

PROGRAM AND PROJECT SUPPORT OF YOUTH WORK AT THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

One of the biggest challenges in social policy today is to support youth work and its active involvement in public affairs. At the level of public administration in the Slovak Republic, the key means of supporting youth work is the form of projects funded through various programs and schemes. These instruments are based on strategic documents that have been approved in order to support the government and regional authorities in their efforts to increase the involvement of young people in society. In recent decade, several national projects from the European Union resources have been financed in the Slovak Republic, as well as various programs and schemes from the state budget to support youth work, participation and empowerment of young people in society. These activities significantly reflect the efforts of our public organizations and institutions working with youth to provide the best possible support for the development of young people and their involvement in civil society.

Key words: youth, projects, programs, participation, schemes, work

JEL Code: H83, J13, H75

Introduction

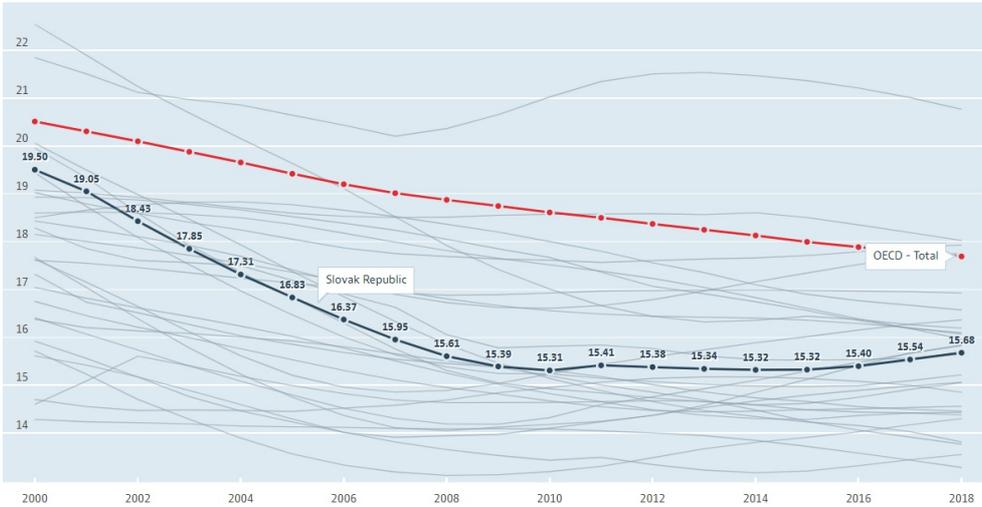
The issue of youth work and their active involvement in civil society is one of the greatest social challenges of today's modern society. The governments, as well as local and regional authorities, as the bodies closest to the young person, play a very important role in this process, as promoting the involvement of young people in civil society is one of the key pillars in building a modern, democratic society. The young generation of the population of the Slovak Republic under the age of 30 represents a substantial part (37.4%) of the population of the Slovak Republic (Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic, 2014). This group has specific needs that need to be taken into account in the process of preparing young people for life and work. Unemployment is a heavy burden for

the young (Machová – Zsigmond – Csereová, 2020). Current levels of youth unemployment need to be understood in the context of several interacting factors (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Long-term unemployment poses a significant risk to low-skilled workers and young people (Rievajová – Klimko, 2016), therefore, it is very important to support youth work at the level of public administration, which should subsequently, among other things, make it easier for young people to enter the labor market. Youth work encompasses a broad range of activities (e.g. social, cultural, educational, sports-related and political) carried out with, by and for young people through non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2014; Dudić et al., 2020). Youth work is a purposeful activity that responds to the needs of young people and leads to the positive development of their personalities. It is based on the principle of voluntary participation of young people, a partnership approach and mutual respect. Its role is to contribute to the maturity, coming of life and self-knowledge of the individual and the group. It is implemented by employees professionally prepared for this activity. The potential of youth work consists in the challenges, understanding of needs and support for the quality of youth work, which will affect the value of life of current and future young generations (Iuventa, 2018). The official definition of youth work can be found in the document EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering Youth, adopted by the EU Council on April 27, 2009 (European Council, 2009). The development of civil society in Slovakia was greatly influenced by the civic youth associations and movements, especially in the uniting of national councils and international youth organizations in Europe under the recently created Youth Forum (Macháček, 1998). In this paper, we were working with secondary data and the methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction and induction have been used.

1 Demography of youth population

According to OECD statistics, youth demography is currently declining slightly. In percentage terms, in 2018 the young generation of OECD countries accounted for 17.69% and the European Union (EU) for 15.54% of the population. The demographic curve of the young generation during the years 2000 - 2018 shows a declining character. Taking into account the above, we can state that in the EU countries in selected years it shows a minimal increase in the percentage level of the young generation compared to the OECD. Although the curve shows a stagnant trend in the observed period, the end of the observed period is stabilized for the OECD at around 17% of the population and the EU at around 15% of the population.

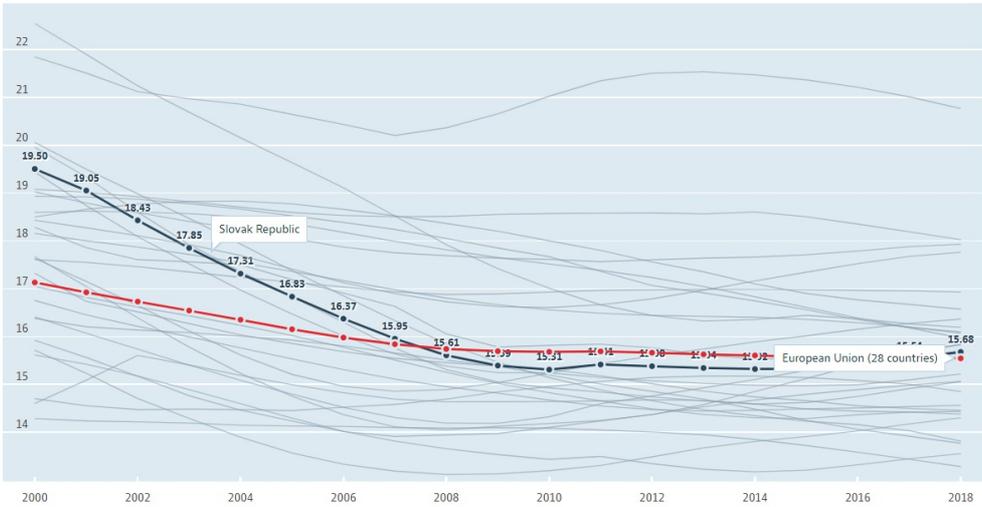
Fig. 1: Young population (Slovak Republic - OECD, % of population, 2000 – 2018)



Source: OECD Data, Labour Force Statistics

The demographic curve of the young generation in Slovakia during the years 2000-2018 shows a declining trend. Since in the years 2000-2010 we can talk about a radical decline, with a drop greater than 4% (from 19.5% to 15.31% of the author's note), the observed period shows that from 2010-2018 the numbers vary with a small deviation to value of 15.68%. The total percentage of the OECD population compared to Slovakia is 17.69%, while the above value of 15.68% of the young population in Slovakia represents a relatively high percentage of the value of the OECD youth population.

Fig. 2: Young population (Slovak Republic – European Union, % of population, 2000 – 2018)



Source: OECD Data, Labour Force Statistics

During the period under review, the EU consisted of 28 other Member States. The percentage value of the population of young people in Slovakia is 15.54%. The initial value is in the case of the EU and SVK at different levels (in 2000 SVK -19.50% and EU - 17.13%).

The population of the young generation in the Slovak Republic shows a higher percentage value compared to the EU, which represents a figure of 15.68%.

2 Support of youth work at the level of public administration

At the level of public administration in the Slovak Republic, the key means of supporting youth work is the form of projects funded through various programs and schemes. The activities and activities supported by the programs and schemes regarding youth are in general intended to make it easier for young people to integrate into society, to promote their active citizenship and to contribute to their employability. The aim is to encourage young people to be active citizens by increasing their participation in civic life and community activities, increasing their participation in the system of representative democracy, promoting various forms of participatory education and respecting the right of every young person to state care and equal treatment. These principles are also based on respect for and protection of human rights, the creation of a multicultural society and the fight against discrimination (Štefko, 2019), as well as supporting activities that respect cultural diversity and develop intercultural learning (Lorincová, 2018) through the joint activities of young people from different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds (Koutná – Janíčko, 2018). We can publicly profess our way of working with children, youth, families, schools, communities, and other life spaces and contexts in which relationships are built and development occurs.

One of the main goals of the programs and schemes for youth in Slovakia is to inspire young people to express their views, to be actively involved in solving the problems of the community in which they live, and to participate in decision-making on public matters that directly concern them. Participation is the key word here. Participation is the active involvement of young people and youth organizations in dialogue, influencing and co-decision on matters concerning the lives of young people at national, regional and local level. The active participation of young people in decision-making and action at local and regional level is important if we are in favor of building a more democratic, broad and prosperous society (European Council, 2003). Young people, therefore, can gain autonomy and take over responsibility in areas where it is typical of adults (Macháček, 1994).

2.1 National projects financed from the European Union resources

The field of education and support of youth and their involvement in civil society is a long-term priority of the EU. Since Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004, several national projects have been implemented from the sources of the EU structural funds aimed at supporting youth work and its active participation in civil society. In the programming period 2007-2013, which was (after the shortened period 2004-2006) the first full membership period in which Slovakia was eligible to draw EU funds, national projects aimed at supporting youth were implemented under the Operational program Education (OP E). The Managing authority for OP E was Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic. The following national projects were implemented in the field of youth support within OP E:

National project "PRAKTIK" - Practical skills through non-formal education in youth work.

This project was implemented by Iuventa - Slovak Youth Institute in the period 10/2012 to 10/2015. The project focused on the development of practical skills in the field of youth work for both youth workers and youth leaders and contributed to the systematic change and innovation in the field of youth work and non-formal education. The aim of the project was to increase the quality of youth work in hobby activities and thus ensure the development of practical skills; provide space for youth leaders to actively participate in the preparation and implementation of leisure activities and ensure the transfer of know-how from youth workers to youth leaders. The financial allocation from the EU resources was 5 236 011.61 EUR.

This national project contributed to increasing the quality of youth work on a national scale. Through the Regional thematic centers of youth, it was possible to connect entities active in youth work, representatives of local governments, state administration, the third sector and higher education. The training brought innovative methods and inspiration to youth workers. During the training, they tried in practice to prepare, carry out and evaluate experience camps, engage and motivate children of different ages and specifically teach them something new.

National project "KomPrax" - Competences for practice. This project was implemented by Iuventa - Slovak Youth Institute in the period 12/2010 to 6/2015. The focus of the project was to enable young people and youth workers to access the re-acquisition and flexible acquisition of competencies in youth work with comprehensive counseling services. The financial allocation from the EU resources was 8 071 713.27 EUR.

This national project contributed to support for the quality of educational and training programs in youth work with the aim of preparing graduates for lifelong learning and learning; to promote the social recognition of youth work and ensuring the development of

information channels and databases on youth work and the education system in this field; to develop the level of key competences of youth leaders and youth workers in order to facilitate access to the labor market and to contribute to the recognition of employers' competences acquired in youth work in formal education.

National project “A comprehensive counseling system for the prevention and influence of socio-pathological phenomena in the school environment”. This project was implemented by The Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology in the period 3/2013 to 12/2015. The focus of the project was to support the raising of the educational level of primary school pupils with special educational needs by streamlining the system of educational counseling and prevention in the interest of their social integration and employment in the labor market; support for further education of employees of the system of educational counseling and prevention, innovation of counseling methods, methodologies, tests; support the raising of the educational level of persons with special educational needs through lifelong counseling, with professional counseling support of employees of the system of educational counseling and prevention and increasing the long-term competitiveness of the Slovak Republic through the support and integration of pupils with special educational needs in society, on the labor market in terms of the needs of the knowledge society. The financial allocation from the EU resources was 14 780 699.22 EUR.

This national project contributed to increase the educational level of people with special educational needs by supporting the development of a comprehensive advisory system; further education of professional employees of the system of educational counseling and prevention, especially psychologists and special pedagogues and further education of pedagogical employees of the system of educational counseling and prevention.

2.2 Programs and schemes financed from state budget

In the last decade, not only projects from EU structural funds have been implemented in the field of youth work support from the public administration level, but also various programs and schemes financed from the state budget and implemented by government institutions.

Program “*Guarantee for young people in the Slovak Republic*” is implemented in accordance with the National Plan for the Implementation of the Guarantee for Young People in the Slovak Republic, which was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic at its meeting on February 5, 2014. The term "Guarantee for young people" refers to a situation where young people receive a quality job offer, further education, apprenticeship or

traineeship within four months of losing their job or completing their formal education. The offer of further education could include quality training programs leading to a recognized professional qualification. The main change was that in comparison with the original guarantee, the Slovak Republic moved the limit from 25 to 29 years of age of young people, provided that in the group of 25-29 years the guarantee will apply mainly to the long-term unemployed (over 12 months) or at least over 6 months in the register of jobseekers (Ministry of Labour, Social affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2014).

Another scheme implemented in Slovak Republic is the “*Youth programs for 2014-2020*”, which was created on the basis of the need for structured and systematic support for such activities for young people, that contribute to the acquisition of competencies necessary for a full social and working life. Youth programs for 2014-2020 focus mainly on non-formal education in youth work and the development of youth policy in Slovakia. These programs are implemented through calls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with Iuventa - Slovak Youth Institute. In accordance with the specific objectives of this scheme, these programs were determined:

- The program "SUPPORT for youth organizations",
- The "Youth Policy PRIORITIES" program,
- "VOICE OF YOUTH" program,
- "SERVICES for Youth" program,
- The "COMMUNITY FOR YOUNG" program,
- "EVIDENCE ON YOUTH" program (Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic, 2016).

These programs aim to increase young people’s skills in preparing them for life. The main emphasis is on the development of active citizenship, the empowerment of young people in society, the promotion of volunteering among young people, the recognition of non-formal education in youth work, the support of the young generation as the basis of a modern, knowledge-based and knowledge-based society. For comparison, in the Czech Republic, youth support is implemented through several programs and schemes:

- State support programs for work with children and youth for NGOs;
- Program Development of the material and technical base of extracurricular activities for children and youth;
- Programs announced by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for the area of talent support.

Conclusion

The support of youth work and active involvement of young people in public affairs is one of the biggest challenges in social policy. There is an imminent need to speak about young people needs and concerns and to be focused on education, skills training, employment and the prevention of radicalization of young people in today's uncertain and rapidly changing world. It is essential to take effective action in this area at the level of the government and its institutions. Youth work is a purposeful activity that responds to the needs of young people and leads to the positive development of their personalities. It is based on the principle of voluntary participation of young people, a partnership approach and mutual respect. At the level of public administration in the Slovak Republic, the youth work is supported by many projects, programs and schemes. A very important source of funding in this area is the EU Structural Funds, which have funded national projects aimed at supporting youth work, active participation young people in civil society supporting as well as enabling young people and youth workers to access the re-acquisition and flexible acquisition of skills and competencies in the labor market. An additional source to the EU structural funds for the support of youth work in Slovakia is the state budget, through which various programs and schemes aimed at supporting young people are financed. These programs are implemented through calls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic and its subordinate organization Iuventa - Slovak Youth Institute. The calls focus on a wide range of activities for young people, and emphasize the diversity of areas in support of the activities of youth organizations themselves. They aim to increase young people's skills in preparing them for life, support active citizenship and recognize the young generation as the basis of a modern, knowledge-based and knowledge-based society. Overall, at the level of public administration in Slovakia, the issue of youth work is very strongly supported; in the future we would recommend a larger financial allocation from EU structural funds as well as from additional financial sources.

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