note that the annual budget has been significantly increased from 37 million AMD (as of 1997) to 411 million AMD (as of 2009). From the first stages of state youth budget availability part of this budget has been regularly allocated to the NGOs dealing with youth issues through grant projects. It is also interesting to notice that the state has chosen to “Prioritize public initiatives

for funding of Youth related entertainments and projects rather than the activities of State bodies and entities.”

Let us now look at the development of mechanisms for mentioned NGO grants allocation. In the early stage an Expert Council established by the Ministry of Culture and Youth composed of 50% governmental and 50% non-governmental representatives was the structure to review and take decisions on grant proposals submitted by the NGOs.

The reviewing process of ministry grants system for NGOs in 2009 acknowledged the efforts of the system and quantity of youth projects supported. The cooperation between the state and NGO sphere was noted to be quite efficient and important to be continued. However, it also made it clear that there was a lack of transparency in the process of assignment and selection of the grants allocation committee members.

In order to increase the level of youth participation, to assure a higher transparency and publicity as well as to improve the application, assessment and quality assurance mechanisms of the system, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Armenia launched initiation of its Online Grant System in the end of 2009. Relevant experts from NGO sphere were consulted to suggest the required functional specifications of the Online System as well as develop improved versions of grant types and revised versions of application, assessment and report forms for which a thorough study of already existing successful examples was carried out.

The Online Grant System was ready to receive the first grant applications in August, 2010. The System enables the registration of not only NGOs but also for the first time independent experts who are selected according to the selection criteria published on the same web platform and are able anonymously to review submitted proposals. The assessments of independent experts are finalized (based on mathematical calculations) by the Coordination Group of Online Grant System of newly established Council on Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister of RA and handed over to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for proceeding with grant allocation according to the received decision.

The automatization of application, review and reporting procedures has lowered the factor of subjectivity, which is crucial in a country with quite high corruption rates. The obligatory publishing of project descriptions and full financial reports provided by applicants certainly help improve the quality of received proposals as well as increase the level of transparency.

Besides the State Budget allocations there was two Funding structures created by the Government with different tasks. One of them was the All-Armenian Youth Fund created by a Decree of the President in 1998. Since that time the Foundation has realize a number of projects, especially concentrating on support to students and student self-government organizations. The Foundation was also realizing the annual “Baze” All-Armenian Gatherings bringing together several hundreds

of youth from various regions of Armenia and Diaspora. All-Armenian Youth Fund is undergoing now a process of restructuring. Another structure was the “Pan-Armenian International Youth Center” Foundation created by the decree of the Government of Armenia in 2001. This Foundation was organizing All-Armenian Youth Forums, various training courses promoting the cooperation with youth from Diaspora, European and international cooperation.

Armenian youth NGOs can also apply to grants in European Youth Foundation of Council of Europe, though we should mention that in comparison with our neighboring countries the Armenian YNGOs are rather passive in using this opportunity.

A very successful exercise was the opening of YOUTH Programme of European Commission to Armenian YNGOs in the framework of European Neighborhood Policy in 2004. Until that time there were very few possibilities for young people from Armenia to have at least a minimal international mobility and intercultural learning experiences. The YOUTH Programme and its successor “Youth in Action” Programme of European Commission has opened up a serious opportunity for it and this opportunity was taken quite actively by YNGO sector of Armenia. According to the SALTO EECA Resource Center’s Evaluation Reports on Action 3.1 and Action 2, Armenian YNGOs are quite active in both Actions. European Commission is also very actively supporting youth and in particular students through its TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, Grundvigh programmes and EuropAid Agency.

In general we would state that the international donor community which has representations in Armenia is not very active in youth sector. Hardly any international donors have specific programs or grants directed to young people. But for sure the other programs are not restricting the participation of youth and student organizations, so amongst most active donor agencies we can name the USAID Agency of US Government, Open Society Institute, UNICEF and UNDP, Eurasia Foundation, World Bank, World Vision, OSCE, British Council and DAAD. Besides this the Embassies operating in Armenia (Russia, US, UK, etc.) also have their grant programs as well as various European Countries has their International Aid Agencies, such as Switzerland, Sweden, Netherlands etc.

5. Trends, needs, challenges and expectations

It is not always easy to summarize a phenomenon which is so multi-faceted and dynamically evolving in a quite rapid rate. And these are the two key words that can best describe the National Youth Policy and youth situation in Armenia – “dynamically evolving” and “diverse”. But for sure some concrete trends are easily detectable and some clear conclusions can be made based on them. We strongly hope that this will be another contribution to the development of a more effective strategic approach in the sphere of National Youth policy.

So first trend that is possible to extract from the observations of the current policies of the State, strategies and programmes is the **clear emphasis on the education system its reforms, its synchronization and harmonization with European standards as well as providing better links with the labor market**. There are a number of State programs motivated also by Armenia’s participation in Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process, but all in all it is necessary to state that the current situation is a clear “transition” period with all its minuses, when there is a lack of specialists understanding what are all those “bolognas” about, how it is possible to adapt something new to Armenian realities without totally destroying what was available before the reforms as well as how to combine policy and mechanism changes with appropriate changes in the minds of the stakeholders, beneficiaries and the general public.

Another issue to mention is the emergence of the **non-formal education system in Armenia**, as the labor market is now more and more actively seeking for some competences which are not provided by formal educational system, and they are widely practiced and trained in YNGO sector and in numerous trainings the numbers of which are increasing day by day. The “State Concept of Non-Formal Education in Armenia” in 2006 was a major milestone in developing non-formal education institution in the country, but still the development of appropriate Action Plan is constantly delayed since 2007. The topics of recognition of non-formal education, the quality and standards issue as well as the lack of general awareness on it are still challenges to be addressed in this sphere. However the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have started a process of training youth workers in this sphere and according to the Work Plan of the Youth Policy (2009-12) each year till 2012 (and maybe further) 50 youth workers will pass the “Training for Trainers” LTTC and appropriate methodological training materials and manuals are developed.

One of the four major priorities of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012” is the promotion of **youth employment and entrepreneurship**. This is a quite hard task in a country with such high rates of poverty and low level of economical development, but we should state that there are a wide range of measures planned in this sphere, and what is even more important, through the involvement of the Network of Regional Youth Centers these programs are going also to the regions, which suffer from youth unemployment much more than the capital.

The **vocational training**, which seemed to be forgotten after being a quite important part of education system in Soviet times, shows some signs of awakening. This is quite important especially for young people for whom higher education is not accessible (either because of intellectual capacity, lack of financial means or simply because of choice). Reforms in vocational training are very important for decreasing present youth unemployment rate which is rather high.

One of the biggest state programs of the last decade is the “Accessible **housing for young families**” program launched in 2009. It is one of the main programs aimed at another one of the priorities of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012”, namely “Improvement of the social-economical situation of young people”. This program is still in its testing phase and a number of methods of solving the housing problem of young families are being developed and implemented, based also on the international experience in this sphere.

Another tendency of the last two years in the National Youth Policy sphere is the set of measures aimed at **raising the level of participation of youth leaders in decision making processes as well as providing a higher transparency in budgetary expenditures** in the sphere of funding the initiatives of YNGOs from the State Budget. In this framework the Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime minister was reorganized in 2010, and a more transparent way of the nomination of YNGO sector representatives was introduced. The renewed Council also developed a new funding scheme for grants to YNGOs from the state budget means, and in the second part of the 2010 an Online Grant System was introduced to YNGO sector which is providing a much higher transparency and publicity level than the previous grants system. Actually this system has no precedents in any of the countries in the region and the other European countries as much as we are informed, and if it will succeed the efficiency of the public expenditures for youth projects will be considerably raised. The major challenge in this sphere is the inertia and resistance of the supporters of the previous system, which do not accept the innovative nature of the system and sometimes are afraid to lose some dividends that the previous system was possibly providing them.

Another positive tendency in the National Youth Policy is the **programmed/strategic nature** that it is starting to gain after the completion of the National Youth Report and the adoption of the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012”. The last document and the corresponding Work Plan 2009-12 are clearly activity and **indicator based and foresee a yearly monitoring process** to be realized by YNGOs and state structures. There was no public monitoring realized in 2010, but at least having this point in the Work Plan is creating the possibility and will in case of successful realization highly affect the effectiveness of the National Youth Policy.

Development of the National Youth Report has opened a new phase in the National Youth Policy. On one hand it has created bases for development of evidence based youth policy, and on the

other hand has raised the importance of the **youth research institution** in general. Although the youth research institution is still quite weak in Armenia, in the year 2011 an update of the National Youth Report is planned which will stimulate the development of this sphere.

One of the negative tendencies is the **increasing “politisation” of the youth policy sphere**. The youth policy structures were traditionally a politics-free zone and the YNGO sector was promoting this situation through its lobbying efforts. This was giving a possibility to secure the National Youth Policy from the effects of numerous political changes that were happening in the Republic. But last couple of years due to increasing political confrontations between different political parties, there is a tendency to give a political color to youth policy as well. More and more issues relating to the National Youth Policy are discussed in political couloirs before reaching the youth sector, which is negatively affecting the trust of YNGOs (especially the vast majority of non-political YNGOs) towards the National Youth Policy.

The situation is also coming more complicated as the youth sector is traditionally “attached” to another Ministry to which it has no any special relations. At first it was in the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs and then it was transferred to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Each transfer or each change of the Minister is paralyzing the Youth Policy system for a couple of months at least, so this situation is endangering the normal functioning of the youth policy sector. A solution of this issue can be **transfer of the youth sector of the State Policy to a separate division** and providing its political immunity as a sector which is uniting and serving the whole body of the youth in the country.

Another characteristic of the youth policy of the recent years is the higher attention to the **issue of youth information**. The state structures are constantly trying several types of media to provide this aspect of the National Youth Policy. The last scheme is the initiative of an online portal of youth information. The two components of it are already launched “Online Grant System” (www.cragrer.am) and the bilingual “Online News Portal” (www.youth.am). Another two components are in the process of development which will be a social networking platform with e-learning opportunities and a section on the resources and information on National Youth Policy and programs for young people. Besides this Ministry is organizing a TV program “Comma” which is broadcasted on National Television. The Network of Regional Youth Centers with its libraries and computer halls is another tool for the youth information dissemination. But here it is necessary to note that the youth information system is not yet reachable for majority of the youth, as the internet coverage in Armenia is not very wide.

There are a big number of YNGOs and NGOs working with young people registered in the State Registry Agency. But the number of normally operating and sustainable NGOs amongst them is quite low. The main reason for this is the lack of youth workers and youth leaders with appropriate

skills and knowledge on community work, organizational management, project development and management, organization of training events etc. Accordingly creation of systematized mechanisms/schemes of **youth worker training, empowerment of newly established NGOs and youth initiative groups is a must** for the youth sector of Armenia.

The “Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012” is prioritizing the sphere of **promotion of healthy lifestyles** popularization of sports and providing awareness raising programmes about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention. This is very important tendency and the youth in Armenia is almost not at all interested in sports and the knowledge on health, healthy lifestyles and healthcare system are very low. Sports facilities and in general leisure time facilities systems are extremely underdeveloped especially in the regions and rural areas, which is another cause of young people’s internal migration to urban areas and especially the capital.

Support of international and especially European cooperation is an important sphere of work of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. The level of awareness of young people on European issues is extremely low in Armenia, although the interest towards them is very high. European integration and cooperation is one of the priorities on Armenian Government in general and National Youth Policy sector has a long story of cooperation with Council of Europe. The European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership initiative are opening up new possibilities of developing intercultural dialogue possibilities for Armenian young people and both the “Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012” with its Work Plan and also the Work Plan of the Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia are emphasizing the development of international and European cooperation. Youth in Action Programme of European Commission (and YOUTH Programme in the years 2002-2006) have contributed a lot to the European awareness raising and international mobility in Armenia. Now the new Online Grants System has special categories for “Travel Grants” and “Co-Funding Grants”, which are facilitating Armenian youth’s participation in these programs.

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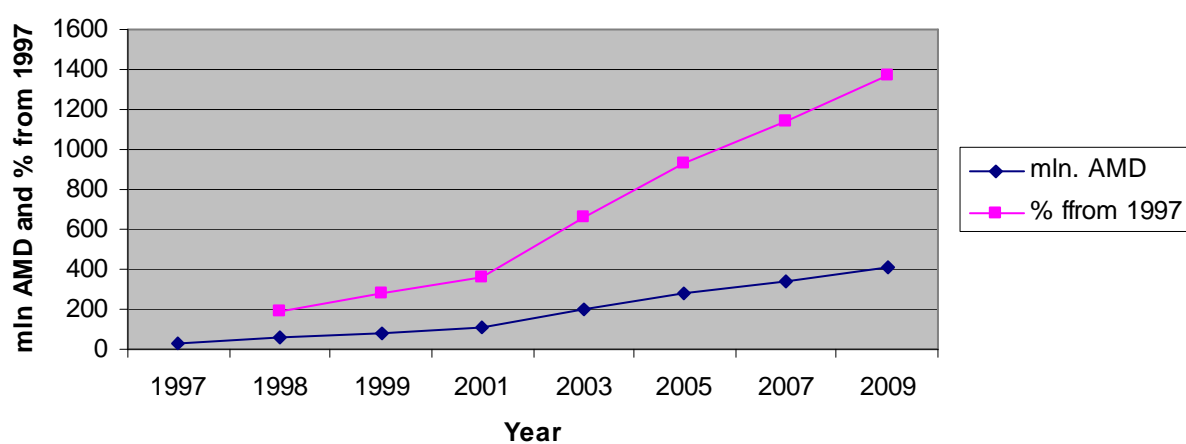
Annexes

Country Profile in 2010

General Information	
Full name of the country	Republic of Armenia
Government type	Presidential Republic
Capital city	Yerevan
Region	Caucasus
Official language	Armenian
Ethnic Composition	97.9 per cent Armenian, 1.3 per cent Yazidi, 0.5 per cent Russian, 0.3 per cent others
Religion	Armenian Apostolic Church
Currency	Armenian Drams (AMD)
Exchange rates (Jan 2011)	1 EUR - ??AMD
Surface area	29,743 (square kilometers)
Population (2009)	3,238,000
Population density	108.4 (per square kilometer)
Urban population	2073.4 thousand
Rural population	1164.6 thousand
GDP per capita	1,127.4 (thousand AMD)
Statistical Data	
Gender Ratio	F: 1669.7 thousand (50,9%) M: 1568.3 thousand (49,1%)
Youth population (2009)	905.2 thousand
Number of marriages	?
Number of birth (2008)	41.2 thousand
Number of death (2008)	27.4 thousand
Natural increase rate	4.2 per 1000 population

Number of divorces (2008)	3031
Life expectancy	73.8
Education	
Literacy rate	99.4 per cent
Enrollment in all types of education primary, secondary and tertiary institutions (per cent of 6-22 years old population) (2008)	65.7 per cent
Employment	
Officially registered unemployment rate	6.3 per cent
Youth unemployment rate (2006)	55.9 per cent
Economically active population	1192.5 thousand
Age Related Regulations and Rights	
Compulsory education (up to...)	Yes, up to 16
Compulsory military service	Yes, responsibility starts from 18
Legal employment	16
Marriage without parental consent	F: 17 M: 18
Minimum voting age	18
Purchase of tobacco and smoking	18
Purchase of alcohol and drinking	18 ?
Driving license	18 ?

State Budget Allocations to Youth Affairs



Poverty level in 2008 (in per cent of population)

