

Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic

National report on youth policy
in the Slovak Republic

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1. Introduction

The following document is a summarizing report, which is a result of cooperation of various experts in the field of youth and youth policy in the Slovak Republic. The report is a complex document monitoring important aspects of young people's lives in the Slovak Republic. It informs about the conditions, problems and future prospects in the field of policy towards youth. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for the citizens of other countries to understand Slovak youth policy structure and its future development possibilities. The Slovak Republic is not the only country where this kind of a document is being created. The same process has been realized in several European countries since 1994, when the Council of Europe adopted a proposal of Claes Anderson, Finnish minister of Education, in order to stimulate the creation of national policies towards youth in the Council of Europe's countries

. The Council of Europe respects the national background and approach to youth policy in individual states and encourages cooperation between countries in the process of national reports compilation. Thus, this document is based on a broad discussion of various experts from governmental as well as non-governmental organisations, reflecting up-to-date theoretical knowledge and practical experiences.

The aim of the National Report is to give answers to questions; such as how positive is the approach of contemporary society towards children and youth, what avenues to innovation the national policy should pursue, what the role of national policy towards children and youth can be in the context of national development and how can governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as individuals get involved in the national policies concerning children and youth.

Preparation of the National Report was launched in 2003, when the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the project proposal and approved the Project Board of this document on 5 June 2003. Slovak the Ministry of Education, Department of Children and Youth is the guarantor of the project and the organization Iuventa carried the responsibility for the organisational management of the project and the review process. In the initial preparation phase (November 2003 – January 2004) several focus discussions on individual chapters of the National Report were held with experts, members of associations and the public. The discussions showed how different the views of the situation, problems and challenges in various areas of young people's lives were. The public discussion on individual chapters has been going on also on the Internet since December 2003 on the website www.spravaomladezi.sk. Current information about the current phase of development of the National Report can also be found on this website. Several discussions, seminars, consultations and workshops have been held with experts and representatives of non-governmental organisations during the preparation process of the National Report. Their aim was to discuss the relevancy of the content of the Report.



2. National youth policy in the Slovak Republic

The term „youth“

Slovak legislation does not recognize the term „youth“.

The public recognized the term “youth“ from the sociological point of view as a socio-demographic group, but also from the psychological point of view as a phase of life (youth). In both cases it is subject to significant social changes, which result in a change of lifestyle. In general, youth is a special phase of life, which requires a “safe but unrestricting social environment”, relieving the young people of the burden of adult tasks and worries and providing opportunities for learning and preparation for adult life. Thus it is necessary to ensure that young people have sufficient free space and enough opportunities for development, education and acquirement of life skills in this phase of life. (Ondrejkovič 2001).

In the light of the Slovak tradition of demographic statistics and taking into consideration the standard statistics of the United Nations and UNESCO (The Global Situation of Youth in 1990:Trends and Prospects.UN,NY1993) in Slovakia we define youth as a group of young people between 15 and 26 years of age.

Related terms

The Slovak legal code only recognizes the terms minor and underaged.

Minor

The Labor and Legal Code use the term “minor” for persons who reached the age of 15 but are younger than 18 years of age. Minors enjoy increased legal protection but are also subject to certain restrictions. Persons younger than 18 years of age cannot among other things play slot machines and engage in gambling at casinos. Minors are protected also by the Act on Advertising.

Under-aged

The Legal and Penal Codes of the Slovak Republic also use the term under-aged. It describes a person who has not reached 15 years of age. They are subject to a number of legal restrictions and regulations, some of which allow them to be employed under specific circumstances. Their employees have to observe the following preconditions:

- The work is not relentless,
- The character of the work (its content and extent) does not endanger the health, safety, further development and school attendance while participating in:
 1. Cultural events and artistic performances,
 2. Sport events,
 3. Advertisement.
- Maximum daily exposure to work may not exceed 6 hours.
- Maximum weekly working time may not exceed 30 hours.
- During school hours a minor can work a maximum of two hours per day and 12 hours per week in the case of work in the after-school hours.
- The employer ensures a rest time of at least 14 subsequent hours and a minimum weekly rest of at least two subsequent days. Under reasonable circumstances or due to organisation related reasons the resting time can be reduced, but only up to 36 subsequent hours at the most.



- The employer ensures the minor an adequate break, at least after every three hours in the range of at least 30 minutes.
- If the minor is employed by more than one employer, the working days and hours are added up.
- The work of minors between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. is forbidden.

Children

According to Article I of the Convention on the rights of a child any person under the age of 18 is to be considered a child, unless the relevant legal code does not define another age of legal maturity. The legal age is defined in the Slovak Republic by the Civic Code (Act No. 40/1964 Coll. as amended). According to § 8 article 2. of the Civic Code “legal age” is acquired as of the day a person turns 18 years of age. Maturity before this age can be obtained only in the case of marriage. Legal maturity gained this way is valid even if the marriage is terminated or declared invalid.

The currently valid Penal Code of the Slovak Republic uses both terms “child” as well as “minor”. The § 216 b of the Penal Code (Act No. 140/1961 Coll. as amended) took over the definition of the term “child” from the Article 1 of the Convention on the rights of a child. According to the relevant provision of the Penal Code a “child” is a person younger than 18 years of age, unless this person gained legal maturity (based on the above-mentioned procedure of marriage) before turning 18 years of age. According to the § 11 of the Penal Code the legal responsibility of a child is defined as follows: “A person who committed a crime before turning 15 years of age is not legally responsible for the action”. The § 74 Article 1 of the Penal Code qualifies a minor as a “person, who has turned 15 years of age and was not older than 18 years of age at the time when the crime was committed”. The legal responsibility of minors is defined by chapter seven of the Penal Code. In accordance with the § 79 article 1 of the Penal Code “the penalty of confinement defined in this Act is to be reduced by half in the case of minors” whereby “the maximum penalty for underage offenders cannot exceed five years and the minimum penalty is one year”.

National youth policy in the Slovak Republic

Young people are the most valuable social capital of any society; they create its present and future. The society offers opportunities for young people to fully develop and become self-sufficient personalities. Moreover, it expects young people to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them. The national policy towards youth aims to provide standard conditions for their physical and mental development. Furthermore, there are mechanisms in society, which protect youth from crime, discrimination and abuse. It is one of the government's priorities to offer alternatives for young people in order to help them get prepared for life in society and be able to participate in the development of society in a positive way. From the government's perspective, young people are regarded as those learning how to orient themselves in the sphere of work trade and becoming active citizens. Thus, the government influences individual areas of young people's lives through systematic changes. It creates appropriate conditions for every young person to have sufficient accommodation, education and job opportunities, to be able to pursue his or her interests, find and maintain social contacts, establish a family and raise children.

The national policy towards young people is created in interaction with all other subjects active in the youth field and they influence its development. The basic responsibility for the development of a young person is carried by his/her parents (or social educators, in some cases). The state policy encourages parents to fulfill their social roles; it offers various support programmes and creates mechanisms of protection if parents fail to take care of their children. It is the governmental and non-governmental institutions objective to primarily help to create natural conditions for healthy personality development



of children and youth. Youth projects reflect a variety of know-how from various areas of science and research.

The Slovak youth policy is adopting and gradually implementing modern principles of the European democratic youth policy approaches, which are being transformed into specific goals of the youth policy.

2.1. Principles of youth policy

State policy regarding children and youth in the Slovak Republic, in the context of the European context, considers young people as an individual sociological segment of the society. The life and development of youth should be based on the following principles:

- **Partnership between generations.** Young people should fully participate with other generations in the development of youth policy aimed at the preparation for a life in a modern, open and constantly changing society. Currently, local authorities and representatives of the older generations tend to provide only a limited number of opportunities for young people to accept responsibility for the development of the civic society and public life. On the other hand, the young people themselves only rarely tend to initiate the development, occasionally providing impulses impetutes for the development of public life in their communities. Although they respect the examples of some adults, parents, local authorities, experts or celebrities, in general they lack trust in the authorities of the adult generation. They often tend to think that adults do not understand the problems and lifestyles of young people.

- **Solidarity and social justice.** This principle is based on the necessity to improve social conditions of youth and ensure their equal access to opportunities, emphasizing their potential to help other members of the young generation in need.

- **Active and participative citizenship.** This strategy regards active participation of young people in social and economic development of the country as an effective mean of their own socialization. It currently encounters barriers, which slow down progress in this area. Initiatives of young people and their representatives are found useful in the area of youth services and free time activities and partially in the area of environmental protection, much less in other sectoral policies (for example in formal and non-formal education, housing, unemployment).

- **Social and economic inclusion.** This principle points to the necessity to include young people into social and economic life of the society and the necessity to identify all possible ways to reduce socially unacceptable behavior of young people and provide social security for youth. High school and university graduates usually find a place in the public and professional life successfully. Even if the state creates mechanisms for the integration of youth with more limited opportunities (including those from a non-stimulating environment or with a health or mental handicap), but their integration is currently complicated in certain regions of Slovakia by economic hardships and problems related to the transformation of public administration systems.

2.2. Characteristic and objectives of youth policy in the Slovak Republic

The government of the Slovak Republic adopted in December 2001 the Concept of state policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic until the year 2007, which serves as the basis for the development of children's and youth work.

The mentioned document characterises the state policy in relation to use as:

1. the action of the state through state institutions and other tools, ensuring conditions for the development of children and youth, creating among other things the preconditions for their participation in social and political life including legislative processes.

2. creation of conditions for the formation of young people into independent individuals (capable of making free choices, maintaining control over their personal and social life as individuals and members of society), exercising solidarity (paying attention to others, cooperating with them and capable of empathy), responsible (capable of accepting responsibility for their actions, keeping their obligations) and actively involved (capable of respecting values, acting in accordance with them),

3. creating conditions for the formation of values by children and youth in the context of social norms,

4. preventive protection and protective measures ensuring the safety of children and youth from negative influence and threats.

The **Concept of state policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic until the year 2007** also defines the basis for the formation of youth policy aims.

The actions of the state aimed at children and youth have to be differentiated and addressed in the area of support and protection provision, with emphasis on complex protection and support of the young generation.

Under support we generally understand activities of the government institutions, which within the frame of the national youth policy **activate specific groups of young people towards participation** on public social and political life and on the implementation of tasks arising from the national youth policy.

Support means mainly:

- the creation of conditions in the context of fulfillment of the family functions as the basic environment for the raising and education of children and youth,
- education of children and youth, their professional preparation for work,
- support before the entry into the labor market, stimulation of youth employment and protection before unemployment,
- creation of conditions for the functioning of children and youth civic associations,
- creation of conditions for the use of free time and leisure,
- support and creation of conditions for mobility and development of international contacts and cooperation of young people,
- creation of specific conditions for the development of the talents of children and youth in the various areas of human activities,



- support to youth participation in the cultural, social and political life of the society, creating conditions for young people's creative input into cultural development.

Protection is generally understood as an action by the state aimed at the elimination of negative and threatening phenomenon, decreasing their impact on children and youth, solving problems which represent obstacles to the development of children and youth especially in cases of family failure or disadvantages individuals.

Protection mainly means:

- protection of civic rights and freedoms,
- protection and support of the health of children and youth,
- specific care, education, protection and support of individuals with health and/or mental problems, seen as preventive care from the occurrence, deepening or repetition of dysfunctions in the area of physical and psychological health and social development of children and youth,
- protection from abuse, sexual exploitation, bullying, neglect, cruelty and other forms of mistreatment endangering the healthy moral development of children and youth.

Aims of the youth policy:

- to create conditions in which youth work can be oriented on the creation of opportunities instead of just identifying problems, and thus contribute to the formation of intercultural, environmental, ethical and civic attitudes of young people, increasing the quality of their lives;
- collecting and respecting opinions of young people mainly in the context of youth policy strategy formation, in the context of creation and implementation of concept of regional development, accepting and supporting their initiatives in environmental protection and social interaction at local and central level;
- creating conditions for the education and skills acquisition in the context of formal and non-formal education system, enabling young people to integrate on the labor market as well as in the society;
- establishing a system of youth policy implementation monitoring, within the framework of inter-sectoral policies and effectiveness of the utilisation of youth policy tools.

2.3. Brief history of youth policy in Slovakia

Slovak youth policy in the period of time from 1948 to 1989 was mainly characterised by non-democratic centralisation and ideology.

State youth care was shared between the government administration and unified children's and youth organization until the end of the 1980s (the Czechoslovak youth union, later the Socialist youth union – for young people 15 and up and the pioneer organization – for children 6 to 14 years of age) which was educating the youth on the basis of communist ideology. The government promoted a unified ideology transformed into government youth policy and the lives of children and young people were revolving around this ideology. Since their establishment, these organisations worked mainly at schools and replaced the system of autonomous students' parliaments previously active in the field of education. Formal Units of Pioneers and Units of Sparks (official name for the youngest school children, members of the organization) were based on a unified pedagogical programme adjusted to individual age groups. The organization membership covered almost 90% of the population of children and young people under 18 years of age.

The education of children and youth at schools was a responsibility of the so-called group leaders and volunteers who were the leaders for individual groups of children. The class teachers usually had the roles of the group leaders mainly in villages. State youth and children care was provided by a complex system of local, regional and territorial national authorities, called National Committees. These managed all aspects of young people's lives in individual regions (accommodation, system of education, culture, health service, social matters, public catering, etc.). The National Committees did not have self-government autonomy; they were the tools of the state influence at regional level.

In 1968-1969 a process of pluralisation of childrens and youth organizations took place and on the 10th April 1969 a first attempt for the formulation of principles of a national youth policy was made.

Apart from the ideological peculiarities, the danger of inter-departmental competency disputes became apparent. In the context of discussions related to the potential need for a "ministry of youth", scientists and youth politicians proposed, that it is potentially more beneficial to „...retain the current system of partial distribution of the youth agenda among the ministries and create a new institutional body, which would coordinate cooperation between them, resp. define priorities and principles for the resolution of specific problems of young people, including those which have not been dealt with or assigned into the competency of a ministry“. (Macháček 1992 p. 710)

At that time, the establishment of the national commission for youth or a youth ministry was not hindered by competency disputes, but by a political dispute about a unified youth organization. One of the main political representatives at the time declared: "if we have a department of youth, we do not need youth organizations." He clearly evaluated the function of a youth organization as a prolonged arm of the government. The "normalisation" after the year 1969 brought back the idea of a unified youth organization as a governmental organization for youth. This paternalistic government model of youth care with its ideological base in the "only correct ideology" doomed the efforts of experts, mainly sociologists and psychologists, trying to form a youth policy, the government called this a dangerous tendency aimed at the destabilization of the unity of youth.

Since 1976 the coordination of the unified children's and youth organization and the National was the responsibility of the National Commission for Youth, Physical Education and Sports. In 1978 Government Committees for Physical Education and Sport were established. The above-mentioned institutions had very little positive results in the solutions of problems in the field of institutional youth care, physical education and sport, because of their unfavorable operational position in the government structures and insufficient impact on relevant legislation. A considerable step forward was made with the adoption of the Act No. 50/1988 Coll. that widened the influence of Ministry of Education of the Slovak Socialist Republic in the field of youth care.

The process of democratization launched in 1989 found its reflection in the educational system. The doctrine of state policy towards children and youth changed. The national policy gradually ceased to have a character of "paternalistic" youth care and started to establish supporting activities for youth and children as a part of general and social regulations affecting the entire population.

The creation of a national youth policy after 1989 in Slovakia was mainly a complicated process of the transfer of competencies from the government institutions in the area of support and protection of youth as well as searching for a partnership-based relation between the state and the civic sector, represented mainly by youth civic associations.



This process can be divided into three phases (Macháček, 2002):

- (1989 - 1992) - completed by the government of the Slovak republic which adopted in 1992 the declaration of the Principles of national youth policy.
- (1992 - 1998) - the second phase was marked by the preparation of the so called Act on the protection and support of youth for the meeting of the legislative council of the Slovak government, following the approval of the Concept of protection and support of youth (1995) by the government,
- (since 1998) - the third phase was completed by the approval of the Concept of state policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic until the year 2007 approved by the Slovak government in December 2001.

First phase of national youth policy formation

1989 after the unified mass youth organization based on one ideology disintegrated a wide net of associations, institutions and organisations was created throughout the Slovak Republic. Many of them based their activities on the traditions from the near or far past (Scouts, Pioneers, Fenix, Silesians, YMCA, etc.). Some were established on the principle of common interests, some as a faction of an adult political, religious or other association. Based on their orientation, the youth organisations were divided into four groups: those based on young peoples interests, those with a socio-political base, children's organisations and those based on professions.

There was a need for one common representative body because of the inner differentiation of the youth movement. As a result of political pluralisation the process of forming one common representative body was not clearly understood and many organisations have attempted to take on this role since the beginning of the 1990s. Finally, the Slovak Youth Council succeeded because it emphasized the priorities of the national youth policy. In 2000 it became a partner organization of the Ministry of Education, achieved international credit and a strong position among the European youth structures.

Nowadays, the Slovak Youth Council enjoys a great deal of support among regional youth councils, which initiate youth activities in specific regions in accordance with the reform of the public administration. The government supports activities of the Slovak Youth Council, regional councils and civic associations for children and youth through direct state subsidies in the form of financial grants.

The most significant reason behind the need for a complex national youth policy was the establishment and existence of the political, interest-based and multi-denominational plurality of civic youth associations.

Since 1992 government youth care in the Slovak Republic has been based on the document "Principles of State Policy towards Youth in the Slovak Republic", which determined the main areas of action of state policy towards youth. This document re-introduced the terms youth policy and redefined the relation of the state towards youth. The principles included those defined by the Convention on the rights of a child, as well as the recommendation of the conference of European ministers responsible for youth.

A new turn in the context of the relationship between the state and youth came in the beginning of the 1990s - characterized by a retreat from state paternalism, a move towards a shared partnership, provision of support to youth initiatives, implementation of principles of participation and development of non-formal education concepts.

The adoption of the state youth policy principles brought the Slovak Republic closer towards other Council of Europe member states with established bodies of government administration dealing with youth policy and coordination of youth work. The responsible body of the government level youth policy was at that time the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, with a department of youth and sports, and later the Ministry of education and science of the Slovak Republic under the supervision of the state secretary, who was responsible for the department of youth and sports.

Second phase of national youth policy formation

Practical experiences from the implementation of the Principles in the first half of the 1990s pointed to the fact that this document (its content as well as the concept) superseded the possibilities of the organizational and management structure of the governmental administration at that time. Following the reorganization of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and the subsequent reduction of the number of employees of the department of state youth care it could no longer fulfill the assigned tasks. At the level of district offices, state youth care was administered by one employee, who was also responsible for sports and other activities. The hardships connected to the realisation of state youth and sports policy in the mentioned period of time was due mainly to the limited resources and the governmental administration system, as well as working conditions marked by priorities assigned to numerous complicated issues related to the education system. The issue of youth policy has not enjoyed an adequate priority status in the structures of the Ministry. In 1993 the funds for state youth care have been cut in half, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of employees in the institutions run by the Ministry and the number of researchers dealing with youth issues. *The preconditions for the activities of the Slovak Youth Council have also been limited. Nonetheless the Slovak Youth Council was awarded the World Youth Award in 1993 by the UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, CENYC and AYC. The award is given to the most progressive Youth Council of the world, and the Slovak Youth Council was given the award mainly for its activities in the area of youth work, promoting and initiating positive changes in different sector policies related to youth policy. Despite this success the Council had to reduce its activities dramatically due to financial hardships.*

- The slashed prestige of youth policy was also related to the dismissal of the legislative proposal of the Act on government support and protection of children and youth in the Government's Legislative Council.

The most important goal of the government Concept of protection and development of young people (*Mládež a spoločnosť*, 1996, issue No. 1) was to prepare a legislative proposal on the protection and support to children and youth, and it was not fulfilled. Similarly, the Council of the Minister of Education for children and youth failed to achieve progress in the process of establishing the legislative framework for youth policy in the highest possible form - a law (Perašinová, 1995). The most important reason for the failure in the process of preparation of the legislative proposal was the limited ability of the Ministry of Education to coordinate the tasks with other government departments. (Bošňáková, 2001, p. 44). Another important reason for the outcome was the non-convincing explanatory campaign related to the necessity of the legislative framework and ambiguity over the issue of its planned extent, resulting in the failure to elaborate a consistent analysis of the legislative environment creating the scope for youth work.

Third phase of national youth policy formation

Following the elections of 1998 the government established in October 1999 the Government Council for children and youth, whose mission it was to prepare proposals for the government of the Slovak Republic on



solutions and procedures for the realisation of the governmental youth policy. The members of the Council include representatives of the seven ministries at the level of state secretaries and 10 representatives of the non-governmental sector – Slovak Youth Council, foundations, trade unions, Unions of Slovak Cities and Municipalities, UNICEF etc. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak republic, which includes a Department for children and youth is currently responsible for youth policy.

Considerable change in the state Youth policy Concept came in December 2001 when the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the *Concept of state policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic until the year 2007* (further only as “the Concept”). One of the most considerable impetuses to create the Concept was a recommendation of the European Commission and the outcomes of the first world conference of Ministers responsible for youth (the so-called “Lisbon Conference”) held in 1998. The inspiration during the creation of the Concept of policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic came also from the two-year-long discussion in the countries of European Union surrounding the writing of the White Paper, which was adopted by the European Commission in the year 2001.

The compilation of the Concept was preceded by research analyses of the state of youth work covering the period of time between 1990 and 2000. The main intention of the Concept is to define the strategies for a complex and systematic approach to the resolution of youth problems. The Concept points out that the state is not and cannot be the only subject saturating the needs of young people. Young people are not only the object of state care, protection and support but also an active subject participating on the development of democracy in the society. The implementation of the concept is ensured through coordination of activities by governmental and nongovernmental institutions and organizations in the form of annual action plans, which are adopted and evaluated by the government.

„The Concept does not limit itself only to the areas of primary interest of the Ministry of Education but it also touches other sectors. The Concept includes the family, education of children and youth, work, preparation for future vocation, social integration of youth, youth life-style, youth public and political participation and mobility of youth. The importance of the Concept is in the coordination and determination of the main activities that the individual ministries, self-government and non-governmental organisations should focus on. The determining element in these activities is the Government Council for children and youth“ (Concept, 2001).

In all phases of the transformation process after the year 1992 a lot of energy was invested into the promotion of the principle based on the following:

- any youth policy has to be global and its principles included into the coordinated policies of individual sectors,
- every global and integrated policy aimed at youth is a system of a whole range of areas where activities in favour of youth are being implemented, while the coordination in the different areas relevant to youth has to be specified at regional, national but also European level.

So far the efforts to complete the process of approval of an Act on the support and protection of youth have not been successful yet. The problem lies in the inability to achieve consensus among individual entities dealing with youth issues which in the context of a parliamentary democracy is reflected in the weakened “political will” to undergo the fight for the adoption of the Act on Youth.

2.4. Organization of youth policy

Youth policy service is organized at the central level and at that of self-governments of cities and municipalities. As at 31. December 2004 the number of cities was 136 and villages 2.766, in accordance with Act No.369/1990 Coll. independent self-governing units.

Each level has its own elected representatives, tasks and responsibilities. Some tasks are shared with state service and municipality.

Elected representatives of all three levels (National Council of Slovak Republic, council of autonomous region, and municipal council) as well as mayors and heads of autonomous regions are elected for a period of four years in open democratic elections.

At the central level it's the National Council of the Slovak republic, the ministries, organizations of state administration. The main bodies have an organizational structure the regional level. The number and territorial coverage of state administration units is identical with the number and borders of self-governing regions (symmetrical arrangement). In cases where needed the state administration bodies create further offices.

At the level of the self-government there are offices of autonomous regions with their own offices (their partners can include formal and non-formal groups of young people, such as city youth parliaments or councils etc.)

All institutions and organizations are interlinked and cooperate along horizontal as as the vertical lines.

2.4.1. Central level of youth policy The government and its departments

At the level of the government, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic is responsible for implementation of the national policy towards the children and youth – it is its guarantor and co-ordinator. The responsibility for this task is borne by the Department of children and youth. Interdepartmental cooperation is realised by the government in the last years though the Government Council for Children and Youth and since 2002 also by the means of common preparation and implementation of annual Action Plans for the implementation of the youth policy concept till 2007. Certain specific tasks related to the National youth policy are implemented by other ministries including the:

- Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Construction and Regional Development

Ministry of Education of SR – Department of children and youth

- Coordinates the activities of the central government of the Slovak Republic in planning and implementation of the youth policy,
- Elaborates and updates long-term plans of the Ministry in the field of children and youth,
- Provides technical-organisational and contentual support to the activities of the Government Council for Children and Youth,



- Proposes direction of research in the field of children and youth, gives suggestions for further development of the analysis and implementation of the scientific researches and best practices into practice;
- Drafts legislation and conditions of financial support of youth organisations, youth information centres and other institutions providing services to children and youth
- Is responsible for the implementation of the EU YOUTH Community programme
- Guarantees co-operation between governmental and local youth policy level through publishing of research, analytical and prognostic documents, organising work seminars, conferences and trainings for the representatives of regions, cities and municipalities along with youth workers and youth. Besides these activities ensuring communication between governmental, regional and local level there are also different financial support systems for development programmes
- Creates conditions for the work of children's and youth organisations, co-operates with these associations and other institutions providing services to children and youth.

Iuventa

Iuventa is an organization in direct subordination to the Ministry of Education and realizes activities related to the support and development of youth work, educational and research projects and creates mechanisms for the distribution of information on youth to subjects active in this area. It is at the same time the administrative and service centre for the grant programme YOUTH and the Children and youth support programme in the Slovak Republic. It cooperates actively with regional youth centers realizing similar activities in the regions of the cities of Košice and Banská Bystrica and the Slovak Youth Council, with which it realizes several developmental projects.

Government Council for Children and Youth

Government Council for Children and Youth is the advisory, initiating and coordination body of the Slovak Government for interdepartmental, conceptional, methodological and legislative activities of the government in the field of children and youth care. It is responsible for the grant-making policy of the ministries focused on children and youth and other systematic initiatives in this field. The chairman of the Council is the Minister of Education. The Council consists of 17 members; out of them are seven from governmental institutions and the rest represent non-governmental organisations.

The monitoring and analyses of the system of support of children and youth is one of the main goals of the Council. It analyses the situation in all structures of the national system and on the basis of this analysis sets basic priorities of the national policy with respect to youth and children.

2.4.2. Level of self-governments

On the level of the autonomous self-governing regions the following institutions are responsible for the implementation of the youth policy:

- Self-government institutions of the autonomous regions
- Regional youth councils
- Regional youth centres
- Regional Commission for childrens and youth work

Self-government institutions

Ensure the administrative and organizational issues related to youth policy at regional level

- In the field of social support for youth – social prevention and social counselling services, institutional care in the organizations of social services – social care institution for children with weekly board, institution for single parents, care service centres, foster care institutions, sanctuaries, rehabilitation centres, social care institution for children with daily board, preparation of educational-relaxation camps for children;
- In the field of education – establishment, operation and closing of schools and school facilities (secondary schools, centres of practical education, basic art schools, regional youth centers, youth hostels, school counties etc.), distributions of funds to the schools and school facilities which are operated by the autonomous region, providing information in the field of education
- In the field of physical culture – elaboration of the development of the physical culture according to the conditions in the autonomous region;
- In the field of culture – management of the cultural institutions and libraries
- In the field of health care – establishment of clinics and hospitals, doctor's offices in the institutions of social services, facilities for long-term patients, hospices, stationeries and centres for the treatment of drug addicts;

The field of youth is an integral part of several organizational branches of the office of the autonomous region.

The selfgovernments are now realizing their competencies in the area of youth policy, approve its concepts, create advisory and coordination bodies and create internal positions for a professional responsible for youth whose task should be to coordinate and methodologically support activities of all organisations and institutions active in this field in the region.

Regional youth council

A regional youth council is an umbrella organization representing the plurality of political, interest-based and other civic associations of children and youth, and it acts as a partner of the relevant institutions (the self-government) responsible for the formation of the concept of regional youth services.

Regional youth councils operate in each of the administrative regions of the Slovak Republic and create platforms for meetings between these organisations, opportunities for an exchange of experiences, methodologies, and support activities of children and youth organizations in the region. They also promote and encourage partnerships with state institutions and monitor activities in the region, mediating communication among local youth organisations, bearing the responsibility for the positive presentation of the organisations and their services. Regional youth councils also provide consultancy in the process of project realization and are active in the field of preparation of training sessions and seminars.

Regional youth centres

Regional youth centres are a new element in the structure of the regional youth policies. Currently they work only in two regional towns (Košice and Banská Bystrica) as pilot projects. Their main area of responsibility includes the coordination of the all institutions participating in the implementation of youth policy in the region (schools, educational and social institutions, civic associations, counselling services, municipalities etc.), but they also initiate and promote the process of implementation of youth policy and provide educational opportunities for youth workers. Employees of the regional centre receive tasks directly



from the office of the autonomous region and disseminate them to the specialized departments and to the leaders of the children and youth organisations.

The Regional Commission for the work with children and youth

Its members are representatives of expert and social institutions involved in various aspects of youth life (schools, educational facilities, representatives civic associations, leisure-time facilities, church institutions as well as parents and representatives of the private sector).

The main role of the Commission is to elaborate the implementation plan for tasks arising from youth policy in the context of the regional conditions for individual years, but it also monitors the implementation of tasks, applies arrangements for their realisation and elaborates evaluation reports on task-performance for the relevant year, and carries out the dissemination of information and feedback to interested parties and initiates their co-operation in carrying out the coordination of individual tasks.

Local administration units of municipalities

The municipality:

- Manages schools and facilities at local level;
- Supports social life of youth by providing various services, contacts to various other bodies and institutions of public administration and information for young people on various issues (ways of spending leisure time, accommodation, education, future career prospects);
- analyses activities of institutions and services for children and youth in the community,
- Monitors effectiveness of measures related to youth.

After the adoption of Act No. 369/1990 Coll. on local establishment and following the realisation of fiscal decentralisation in 2004 conditions were created for the realisation of own policies in relation to children and youth at the level of local self-government. After the adoption of the Act their representatives have greater freedom in the realisation of activities for children and youth, but the quality and scope of these services varies from one municipality to another.

As of the 1. 7. 2002 competencies were transferred from the state to the municipalities in the area of leisure centres and various school clubs. Leisure centres exist in more than 120 cities, school centres for interest-based activities in more than 15 cities and school clubs are established in over 80 % of primary schools. These establishments make up the basis for the creation of conditions for good use of free time by children under 15 but also for older young people.

The priority of self-governments is the provision of education and social services and the youth policies tend to reflect this in terms of activities.

The structure of organisation of youth policy reflects the process of decentralisation of state administration, which is going on in Slovakia since 1990 and is gradually creating legislative and organisational conditions for the practical implementation of youth policy. In this structure the state administration creates conditions for the conceptual and systematic work and the activities of professional and volunteer youth workers. Municipal representatives are irreplaceable in the process of identification and implementation of strategies which reflect local needs and conditions. They can use the so-called „original competencies“ (self-government competencies), which include local development, housing, preschools and schools, social services, clinics, some hospitals, culture, local tax and fees collection, participation on regional planning. They can also invest

and become members of business subjects. The players involved in youth policy implementation include apart from the state administration institutions also schools, educational and cultural institutions, sports, cultural and labor union organisations, civic associations, the church, private entities and foundations. Often these subjects use legislative measures and financial donations as tools. The ongoing decentralisation of public administration and the related transfer of responsibility and competencies to local self-governments can create an environment where local authorities can come closer to young people. So far such efforts are rather rare in Slovakia, mainly because many mayors do not consider the issue of local youth policy as important for the local community. Priority is often given to other issues considered more important such as infrastructure, environment etc. Concepts of regional respectively local youth policy have been created by few self-governments (e.g. Zilina, Bratislava), resp. city councils (Prievidza, Rimavská Sobota). Many municipalities fall for the stereotype of reducing youth policy on issues of education. They focus their attention on ensuring the functioning of schools and educational institutions. Other relevant themes are given little attention. The legislation does not assign self-governments the duty to form youth policies at the regional and local level. This contributes to the complicated problems related to the implementation of youth policy – which include a lack of finances, lack of experience and knowledge of youth issues and youth work by self-government employees, inadequate coordination of activities by individual departments of the involved institutions in terms of youth policy aims as well as relatively weak pressure from regional youth networks in the context of sectoral policies.

The most prominent player in the area of promoting youth policy in the Slovak Republic is the Ministry of Education – the department of children and youth, as the guarantor of the national concept of youth policy. Its efforts so far do not receive adequate feedback from other relevant institutions.

2.4.3. The Youth Council of Slovakia

The Youth Council of Slovakia (RMS) is an umbrella organisation – an association of non-governmental not-for-profit children's and youth organization. Currently it represents 36 children's and youth organisations. The basic aim of the Council is to influence the national policy in favour of conditions creating for youth and children with respect to the Slovak legal system. The council participates in the implementation of Concept of state policy towards children and youth in the Slovak Republic until the year 2007. The Youth Council of Slovakia became a partner organization to the Ministry of Education in February 2000. The Youth Council of Slovakia is also the official representative of Slovak youth in international youth organisations and platforms. It actively participated on the establishment of the European Youth Forum and it is present in the Commission of the EYF for relations with the EU and in the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Youth.

2.4.4 Youth Research in the Slovak Republic

Youth research in Slovakia traces its traditions to the period between the two world wars (J.Čečetka, A. Jurovský, A.J.Chura). We have never had an independent institute dedicated solely to youth research. At institutional level the needs in this area are met by research groups, departments or individuals at universities, in the Slovak Academy of Science and other specialised research institutions. At the Institute



for Information and Future Prognosis at the Ministry of Education a section for youth research was established in 1990. The organisation IUVENTA is creating a research group focusing on youth.

Compared to most countries of the European Union, science and research are generally less financially supported from the state. The current financial benefits for scientists and researchers in the Slovak Republic are not satisfactory, especially at institutions dependent on governmental funding. As a result, there are only a few young researchers and scientists involved in their field of research: many of them take advantage of commercial job offers instead.

In response to this situation, the Ministry of Education has been trying to make the field of research and science more attractive for young people. One of the effective means the ministry is implementing is the establishment of doctoral studies within which young graduates are actively involved in research projects. They are incorporated in research bodies and institutes at universities.

Another important issue is the coordination of development tasks in the area of youth research. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic makes contracts that support scientific research only with directly governed institutions. The topical issues for research are often not well coordinated with other research institutes and other relevant research bodies and universities.

In 1990, *The Slovak Youth Information and Counselling Association* was founded to solve the problem of communication among specific scientific branches, researchers and youth workers.

Based on the initiative of the Department for children and youth of the Ministry of Education, the magazine *Mládež a spoločnosť* (Youth and society) was established in 1990 and in 1995 it was transformed into its current form. This magazine deals with the questions of the national youth policy and research in the relevant fields. The magazine and its content followed the tradition of similar magazines from the past. It is designed especially experts, scientists, university students and youth workers.

2.4.5. Foundations

There are several foundations working at the national level in Slovakia. Their aim is not only to distribute funds, but also to systematically support activities leading to the fulfillment of the needs of young people within the context of their communities; influencing in this way the public opinion in favour of young people. In the Slovak Republic a number of foundations are active in the area of supporting children and youth work. Below are mentioned two of them that contribute the most to the development of youth work.

The Foundation for the children of Slovakia is the biggest foundation in the Slovak Republic concentrated on the support of work with children and youth in danger. Since 1999 it has been organising a fundraising campaign called “An hour for children”. Its main aim is to address the biggest possible number of individuals and inspire them to donate their salary for the last working hour in the year to projects for children and youth. Yearly there are more than 150.000 people involved in the project and the collected funds support annually more than 400 children’s and youth projects. The Foundation also organizes and supports training of life skills for the leaders of youth groups, conferences and seminars for youth workers and initiates the elaboration of situational analysis of the needs of young people, but also provides scholarship programmes for economically-disadvantaged students from different regions of Slovakia.



The mission of the **Slovak Youth Foundation** is to support and strengthen the participation of young people in the life of society in general, with the aim of maximising their potential for the development of the civic society in the Slovak Republic. The Foundation supports among other things the establishment and further development of open clubs for young people in all regions of Slovakia, providing specific services to those who are not members of the children and youth organisations and for disadvantaged young people. Also, the Foundation supports the research and development of volunteering in Slovakia in the institutional development of youth organisations. 2005 it is administering the grant programme “Participation” of the Ministry of Education, aimed at the creation of opportunities for the active involvement of young people in public life at local and regional levels.



3. Social background of youth in the Slovak Republic

3.1. Demography

The Slovak Republic is divided into 79 districts (municipalities) and eight regions. Citizens live in 2.902 villages and cities. At the end of 2004 the Slovak Republic had 5,384,822 million citizens, with 51,5% being female. For every 1.000 women there were 943 men. With an area of 49,034 km², there are 109,8 inhabitants for every km² in the Slovak Republic. Of the entire population, 56,6% live in cities and 43,4% in the countryside. Individual municipalities vary greatly in size. The communities vary in composure and living conditions which is reflected in demographic indicators.

Table no. 1:
Comparison of the basic demographic indicators for municipalities in the SR (2000)

Indicator	Slovak Average	Municipality with highest value		Municipality with lowest value		Difference
HM natality	10,2	Námestovo	17,8	Bratislava, Myjava	7,6	10,2
HM Marriages	4,8	Námestovo	6,9	Krupina	3,8	3,1
Population growth	0,7	Kežmarok	10,5	Medzilaborce	-10,3	20,8
Infant mortality (per 1 000 live births)	8,6	Poprad	19,0	Tvrdošín	0,0	19,0
Out of marriage births (in %)	18,3%	Rimavská Sobota	39,0%	Námestovo	2,6	36,4
Average age of females at first marriage	23,6	Bratislava	25,3	Kežmarok, Veľký Krtíš	22,2	3,1
Average age of females at first birth	23,9	Bratislava	26,5	Kežmarok	22,2	4,3

Source: State and movement of citizens of the Slovak Republic 2000. Bratislava, ŠÚ SR 2001

Note: HM – gross measure, calculated per 1 000 inhabitants

In the case of some indicators, the differences between individual municipalities are very big. These include natality or population growth, but also infant mortality and the percentage of children born outside of marriage. An important role is played by cultural factors, the social and economic situation of citizens, the gender and age structure of individual regions and the structure of inhabitants in terms of family structure and education, but also ethnic background and religious affiliation. Mainly the last three significantly influence family life and reproductive behaviour. The reality is also shaped by the process of industrialisation and urbanization of the past, which resulted in an increased concentration of inhabitants and the aging and the depopulation of other areas. After 1989 the traditional and industrialisation-related differences were joined by differences in living standards. Certain regions of the Slovak Republic suddenly had a high unemployment rate and lack of job opportunities and their inhabitants started to migrate to find work, often abroad.

Slovakia is from the point of view of demographic indicators a diverse country. Differences are due to the ethnic composure of the population, but also to living conditions and traditions. These differences have to be considered in the process of establishing national youth policy.

Representation of youth in the population

As of December 2002 (ŠÚ SR – official data from the citizens count) there were 1.968.706 young people from 0 – 25 years living in Slovakia. One sixth of them are children under the age of 6, a large number are children in the age group 6 to 14 years (one third) and the rest (half) are young people from 15 to 25 (source ŠÚ SR). In every age group there are 8.000 – 42.000 more boys than girls. The highest number of young people is in the age of 23 (96.023). The number of young people of 15 – 25 is 993.715.

Table no. 2:
Age categories of children and young people

years	0 - 5	6 - 14	15 - 25	0 - 25	No. of citizens	Share 0 - 25 (v %)
1993	458 974	797 058	945 215	2 201 247	5 336 455	41,2
1994	444 118	781 870	970 578	2 196 566	5 356 207	41,0
1995	427 393	767 895	987 673	2 182 961	5 367 790	40,7
1996	409 554	755 343	1 001 103	2 166 000	5 378 932	40,3
1997	390 671	743 279	1 011 440	2 145 390	5 387 650	39,8
1998	374 001	727 840	1 016 561	2 118 402	5 393 382	39,3
1999	357 199	712 175	1 016 068	2 085 442	5 398 657	38,6
2000	346 259	690 166	1 010 277	2 046 702	5 402 547	37,9
2001	334 615	672 355	1 006 567	2 013 537	5 378 951	37,4
2002	325 131	649 860	993 715	1 968 706	5 379 161	36,6
2003	314 767	620 527	974 165	1 909 459	5 378 610	35,5

(Source: ŠÚ SR), r.2003 – INFOSTAT, database POPIN (prognosis)

If in 1993 there were 2 201 247 children and young people under the age of 25, in 2002 it was less by 232 541. The number of youngest children (0 – 5) decreased in the last decade by more than 133 843 (41.16 %), the number of children 6 to 14 decreased by 147.198 (22.65 %) while the age group 15 – 25 grew in numbers by 48.500 (5.13 %). The decreasing population of children led to changes in the population structure. At the beginning of the 1980s, the population was dominated by the youngest categories. During the last decade the trend is the exact opposite with the numbers of the youngest going down. In the past few years the population of children in the Slovak Republic is rather stable and if the natality fails to grow in the coming years, the proportion of individual age groups will remain the same. There are more boys born and thus they slightly dominate the childrens population. From 1999 to 2003 boys 0 – 25 years-old made up 51.1 % (998.928), while girls represented 48.9 % (955.917).

According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as of 31 December 2002 Slovakia had 1.399.547 inhabitants from 0 – 19 which represents 26 % of the general population (in 2000 it was 27.4 % while in 1999 28.1 %). The number of youngest inhabitants (0 – 19 years) began to decrease in 1990: at first by 15.000 per year, as of 1996 it was already by 40.000 per year. In the course of the 1990s the population under 19 years of age decreased by 21%: in 1990 it was 1.770.696, in 2002 it was 1.399.547 (down by 317 000).



The decrease in numbers of children in individual age groups began much earlier. The number of children under 4 had been decreasing as since 1980, while the number of children 5 – 9 decreased since 1987, and the age group 10 – 14 after 1989 and the adolescents (15 – 19) in 1995 (source: SPŠPR, 2004). This development caused changes in the structure of the population under 19, mainly from the point of view of nationality and religious affiliation. The higher natality of the Roma population results in the fact that the structure of Roma children is the exact opposite of the general population – the number of the youngest children is the highest and their share decreases with increasing age. The Roma family also differs in terms of family structure – with a higher share of one parent families.

The total growth of inhabitants is declining because of the declining numbers of live births, the stagnation of mortality and the low increase of migration. The demographic evolution is slowing down. Similar situation can be seen in various European countries, with only a slight difference between them. The imaginary age pyramid in Slovakia ages from bottom up, i.e. the growth of children age categories slows down, due to falling natality. The more developed countries age from the top, due to a greater longevity. The following numbers verify the fact that Slovak population is aging. In 1950s children up to age of 14 represented 30%, 60-years old 9.9 %. Fifty years later, children represent 19.2% and people over 60 15.5% of population. 2001 can be considered as an important point in demographic evolution of Slovakia because instead of the growth there was a fall in the number of inhabitants (844 persons). Just for comparison, the natural growth of inhabitants in 2000 was 2.427 persons, on the other hand in 1990 it was 25.370 persons. This phenomenon witnessed in Slovakia only during World War I in 1916-1918. Changes in demographic behavior of inhabitants are usually spread from west to east. The fall of the number of live births is more distinctive in the west and southwest while in the east the fall is less pronounced.

Demographic evolution causes the following consequences:

- The capacity demand of pre-school and school facilities is decreasing,
- Because of the marriage delay, children leave parents' house later - the growth of multigenerational families,
- Burden on the productive level of society increases.

Generally, young people are the most sensitive part of social groups and they are affected by the social changes the most. Today, people aged 20 experienced their childhood during the breakdown of the totalitarian regime and at their adolescence was influenced by many democratic changes. The manners and approaches to life of young people are different today, sometimes hardly accepted by the elderly living most of their lives in the traditional totalitarian culture.

Today, youth tries to achieve cultural independence; they follow aspecific way of living, fashion, specific value system, and new forms of relationships.

Life of young people follows certain patterns:

- **Family** – marriages at older age, the growth of independent single living people, change of marriage to partnership.
- **Education** – splitting the education into numerous age periods, prolonging the period of education.
- **Employment** – self- realization, individual approach, longer education, unemployment.
- **Culture** – religious, sport, political life of youth is influenced by relations that continue to cause inclusion but also exclusion
- **Politics** – lower participation of youth

- **Everyday life** – new ways of behavior (e.g. indulgence) in fashion, sexuality and communication, represented by peer groups and media.
- **Value system** – plurality of opinions prevails.
- **Communication** – young people prefer flexible, fast and frivolous communication.
- **Approach to life** – individualism arises, the individual as the bearer of culture and education.
- **Leisure time** – dissociation from traditional social environment and inclination towards informal groups.

The realization of youth policy is based on ensuring economic, social, legal and cultural preconditions for the dignified life of young people. Another important factor is the moral climate of society and the respect of moral values, which should be naturally reflected by the legal norms. The mentioned framework is being created and influenced by global international development and the historical context, which finds is reflected in the lifestyles of young people.

3.2. Globalization – international context

Life of young people is embedded in the process of globalization, which has replaced industrialization, modernization, and the scientific-technical revolution. “The character of the globalized world is like a spider web – a small touch in any part of the web can evoke a vibration in any other further part” (Pike, 1994, p.22). People, institutions, time and place in the worldwide net of global relations are interconnected. The interdependence of people increases, the character and level of global society and local communities are linked. Universal economic principles of the world are: plurality, market mechanism and competition.

The fall of communism as an isolated and totalitarian regime was caused by the influence of ideas of democratic pluralism in Central and Eastern Europe. As the Slovak Republic along with other central European states joined the EU, better conditions for fast economic and social development were created. The European Union allows: the free entrance to the open European market, possibility of employment in European countries, free competition, possibility to invest within European Union and economic growth. In the process of globalization, Europe is building its own political and economic structures based on universal democratic principles of freedom, equality and solidarity. In addition, religious, linguistic and historic diversity is not disappearing in European countries. The mentioned frameworks represent the form of youth policy, which draws attention to the national youth policy on “enforcement of youth participation, the conception of young people as human resources, ...help to integrate young people into society (mainly ethnic minorities) and support of cultural diversity” (European framework of youth policy, 2004).

3.3 Economic conditions of implementing the youth policy

After the revolution in november 1989, there have been difficult circumstances in the socio-economical development of society in Slovakia, where in the background of its micro- economy the unclear delivery of financial resources into private hands was realized. At the same time, some changes were made in a directive manner, for example the establishment of a financial and banking sector, as well as the service sector. Less attention was paid to the micro-economy. The main trends are outlined below:




- Polarization of society, with a small group of rich people and much bigger group of people living in bad conditions/on the periphery;
- Increase in unemployment and poverty;
- Differentiation of problem groups in our society, where mainly the Roma population, young people, young families, broken homes, unemployed people and people with less education belong;
- The problem of youth involvement in society is increasingly gaining importance, mainly because of the contradictions between their expectations of the future, and actual possibilities related to employment, financial resources etc.;
- The new phenomena of this transforming period is youth unemployment

Table no. 3:
SWOT analysis of economic features in Slovakia

Strength	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic strength and liberal economy - High level of industrialization - Sufficient capacity of building industry, and preservation of agrarian sector - Sufficiency of skilled labor power, - Functioning network of healthcare centres - Network of primary and secondary schools and universities, - Existing infrastructure of roads, and infrastructure of transferring and supplying petrol, gas and water, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low productivity of economy, - Insufficiency of own financial resources, - Low competitiveness of products - Old technologies - Long-term payment disability, indebted entrepreneurs - Insufficient support to small and medium-sized enterprises - High energy demands of economy - Insufficiency in support of science and research - High level of unemployment, - Lacking inter-connection of the educational system and the labor market
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of industry, agriculture and infrastructure with the support of EU, - Distribution opportunities in European markets, - Flow of investments from foreign countries, - Government support to industry and agricultural politics, - Initiatives in support of investments, - Introduction of indirect support of science and research, - The utilization of primary energy, - Active pro-employment policies, - Standards in health care, - Enhancement of public transport, - Decentralization of public administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pressure of world market and the destruction of domestic production capacity, - Continuing recession of economy, - Exhaustion of own fuel resources, - Further decrease in economic activity of less-developed regions, - Unpreparedness of regions for the creation of favourable conditions for foreign investors, - De-population of rural and border areas, - Rising unemployment, - Insufficient resources for support of housing construction and limitations due to lack of resources for public transportation systems, - Continual economic stagnation in some regions of the country

Slovakia belonged for a long time to the group of European countries with the lowest income disparities. In the course of the 1990s the disparity of income in Slovakia began to grow gradually. The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion for the years 2004 - 2006 included for the first time official data on poverty as the share of individuals living in households whose income is lower than 60 % of the median equivalent of average income. In the Slovak Republic every fifth citizen will have a personal experience with poverty. The group most endangered by poverty is made up of children under 15 years of age (30 %). The level of risk of exposure to poverty decreases in Slovakia with age. While in the age category 24 - 49 more than 21 % of the



population have been endangered by poverty, in the age category 50 - 64 it was „only“ 14 %. The degree of exposure to the threat of poverty in Slovakia is higher in the case of unemployed persons, with almost half of them (47 %) living under the threshold of poverty. Based on the type of household, the highest level of poverty in Slovakia can be found among single parent families (40 %), with at least one child. The degree of poverty grows with the number of children in the household. More than one-fifth of households (22 %) in Slovakia which have two adults and one dependent child living in them were endangered by poverty. Among the households with two adults and three and more children the level of poverty reached 35 %. Households without children showed differing degrees of poverty in correlation with their composition. Among the one member households 28 % were exposed to the threat of poverty, 31 % of persons in the age of 30 - 64 years and 20 % of persons older than 65 years of age. (SŠPR 2004, p. 55).

The so-called effectiveness of social transfers, which is reflected in the decreased threat of poverty after the inclusion of social transfers, is relatively high in Slovakia. Without social transfers and pensions, the level of poverty in Slovakia would increase to 43 %. The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion for 2004 - 2006 identified groups of citizens most endangered by the threat of poverty and social exclusion. These mainly include long-term unemployed, including young people 16 - 24 years old with lower degree of education or education that is not in demand on the labor market. The groups exposed to a higher threat of poverty and social exclusion include families with children, single households, people living in Roma communities, migrants, people with a health problem and the homeless.

3.4. Environment

Environmental protection has been declared by the Government of the Slovak Republic to be an important tool for the long-term sustainability of development and a natural component of a healthy economy. The Slovak republic as one of the first countries in the world legally embedded the concept of sustainable development (in the Act no.17/1992 on environment). The concept of sustainable development is based on the harmonization of development in three basic areas - economic, social and environmental development while maintaining balance between economic expansion and growth accompanied by a rise in living standards and effective protection of the environment. One of the priorities in the area of environmental protection is definitely the increase in public environmental awareness, including the dissemination of information on the state of the environment, the causes and consequences of the current state as well as the principles of environmental preservation that can be implemented by individuals. In relation to children and youth, one of the most effective ways to positively influence the attitudes towards environmental problems is environmental education, delivered in the form of educational programmes at schools and through non-formal educational systems.

The system mentioned above is based on a conception of environmental education approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No.846, adopted on the 25th of November 1997, designed to increase the ecological awareness of the entire society. On the basis of this concept, a complex structure of environmental science, education and promotion was created. This process is realized through different tools and means - based on the cooperation of environmental education centres and schools, by organizing methodological days, competitions, consultations and instructive paths. Their importance is raised by the fact that, nowadays, they help focus the attention of children and youth on the values of nature and the negative influence of human activities on the environment (resulting in erosion, air and water pollution). Several



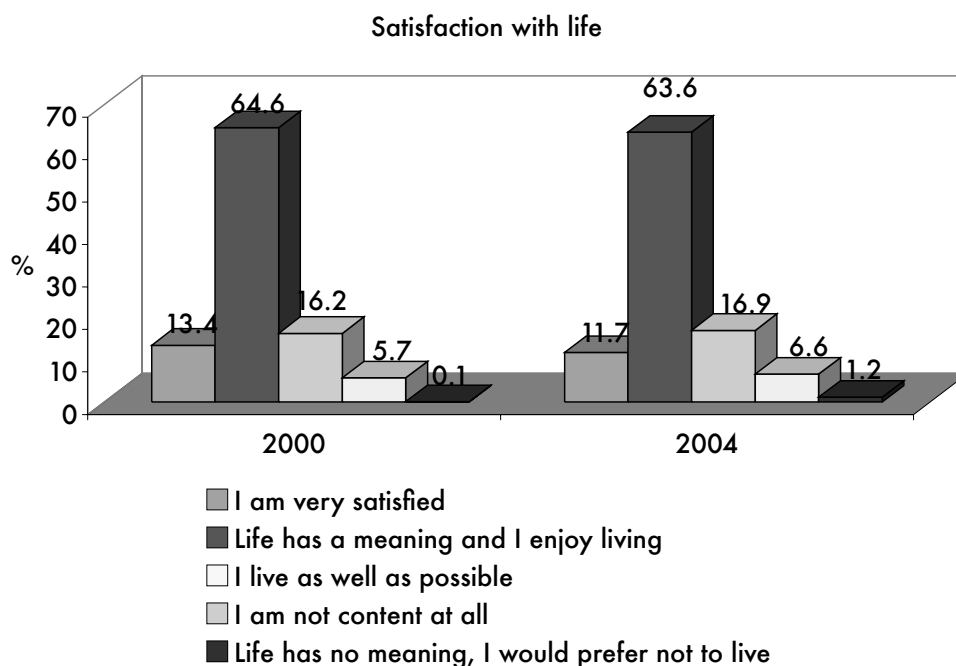
museums of national importance also produce programmes with environment protection themes and explore ecological attributes of exhibitions (e.g. the Slovak museum of nature protection in Liptovský Mikuláš). Very popular are expositions with the theme of protecting nature, lectures, discussions, debates, competitions and so on. Significant place in environmental education of the children and young people definitely have non-governmental organizations dealing with environmental problems. Non-governmental organisations have accumulated extensive know-how in this area and are thus gaining authority in this area of expertise. The members of many organizations have extensive experience with environmental education, enriched with great enthusiasm and high level of personal dedication. Non-governmental organizations, besides the projects, which can be used as good examples during the educational process, are also preparing different activities for teachers and students. Environmental education presents an integral component of education programmes at nursery schools, primary schools and secondary schools. In nursery schools, a special programme dealing with environmental education is currently realized. Primary and secondary schools are following the defined interdisciplinary curriculum. These educational plans are specified as an “environmental minimum” and are based on various educational subjects. Various school competitions and secondary school activities dealing with problems related to environment protection are held every year. A project encouraging schools to become health-friendly has been a real success. This project offers a frame within which different environmental problems and potential solution are discussed in context with human health issues. Environmental education is presented together with health education, as they are inter-related. The process of forming environmental awareness of young people could be greatly enhanced by the involvement of parents. The potential of church involvement is not fully utilised in this area either. The process of forming a harmonic relationship between young people and the environment can be enhanced by direct everyday contact with beauty and harmony in all possible forms. There are great gaps in this area. Experiences from all around the world prove that young people growing up in an environment devoid of any elements of nature, are more vulnerable towards different socio-pathological phenomenon such as violence, criminality and drugs.

The process of forming environmental awareness of young people should take on two main directions at the practical level. The first direction can be characterized as education leading to acquisition of knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and possibilities to positively influence their resolution. The second direction which should not be forgotten is based on emphasis on values, mutual relationships and an environmentally friendly lifestyle, which can significantly influence not only the quality of life of an individual but also the quality of life of the whole society.

3.5. Values of young people

In Slovakia, the number of young people having an optimistic view of their life, evaluating their position in community positively and believing in their personal prospects, is growing. Nowadays, life optimism is clearly visible within the 15 – 17 age group, and also in the groups of university students, employed young people with sufficient financial income and young people who believe in God. Approximately one fifth of the population of young people think of their current and future life in a rather pessimistic way. This group consists mainly of young people 18 to 20 and unemployed young people.

graph no. 1:
Declared satisfaction with life



In general, young people in Slovakia prefer individual values such as a good job, happy family life, satisfaction and harmony, friendship, property and money. There might be slight differences in the prefer order of these values, depending on the age group, sex and beliefs of young people. Most women place value especially on good marriage and having children, then having harmony in life, tolerance and also good education, knowledge, health and living in harmony with religious principles and human rights. Friendship is on the sixth place in their life priorities scale. Men emphasize the need of being employed as their first priority. After that, they put happy marriage, children, friends and personal freedom, self-realization, plenty of free time, money and property, respect for their own nation and moral principles.

According to age, most boys and girls between the age of 15 to 22 consider happy marriage and children as their most important value, meanwhile young people between the age of 23 to 26 think that having a job is very especially important, which is according to them a precondition for having a happy family. This age category is more aware of the importance of self-realization and education in their personal lives.

People who believe in God value most a happy marriage, children, spiritual life, an opportunity of having a job, and a content and harmonious life. Young people who do not believe in God and those who do not take a stand towards faith or religion, lean towards happy marriage, education of their children and job opportunities, while valuing personal freedom, property and money as well. (Research results UIPS, 2004)



3.6. Gender differences

According to last years statistics, the structure of inhabitants of Slovakia is made up of by 51.4% women and 48.6% men. In recent decades, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of women in the population. Most of the population live in families (68.3%), out of which four fifths live in two-parent families. 90% of one-parent families are run by women. Public still believes in “traditional” arrangements of the family roles: man, the provider and woman, the mother taking care of household and children. The economic situation in the household and higher education of women are believed to be the reasons why employment of women is becoming equal with the employment rates of men.

In spite of this fact, household duties are still the domain of women. One of the reasons for this is a regional disharmony of living and job opportunities, which forces many men to leave to find work, either travelling or staying away for a longer period of time. These facts contribute to women's financial dependence on men and are increasing their dependence on the social system.

Equality, opportunity in education

The opportunities for education are generally the same for men and women. Slight differences are caused by a continual preference of men and women for specific study fields (technical and humanistic). The average standard of level of education of men and women is comparable.

Table no. 4:

Relation between girls and boys on different levels of education

Level of education	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002
Pre-school education	-	-	0,93	0,93	0,93
Basic education	0,95	0,96	0,96	0,96	0,95
Middle education	1,00	1,00	0,98	0,98	0,97
Higher education	3,26	2,65	1,84	2,12	2,02
University education	0,87	0,93	0,98	1,02	1,05

In the last few years, women became dominant in higher secondary and university education. From the point of view of increasing requirements for higher education, the educational structure of the population of women is getting more favourable. Men are showing slightly better indexes of literacy, which might be caused by women out-numbering men among the oldest population of citizens and by higher illiteracy among the Roma women.

Women and Economics

A whole set of factors related to the complicated economic development came to the spotlight during attempts identify the basic problems women are confronted with, since the period of transformation of Slovak society in the '90s. These are complex problems connected with poverty, women' unemployment, stereotypes in gender job differentiation, barriers in the process of starting own business activities, differences in remuneration, and also in the notoriously higher burden related to working and family care.

Slovak women suffer the most by financial problems and lack of time, whereupon most handicapped groups of women are divorced women or single women with children, often living on the edge of the living minimum (in poverty). Despite the comparable education level of men and women, wage differences of

men and women are increasing every year. This is the direct result of a growing feminisation of some [low-paid] fields (textile and clothing industry, education and health service – in the latter two, number of working women has risen above 80%), whereupon men have reinforced their working positions with the potential for higher income (e.g. banking sector and money market). The share of women in managing positions represents only one third. The preponderance of women with low-income jobs shows the hidden discrimination reflected in remuneration.

Women's determination to start new independent business activities is (considered) a breach of the traditional model of economic dependence of women on men. At the end of 1998 men with their own business represented 9.4% and women 4.1% of the working population.

In direct consequence of these differences, the average women's wage is more than one fourth lower than the average wage of men. It might be attributed to the increasing number of women working in so-called low-income fields but the highest differences in men's and women's wages are in high-qualified positions.

Table no. 5:
Development of average wage difference

Indicator	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Wage of women as the % from wage of men	78, 5	77, 0	75, 0	75, 0	74, 1	71, 7

3. 7. Implementation of the rights of children

The complex basis of the definition of rights of children is derived from the Convention on the rights of a child (further as „Convention“), which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. The Convention was signed by the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic in New York on the 30th September 1990. After late president ratified the document and the Convention came into force as of the 6th February 1991. The Slovak Republic as the successor became a signatory of the Convention on the 28th May 1993. The Convention represents a whole scale of human rights, emphasizing basic human rights with respect to the vulnerability of children. Its main pillars include among other things the right of children to live with their parents or enjoy foster care in the case of need, but also to receive protection from abuse and neglect but also the right to participate on decisions about their life.

As the Convention is an international document, it is binding for all signatory countries. In the Slovak Republic it has priority over the legislation of the Slovak Republic.

The legislation of the Slovak Republic does not have an independent codification of the basic rights of children. The basis for the legal status of the child is defined in the Constitution (Act No. 460/92 Coll.). The basic rights and freedoms belong automatically to every human being with the exception of rights which are applicable exclusively to citizens of the Slovak Republic (for example the right to vote).

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic provides for the principle of special protection of children and youth, explicitly stating it in the Article 41 paragraph 1 that “special protection of children and youth is guaranteed”. This constitutional principle is reflected in specific legal tools, including the civic and family law, labor law, social security law and the penal code.

The level of informedness of young people in Slovakia about their rights and their potential violation has been subject to research conducted by the Center for the research of labor and family in 2002 and the



Institute of information and prognosis in 2004. According to the findings of the Center for the research of labor and family as of 2002, more than one quarter of the population of young people up to 17 years (26.8%) claimed that they never heard about the Convention on the rights of a child, while the remaining 73.2% heard about this document in the past. Those who claimed not to have heard about the document were mainly boys and inhabitants of small cities. Based on the attended school, most information on the existence of rights of a child is available to students of high-schools, while the opposite was true for students of professional preparation schools. The knowledge of young people on their rights is significantly influenced by the education of their parents and the child-raising style. Young people raised in a democratic way are more informed about their rights (48.3%), than the teenagers raised liberally (32.3%) and those raised in an authoritarian style (35.2%). Young people whose parents use punishment are more informed about the existence of rights of children than those that are never punished (UIPS, 2005, p. 6).

Several sources confirm that the most common source of information about the Convention is the school. According to the research of the Center for the research of labor and family and UIPS, almost 2/3 of the questioned persons declared that they were told about the Convention by a teacher during the school lectures, mainly those on civic education or ethics. The teacher was a source of information most frequently in the case of high school students (80.6%), least frequently for students of professional preparation schools (59.2%). (UIPS 2005, p. 10). The second most important source of information is the media – radio, television or newspapers. The so-called „new technologies“ play currently only a marginal role in the dissemination of information on the rights of young people (SPŠPR, 2004, p. 24.)

Young people assign the greatest importance to the right of education (61.4%), the right to have and express an opinion (31.3%), the right to food and housing (20.0%), right to life (19.8%) and the right to protection and safety (16.8%). Least importance was assigned by young people to the right for parental care (3.6%) and the right to social security and care (3.4%) (SSPR 2004, p. 25.)

Observance of rights in the school environment

Young people mentioned in their answers several ways their rights are violated at schools and the family and social environment. According to the data of acknowledged Slovak research institutes (UIPS and SSPR), the most frequent type of violation of rights is bullying of pupils at schools (31.0%) and the inability to express their opinion at the school (30.2%). Bullying is mentioned as a problem more often by men (35.6%) than women (26.9%) and young people in the age of 15 years. Bullying is practiced mainly at professional preparation schools (36.0%), the least at specialized high schools (26.5%) and from the point of view of regional distribution, in the region of the capital city Bratislava. This region has most pupils complaining about violations of another right – the right to express own opinions. The dissatisfaction of pupils with opportunities for expressing their opinion grows with age and from the point of view of school type in the case of students of professional preparation schools. (UIPS).

In connection with violation of rights young people also mention the offer, sale and use of drugs (19.8%). Students of all ages encounter drugs at schools. From the point of view of the type of school, drugs are most often offered at professional preparation schools (36.0%), least in regular high schools (10.3%) and gymnasiums (13.1%). A higher percentage of students encountered drugs in the capital city. On the basis of spoken statements of the students, the students consider the existence of drugs at schools as a frequent phenomenon (UIPS, 2004, p. 18).

A slightly smaller number of students place among violations of rights discrimination (13.9%), psychological punishment (12.0%), unfair evaluation (6.8%) and physical punishment (5.4%).

Discrimination is more significantly experienced by young people studying at professional preparation schools. Humiliation, insults or underestimation of pupils as a form of psychological punishment are more often mentioned by females and students of higher grades of high schools. This type of punishment is more often mentioned by students of gymnasium (16.4%), and least by pupils of professional preparation schools (8 – 9.0%). Psychological punishment is least frequently experienced by young people in the capital of Bratislava and the region of Trnava (3.3%), while young people in the region of Žilina, Nitra and Trenčín encounter this form of punishment most often (16 – 18.0%). Unfair evaluation of knowledge is perceived as a violation of rights by mainly younger pupils. Based on attended schools, it is a problem mainly for students of gymnasiums (11.5%), and it is perceived least by students of professional preparation schools (4.0%). Physical punishment (punches etc.) is more often encountered by young males (6.3%) than females (4.7%), (UIPS 2004, p 19).

Observance of rights in the family

According to research outcomes, approximately 14.4% percent of questioned students encountered a form of violation of rights at home. The most frequently mentioned problem is the inability to express own opinion in front of parents (43.3%) and use of physical punishment by parents (21.2%). The most frequently mentioned violations of rights included physical punishment (15.1%), discrimination (7.5%) and offer, sale and use of drugs (7.5%). Under the threshold of 5% remained the following types of violations of rights (3.4%), bullying (2.1%) and failure to fulfil basic needs (1.4%), (UIPS, 2005).

Inability to express an opinion or lack of acceptance is more often perceived by women (52.1%) than men (36.7%). It is perceived as a problem mainly by students whose parents prefer an authoritarian style of child raising (56.3%), than in the case of families with a more democratic system (45.7%). Parents with an university degree are more willing to listen to the opinions of their children than those with lower education. Based on the home community, young people living in communities with less than 2.000 inhabitants complained most about not being able to express an opinion (56.4%), while this was perceived as a problem least by young people from cities larger than 100.000 inhabitants.

Psychological punishment by parents was perceived more intensely by women (24.0%) than men (16.3%). In families with one own and one stepparent respondents complained more often of psychological punishment (50.0%) than in families with both biological parents (15.9%) and slightly higher than those from single-parent families (31.6%). Young people who described their parents as democratic declared lower levels of use of psychological punishment (18.1%) as young people whose parents were more authoritarian (31.3%) or liberal (25.0%). Psychological punishment is more often used by parents in larger cities with over 100.000 inhabitants, less frequently in small communities with less than 2.000 inhabitants.

Encounters with physical punishment were more frequent in the case of men and young people younger than 15. Physical punishment was more often experienced by young people living in families with both biological parents. Physical punishment was more often experienced by young people from larger cities with over 100.000 inhabitants (30.0%), while in smaller communities it amounted to 11 – 15% of positive answers. Physical punishment was defined as a form of violation of rights mainly by young people who knew the Convention.

Discrimination (in the sense of preferable treatment of a sibling by parents) was perceived more often by men (10.2%) than women (6.3%). Discrimination at home was perceived more often by young people who live with one biological and one stepparent (30.0%) and young people with authoritarian parents.

Encounters with the use of alcohol at home were more often mentioned by females, but the issue is perceived by all young people similarly. Most encounters with alcohol at home were reported by children of



liberal parents, least by children of authoritarian parents. The frequency of encounters also correlated with the size of the community – the greater the size of the community the more frequent were the encounters. The tolerance of the existing offer and use of alcohol at home was much lower than that in the school environment (UIPS 2005, p. 25 - 26).



4. Youth life in the Slovak Republic

4.1. Improvement of knowledge of youth from perspective of public institutions

Every democratic society reflects upon the concept that those, who are influenced by decisions should participate in the decision-making process. In a democratic system its the public which defines the direction of the development and the role of the elected representatives and employees of public institutions is to create conditions for this development. The involvement of the citizen into the management of public affairs is a confirmation of his/her right to have a voice and be involved in the process of problem-solving. Public institutions have the obligation to find opportunities for the informing of citizens and their meaningful involvement into the process of public planning and decision-making and to collect information on the life and opinions of the citizens in order to be able to verify the effectiveness of their advancement.

Public institutions in a totalitarian regime but also in the years immediately following the „velvet“ revolution were perceived as hierarchically superior to the citizen and the citizen was in a position of a subordinate and claimant. The public administration reform has brought along the idea of a public administration as the „provider of services to citizens“. In this relation the representatives of institutions adjusted to the principles of interaction with the public, which include for example transparency of decision-making, the right to appeal, the concept of the protection of personal data and the obligation to provide information to citizens etc.

The above mentioned facts influence the implementation of youth policy both at the central and regional level. Public institutions in cities and municipalities should become partners of young people and organisations working with youth that try to gain support in the process of project implementation or present the wishes and needs of the children and young people. The precondition for this is the awareness of the needs, interests and intentions of young people by employees of public institutions and their openness to dialogue in the process of their fulfilment. Availability of relevant information to public institutions about the youth scene is the basic precondition of the participation of young people in public life. A functional youth policy at the central and local level is based on the interest of public institutions in gaining information on the needs of young people and in the provision of information to young people about their aims in the area of youth policy. Only on this basis can they then request young people to accept responsibility for influencing public life but also realise the responsibility of public institutions in the provision of opportunities for the active participation of young people in public life.

The base for youth participation in Slovakia is being built rather haltingly. It can be concluded that both the communal sphere and the youth scene are only waking up in the area of information provision. So far, only several municipal and city councils introduced a communication strategy with the aim to increase youth participation, based on a regional youth policy (these include for example the cities of Prievidza, Bratislava, Žilina, Košice, Michalovce).

A majority of self-governments actively communicates with young people, but from the point of view of youth policy aims this activity seems to lack concept mainly due to the fact that:



- its not based on the concept of regional youth policy development;
- the thematic categories of information to be collected on young people and provided to them are not standardised;
- the methods of information collection are not standardized;

Due to the non-existence of a concept of regional youth policy the employees of institutions have access to a large amount of information on youth, but only a portion of it is relevant. According to research results, more than 55 % of self-government employees receive and give information mainly through „neighbour relations“, through personal contact (Juventa, 2003). Often this information is insignificant from the point of view of youth policy aims, yet the representatives of institutions often do not know themselves what information they are interested in and realise its absence only once they find themselves in a conflict with young people. An elaborated concept of youth policy would definitely make the coordination of individual departments easier, due to its intersectoral character. Otherwise the employees communicate only within the framework of their professional orientation, out of the context of the activities of other institutions or departments in the region, thus providing only partial information.

In general it's true, that every effective approach to the issue of identification of needs of young people should be based on the collection of information available at the hierarchic structure of public administration. The self-government bodies should, in the process of realisation of tasks related to youth support, use the information, suggestions and proposals of citizens, which they can gain through:

- direct interaction with young people mainly through deputies and committee members;
- allowing young people to participate in the meetings of the local representation;
- through reports and suggestions of young people;
- creating space for young citizens to present their opinions in local media;
- adjusting the opening hours so that young people can visit the offices at a time which suits them;
- organising public hearings, where young people can present their opinions;
- monitoring the youth scene through questionnaires and other methods;

Only a few institutions use the mentioned methods for the collection of feedback from young people. We can mention an example from the municipality of Pruské, in the district of the city of Ilava. The mayor of the municipality initiated a survey that gave the citizens an opportunity to evaluate the work of the self-government and also nominate personalities in the area of sports, culture or those contributing to the community development for public acknowledgment.

The goal of the anonymous survey delivered to all households in the municipality was to create a tool for direct feedback for employees of the self-government and elected deputies and in the case of nominations for public acknowledgement to motivate citizens to become involved in community development. The survey included an opportunity to voice issues related to the needs of young people in the context of community development. The results of the survey were sent together with an annual report of the mayors activities to every household.

The communication strategy formation, which will include the collection of information from citizens, is at its beginnings in Slovakia. Such a strategy can contribute to the strengthening of the municipalities image and to the harmonization of relations between the citizens and the self-government and support intergenerational dialogue. Its really is worth it to abandon disputes between neighbours and overcome the reluctance to search for ways to motivate young people to cooperate with self-governments.

4.2. Youth education

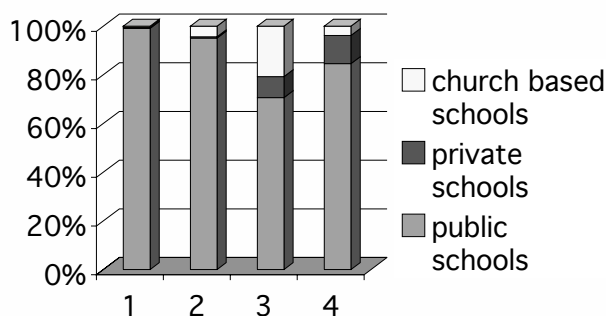
Social changes after the 1989 in politics and economy have had an impact on changes of the education policy. The process of transformation of the education system that has begun in 1990 continues with bigger or smaller success up to these days. In 2003 there has been an increase of the population with higher education according to the census. In 1991 there was a 15% quotient of population with complete secondary education and in 2001 it was 20.4%. The university graduates currently represent 7.9% of the population. There has also been a change of the structure of the university graduates. In 1991 there has been an increase of university graduates from 30.6% to 43.7%. University graduates with economic represent 15.5% nowadays, whereas in 1991 it was only 11.6%. The quotient of the graduates with a technical and agricultural specialization has decreased (source- Statistical office of SR).

The characteristics of the current education system

There have been lots of changes in a field of education during the past 10 years. The competencies from the centralised and directive education system were gradually moved to lower levels of management. Universities gained autonomy, elementary and secondary schools gained legal independence and became self-governing institutions.

An amended education law from 1990 enabled the creation of a pluralistic, differentiating and diversified education system instead of the unified educational system of the past. Church and private elementary and secondary schools were established based on "grassroots initiatives". The changes in the education sector did not progress immediately after the 1990s systematically, because the necessary legislative conditions for a free development of private and church schools were not in place at the time. The first two elementary church schools were established in 1990 and in 1993 there were already 81 of them. In 1993 the first private secondary schools were established in the Slovak Republic.

Graph no. 2:



1 - Kindergartens

2 - Elementary schools

3 - Secondary grammar schools

4 - Secondary schools, colleges



Table no. 6:
Number of schools in Slovakia in the school years 2003/2004

Type of school	Number of schools
Kindergartens	3,120
Elementary schools	2,387
Secondary grammar schools	223
Secondary schools, colleges	368
Secondary institutions and institutions without GCE	247
Special schools	439
Universities	24

Source: UIPS

The system and organization of education for children of “ethnic minorities” is not a special element of the education system, it is in fact, identical to the organization of Slovak schools. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic guarantees the members of minorities the right for education in their mother tongue (in Slovakia, predominantly schools with the Hungarian and Ukrainian language as the teaching languages). A problem that still waits for satisfactory resolution is the education of Roma children and the children of migrating parents.

Differentiation of the education system

The principle of democratization deepens in the field of content of educational formation mainly by implementation of the participative model for creation of local education programmes, involving teachers as well as parents participating in their creation. Schools that are open for the public make the local community responsible for the quality of education at schools. Parents, together with the founder institution, have the possibility to decide about the school profile and quality of delivered education.

Since 1993 the differentiation has gradually started to assert itself at the level of pedagogical documents as well. The schools have the right to replenish subjects according to the interest of the students, parents or regional differences. The central regulation of the education system gets weaker because of this. Elementary and secondary grammar schools use the possibility of school or classroom’s specialisation, e.g. the elementary schools very often establish classrooms with extended teaching programmes. Nowadays there are more than 40% of the elementary schools that have classrooms with extended teaching of mathematics, sports and foreign languages. Apart from this the schools can select the extended teaching of music, art, and technical education or they can adjust the curriculum to regional conditions.

Also the students can choose the secondary grammar schools according to the specialisation, e.g. in mathematics, mathematics and physics, programming, informatics, P.E., cultural-educational activities, social-scientific specialisation, art education, Slovak language and literature. After 1993 bilingual secondary grammar schools were established based on the cooperation of the Slovak Republic with other countries.

Schools also provide other services for students, such as school psychologists. There is an appointed counsellor at schools who helps students with the career choice. According to the new bill governing the financing of those services, they will be considered as new services, which the school provides during the teaching time. The school canteens and clubs where the children can spend time before or after classes are very much appreciated by parents.

Elements of the present education system and their characteristics

Compulsory education was extended from 9 to 10 years in the amended education law in 1990. The elementary school was prolonged from 8 to 9 years, with the structure of 4 + 5 (1. grade and 2. grade) based on the same document. In 1997 it came to a complete implementation of a **9-year concept of elementary education**. The last grade of the compulsory elementary education can also be carried out at specific types of secondary school or at college. Since 1991 we have witnessed the establishment of high schools with 8-year education programmes.

Table no. 7:
Characteristic of educational grades in the Slovak Republic

Pre-school institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are focused on the complex development of the child's personality therefore they complement the parental upbringing • A new element in the pre-school education is the possibility of interconnection with elements of school system and school institutions • Five year old children and children with postponed school attendance are accepted preferentially. • Possibility of appointment of teacher assistant (e.g. in kindergartens with high prevalence of ethnic minority children) • Kindergarten is available for the children from the age 3 (with possible exceptions for children aged 2)
Elementary school	<p>Free education at state Elementary schools guaranteed by law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-year compulsory education, 9-year elementary school • It starts when the child is 6 years old and lasts 9 years • Four year term in the 1st grade of elementary school, five year term in the 2nd grade of elementary school • After the completion of the 4th year in the 1st level of elementary school there's the possibility of continuing at an 8-year grammar school • Gifted and talented students can finish the elementary school earlier than in 9 years • An assistant teacher can work at elementary school
Elementary art schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide basic art education • They are designated for students of elementary schools • They are not part of the compulsory education system • A degree of formal education is not gained by graduation
Students with special Educational needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Committee decides about the placing of a child into a special school after the diagnosis and parent's agreement • They are designated for students who are mentally or physically disabled • Currently there is a trend for the establishment of integrated classrooms where children with special needs are integrated among others
Secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They start when the child is at the age of fifteen and last 2,3,4,5 years. - Secondary grammar schools last 4 or 8 years - Colleges last 4 or 5 years - Secondary training institutions last 2,3,4 or 5 years
Training institutions - vocational schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They produce qualified workmen and technicians. They have programmes which may and may not be finished with GCE examination • They last 2,3,4 years
Extended courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-3 years • Extended and post-graduation studies



Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide education with a university orientation • There are 25 universities in Slovakia at the moment • The fields of study are divided into 9 basic groups: education and training; arts and fine arts education; natural science; constructing, technologies, production and communication; agriculture and veterinarian science; medical and social services; services; social-science subjects, law and business; IT, maths, information and communication technologies • University education provides opportunities for studying at three levels: bachelor, master and doctor's degree. • The length of the studies is 3; 4; 5; 5.5; 6 years
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Content of education

The most important means of educational content regulation are the curriculum and educational standards as the input and tests and evaluation of educational results represent the output. As result of the implemented changes, today's schools present a pluralistic view on particular social issues. The contents have been reshaped at all types of schools so that the development of abilities, attitudes and acquirement of crucial competencies dominate instead of encyclopaedic knowledge.

Another change was made also in the teaching of **foreign languages**. The teaching of English, German and French language was expanded, the frequency of Russian teaching decreased compared to 1989. Currently there are still some insufficiencies in the number of qualified teachers at elementary schools. A very serious insufficiency of the language policy is the incapability to ensure continuity in foreign language education between the elementary and secondary school.


The contents of foreign language classes slowly begin to resemble standard European contents. After 1993 changes were also made in the **assessment** of students. The opportunity to orally evaluate the achieved results of the students was introduced in the education systems throughout the whole elementary school and from academic year 1994/1995 also the results of students in all subjects at elementary school in the 1st – 4th grades.

Following the adoption by the Pedagogical, the classification order in the 2nd level of elementary schools enables oral evaluation in the subjects such as civic education, arts, music, P.E., technical subjects.

In 2000 the **State School Inspection** was established in order to control and determine the quality of education and the general provision of services at schools. It carries out the function of government control over education at elementary and secondary schools and is an independent institution. The law determines the contents and range of its activity.

The teaching of religious education with an alternative of ethics education has been introduced from 1993/1994. Another element of educational system humanisation is reflected in the possibility of integrated teaching of disabled students in classes with regular students, with the aim to eliminate the segregation of disabled children. There is also an endeavour to cater to of extremely talented children in the form of individual education plans. The contents of education at elementary and secondary schools are divided into teaching subjects.

The contents at the **elementary schools** in the 1st – 4th forms consists of the following subjects: Slovak language and literature, cultural studies, geography, mathematics, natural science, practical teaching, art, music, P.E. The number of hours in the first four grades ranges from 21 in the first grade to 25 in the fourth grade.



The teaching at the second level (forms 5-9) is also focused on particular teaching subjects: Slovak language and literature, foreign language, history, geography, civics, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, technical education, art, music, P.E., ethics/religion.

It is possible to use the extended lessons in the 7th – 9th grade. The overall number of hours per week ranges from 26 to 29. The regular classes last 45 minutes. There are also subjects that do not quite belong to the sphere of regular system of education, such as e.g. environmental education, marital and parental education, and European citizenship classes. These subjects are often integrated into other taught subjects.

Orientation of **secondary schools** can be divided into general secondary education and specialized professional preparation.

The **grammar schools** have general-educational orientation as well with different length of studies, and the curriculum is also divided into teaching subjects: Slovak language and literature, history, civics, aesthetic education, ethics/religion, foreign languages, mathematics, informatics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, P.E. There are 16 extended classes in the course of four years. There is an alternative teaching plan in these schools, which enables a big choice for students in the 4th grade, who can choose additional subjects they want to study apart from the compulsory subjects such as Slovak language, foreign language and P.E.

It is necessary to expand the educational curriculum along with the implementation of information communication technologies in particular subjects so that the school will be able to provide education in accordance with the goals of the informatization of the society.

Secondary training schools have also changed gradually from 1993. The changes were brought about by an innovation of the contents of teaching materials, issuing new teaching plans with an emphasis on language skills acquisition and through profiling schools and graduates through a group of selective or non-compulsory subjects.

Education programmes oriented on Roma children and the reinforcement of environmental education has been developed, with new teaching and study departments and special programmes introduced. The growing diversity and number of educational programmes led to the creation of a unified standard of technical education, which determines the educational curriculum that determines basic educational contents for the specific types of schools. This complex document is called the “Standard of the secondary-school technical education” and includes a set of requirements defined for the educational programmes. It does not include the requirements concerning the output qualifications for particular professions, as it is assumed that the labor market will influence the standard demands for the individual professions. The schools get the opportunity to make or create their own education programmes in cooperation with social partners (mainly the employers), parents, students and other subjects involved in education.

The educational process at the secondary training schools proceeds in the context of the general educational curriculum enriched with the aspect of preparation for specific professional careers.

Universities

The Bill on Universities was passed in 2002. Universities are legal entities. Currently there are 25 universities in Slovakia and these include public, state and private entities. Universities have the exclusive privilege to provide university education. Nowadays the transformation of study departments into study programmes is underway. Study programmes are divided into three degrees. Each university provides the



university education within the study programme of the 1st degree. According to the character and activity range they are divided into university-like and non-university-like.

Teaching process

The teacher has a right to decide about the contents as well as the forms and methods of teaching. There are great opportunities for the teacher so he/she can actively develop their position in teaching mainly because of the opportunity to make free choices regarding their work. The teacher can collaborate more with the students in the selection of work methods. Relations between the teacher and students change only gradually even though the teacher has these opportunities. The result is shown in student's questionnaires filled out within the framework of the international observation project, where the Slovak students answered that during the lesson the teacher mostly explains the rules and definitions and only rarely uses project methods, problem solving tasks, work with textbooks or work in groups. Students feel that there is no space for their own presentation and initiative.

Current status and development trends in individual areas of the educational system – quantitative indicators

- Only 10 % of economically active citizens of Slovakia have a university degree (age group 25 – 64);
- Only 25.5 % of high school graduates are accepted at universities; while in other countries the average is more than 35-40 %;
- The number of high school graduates is low. In the Slovak Republic it's 69.1%, while in other developed countries it's approximately 80 %;
- Special schools (for mentally disadvantaged students) still have too many pupils. European indicators show that these schools should serve less than 3 % of the population, in the Slovak Republic it's over 4.5 %. It is necessary to re-evaluate the real status of these children and integrate them into standard classes – this being mainly the case for Roma children and those coming from disadvantaged social environments.
- The structure of different types of high schools is still not well balanced, with the number of gymnasiums being too small;
- The complex concept of life-long education is only now being introduced, its absence being most visible in the area of further education of teachers and parents. The previously implemented systems of further education of pedagogical staff require significant innovation and developmental support;
- In 2004 there were 3049 kindergartens, 16 of which were private and 30 church based with a total of 7203 classes (147.314 children and 13.751 teachers). It's necessary to:
 - a) innovate the educational curriculum
 - b) find solutions for the integration of disadvantaged (Roma) children
 - c) include the kindergartens into the school system
 - d) create preparatory classes in kindergartens for children from disadvantaged environments;
- The number of primary schools in the Slovak Republic is 2,302, they have 600.885 pupils and 40.014 teachers. Problems are with the lowering qualification of teachers, lack of new text books and teaching materials, the transformation of curriculum, low wages of teachers and participation of teachers in life-long education.
- High schools in the Slovak republic: there are 217 gymnasiums, 339 professional preparation schools (SOŠ) and 374 training institutions (SOU). The imbalance in the number of schools reflects the tendency to maintain a strong network of training institutions at the cost of gymnasiums (offering



a more general education). It's necessary to a) re-structure the schools – reduce those schools whose students cannot find placement on the labor market and create new educational programmes which reflect the needs of the domestic and European labor market b) increase the share of gymnasiums so that conditions are created for an increase in the number of students leaving high schools well prepared for universities;

- Art and special schools – there are 197 basic art schools with 96.887 pupils and 437 special schools with 32.244 pupils. Trends: art schools are slipping away from the relevant legislation and it's necessary to create legislation space for them. In special schools it's necessary to re-diagnose pupils and increase the numbers of qualified teachers;
- Universities are governed by the new Act on universities, which requires an amendment in the area of schools fees and other regulations. There are 25 universities in Slovakia with 92.140 students of the regular daily courses and 38.948 students of external studies. It's necessary to strengthen BC studies and innovate the departments in accordance with the ISCED classification as well as start with the evaluation of the quality of provided education (TMQ).
- Life-long education – in 2001 the ministry of education issued a Memoranda on life-long education which includes the basic trends divided into six key elements: new skills, competencies for all (1); more investment into human resources (2); innovations in education (3); acknowledgement of value of education (4); new approach to professional orientation and consultancy (5); bringing education closer to homes (6).
- Support services for schools - STAV: school clubs, centers for free time activities, dormitories and schools in nature represent a support system for schools. Currently there are 135 centers for free time activities and 17 centers for interests development with 2332 professional staff.
- Consultancy services and special pedagogical intervention are provided in counselling centres. These include educational counsellors, school psychologists, coordinators of prevention and other support staff, working in counselling centres, integration centres, diagnostic and foster care homes and re-education children's and youth homes.
- Special interest-based establishments (language schools etc) and service providers (kitchens, libraries, computer laboratories etc.). Trends: efforts to increase the quality and professionalism of services and their management, including supervision and monitoring (evaluation) and further education of staff.

Quality and chosen achievements of the education system

The Slovak Republic is involved in international comparative studies administered by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) as of 1995. In the following section we will provide data compiled in the Report of the TIMSS 2003 study on the trends of achievements by 14-year-old respondents in mathematics and scientific (nature history) subjects and the comparison of Slovak eight grade students with students from more than 40 different countries. The provided information reflects the result of the entire educational system in Slovakia.

How has the level of knowledge in mathematics by Slovak 14-year-old eight grade students changed between 1995 and 2003?

The average performance of Slovak eight grade students in 1995 represented the value of 534 points, thus placing them on the seventh highest rank among all participating countries. The performance of our students oscillated on the scale between 400 and 701 points. The average achievement of this age group of students at international level in mathematics was 519 points.



In 1999 the average performance of Slovak eight grade students remained at the same points average of 534 as in 1995, placing them 11th in the international comparison. The performance of Slovak eight grade students oscillated on the scale between 275 and 861 points. The average achievement of this age group of students at international level in mathematics was 521 points.

The performance of Slovak eight grade students in 2003 represented 508 points, placing them on 13th in the international comparison. The performance of Slovak eight grade students oscillated on the scale between 344 and 672 points. The average achievement of this age group of students at international level in mathematics was 467 points.

Table no. 8:
Points achieved for performance in the years 1995, 1999 and 2003

Year	Minimum performance	Maximum performance	Average performance	International performance
1995	400	861	534	519
1999	275	861	534	521
2003	344	672	508	467

During the eight year period when the TIMSS research was realized, a statistically significant decrease in the quality of knowledge of Slovak students in mathematic became apparent. The difference in the average achievement of Slovak eighth grade students in mathematics between 1995 and 2003 is -26 points.

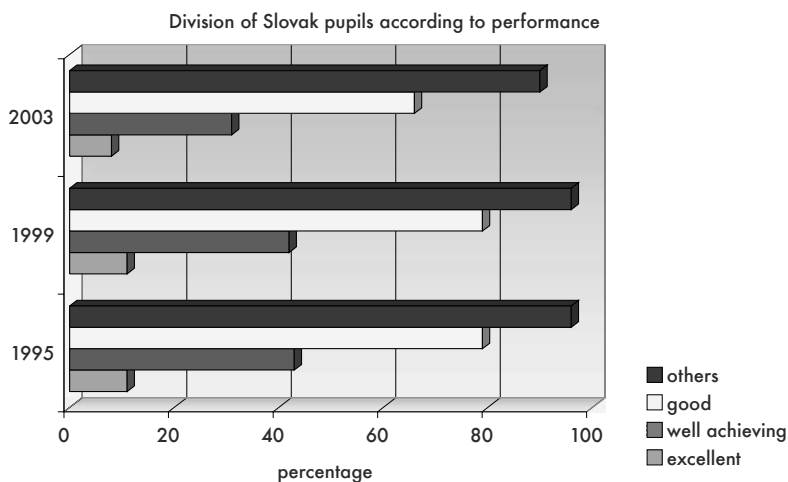
This means that only 8% of Slovak eighth grade students can solve more complicated tasks and apply knowledge of mathematics in the course of resolution of real life problems. Only 8% of Slovak eighth grade students can process provided information, identify necessary and important data for further processing, and come to conclusions respectively propose, evaluate and discuss solutions of problems. The level of ability to resolve problems by Slovak pupils is very low and according to the above mentioned statistics it's getting worse.

The results also indicate that 10% of Slovak eighth grade students demonstrate only basic mathematical knowledge, for example, in dealing with operations involving basic numbers without the use of a calculator. These students lack understanding for single data information and are not able to resolve problems independently without the help of another person. The number of such pupils has grown significantly in the monitored period between 1995 and 2005.

Students with excellent skills and ability to use them for the resolution of problems arising in everyday life have a good chance of being successful in the society, both domestically and internationally. „**What is the number of excellent students in individual countries?**“ An analysis of the respondents gives a partial answer to the question: From any selected 100 „straight A“ students 11 will be from Singapore, 10 from China, 4 from Hungary, while **3 from Slovakia**, the Czech Republic and Canada and 2 from USA. If we were to ask ourselves the same questions based on the regional distribution within the borders of Slovakia, we would get the following answer:

Of 100 Slovak „straight A“ students 42 will come from the capital city Bratislava, 21 from the region of Nitra, 16 will live in Zilina, 11 in the region of Trencin, 5 will come from regions of Košice and Trnava. The group of excellent students would involve no student from the regions of Presov and Banska Bystrica.

Graph no. 3:
Graphic description of pupils according to performance



The difference between boys and girls

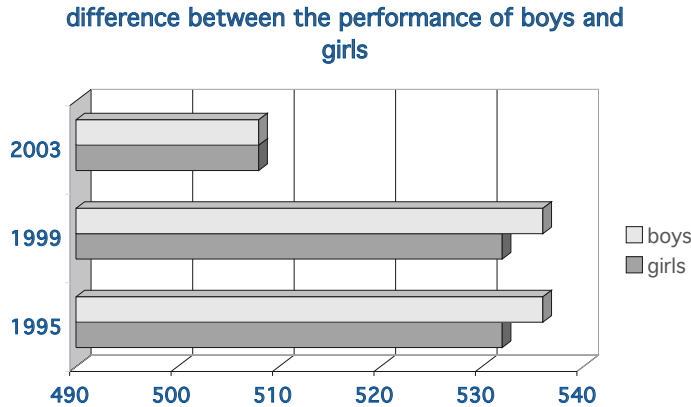
In 1999 the average performance of Slovak boys in mathematics was significantly higher than the average performance of Slovak girls. In 2003 no significant difference was noted in the performance of boys and girls mathematics. The average performance of Slovak boys and girls in mathematics worsened between 1995 and 2003 by 28 points. Statistically significant are the better results of boys in geography, physics and chemistry.

Table no. 9:
The difference between the performance of boys and girls between 1995 and 2003

Year	Performance	
	Girls	boys
1995	532	536
1999	532	536
2003	508	508



Graph no. 4:
Graphic description of the difference between the performance of boys and girls in the course of realisation of the TIMSS study



Characteristic of teachers

The IEA research regularly monitors the attitudes and opinions of students and teachers. The questions in the teacher questionnaires of the TIMSS study included data on age, gender, education, pedagogical experience and possibilities for further education.

Table no. 10:
Age and gender of mathematics teachers

Year	Percentage of students taught by teachers						Number of taught years
	Less than 29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	More than 50 years	Female	Male	
2003	11	22	28	39	79	21	21
1999	9	21	38	32	86	14	21
1995	7	21	50	22	79	21	20,9

Characteristic of Slovak teachers of mathematics teaching eighth grade students of primary schools provided in the table can be interpreted in the following manner:

In 1995

79% Slovak 14 year old eighth grade students were taught mathematics by a female teacher. The average age of mathematics teachers was on the scale between 40 to 49 years of age for 50% of students. Only 7% of our students were taught mathematics by a teacher younger than 30, but 22% of students had a teacher older than 50 years.

In 1999

Only 14% of Slovak eight grade students were taught mathematics by a male teacher. 32% of Slovak students were taught by a female teacher, probably older than 50 years.

In 2003

39% of Slovak eight grade students are taught by a teacher older than 50 years of age. Only 11% of

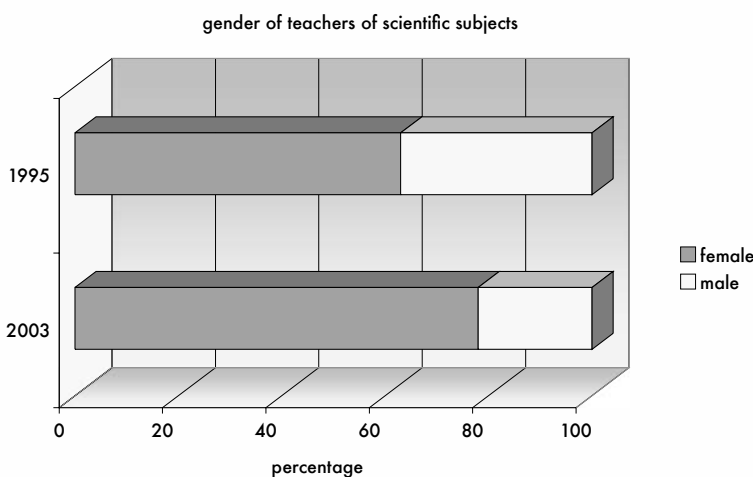
students has a teacher younger than 30. 79% of Slovak eighth grade students of primary schools have a female mathematics teacher.

Table no. 11:
Age and gender of teachers of scientific (natural history) subjects

Year	Percentage of students taught scientific subjects by male/female teachers					
	Less than 29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	More than 50 years	Female	Male
2003	16	20	25	39	78	22
1995	13	25	40	21	63	37

As the table shows, compared to the mathematics there was an increase in the number of male teachers of scientific (natural history) subjects.

Graph no. 5:
Graphic description of teachers of scientific (natural history) subjects based on gender

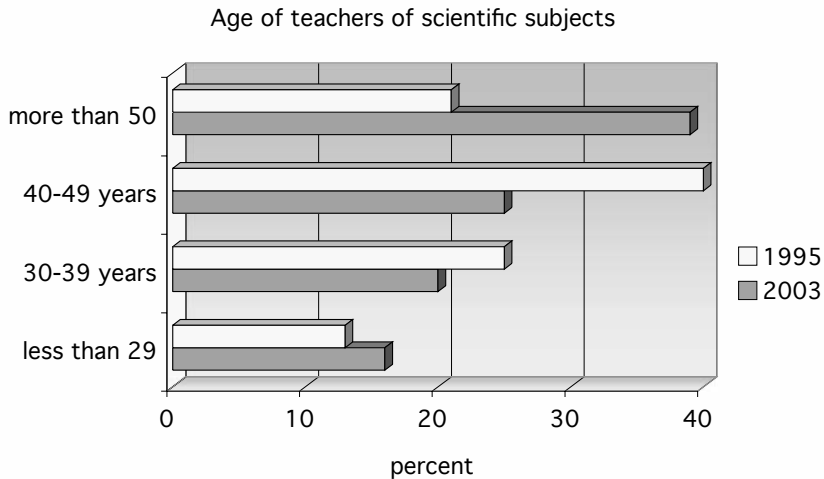


In 1995, 37% of our eighth grade students were taught scientific (natural history) by a male teacher while in 2003 it was only 22% of students. This is a statistically important decrease of male teachers. In the past eight years there was a slow increase in the number of teachers younger than 30 years of age. In 1995 over 13% of Slovak students had a teacher younger than 30, which is 6% more than the representation of this age group among mathematics teachers. In 2003 16% of eighth grade students had a male teacher for at least one subject. During the monitored period between 1995 and 2003 a statistically significant increase of 18% in teachers older than 50 was noted. 39% of Slovak eighth grade students are taught by a teacher older than 50.



Graf no. 6:

Graphic representation of teachers of scientific (natural history) subjects according to age



The average age of the Slovak teacher of mathematics in the eighth grades of primary schools is 43.3 years. A majority of them are women (79%). The average length of experience of our teachers of mathematics is 21 years. Of the participating teachers 98% teach full-time, devoting 69% of their time to mathematics. The average weekly teaching time for a teacher of mathematics is 23.1 hours. The number of hours taught per year is 894.8. Slovak Republic ranked average among the tested countries in this area. The international average of taught hours of mathematics per week was 24.6. The lowest number of hours was reported by Kuwait - 15.1 and highest by teachers in Singapore - 39.8. Similar situation was to be seen in the case of scientific (natural history) subjects. Slovak Republic belongs to the countries with lowest stability of the teaching corps. Schools with a stable 50 percent of the teaching corps represent 86.2%, those with more than 80% stability in teaching corps make up only 39.4%.

The above mentioned data implies that the age average of teachers of mathematics and scientific (natural history) subjects in eighth grades of primary schools in Slovakia is one of the highest in the world. Our eighth graders are taught mathematic most often by female teachers with over 21 years of pedagogical experience. Their official teaching time is lower than that of teachers in other countries. They also spend more time with preparation and revision of written outputs and tests and with individual preparation for the teaching process. A majority of our teachers of mathematics and scientific (natural history) subjects in primary schools think that in order to achieve good results in mathematics and scientific (natural history) subjects they do not have to learn formulas and procedures, nor understand mathematical terminology and principles, and they do not need to know where these are applied in real life. Eighth grade teachers do not think it's important for their students to be able to explain their solutions and conclusions. A majority of our teachers is convinced that there are students who have a natural talent for mathematics and scientific (natural history) subjects and if a student wants to achieve good results in these areas, s/he has to think creatively and in logical correlations.

What influences the performance of students?

The TIMSS study included questionnaires targeting factors, which influence the performance of students. These factors can be divided into two main groups. Factors in the first group are related to the social and economic background of the student (level of education of parents, number of books in the home, conditions for the preparation of home work etc.). The second group involves factors directly related to the school and the education system (style of management, priorities of the school director, further education of teachers, equipment of the school, teaching methods, attitudes and opinions of teachers).

In the Slovak Republic, 34% of eighth grade students have parents with university degrees. The performance of these students in mathematics reached 549 points, which is higher than the average performance of students with parents with a high school degree by 47 points. The correlation coefficient which reflects the dependence of the „performance in mathematics on the home environment“ in Slovakia was 0.31. This means that the higher the education of the parents, the better is the performance of pupils in mathematics. The average Slovak father had higher education than the mother, who in turn had more influence on the student. The peer influence exceeds the influence of parents. 88% of our eighth graders have their own desk at home, which they use for school preparation and elaboration of assigned home work. The performance of these students in mathematics reached 512 points and is higher by 35 points than that of students which lack this equipment.

In general it is assumed that the number of books in a household has a high correlation with the education of the parents and as the TIMSS research proved, also has a positive influence on the student's school performance. The Slovak Republic placed among Arab and African countries in the category of the number of books in the household. Only 12% of Slovak eighth graders have more than 200 books at home, thus falling under the international average. The performance of these students was 551 points, thus higher by 127 points than the performance of students who reported an average of 10 books at home. A majority of Slovak students (41%) reports an average of 26 to 100 books. More than 20% of all students in a majority of European students participating in the TIMSS study reports more than 200 books at home.

Table no. 12:
Number of books at home

Number of books at home									
More than 200		101-200		26-100		11-25		0-10	
Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.
12	551	18	543	41	514	24	465	5	424

In 1999 17% of Slovak eighth grade students reported more than 200 books. The number of students reporting more than 100 books at home has also been on decline since 1995. The number of books in Slovak households with a school attending student has been on the decline since 1995.

Computer technologies in education

Our society is changing in the past few years to an informational society. The school is not the only source of new information for students. The mission of the school will transform towards guiding and



assistance in the orientation of students. The transfer to a learning society implies a change in the education system, where the traditional transfer of knowledge will be replaced by providing tools and encouraging skills for finding information and their effective processing and utilization. Due to this trend the TIMSS study put emphasis on the utilization of computer technologies in the educational process and after-school programmes. The students answered questions on how often and where they work with computers. In 2003 almost 67% of Slovak eighth graders replied that they own a computer. The performance of these students reached 519 points, exceeding others by 34 points.

Table no. 13:
Utilization of a computer

Utilization of a computer at home and school		Utilization of a computer at home but not at school		Utilization of a computer at school but not at home		Utilization of a computer at another place excluding home and school		No work with a computer	
Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.	Students in %	Perform.
26	537	33	519	16	486	13	480	12	476

As the table shows, better results in mathematics were achieved in 2003 by eighth graders who had the opportunity to use computers both at school and at home. Such students represented 26% and their average performance was 537 points. In the context of the international comparison the achievement was 13% lower than the international average. A higher representation was noted in 30 countries. Of all Slovak students 12% reported in 2003 that they do not use a computer at school not at home. The performance of these students was lowest of all monitored groups and it reached 476 points on average.

How does the size of the school influence the performance of students?

One of the most important findings of the TIMSS research was that pupils from “well-to-do” families performed better in mathematics, they also reported higher preference for mathematics, did not believe into luck and learning things by heart, but rather into active participation in math classes. The higher the preference of students for mathematics and the stronger the belief in the value of hard work, the higher their achieved results in mathematics. Also, the atmosphere at the school influenced the performance significantly. Better atmosphere was reported from smaller schools with a lower number of pupils per class, mainly from rural areas. The personal preference of pupils correlated with the performance in the given subject. Teachers expressed a wish to have high-performing students, that also have a high preference (positive relationship) to the taught subject.

Based on the international observation PIRLS on which the Slovak Republic participated in 2001 and which was aimed at evaluation of reading with comprehension skills of 10-year-old children, we can conclude that Slovak girls had better results in reading than boys. Slovak students achieved a higher score in reading informative texts than in literary texts.

In Slovakia only 36% of children read stories and novels at least once a week and an interesting fact is that 72% of the students from the 4th grade form read special literature and 69% read magazines. Girls read for pleasure more often than boys. We found out from the results of the international study CIVIC Study Education that students achieved good results in the field of factographic knowledge and worse in the field

of interpretative skills. It is therefore quite obvious that the pupils achieve better results in facto-graphic tasks with simpler application.

Following the example of international observations, the measuring of educational achievements on the national level expands through utilization of didactic tests. The results of these national observations are a source of feedback for schools, teachers and pupils. The international experiences in the evaluation of education system effectiveness are used to refine the process, including the French know-how as well as the international recommendations based on observations of IEA.

Financing of the education system

The quality of education is directly connected to the **financing of the educational system**. About 4.4% of the GDP goes into education these days. However there is only limited data available on the effectiveness of utilization of these funds. That is why a lot of attention has been given to the search for an optimal financing system for the education system, which has been underway since the year 1993.

According to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic citizens have the right to free education at elementary and secondary schools, and so far according to the abilities of people and the opportunity of the society also at universities. The state takes care of the financing of the education system, its operation and deals with accidental situations, it contributes to financing of the development of state and private and church schools, and finances developing programmes, textbooks and school competitions. Currently there are plans to change the model of education financing so it would become more effective and would support those schools interested in maintaining high quality of the educational process.

Since January 1st 2004 there is valid new bill about financing elementary and secondary schools and school institutions. The new way of financing is based on the normative principle, which means that the schools are financed according to the number of their students. It is a system based on multiple-source financing. With regards to the fact that there are limited (often insufficient) resources available for the financing of education, it is necessary to consider the efficiency of the management of finances and necessary investments mainly in connection with the decreasing demographic tendency. These facts will very much influence the rationalization of the school chain. The bill introduces a two-degree system of financing of regional education system. In the first degree the school gets the finances from the Ministry of Education and in the second degree the founders of the schools specify the financial means for schools and school institutions within their operations.

The reason for this effort was the need to introduce a model of financing that will be motivational, encouraging schools to provide education of the highest possible quality. The students and parents can thus make important decisions and hopefully the founders will try to use the available means as effectively as possible.

The institute of educational vouchers was introduced. This form of financing is used only within the framework of after-school services provision based on the interests of the students. The concept is based on a scheme, where each student decides which after-school class offered by the elementary and secondary schools or other school institutions he or she will attend. The schools began offering attractive after-school programmes in order to compete for students to invest their vouchers into the offered programmes. There is currently a wide public discussion of the system of financing university studies in the future.

Orientation of the students for further studies

The education is effective only, when the graduates assert themselves on the **labor market**. Due to great gaps in the strategy for development of individual regions there is significant dissonance between the



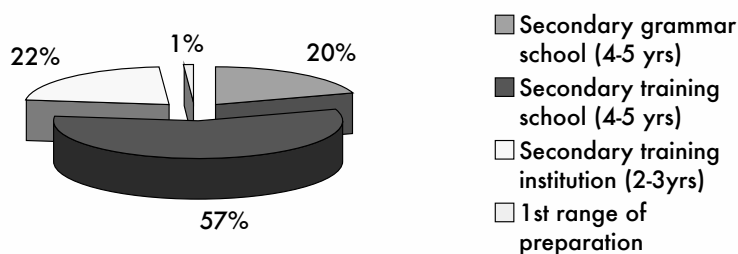
chain of secondary training schools and secondary training institutions and the needs of the labor market, resulting in the un-employability of their graduates. The interest of students and parents is mostly focused on a GCE specialisation.

It will be necessary to observe the conditions and requirements of the labor market in the context of the education of future employees and to focus the specializations of secondary schools on demanded skills and branches of industry seeking educated labor.

The selection of students for secondary schools is based on entry examinations, which consist of didactic tests mainly in two subjects – Slovak language and mathematics, in some cases of three subjects. Students who want to study at school with a minority language as the teaching language take the entry examination also from the teaching language. The tests for the entry examinations are made by the secondary school. In some cases schools also take into account other results and achievements of the student not just the test, e.g. the results of knowledge competitions, sports competitions.

Graph no. 7:

The share of students at particular types of secondary schools in the school year 2004/2004



Source: UIPS

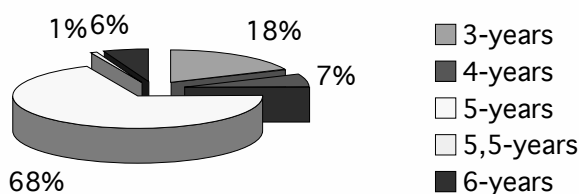
Girls represent 51.7% of the total number of students. The graph shows that in Slovakia there is interest in secondary training schools with a GCE examination (this number contains also secondary regular schools). The girls are interested in secondary grammar schools and some departments of the secondary training school whereas boys dominate at secondary schools without the GCE examination.

Number of students at universities

The graph shows the level of interest in studying at universities.

Graph no.8:

Total number of students at universities according to the length of studies



Source: UIPS

Level of education

The quotient of citizens with higher education increased in comparison with the past according to the census in 2001. In 1991 the quotient of citizens with a complete secondary education was 15% but already in 2001 it was 20.4%. The university graduates represent 7.9% of the population. The structure of the university graduates changed also. The quotient of people with a university education rose from 30.6% in 1991 to 43.7%.

15.5% of the university graduates have an economic education whereas in 1991 it was 11.6%. The number of graduates with technical and agricultural specialisation decreased. (Source: Statistics Office)

The level of education of ISCED 2 does not correspond to the development needs of the present society, it is necessary to offer more post-secondary education in the education system, e.g. in the form of post-graduate, extended or bachelor education. Apart from the formal education the informal education expands more and more, progressing mainly along the main streams of education and training preparation and usually it is not finished with the issuing of an official document. Non-formal education represents an area which will play an important role in the further and life-long education of citizens.

Support to pedagogical innovations

The reform of the Slovak education system is realized de facto (not de jure) at two levels. The first level includes the National programme projection in the context of the Millennium (vision of the educational system for the next 15-20 years) and the second level includes a reform of the education system based on the initiatives of teachers, pedagogical staff and school administrators at all levels of the system. The active participants of this process meet at regular national platforms and meetings. Their aims include the introduction of alternative education systems, implementation of regional specifics in education, innovations in the area of school management at local, regional and national level, and support to pedagogical staff who are willing to introduce innovative changes to education.

The basis for the transformation of our schools into institutions providing both education and guidance is anchored in the National programme of education of the Slovak Republic for the coming 15 – 20 years (project MILLENIUM), which was approved by the government of the Slovak Republic on the 19th December 2001. The basic trend of the project is the transfer of emphasis from education to guidance. Attention is mainly devoted to the diagnosis and professional development of non-cognitive traits including:

- Development of creative thinking and problem resolution
- Education towards emotional maturity
- Development of internal progressive motivation
- Normal behavior
- Auto regulation and acquirement of positive attitudes and values
- Creativity as a universal attribute of a personality, community and society.

Just as the Slovak society is undergoing a process of democratisation, the same process is happening in the education system. This process is often painful and marked by contradiction, because it requires a radical change of stereotypes in the context of educational aims and the communication with students. The globalisation related trends and changes in life-styles of people create pressure on the education system in Slovakia to change its perception of the educational needs of a young person. Today, the priority is shifting from the simple preparation for future jobs to the preparation of young people for the adaptation to life in a world of constant changes not only in terms of knowledge but also of relationships. Here all three levels of the Slovak education



system encounter the problem of the content of education, where it's hard to find the golden middle road between the offer of encyclopaedic knowledge and extreme professional specialisation. The education system currently puts emphasis on the transfer of information, not the transfer of values. Young people leave schools without a moral vision, which usually includes the concept of personal responsibility. The educational process should offer solutions not only for issues related to job preparation, but also of personal growth and character development. This is not only a question of education but also of the approach towards students. Students today do get enough, even an abundance in knowledge, but have little space to discover it themselves. And as shown by research, the ability to use the knowledge by individuals decreases, together with the motivation for life-long learning. Another problem lies in the variability of the content of education in relation to the labor market. Educational content innovations chronically lag behind the needs of the labor market, which changes too fast. A great handicap of the Slovak education system is the low social prestige of teachers and of the educational environment. Low financial subsidies result in the lack of interest in teaching and poor equipment of schools.

Currently there is a need for informal support from the third sector, sponsors, foundations, specialists for the development of alternative schools, new school books, new activities (drug prevention programmes, multicultural and pro-tolerance education, special programmes for Roma children etc).

Also, the participation of experts on the creation of a new curriculum, standards, concepts of further education for teachers, the transformation of support services and of a new model of regional management of educational activities can be helpful.

4.3. Young people and unemployment – labor market and education

One of the strategic goals of the Government of the Slovak Republic is the stabilisation of employment, its progressive increase and decrease of unemployment. A successful market economy with a high employment rate requires a stabilised and flexible labor market, which is able to react fast to the changing economical and social conditions. Throughout the previous years various important documents have been prepared and adopted in the field of employment and education (mainly covering the areas of specific professional education and preparation, as well as the concepts of further education) which are based on the documents of the European Community and which were recommended by the European Commission to Slovakia. These include the following:

- European strategy of employment
- Memorandum of life-long education (2000)
- Evaluating reports of the European Commission about the Slovak Republic's Readiness for the membership in the European Union (1999-2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003)
- Millennium – National guidance and education programme in the Slovak Republic for the next 15-20 years (December 2002)
- National plan of employment (November 2000)
- Joint evaluation of employment priorities in the Slovak Republic (November 2001)
- National action plan of employment for the years 2002 - 03 and 2004 - 05
- Report on fulfilment of goals and priorities arising from the document "Joint evaluation of employment priorities in the Slovak Republic" for 2001 (June 2002)
- Programme statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic (November 2002)

- Strategy of employment growth based on the reform of the social system and the labor market 2003
- Strategy of competitiveness of Slovakia until 2010 (Lisabon strategy for Slovakia),
- Sector operation program Human Resources (2004).

Unemployment in the Slovak Republic

High unemployment is a problem accompanying the development of the Slovak economy from the start of the transformation in 1990. One of the main reasons for the unfavourable situation on the labor market is the inadequate functioning of the market mechanisms, a relatively high share of re-distribution in the economy and the orientation of labor market policies predominantly on issues related to the offers. A problem also lies in the low flexibility of the labor market arising from its deformation by administrative barriers (limiting the demand for work) and non-flexible cost of work. An accompanying symptom is a large regional disparity. Another unfavourable effect on the labor market is the slower development of the information society (in comparison to the neighbouring countries), the relatively low share of those with university level education and the educational structure not reflecting the demands of the market.

As of 1990 the level of unemployment in the Slovak Republic continually grew, mainly due to the transformation of the socialist into the market economy with all its consequences. Not even after 15 years of transformation has the level of unemployment dropped under double-digit figures. A characteristic feature of the Slovak labor market in the first years of the transfer from a centrally planned to a market economy was the significant volume of the so-called „hidden unemployment“, resp. over-employment in many big state enterprises. This was one of the reasons for the slowdown of the privatisation process (and vice-versa) and the overall immobilization of the labor market. The inadequate functioning of the labor market was also supported by the absent wage regulation: in the liberalised but inadequately competitive environment there was a tendency for continual growth of nominal wages and the increase in the general labor-related expenses. This had a negative impact on the development of the labor productivity, which was decreasing.

In 2002 the economy recorded the most significant interim growth since 1998. The unemployment decreased to 17.9%. At the end of that year, the intensive preparation of a reform of the social security system was launched.

2003 can be considered as the year of significant changes on the labor market, mainly in the legislative area. The legal framework for the realisation of a strategic reform of the social security system including the insurance toward unemployment, social assistance system, the system of social benefits and public services was elaborated. The most significant event in this area was the amendment of the Act on employment, which came into force as of the 1st January and which obligates the unemployed to report every two weeks at the Labor Offices. The generally positive development of unemployment rates in 2003, whose average value represented 15.3% was related to the favourable development of employment, an increase in the number of available jobs, and an improved situation in the labor market. The significant decrease in unemployment was also due to the increase in resources available for the implementation of job creation policy, which was used for the support of establishment of sustainable jobs. The most frequently used tools of an active labor policy were re-qualifications, support to self-employment etc.

Act No. 453/2003 Coll. on the institutions of state administration in the area of social issues, family and employment services and on the change and supplementation of several acts, which came into force as at the 1st of January 2004, the government institutions responsible for social services and employment services were established:

- the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic,
- the Central Office of Labor, Social Affairs and the Family,



- the Bureau of Labor, Social Affairs and the Family (46 established at regional level).

In September 2004 the government of the Slovak Republic approved through the Declaration no. 906/2004 the National action plan of employment for the years 2004 – 2006. The basic strategic aim of the Slovak Republic was to come closer to the goals defined by the Lisbon strategy in terms of employment reaching 70% in 2010. The Slovak government realises in this aspect several structural reforms:

- as of 2003 the Labor Code was amended, helping the harmonisation of the needs related to the flexibility of the labor market with the requirements for the protection of rights of the employee in the context of the labor related relations,
- in 2004 a tax reform, was introduced with a 19% flat tax for legal entities and individuals,
- in February 2004 the Act on employment services came into force, creating a legal framework for the provision of more targeted and individual centered employment services. The national action plan of employment for 2004 – 2006 defined the following three basic steps which will define the process of implementation:
 - increasing the adaptability of employees and enterprises,
 - involving a greater number of persons on the labor market and ensuring the opportunity to choose to work for all,
 - increasing the effectiveness of investment into human capital and life-long learning.

In 2004 the trend in decreasing unemployment continued. This positive trend has to be seen in the context of administrative measures on the labor market – more persons were removed from the lists for non-cooperation, due to the tightening of the condition for remaining in the register, and persons working in the informal economy were removed. Also, seasonal factors contributed to the development, together with the positive development of the economy (reflected in the growth of final consumption of households and the generally satisfactory GDP growth dynamics, the slight increase in employment rates and of actual wages). But also in this period there are great differences in the numbers reported by the labor offices and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The unemployment as at the end of the year was 13.1%.

In February 2005 the level of unemployment decreased to 13.08% and thus reached its lowest value since 1998.

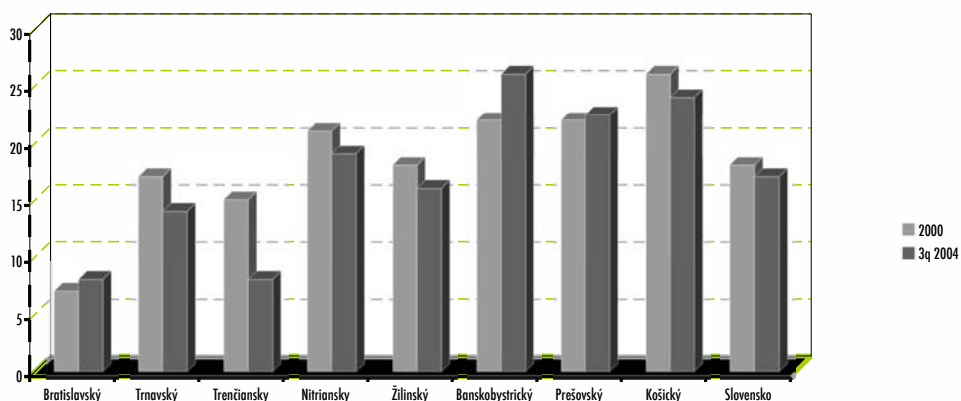
Unemployment in Slovakia has a significant ethnic dimension, which is visible in the extremely high unemployment of the Roma, which reaches according to the Statistical office of the Slovak Republic app. 75%, while the employment level represents app. 14.3%.

The most significant problem, which negatively influences the Slovak labor market is the long-term unemployment (exceeding 1 year), which became a problem immediately after the introduction of the transformation of the economy. In 1994 its share on the overall unemployment represented 41.7% and a significant increase was recorded in 1995, when its share on the total unemployment represented 53.2%. Till the year 2000 the share of long-term unemployment showed a slightly decreasing tendency, but at the beginning of 2000 it began to grow again and reached the level of 50% just to rise again in 2004 to 63.2%. The reasons for long-term unemployment are numerous. Apart from education and qualification (it hits mainly non-qualified workers with low levels of education, who find it hard to find a job in regions with high unemployment) these also include psychological aspects. For persons who were not employed for longer than a year, finding a job is difficult because they lose working habits, become passive and fall into apathy. Long-term unemployment has a destructive influence on family relations, the health and the economic situation of a family. In often leads to social exclusion and a loss of social contacts.

Slovakia also reports significant differences in general living conditions and unemployment between regions, cities and rural areas. Highest levels are reported by the regions of Košice, Presov and Banska

Bystrica. In the case of the Banská Bystrica region the level of unemployment rose in the past few years and it became the region with highest unemployment (with unemployment significantly rising in the individual municipalities of this region).

Graph no. 9:
Level of unemployment in individual regions of Slovakia

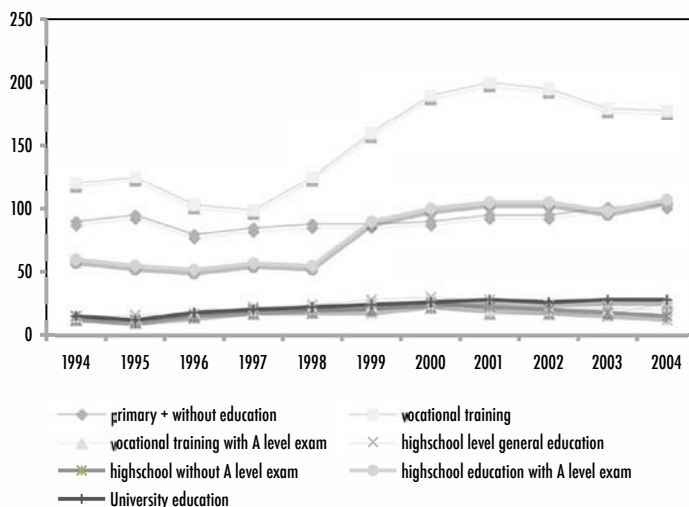


Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The reasons for the regional differences in the level of unemployment are due to the inherited sectoral structure of their economy (the previous orientation on mining and extraction industries, agriculture or weapon industry), the demographic and educational profile of their citizens, degree of foreign investment flow and the level of development of small and medium-sized enterprises. The reason for the increase in the number of job seekers is the termination of labor contracts for a definite period – seasonal jobs, mass layoffs in some regions, registration after maternal leave and the ending of army service etc. Also, there is a persistent unwillingness to employ long-term unemployed job seekers by the employers. The increase in the general unemployment highlights the problems of high risk groups, the long-term unemployed from the Roma ethnic minority, individuals with a limited working ability due to a handicap and persons with a serious health problem, as well as the elderly, the socially unadaptable, families with a higher number of children and single parents, young people growing up in a disadvantaged environment, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. A majority of these persons suffers from long-term exclusion from the labor market, is dependent on social benefits and lives below the poverty level. This is mainly true for the young, persons with minimum qualification, women and those with impaired health. The placement on the labor market is complicated by the lack of available jobs, as well as the low educational structure of job seekers and in some cases by the unwillingness and passive approach of the unemployed. The educational structure of the unemployed in Slovakia was at first relatively stable. This stability was disrupted in 1998, when there was an increase in the number of unemployed persons with highschool education.



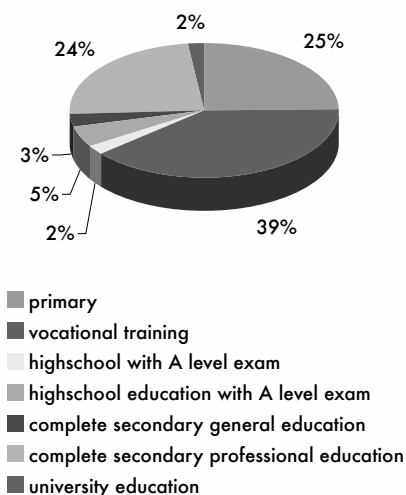
Graph no.10:
Development of unemployment according to education



Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

In the third quarter of 2004 the share of those with basic secondary education on general unemployment represented almost 38 %. Persons with a completed highschool education represented 23% and persons with primary education 24 %.

Graph no. 11:
Unemployed according to education in the 3rd quarter of the year 2004



Unemployment of young people

In the structure of the unemployed based on age groups, there is a high share of unemployed young people. This fact is partially due to the educational structure of graduates which does not reflect the demands of the labor market, but also the demographic factor (strong age groups entering the labor market).

Table no. 14:

Registered unemployed (RU) as at 31.12. in the years 1993 -2004												
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
EN Total	366095	371481	333291	329749	347753	428209	497521	540553	533652	504077	452224	383155
Of that												
Young people (15-29r.)	173783	168065	145093	143831	153227	189420	232875	244689	219770	195365	156059	120078
Of that (Age)												
19	62542	60415	53534	53296	55757	64706	81607	72669	52073	38082	24614	20547
20 - 24	58573	56080	47851	49603	55327	73090	92050	106481	98570	90300	70959	52033
25 -29	52668	51570	42708	40932	42173	51624	59218	65539	69121	66983	58486	47498
Share in %												
15 - 29 from EN total	47,2	45,2	43,5	43,6	44,1	44,2	46,8	45,3	41,2	38,8	34,5	31,34
Of that												
19y.o. from the number of young people	36,0	35,9	36,9	37,1	36,4	34,2	35,0	29,6	23,7	19,5	15,8	17,11
20-24y.o. from the number of young people	33,7	33,4	33,0	34,5	36,1	38,6	39,5	43,6	44,8	46,2	45,5	43,33
25-29y.o. from the number of young people	30,3	30,7	30,1	28,5	27,5	27,3	25,4	26,8	31,5	34,3	37,5	39,56

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

There is a high ratio of young unemployed people from the total number of registered unemployed. These problems are also stated in the Comprehensive monitoring report about the readiness of Slovakia for a membership in the EU of November 5th, 2003 in chapter no. 13: Social Politics and Employment: *“The reform of the guidance and education system, including the life-long education must be accelerated. Equally it is necessary to support the active and preventive labor market policy and to increase the motivation for work.”* Further the report urges: *“The majority of Roma community members remains exposed to the social inequalities, social exclusion and a spread of discrimination in education, employment, in the system of criminal justice and in the approach to public services. Further it is necessary to exercise a considerable effort for improving of this situation.”* The chapter 18: “Education and technical preparation” states that it is expected in the field of education and technical preparation that the reform of vocational education will be realised in Slovakia.

From the point of view of the educational system it is important to look at the school graduate's employability as well as the more general criteria of employability of graduates on the labor market



according to their level and specialisation of the achieved education. The fact that the unemployment rate (similar to elsewhere) decreases with the increasing level of achieved education points to the fact that there is an increasing demand for educated workers in a developing economy and that the adaptability of the man-power to the fast changes on the labor market is markedly higher in the group of people with higher achieved education.

The transformation of vocational education in the Slovak republic was realised spontaneously in the past, from a relatively low number of fields of study to a number that many times exceeds the European average. Currently, there are cases of several programmes, which prepare graduates for a certain vocation, but vary just slightly from each other. The Ministry of Education is preparing changes as of September 2005, which should decrease the current number of 1.032 fields of study to 650.

Of the total number of 379.811 of on registered unemployed as at 31st December 2004, there were 124.459 registered young unemployed under 29 years of age, representing 32.8 %. Young unemployed men, registered as at 31st December 2004 numbered 64.757 of the total of 186.229 registered unemployed men, representing 34,8 %. Of the total of 193.582 registered unemployed women as at 31st December 2004 there were 59.702 registered young unemployed women under the age of 29, representing 30.8 %. Employment of women in Slovakia is lower compared to the employment of men. The reasons for the lower levels of employment of women are due to their lower economic activity. Employed women usually work in sectors with lower wages, namely in health care and social services. Women have lower representation in management level positions. Significant differences remain between the average wages of men and women.

Unemployment of school graduates

Around 105.000 school graduates of various types of schools enter the labor market each year. The graduates represent a very specific group on the labor market: they have the latest knowledge, but on the other hand they don't have enough experience with its implementation and the employees rather prefer older, more experienced employees where they expect an immediate ability to fulfil specific tasks without a need for extensive further training. They have doubts about the extent of knowledge and ability to implement it in the context of the specific job assignment.

The relevance of the achieved education and the gained skills are among the most substantial qualities of the education system from the point of view of the needs of the labor market and this question is even more significant in the conditions of the fast changing economy.

The number of unemployed graduates of various schools changes throughout the year: at the end of the year it increases rapidly because a number of graduates start looking for first jobs only after the summer holidays, therefore their number in September is high. A closer look at the numbers of unemployed graduates according to the achieved education shows several important facts.

The most significant group of the total number of unemployed school graduates is the group of graduates from the secondary training institutions without GCE, followed by the graduates from secondary training schools and secondary training institutions with GCE. The graduates from secondary grammar schools represent the smallest group of all unemployed secondary school graduates. The number of university graduates entering into the registration of unemployed people is significantly lower in comparison with the number of registered unemployed graduates from secondary schools.

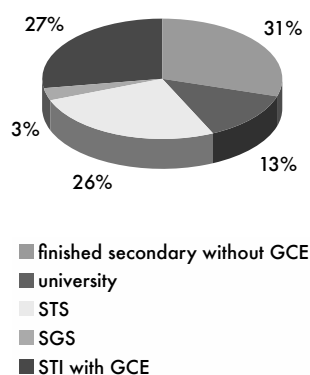
Table. no. 15:

Registered unemployed graduates according to the school types as per 31.1.2004 (Source: DWSAF)

Status of registered unemployed graduates	
Universities	3 781
Secondary vocational schools	7396
Secondary grammar schools	983
Vocational schools with A level exam	7 777
Vocational schools without A level exam	8 433
Total	28 370

Graph no. 12:

Structure of job applicants according to school type as per 31.1.2004



(Source: DWSAF)

Already at entering the labor market young people are often disadvantaged compared to other age groups and that is not only because of the insufficient practical experience but also because their technical preparation doesn't fulfil the requirements of the labor market (the particularly vulnerable group are the graduates from elementary school without further qualification). A part of the young generation is still being prepared for occupations which find little or no placement on the labor market. Today mainly secondary school graduates have problems with a search for a job, those who were prepared in particular fields, e.g. the interest in graduates of managerial, economics specialisations is falling and on the other side there is a lack of available human resources in some fields of working-class occupations.

A serious problem occurs within the group of long-term unemployed young people who never worked and never gained working experiences. Unemployment also has a bad influence on the psyche of young people, leading to an existential frustration, making it even harder to acquire the work habits and to adapt to the working world in the future.

The insufficient interconnection between the school system and the labor market influences the young people's unemployment development in the Slovak Republic. School graduates often end with specializations that make it impossible for them to get employed in their own regions. We can state that the problems connected to the graduate's employability on the labor market were underestimated. It is



necessary to explore the perspective labor market development, utilizing tools of prognosis to affect society's attitudes and to implement changes in the secondary schooling system.

Employers consider as the most significant factor influencing the graduate's employability on the labor market the missing prognosis of the macro-economic development and lack of development projects for particular regions. The employers consider the experience, which the graduates get during their studies as insufficient. (Source SIOV, 2001) But the insufficiency of experience isn't the one and only factor that negatively influences the graduates employability on the labor market. The quality of their preparation is also important. One of the most significant challenges for the educational sphere from the point of view of youth employability is the need for changes in the content of education, which should be adjusted to the needs of the labor market.

The graduates consider qualifications gained outside of the school more important than general knowledge. (Source SIOV, 2001) There are alarming indications about a general lack of communication skills, potential capacity for independent decision-making, practical technical knowledge and abilities, but also in the organisational and managing capabilities, in language skills and in the work with computer technologies, which were not sufficiently emphasized by the education system. The graduates name as the most frequent reason why they did not work in an occupation that would correspond to their specialisation as they could not find a placement in their branch of specialisation, and also state that they were interested in other work. Many of them specified that they chose the specialisation according to their interests, often upon recommendation of other people, taking into account the accessibility of the school (selecting a school in the proximity of their homes). The most essential questions – whether they will be able to get a job after their studies and what their perspectives will be – escape their attention.

Career counselling

The consultancy services in the field of employment play an important role in the effective functioning of the labor market and in prevention of unemployment, especially in the case of young people and school graduates. The services include counselling in occupational choices, consultancy in the job selection process and employer assistance in human resources management.

Act No. 453/2003 Coll. on the state administration bodies in the area of social issues, family and employment services and on the change and amendment of several acts delegated the responsibility for the implementation of state administration covering among other things the career consultancy services provision. The legal framework of the consultancy content to be provided within the public services was defined by Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services and changes in some legal regulation and by the Regulation of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic No. 31/2004 Coll., which placed consultancy among the active measures supporting placement on the labor market. Professional consultancy services and medical statements provision related to employment were re-defined as relatively independent systems and each of these services (including informational and consultancy services) was included in the organisational structure in the form of an independent organisational unit of the Department of Labor, Social Affairs and the family and well as the Offices of Labor, Social Affairs and the Family.

Informational and consultancy services are defined by law as services provided in the course of:

- choosing vocational orientation,
- selecting a job, including the process of changing jobs,
- selection of an employee,
- the provision of information and professional advice on:

- opportunities for finding employment in the Slovak Republic and abroad,
- conditions for the execution of a job,
- opportunities and conditions for the participation on activation programmes on the labor market,
- conditions for the applicability of unemployment benefits,
- conditions for the participation on partnerships create for the support of employment development in the relevant administrative areas falling under the Office of Labor, Social Affairs and the family.

Informational and consultancy services in the context of selecting or changing jobs include: a) revision of professional prerequisites, abilities and acquired professional skills of the job applicant and b) the provision of information and advice related of health and qualification requirements for given positions. Informational and consultancy services in the process of employee selection are defined as the provision of information and professional advice to employers in the process of searching for employees for a given position.

The Act determines that these services are to be provided free of charge. It guarantees a registered job seeker under defined preconditions of a certain length of registration time, defined in the regulation of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic No. 31/2004 Coll. the elaboration of a personal action plan supporting the placement on the labor market.

The occupational choice related consultancy in Slovakia is traditionally offered by the system of counselling at schools, district or regional pedagogical-psychological advisory centres.

Despite the existing institutionalized background and structure of the offered services the value of the occupational and employment consultancy is frequently underestimated. The issues related to the labor market dynamics and occupational consultancy are not included in the school educational programmes, there is a lack of the necessary methodological material and teaching aids; with no systematic education of teachers and counsellors in this area. As of the 1st September 2003 a teaching subject called „Introduction to the world of work“ was introduced at highschoools, but only on a voluntary basis.

Decisions about the future vocational orientation and career building are very important. One of the tools eliminating the risk of wrong decisions in the area of selecting a vocation, education or career as well as influencing the prevention of unemployment and an early termination of education is a *functioning system of career consultancy*. Career consultancy in the educational system is of crucial importance not only for the selection of the right education by students but also for a smooth transfer from school to work. It increases the probability of success, raises interest in further education and the willingness to participate on re-qualification and thus prepare for a change of jobs, in accordance with the situation on the labor market.

The existing system of carrier consultancy in the Slovak republic has significant shortcomings and requires the implementation of new approaches. A persistent problem lies in the inadequately coordinated activities of individual subjects in the area of career consultancy with the educational sector as well as at the level of inter-sectoral cooperation. It's necessary to coordinate the activities of individual actors of this process, help them get to know each others activities, and harmonise these activities so that they interconnect. An improvement of the status of career consultancy within the department of education requires changes and the realisation of a reform. The schools and universities do not have adequate conditions for the provision of career consultancy. Schools and universities are bound, by the Act no. 131/2002 on universities and on changes and amendments of several legal regulations, to provide counselling services to students, but this activity is only a less important part of their tasks which include - teaching, pedagogy and psychology.



There is a lack of human resources, opportunities for re-training are limited and specialisation in this type of services does not exist. In order to create a functioning system of career consultancy its necessary to re-evaluate the existing national consultancy services in the context of the education system through the lense of the conclusions of the EU, OECD and the World Bank from the review of national policies in counselling, evaluate the existing development of the system of career consultancy and critically analyse the current state of the concept of career consultancy with special attention to the status and role of career consultants in the area of professional and career consultancy (unclear competencies of departments and institutions which have to be systematized) and to improve the coordination and cooperation in the context of consultancy services between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic and to specify the competencies and cooperation within the context of consultancy services among other institutions active in this area. It's also necessary to ensure the cooperation and coordination among the consultancy service providers at the national, regional and local level and thus increase their accessibility, ensure coherence in their provision with a special emphasis on high risk groups.

The effective development of consultancy is currently hampered by an absence of systems of forecasting the needs of the labor market, which would identify trends in the development of key abilities and skills. In relation to the realization of the measure 3.3 of the Sectoral operational programme Human Resources called the „Development of career consultancy and forecasting systems for the identification of changes and qualification related requirements of the labor market, the regulation 3.3.A “Development of career consultancy and the regulation 3.3.B “Systems for the interconnection of vocational education and preparation for the labor market”, a working group was created in 2005, made up of representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak republic, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, the Bureau of Labor, Social Affairs and the Family and the National Institute of Vocational Education, which elaborated a proposal of the national project „Complex systems of forecasting and interconnection of education systems with the needs of the labor market (KOSYPP – VATP)“. The aim of the project was to contribute to the improvement of employment levels based on continual matching of the educational offer and the need for qualified, flexible working force on the labor market.

Measures for improvement of the employment rate of young people

The Department for Labor, Social Affairs and the Family (previously the National labor office) concentrated its attention on the resolution of unemployment of young people and adults within the programme within the frame of the implementation of a project approach to the active politics of the labor market. It oriented its activities unto programmes aimed at decreasing unemployment through complex and differentiated approaches to the clients and groups of registered unemployed, considered disadvantaged on the labor market.

The programme for supporting employment of young people

The programme for supporting employment of young people was designed for young unemployed people. In 2003, 1,130 unemployed young people aged 15 – 29 were registered. The programme was proposed and adopted in order to enable the job placement of these young people, if they do not find employment through their own initiative. At the same time the programme respected the needs and possibilities of the regional labor market. In the course of activation the young people taking part in the mentioned programme were given information about the cross-border cooperation and employment opportunities, about the possibilities and conditions for work abroad as well as about vacant job positions within the Slovak Republic.

Another significant tool used within the framework of the further development of a programme and project-based approach towards implementation of active measures at on the labor market was the *Programme of individualized employment services* (PIES). This programme exercised an approach closely oriented on the client with the goal to activate groups of registered unemployed (RU) in need of support for placement at the labor market. Projects realized within the frame of the PIES were based on the regional circumstances and were designed for diverse groups of registered unemployed disadvantaged on the labor market. The main goal was to activate the registered unemployed from the disadvantaged groups on the labor market and that mainly from:

- Long-term unemployed registered at the labor offices,
- School graduates and young people
- Citizens with modified working ability and with severe health disability
- Citizens aged over 50 (before retirement)
- Registered unemployed from the Roma community
- Registered unemployed with elementary education or without education
- Registered unemployed after maternity leave
- Groups of registered unemployed according to regional needs, educational and age restrictions.

In 2003 there were 23 projects realized within this programme for school graduates and young people, where 3,333 registered unemployed young people were listed.

Another tool used were the **clubs for young unemployed**. According to the Offices for Labor, Social Affairs and the Family job clubs or labor clubs are designated to serve unemployed young people but might also address other vulnerable groups of unemployed. The labor clubs realize individual and group counselling, project activities, various activation seminars that are designed to deal with issues related to unemployment and prevention of long-term unemployment. The main aim is to help clients find placement on the labor market.

The **Community Social Work Programme** joins the **Programme of the Cross-country Workers** in localities where young people, so-called „excluded from the society”, live. In 2004, 76 cross-country social workers in the frame of that Programme. The aim of The Community Social Work Programme is a support of groups and individuals who are in the long term retrieved to social exclusion, improvement of their life situation and support of their integration on the labor market and in a society. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family assigned 363,000 Slovak crowns for realization of that Programme in 2004 - 2007. The Programme is preferably assessed for the communities with separated or segregated community (mainly for the Roma nationality citizens).

Sources of young people's incomes

Welfare benefits - their goal is to subsidize the citizen's insufficient income, in order to ensure the basic life conditions and to help persons in material need with the precondition of active participation of the citizen and/or person's which are considered together with the citizen (i.e. family members).

Unemployment benefits - Social insurance benefit which is provided in the case of loss of income due to the employer's activity, in direct consequence of job loss/unemployment and for ensuring minimum income during unemployment,

As at 31st December 2003 1,636 of the total number of 94,104 RU receiving unemployment benefits were young people and school graduates, this representing 1.73%.



Measures and appeals for the future

One of the priority goals of the Government of the Slovak Republic is to effectively ensure the utilization of funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) right from the start of the programme period 2004 – 2006. In order to ensure this, the national and query projects will be implemented under the conditions defined by the Department for Labor, Social Affairs and the Family of the Slovak Republic. In accordance with the §§ no. 11 and 12 of the Bill Nr. 5/2004 Coll. on the statute of employment services and relevant amendments the Department for Labor, Social Affairs and the Family carries the responsibility for the elaboration of national projects. Practically the process will consist of direct provision of financial support from the ESF in a co-financing scheme based on the submission of a Request for the granting of an irrevocable financial contribution. These sources will be used for completing the national policy in the area of employment and social inclusion.

Ensuring consistency and complementarity of policies in the area of education and vocational training as well as social and economic strategies in accordance with the Council of Europe Conclusions of 25 November 2003 on the development of human capital for social cohesion and competitiveness requires the creation of a National Council for the development of human capital under the government of the Slovak Republic as an inter-sectoral independent body resolving key questions of the entire education system, mainly in the area of vocational training, which will coordinate the cooperation of individual sectors, representatives of employers and employees, define development strategies and resolve basic questions related to education. It's necessary to define priorities, elaborate a strategy and a long-term concept of vocational preparation, formulate goals and principles, introduce a complex system of participation of social and other partners on the creation of the content, financing and monitoring of the quality of education at central, regional and local level. Its also necessary to define and specify in a new act on education (resp. an act on vocational training) the status of vocational training in relation to the founders, schools and social partners.

In order to eliminate the problems and insufficiencies in the relation between the education system and the labor market, its important to intensify the cooperation of the education system and the employer sphere with the aim to adjust the content and extent of education to the requirements of the labor market, unification of educational programmes leading to different educational levels as well as educational programmes for youth and adults into one school and ensure a high quality access to information for students within the framework of the national programme of building an informational society with emphasis on consultancy in areas related to education, labor market, career and working opportunities on a life-long basis. Another important step is to ensure coordination between vocational training and the labor market, monitoring and forecasting of the labor market development, monitoring the placement of graduates on the labor market and their success with emphasis on the interconnection of this system with schools. Also the further education should be strengthened in order to increase the adaptability of the work force, systems developed for the support of labor mobility, systems of life-long education supported in order to secure the development of adaptability and secondary education innovated in accordance with the principles of functioning of the European labor market.

4.4. The family – demographic, socio – economic and pedagogical aspects

Slovak society pays intensive attention to children, their education, legal status and the conditions in which they live Support is being provided to families which form the primary environment for a majority of children (more than 99 % of all children living in Slovakia), but also through a system of foster care provided to children who for various reasons cannot live in their own family (0,8 % of children in Slovakia).

Trends in the development of demographic processes with an impact on the population of children

The demographic development in Slovakia can be characterized by a long-term decrease in the birth rate with this trend lasting throughout the 1990s. All monitored indicators of natality support this conclusion. The number of children born alive has decreased from 79,989 in 1990 to 51,136 in 2001. For every 1,000 citizens there is a decrease from 15.1 to 9.5 children. The average number of children per woman is currently 1.2. The development of mortality is rather stable (less than 10 deaths per 1,000 citizens), and thus the trend is a gradual decrease in the new population (in 2001 fewer people were born than died) and its aging (the representation of children decreases and the representation of elderly grows).

Positive trends include a gradual increase in the age of mother at the time of childbirth: from 21-22 years in the 1980s to 24.1 years for first-time mothers and 26.5 years for all others in 2001). The tendency of a delayed natality into higher age of mothers also points to the fact, that most children are born to women in the age span of 25-29 (while before it was 20-24 years of age). Thus the youngest Slovak children have parents that are on average 3 years older.

As for abortion, there is a steady decrease in the number of abortions as of 2003, which begun in the beginning of the 90s. The overall number of abortions in the given year was 25,557 and in comparison with 2002 representing a decrease of 1.101 abortions. The general level decrease to 4,7 abortions per 1.000 citizens.

There is a significant change in the number of children born outside of marriage. Their prevalence is on the increase – in the year 2001 they represented 19.8% of all born children (10 .63). The number of children born outside of marriage per 1,000 citizens was 1.89. This means, that the number of children with only one parent is increasing. At the same time, women under the age of 19 have on average 40% of all children born outside of marriage .A majority of these women have basic or professional preparation level education (80%). There is also great disparity in the regional distribution of children born outsider of marriage. Most of them can be found in some of the regions of East and Central Slovakia including Spišská Nová Ves, Prešov, Poprad, Trebišov, Banská Bystrica and Rimavská Sobota. The highest prevalence of these children are reported among Roma mothers (often a household where both partners live together, have children, but get married only after achieving 18 years of age or remain unmarried).

Slovakia has long belonged to countries with a higher rate of marriage and lower number of divorced. As of the end of 1970s the number of marriages began to decrease. During the past few years there are approximately 5 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants (24 thousand new marriages per year). At the same time the average age of women and men at the moment of marriage increases. In 2001 the average age of the bride was 25.6 years for all weddings and 23.8 for those marrying for the first time. The average age of men increased to 28.6 years for all weddings and to 26.3 years for those marrying for the first time (at the beginning of 1990s the average age for women was 22.5 years and for men approximately 24 years).



The rate of divorces in the Slovak Republic slowly but gradually increases. In 2001 there were 1.82 divorces per 1,000 citizens. 9,817 marriages ended in a divorce, 80% of the requests for a divorce were filed by women. Approximately 30% of the divorcing marriages were childless, the remaining 70% were divorcing with children. A majority of the children remained with their mothers after the divorce.

The mentioned long-term trends are reflected in the structure of the families. The number of complete families is declining while the number of single parent families rises. According to the data from the census in 2001, two-parent families made up 56.4% of all households Slovak Republic (in 1991 it was 67.3% and in the year 1970 it was 78.4%). Two-parent families with children under 15 years made up 31.1% - 10% less than in 1991. The share of single-parent families increased by 11.9% (246,000), which represents in comparison with the situation 10 years ago an increase by 1.4% and in comparison with 1970 by 3.3%. Of all single parent families almost 90% were lead by a mother and only 10% by a father. The term single-parent family in Slovakia means in 90 percent of cases out of a hundred a single mother with one or several children.

There was also a change in the size of families – they became smaller. Complete families had in 2001 an average of 3.44 members, while in 1991 it was 3.52 members. A decrease was reported in the number of families with 3 and more children – from 18.5% to 12.8%. In 1991 there were 1.9 children per 1 family (family model with two children), but the new trends show a change towards a one child per family model. Children in the Slovak Republic most often have one or no sibling. In comparison with the situation as of the beginning of the 1990s the number of non-formal partnerships significantly rose (these are partnerships without marriage). These represented 30,500 - 2.6% of two-parent family households. The number of combined-income families from 2.9% in 1991 to current 7.8%. The economical situation forces many families to combining budgets and share resources.

Changes in the number and age structure of the population of children

The long-term decrease of natality is now having a visible impact on the population of children and youth. According to the statistical office Slovakia had as at 31.12.2000 1,480,240 citizens in the age 0-19 years, representing 27.4% of the population (in 1999 it was 28.1%). The number of children under the age of 18, which is according to the Convention the point separating childhood and adulthood, was lower by 9,000 (26% of the population). If we talk of children in the Slovak Republic, it concerns approximately ¼ of the population.

The number of youngest citizens (0-19 years of age) began to decrease as of 1990: at first by 15,000 per year, later as of 1996 by 40,000 per year. In the course of the 1990s the population of children decrease by 16.4%: in 1990 it represented 1,770,696, in 2000 it was already lower by 290,456. The decrease in the individual age groups began much sooner. The number of children under the age of 4 as been decreasing since 1980, the number of children in the age of 5-9 years as of 1987, the age group 10-14 decreased since 1989 while the age group 15-19 begun to decrease in numbers in 1995. The number of youngest children (0-4 years) thus decreased by 30%, children in the age of 5-9 by 22% and the number of 10-14 year olds by 16%. The oldest group decreased in size by 7%.

This trend initiated changes in the internal structure of the population of children. At the beginning of the 1980s the main share of the population was formed by the youngest children, while in the second half of the 1980s the middle section of the age structure increased in size. At the beginning of the 1990s the oldest segments became the largest (15-19 years of age). This segment formed in 2000 30% of all children. The population of children in the Slovak Republic is characteristic by the fact, that the younger the segment, the smaller its size (the share of youngest children is 19.3%, in the age of 5-9 its 23.6% and in the age of

10-14 its 27.1%). The internal structure of the children's population in Slovakia has been relatively stable and if the natality does not significantly increase (which is unlikely according to scientists) it will maintain its structure in the coming decade. Children under 9 make up 42.9% and from 10 to 19 57.1%. The gender structure reflects biological indicators – the boys in the population slightly prevail (51.1% boys, 48.9% girls). According to the data as of 1991, 90.8% live in complete families and 9.2% in single parent households.

The demographic development of the youngest segments of the population has its specific attributes based on ethnicity (and religion). Higher birth rate among the Roma population brings a high share of youngest children in the population, which is decreasing with age. The Roma family also has its specifics (a higher share of single parent families and non-married couples).

Sexual and reproductive behaviours of young people

There is no systematic research of sexual behaviour of the Slovak population that would monitor their attitudes towards contraceptives, abortions or sexual relations outside of marriage. Information of this type can be gained only through partial researches. According to the research of the agency Focus realized in 1997 and targeting Slovak women, over one third (35.2%) experiences their first sexual intercourse before the age of 17, while at the age of 18 its the case for more than a half of all women (56%). For some the start of sexual activity happens much sooner, under the age of 15 (0.9%). The premature start of sexual life is not accompanied by the use of contraceptives. Thus among the problems that the ill prepared young people have to face are not only unwanted pregnancies, but also a risk of sexual abuse, STDs and sexual violence.

Table no. 16:
Use of contraceptives at first intercourse according to selected attributes (in %)

	yes	no	Does not remember
Total	34	60	7
Under 15	0	100	0
15 – 17 years	39	57	4
18 – 19 years	31	63	5
20 – 21 years	28	58	4
22 – 23 years	27	66	7
24 and more years	32	68	0
According to education			
Basic	26	69	5
High school without certificate	31	60	9
High school with certificate on exam	35	56	9
University	46	47	6
According to education of the mother			
Basic	24	68	9
High school without certificate	31	60	8
High school with certificate on exam	44	49	7
University	59	36	5
Religious preferences			
Deeply religious	20	68	2
Religious	29	63	4
Without preference	46	49	1
atheist	40	53	2

Source: State and conditions of social protection of youth, SPŠPaR, 2004



The number of performed abortions in the Slovak Republic has been declining since 1989. During this period a decrease in the number of births by 36 % was reported together with a decrease in the number of abortions by 67 % (SPŠPaR 2004). In spite of a decrease in the number of abortions there is a relatively high number of unwanted pregnancies among women younger than 19 years of age.

Table no. 17:

Trend in the number of performed abortions

Year	abortion	Women		born	Of that
	number	Until 14 years of age	15 - 19	alive	To mothers younger than 19
1989	48 097	-	-	80 116	9 533
1990	47 901	31	3 159	79 989	9 638
1991	45 098	23	3 113	78 569	11 002
1992	41 923	15	3 263	74 640	10 706
1993	38 302	22	3 301	73 256	10 506
1994	34 432	60	3 339	66 370	8 915
1995	28 887	13	2 579	61 427	7 554
1996	23 863	19	2 238	60 123	7 051
1997	20 850	23	1 973	59 111	6 523
1998	19 395	15	1 853	57 582	6 044
1999	18 141	13	1 705	56 223	5 665
2000	16 580	10	1 701	55 151	5 231
2001	15 899	18	1 565	51 136	4 642
2002	15 301	8	1 504	50 841	4 580

Source: State and conditions of social protection of youth, SPŠPaR, 2004

General values and attitudes towards the family

Being married and forming a family has always played an important role for people living in Slovakia. According to the statistics more than 90 percent of Slovak citizens do get married at least once in their lives and an overwhelming majority of women do become mothers. The high priority assigned to marriage has held throughout the end of the 20th century. According to research of European values (Názory, 2001) almost 90 % of Slovak citizens do not consider marriage to be an outdated institution (a similar opinion was held for example in France only by 65 % of citizens, in Belgium or Luxembourg almost 70 %). In the case of children, more than 95 % of the population thinks that „in order for a child to grow up happily, it takes a home with both parents“ (in Scandinavia its only 60 %). Motherhood without a stable partner is approved by 23.3% of Slovak citizens (the average for Europe was 43.6 %, in Croatia over 66 % and in Island 81.9 %).

Another research (Taylor Nelson Sofres, 2002) has shown that in terms of family-related issues, the society of the Slovak Republic is the most „traditional“ of all Central European countries. Of all four compared countries the share of citizens holding negative opinions of a „partnership of a younger man with an older woman“ was highest in Slovakia (50 % in SR, while only 18 % in Poland). A similar result was seen in the case of denouncing „joint living before marriage“ (63 % in SR, 41 % in Poland), „parenthood outside of marriage“ (60 % in SR, 47 % in Poland), and in „voluntarily chosen childless marriage“ (76 % in SR, 41 % in Poland).

It's possible to assume that a certain differentiation of opinion is due to differences based on generations (opinions of young people) or ethnic background. International comparison shows that the Slovak

population maintains a high level of traditional attitudes towards marriage and children. This is confirmed among other things by the following opinions (Názory, 2001):

- Family is considered very important by 87.5 % ,
- A very important precondition of marital happiness is children 69.8% ,
- It's necessary to do everything possible for a child, even at one's own expense - 60.2 % ,
- The opinion that parents have their own life and no one can ask them to sacrifice it for the children was expressed by 18.1 % respondents,
- The opinion, that a person is not obliged to honour and love his/her parents who do not deserve it was agreed upon by 24.6 % ,
- The opinion that one has to honour and love the parents regardless of their shortcomings was declared by 73.6 % .

Economic and social situation of families with children, vulnerable groups of children and assistance tools

Income of households

The income scale of households at the beginning of the 1990s shifted towards lower income categories, with a missing strong middle class and weak representation of the lowest and highest income groups. In the course of the 1990s the number of the richest but also of the poorest households increased. The so-called middle and higher middle class remained under-represented. According to income statistics as of 2003 a majority of the households remained in the segment between life minimum and average income (almost 40 %), i. e. in the lower middle class. The second most numerous group is made up of households whose income remained between average and 1.5-times the average income (over 30 %). Only 15 % of households in Slovakia exceeded this limit, while 9 % - 11 % of households remained under the limit of the defined life minimum.

Differentiation of households based on income is rather high. The strongest differentiating factor is the growing number of household members and children. The households with a higher number of children than two significantly often drop into the lower income strata. Under the limit of the average income remained a majority of families with two children - almost 70 %, in the case of families with three children it was already more than 90 %. The number of children remains a significant factor in terms of decreasing the living standard of Slovak families.

Subjective evaluation of the income-related situation.

The subjective evaluation of the income-related situation fully corresponds with the results of the statistics. A majority of the citizens places themselves closely above or under the limit of relative poverty. Richness or extreme poverty in self-evaluation occur rarely (only 2 - 4 %). Up to 41.6 % of Slovak citizens evaluate their income as barely enough for basic food and needs (SŠPR 2004). Research has shown that families with children not only have to face an actually more difficult situation but they also report an increased exposure to poverty. Similar results are also reported by the longitudinal research of ÚIPS (2004), where 62.9% of young people 15 to 26 years old think that the living standard of their family is at the border limit of being able to provide for basic needs (61.8 %). Belonging to the highest „economically stable“ was declared by only 1.5 - 2 % respondents. Differences are reflected according to place of residence (residents of cities reporting a better situation), the educational status (higher evaluation of university degree) and family status (young people from incomplete families as well as young people who established their own family - worse evaluation).



Increased attention should be paid to the socio-economic living conditions of some groups of families with dependent children.

In families with dependant children family budget needs to be used in connection to the preparation of children for occupation. Nowadays around 10 per cent of secondary school students and almost 50 per cent of university students studying outside of their hometowns use the accommodation and catering services of boarding houses. The presence of a secondary school student or university student in the family presents a considerable sum of regular and long-term expenses for the family (for food, accommodation, transport, school materials, sanitary materials, clothing, and so on). Only the expenses for accommodation, nutrition and transport for children studying outside of their home towns is higher by 600 – 1,000 SK a month on average for one child compared to families whose children are studying in the place of their home town. Today the studying outside the home town is almost unbearable for about 26 per cent of secondary school students families and for around 16 per cent of university students families and the studying outside of home town is handled only with difficulties by around 16 percent of secondary school students families and by 39 per cent of university students families. The awareness of financial demands related to education of children is even higher in one-parent families. Families where the expenses connected to the children's education don't present major financial difficulties are in minority (around 4 per cent of university student families and around 19 per cent of secondary school student families). In such families parents with university education and with a higher income per family member prevail. The stated information was gained through continual research (Association for work and family survey). Therefore we can state that these reflect a stable trend and absolutely point to the need of supporting families with dependant children in order to prevent social exclusion of a significant group of young people who would lose their chance for their own personal development and successful social integration.

A considerable part of Slovak Roma families can be considered, based on the indicators of social and demographic behaviour, as living in long-term social exclusion based on the ethnic principle. A relatively high percentage of the Roma families live in poverty. Particularly children from Roma communities form a significant group of those that are dependent on social assistance and in need of additional protection. This group of children makes up a majority of the group of dependant children who do not continue with further education after the compulsory school attendance. They tend to enter partnerships or marriages right away, becoming parents a lot sooner than the majority of our population. Due to insufficient education and professional preparation they belong to the relatively numerous group of unemployed, with a poorer position on the labor market. Their basic needs are met almost only from welfare benefits, thus becoming unable to move beyond the borders of social exclusion and their current lifestyle. The questions related to their effective integrations remain unanswered not only on the national level but also in the international context. When taking into account the partial advancements in the demographic behaviour one must conclude that the group of families mentioned above will gradually change their traditional behavioural patterns which are currently viewed as unacceptable by majority population in the future, but it will take generations. The provision of support and help for these families should become a priority of family policy both on local or regional level.

The presence of a **person with a severe health disability** in the family normally changes the style and way of life of its members, increasing demand for mutual help as well as the help and support from public means.

Problematic situations in families

Several studies from recent years show that Slovak families and households continue in tendencies recorded in the '90s of the last century. Low income level, dependence on two incomes in most families, constant increasing of living costs, which is only insufficiently compensated by salary increases – this all creates the basis for the persistence of the main family problem in SR - financial shortage. According to data from SŠPR, worsening of financial situation was reported by approximately 60.3% of respondents in 2003. Slight improvement of financial situation was reported only by 4.0 – 9.0% of respondents (SŠPR 2004, p. 57). The most significant worsening of household financial situation was reported by respondents with lower education, unemployed, unqualified manual workers and those being at home or on maternity leave. It can be said that weak work position of household member on labor market, eventually position out of this market are significant factors, affecting (negatively) evaluation of financial situation of a household. While, until 2000, a worsening of financial situation was recorded also in multi-member families (5 and more members), while the share of those households, whose financial situation has extremely worsened in recent years, has gradually decreased. Currently, large part of all household types perceives their financial situation as worsened or significantly worsened. With regard to income per households member, the financial situation has most expressively worsened in household with the lowest income. More than half (55.2%) of respondents expects a worsening of their household financial situation in the coming period.

The second most frequent problem of current families is shortage of time. In this case there is direct relation with amount of children: the more children are in a family, the larger is the perceived time stress. More than half of respondents – 54.0% report permanent or frequent time stress in their families.

The perception of relational problems by respondents is overridden by existencial problems (finances, living and work). According to actual studies, the biggest problems are in two-child families – twice as much as in childless families.

Re-occurring problem in Slovak families, showing a growing tendency, is the frequent or long-term absence of one of the parents. The so called “one-week trips for work” are known from Slovak’s history – leaving for work with construction groups into cities, Czech Republic, etc. This problem persists also in the middle of the first decennium; however, its character and intensity have changed. On one side it became a solution with respect to providing income for families in regions with high unemployment rate and shortage of work possibilities, namely in eastern Slovakia. Here, due to necessity to earn money, absence of one of parents becomes really long-term – several months to one year. However, this problem is known also to trader’s and businessmen’s families, where work duties take sometimes too much time away from family. Seriousness of this problem is measured namely by effect of long-term absence of parent on family relations, mainly on education and socialization of children.

Family strategies for solution of financial problems vary and their proportions have changed during the decade. Jobs shortage in SR is often solved by leaving for work to distant cities or abroad, resulting in long-term absence of one of parents. This negatively affects partnership relations and education of children. Besides long-term leaving for work there are also efforts to obtain additional sources of income. Another frequent way is to grow own plants and to restrict paid services (so called service self-saturation). Some families had to start restraining consumption. Many families with unwanted children depend on social benefits.



Domestic violence and violence committed against children

For research purposes, domestic violence is being characterized as „any violence, at which victim and offender are or were in the past in any personal contact”. Domestic violence is a serious problem, although not a new issue in Slovakia. It started to be the topic of public discussion in the last years mainly thanks to activities of non-governmental organizations. Currently the media get involved in presentation of specific cases, professionals openly discuss this problem, there are organizations created to help victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence issues became a part of the public political agenda. Several laws have been amended in order to treat domestic violence issues from the legislative point of view – they were defined as crimes and relevant procedures were adopted to deal with them. While the Slovak population thought that there was a high level of indifference to certain violent situations (damaging and destroying of public things – 40.5%, psychical violence of woman against her partner – 38.8%, victimization on workplace – 38.1%, ruthlessness against old people – 38.0%), they think that offenders are reproached in cases of such offences as abusing of parent by child, abusing of child by parent and sexual harassment of women (SPŠPaR, 2003). As many as 57.4% of population think that public opinion „very” or „rather” reprobates the abuse of a child by a parent.

Attitudes towards the punishment of children

The use of different kinds of punishment by parents and other caretakers have a long history. In the past the use of different punishments was wide spread and no one called them violence against children. This began to change in result of activities realized by health workers and due to a broadening discussion on the rights of children. Slovak citizens believe that adequate tools of child rearing include punishments like „a hand on the bottom from time to time“ (98.6 %), „forbidding a favourite activity“ (92.0 %), „punishment by work“ (82.0 %), „refusal to buy something“ (84.5 %). A more negative attitude prevailed in the case of more severe forms of punishment like „denying food“ (87.1 % negative attitudes), „repeated beating“ (75.5 %), „kneeling on a piece of wood“ (64.4 %), „beating with a belt or kitchen utensils“ (56.9 %), or „not talking to the child“ (60.8 %). According to research realized in 2003, the tolerance towards punishment of children in families increased with growing age, older people were more benevolent. With increasing level of education the share of individual tolerating punishment of children decreased. The most significant differences were voiced in the case of gender-based division of tasks and rights among parents. Among the individuals who denied the opinion stating that „couples should divide rights and obligations equally“, there was a higher prevalence of tolerant attitudes towards punishing children and vice versa. (SPŠPaR 2003, p. 31).

According to the results of research (Bakošová 2000) violence occurs in all types of families. Frequently repeated factor was the unemployment of one caretaker, dependency on alcohol and drugs, higher prevalence of diseases. From the point of view of psychological environment there was often a tense atmosphere between the partners. The cultural environment was characterised as non-stimulating, with low quality of life, low education level of parents and ill-preparedness for partnership and parenthood. The research confirmed that both genders, girls and boys, were equally endangered. Girls were often abused by mothers, boys by fathers. From the point of view of age, the most endangered group was that of the 11 – 15 year olds.

In families where violence occurred, the relationships between parents and children were dominated by a lack of understanding, superficiality, a strict hierarchy, under-evaluation of children, humiliation, manipulations and revenge.

The most frequent form of abuse is neglect. From the point of view of violations of rights of children in the family the research has proven that the most-often violated right is the right of children to love of both parents.

Based on the concept of the non-substitutable position and significance of the family unit in the individual and social life, in 1996 the Government of the Slovak Republic passed a new concept of state family policy, reflecting the basic position and function of a family in a democratic society. The state family policy is involved mainly in the field of protection of the family and its members, provision of socio-economic conditions necessary for family sustainability, in the field of children and youth education and care, preparation for marriage and parenthood and health prevention targeting particular family members.

The communal politics should also contribute to the successful realisation of family policy. In a certain way, communal politics affect all families that live in the community. It consists of the most various forms of activities in favour of the family. The self-government suitably complements the activities of governmental institutions, various associations, initiatives and churches.

As of 1991 the Center of support and psychological services was established as a directly managed organization of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family. It is made up of a network of regional branches placed all over the Slovak Republic, providing professional support and psychological services in the area of partnership, marital and other relations, personal problems and crises situations. This network is a tool of implementation of the national family policy, aimed at providing support to families. Currently the institute is in the process of transformation.

The main areas of responsibility at the level of communal politics include the following forms of family services provision:

- services of pre-school institutions with day-long care for children of working parents;
- provision of suitably protected areas for children's play;
- provision of housing with consideration to the particular needs of the family and their old and sick members;
- organization of neighbourhood help networks, which are the most flexible forms of social help preceding state interference with its precautions and social benefits;
- family counselling and preparation of young people for a life in their own families;
- children and youth protection from threats such as violence presented in the mass-media, child abuse, alcohol, drugs, and others;
- financial support of multi-children families and families in social need – it can be realized by discounts on transportation fees, discounts when buying building sites, when moving out, contributions to culture, family recreation and so on.

The socio-economical living conditions of some family groups with dependant children deserve much greater attention than they are getting at the moment.

Chances for an independent living

The highest expense in the life of a starting family is getting a flat or another form of housing enabling the family to independent life, which in Slovakia is considered to be the precondition for the future stability of the family, not only in towns but also in the countryside. As a large number of young families can not afford the investment, they are often forced to stay with their parents. The countryside offers more opportunities to young families in this respect. The process of arranging a household exposes the inter-family solidarity: in the countryside the access to building sites tend to be easier, the offer of voluntary labor power from members of bigger families helps in the building process, extended families tend to help



with furnishing and so on. In the towns, the frequently seen model is based on participation of members of the extended family taking the form of financial and mortgage guarantees for housing mortgages. The flat prices reach extreme sums of money in relation to people's incomes (e.g. in 2004 the price for 1 m² of flat area in the capital city is 2.4 times higher than the average income). What are the solutions available to families in a situation characterised by a lack of housing? The answer for most families lies in mortgages, various types of home retail savings (with the constantly falling state bonus) and the contribution from the State Housing Fund.

Almost all types of mortgage credits as well as the Housing Fund assume a high share of own deposit. Towns and villages try to help by creating temporary-housing projects for young families (providing homes for app.6 years). But their resources are often very limited. The building of houses where flats can be rented by young families is considered a priority and politically promoted as the most advantageous (even though economically less effective) solution. Due to market limitations, the building industry in the area of estates for rental is developing slowly. Also the high prices, which escalated in Slovakia during the pre-accession years and after EU membership, are an obstacle. The non-governmental organisations providing services to families and some politicians appeal in this difficult housing-related situation in favour of the creation of new young family support tools, for example resembling the traditional "newly-weds' credits".

According to the population census, the basic characteristics of housing conditions can provide a certain vision of young people's chances for mutual living with parents if this alternative was accepted: Family houses which enable mutual living the most represent 49.2 percent of the housing fund and their share continually falls as of 1970, while the share of flats rises. The total average surface of 1 flat in m² is 83.9 and still rises, the number of the inhabitable rooms per 1 flat rose from 2.9 to 3.3 from 1991 and 2001. The number of inhabitants for one room fell only by 0.1 in the same period of time. The share of flats with two and more households rose from 1991 from 11.8 to 18.8 percent.

The number and share of four and more roomed flats rises with the new housing construction from 1998 until 2002 (except for 2001). Those are the flats that satisfy the needs of the more well-off segments of the population.

It isn't surprising that young people express such scepticism in the given circumstances. According to the results from the 2001-2002 survey (Association for labor and family survey, 2003) up to 68,1 percent of single respondents stated that the housing conditions are the major reason limiting the number of children they wished to have. The married stated this problem in 59.2 percent of answers. The scepticism of young people leads very often to postponing of marriage to a later age and to living in partnerships outside of marriage. In 2001 it was about 10,000 couples more than it was in 1991.

Two basic attitudes towards human life and its protection are significantly present in the Slovak society: pro-life attitudes oriented towards the protection of life and dignity, emphasizing respect for each human being regardless of his/her age. The philosophical background and pro-life theses were presented at two big international pro-life congresses in the capital of the Slovak Republic at the beginning of the 1990s. This attitude is upheld by a number of civil non-governmental organisations which work in favour of strengthening families in their efficiency, as well as by individual family members and Christian churches.

On the other hand, a part of the women organisations and non-governmental organisations work in favour of the pro-choice philosophy, actively advertising contraception and the right of the women to choose. Some university teachers uphold the pro-choice attitudes in favour of more liberal abortion rules. The supporters of both attitudes hold discussions on the pages of main newspapers, in the radio or television as long as the media offer space for these discussions. Youth follows similar discussions mostly on the Internet. The Internet plays an important role in the formation of the young people's attitudes, which absorbs the pro-life values, but also tends to prefer more comfortable solutions when solving personal problems, that

are often in contradiction with their declared values. Young people who acknowledge religious affiliations tend to have more stable attitudes towards the value of marriage and human life. When it comes to active attitude formation, churches take an active role through religious communions, university-based pastoral centres and activities of children and youth organisations. In spite of the radical reduction of young peoples interest in formal membership in organisations, the youth organisations of this type have a relatively high membership base and provide interesting activities for children that include non-formal education.

An initiative launched by non-governmental organisations which are represented by specialists engaged in strengthening of family functioning has been functioning in Slovakia for three years now. The activists in cooperation with the Methodical-pedagogical centres organise seminars for teachers from all over Slovakia dealing with the topic "Education on marriage and parenthood, sexuality in freedom and responsibility". It is a different point of view on sexuality and partnerships than the media usually presents. It is a combination of sound scientific knowledge and results of researches. It is based on the assumption that the young people have the right to complete information embedded in the context of the relations of women and men, discovering the whole truth about life.

The education towards sexual health, as the World Health Organization defines it, is part of the ethics education classes, which also cover the interdisciplinary topic of marriage and parenthood in the school education system. The pedagogical aim is to provide specific information and experiences that will enable young people to make informed choices and learn the benefits of postponing sexual activity until the period of personal maturity, which is the precondition for a lasting partnership.

The concept of education towards marriage and parenthood in the schools has an inter-disciplinary character. It includes ethics, social, psychological and biological knowledge interconnected with human reproduction and human relations.

The elements of education towards marriage and parenthood are already included in the Programme of education and guidance for children in kindergartens. In the school year 1998/1999 a new concept of education towards marriage and parenthood was presented at elementary and secondary schools and became an integral part of the classes on ethics and religion.

Many governmental and non-governmental institutions, including the churches, have programmes aimed at influencing the young people's attitudes and choices. These programmes are either thematic or focus on life skills acquisition. They can be organised as onetime events or as long-term programmes. Much can be said about the number of events, publications, programmes and projects, which were realized in this field during the past 10 years.

Gaps in provision of education towards marriage and parenthood are obvious in institutional care and institutions of social services, mainly in relation to mentally disabled children and young people.

Institutions for counselling and psychological services have a lengthy tradition in the field of preparation for marriage, responsible parenthood and in solving problems of marital and family relations. The complex network of these institutions in the Slovak Republic and their free-of-charge services ensure their accessibility practically to everyone who decides to use them.

It is necessary to pay more attention to the education of children from secluded communities with respect to responsible parenting. In certain marginalised communities, it isn't uncommon to see underage girls giving birth, sometimes leaving the baby in the hospital. This coupled with early exposure to partnerships and



cohabitation of young teenagers, which are often enhanced by the lack of purposeful activity of unemployed young people with low education living in the circumstances of social exclusion. One of the necessary steps to be taken is a persistent campaign helping Roma parents to understand the importance of education for their children. The society and mainly local bodies of public administration must help with providing education and with the creation of opportunities for the meaningful utilization of the acquired skills of young Roma people.

Major causes of family failure

We studied the main causes of family failure based on data available for the given periods. Main themes from the past still prevail, including issues of child neglect, disinterest in the child (this indicator fell by 12 cases, see table No.2), educational problems in the family (this indicator rose by 34 cases, which means by 15 percent, see table No.2). The rise of causes of family failure due to economical problems and because of housing loss is very clear, the number of these families rose by 12 (7 percent) in 2004, see table 2.

Table no.18:

Main cause of family failure	from 01.01.2003 until 31.08.2003	from 01.01.2004 until 31.08.2004
Child neglect , disinterest for the child	376	364
Education problems	187	221
Economic problems and housing loss	158	170
Health problems	30	33
Drug problems	16	24
Others	43	56

Source: NGO Smile as a gift

Withdrawal of children from families under the authority of legal acts

Nowadays, there are three basic legal acts in Slovakia based on which it is possible to withdraw the child from the family: preliminary measures, orders of institutional care and orders of protected upbringing/ education.

In 2004, based on the preliminary measures, there were 159 (24 percent) more children withdrawn than in 2003. This measure is used mainly in cases where the health and life of the child is seriously endangered and it's essential to immediately withdraw the child from the pathological environment of the family. The positive fact is that the number of children that were ordered institutional education has fallen by 45 in the studied period. Compared to 2003 the number of children who were ordered a protected upbringing has risen by 15 cases which means by more than 100%!

Table no.19:

Number of children who were withdrawn from the family based upon :	from 01.01.2003 until 31.08.2003	from 01.01.2004 until 31.08.2004
Preliminary measures	513	672
Orders of institutional upbringing	291	246
Orders of protected upbringing	12	27

Source: NGO Smile as a gift

The age of children at the time of withdrawal

Alarming is the fact that we observed the highest increase in the age group 0 – 3 years. During the studied period (see table No.4) the number of children in this category rose by 68 (19 percent). A rising

tendency is also in the group of children who were withdrawn at 3 – 15 years, that is by 27 (6 percent) and also the number of 15+ year olds rose by 19 (15 percent).

Table no.20:

Number of children according to their age in the time of the order entry for institutional upbringing, protected upbringing or the impetus for preliminary measures	from 01.01.2003 until 31.08.2003	from 01.01.2004 until 31.08.2004
0 – 3	293	361
3 – 15	421	448
15 and older	110	129

Source: Smile as a gift

Substitute family care and institutional upbringing

The forms of the substitute family care system in Slovakia include:

- adoption
- foster care
- substitute personal care (entrusted to another citizen than parent)
- custody, guardianship

The issues of family, forms of substitute family care and issues related to the withdrawal of children from the family environment are currently subject to three basic legal norms. These are:

- Bill Nr. 94/1963 Coll. of the codex about family as amended by the later decrees
- Bill Nr. 195/1998 Coll. of the collection of laws about social assistance as amended by the later decrees
- Bill Nr. 198/1993 Coll. about school institutions as amended by the later decrees

Currently a reform in the area of family law and substitute care is being prepared in the Slovak Republic. The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic elaborated a proposal of a new Bill on Family and the plenary of the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted the Act on the 10.12.2004. It will come into effect as of 01. April 2005.

The new amendment of the bill brings the long-awaited solutions, which the social practice was waiting for. Among other things it determines a compendium of the parental rights and duties, it terminologically differentiates (in accordance with the international law) the terms guardian and custodian, it eliminates the fragmentation of the legal concept of substitute care.

The draft bill on socio-legal protection of children and social curatorship guarantees the execution of the actions of the socio-legal protection of children and social curatorship for each child who is living in Slovakia. At the same time the draft bill modifies the position of a child, the rights of children and their implementation in the area of socio-legal protection of children and social prevention. The draft of the legal regulation introduces the term “young adult” because this age group of young people is considered vulnerable.

The legal regulation further modifies the obligation of provision of psychological help to the child whose parents are divorcing, it widens opportunities for the assistance to endangered children, to families as well as to adult individuals, introduces to social curatorship a new regulation involving the institutes of custody and guardianship. This also entails assistance to the unaccompanied underaged, and it provides regulations for the substitute family environment and specifies the regulations of international adoption.



At the same time, the possibilities of implementation of the socio-legal protection of children and social prevention by non-governmental institutions are widened (e.g. in the field of instructional measures, international adoptions etc.)

Tab. no.21 :

Children placed in substitute families

Form/year	2000	2001	2002	2003
Legal adoption	404	400	412	364 (26)
Child confined to the care of somebody	****	****	3 450	3 823
In custodial and guardian care	2 581	2 819	2 817	3 054
In substitute families in total	****	****	6 679	7 241

**** data was not available Source: NGO Smile as a gift

The following table and graph present an overview of the number of applicants (direct relatives as well as strangers) for various forms of substitute parenthood in Slovakia. A significant fact is captured in the lines 3 and 4, expressing the high share of grandparents and other relatives applying for substitute care.

Tab. no. 22:

Overview of the number of children placed in the SPS and number of persons they are placed with for the year 2003:

	Year 2003	Number of children	Number of persons/families
1.	Domestic adoption	338	246 married couples
			13 individuals
2.	International adoption	26	Not t registered yet
3.	Entrustment to another citizen than parent	3.823	3,116 grandparents
			582 other relatives
			125 strangers
4.	Foster care	2.497	891 grandparents
			463 other relatives
			524 strangers
5.	Guardianship	557	164 grandparents
			237 other relatives
			58 strangers

Source: NGO Smile as a gift

One of the most endangered and most vulnerable social groups is the group of children who are placed and grow up in boarding type care institutions such as:

- orphanages
- special boarding elementary schools
- technical boarding institutions
- re-educational children's homes
- diagnostic centres
- social service homes

The environment in a boarding-type care institutions has many disadvantages, of which the most significant are the following:

- the non-existence of a reference person leads to the inability to establish suitable fulfilling relations with peers, adults but also with little children and it causes a significant disadvantage in the future formation of partnerships and other social interaction
- unmet developmental needs of children growing up in this kind of environment can result in their inability to meet the needs of their own children
- preference for group work due to operational reasons and lack of opportunities for individual work with the children
- high anonymity of the boarding type of child care
The “public” environment of the boarding house doesn’t provide an opportunity for personal privacy and ownership of “personal space”, absence of preconditions necessary for the fulfilment of basic psychological needs (e.g. desire to be loved, the need for fellowship, safety and trust)
- un-stimulating and artificial environment resulting in weaker school performance, even by children with sufficient mental potential
- appearance of negative influences of collective upbringing – such as e.g. bullying, thefts, lower awareness of personal responsibility, loss or non-existence of personal intimacy
- a child growing up in this kind of environment often lacks basic skills .

These deficits of the institutional care environment disqualify the boarding type of upbringing and care provision. They don’t provide the child with basic conditions for successful growth and development (mainly from the psychological point of view), and fail to create space for observation of the rights embodied in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (due to reasons explained above).

Recommendations for the realisation of family policy

- Help and support to children and youth should be differentiated with regard to demographic tendencies and changes in the structure of families as well as regional differences
- In view of the social traditions of our society, support should be targeting those families with children overcoming difficult life situations and support high quality family relations, especially those between parents and children (individual rights, conflict resolution and mediation etc.)
- in the area of social services, it should not copy the activities implemented by the state, but cover „white spots“
- Provide support to families, which cumulate risk factors
- Even families which are not dependent on social benefits would welcome support in caring for their children
- Preventive activities and programmes for children who leave the education system with basic (resp. unfinished basic) education or simple vocational training
- support of child poverty research, which is inadequate in Slovakia
- realise continual monitoring and evaluation of adopted laws from the point of view of their impact on the children, currently absent
- from the point of view of human rights it’s important to strengthen education aimed at the elimination of gender stereotypes in the family and society in general (gender sensitive education)
- Education on the rights of children should be expanded (accessibility for all children, inclusion in after-school programmes)
- in view of the specifics of demographic development it’s necessary to strengthen sexual education and parental education of young families, future parents (including planned parenthood, parental responsibilities, democracy in the context of family relations,...)



- support the cooperation of institutions in the process of helping children in institutional care, especially when leaving children's homes
- it is necessary to motivate children towards education and to think through their job choice – access of children and young people in institutional care to education and consultancy has to be differentiated and requires individualized approach.
- carry out interdisciplinary research and monitoring of children who suffer from abuse in families.
- promote the needs of children in the media, and through other communication channels (leaflets, brochures) for children and parents
- cooperate with universities and students of faculties preparing for helping professions in the course of organisation of specific educational events
- provision of the gained data on the needs of children to individual ministries, the government and the parliament

4.5. Leisure time and youth

Leisure time plays an increasingly important role in people's lives. It's not just about socializing, the compensatory potential is increasingly gaining acknowledgement (balancing work and school load) together with the preventive functions (leisure time activities provide an environment for acquisition of new skills and transfer of values, thus playing an important role in the prevention of negative social phenomenon).

Activities that have a passive character have a dominant position in the structure of leisure time activities preferred by young people. That is the reason why there are many opinions that young people in our society don't use their leisure time in a suitable way. According to the research and its results (UIPS/2003), nowadays, boys and girls in Slovakia spend their leisure time listening to music, watching TV and by going out with their friends in pairs or in informal groups. They actively entertain themselves with various forms of manual work (handicrafts, jobs around the house gardening). Sport should belong to one of the most important activities of young people, but only 24 percent of children and youth do sport regularly, 24.9 percent just occasionally. Up to 30% of them don't do active sport at all. Among all the sport types, the most popular are ball games, then hiking, cycling, roller-skating, winter sports and martial arts. Only 4.8 percent of youth regularly go to fitness clubs or do body building. A minimum number of children and young people play tennis, table tennis or squash regularly (0.3 per cent).

Young people rarely spend their free time actively. Only 15.7 per cent of Slovak young people prefer to be active regularly, while 35.1 percent do get active during free time, occasionally. Out of this number there are 86.2 percent of children up to 14 years and 75% of adolescents who prefer individual forms of entertainment, which means spending time alone or with friends, depending on him/herself. Almost a half of children and youth (48.4 percent) don't have any spare-time activity at all. The deviation from the organised forms of spare-time activities has been increasing after 1989. Before this year up to 80 percent of children and youth participated in organised spare-time activities in their leisure time through unified, mass children and youth organisations and specialised institutions for education in leisure time for children and youth.

Factors influencing leisure time use

- **Democratisation of the social life**

In the last decennium of the 20th century the contours of the leisure time sphere started to change to the sphere of freedom. This brought an equality of opportunities for all children and young people, the possibility to relatively freely choose the focus and ways of spending leisure time. Many young people weren't ready for such a transformation in perception of the leisure time. They often didn't see the expanding freedom and autonomy as an opportunity to take responsibility for their behavior. There was an increase of decadent forms of spending leisure time, formation and activity of extremist groups and, on the other hand, the escape of many young people into passivity and isolation.

- **Professionalism of leisure time activities**

Today, the most important thing in life of the young people is, according to research employment, a well-paid job, if possible. The age at which the children have to work on gaining skills is dropping, in direct correlation with the increasing demands of the labor market. If 30 years ago an individual became a specialist in his area of professional expertise at the age of around 40, today the "margin" moves 10 years back. People start to judge their success in life according to their achievements (financial and social). They devote more and more energy and time in to the growth of their own professional competency. Its requirements also influence the choice of leisure time activities. Hobbies and interests of individuals correspond with their employment orientation, other leisure time activities are oriented towards person's health preservation and relaxation. For example, an individual will often prefer to study specific books or articles after work rather than reading novels, s/he studies languages, improves his/her computer skills, and so on. He/she also manages to fit a fitness centre, sauna, beauty saloon or other relaxation activities into their weekly schedule. The parents seem to get more interested in leisure time activities which strengthen the future professionalism of their children, e.g. language or art education but also membership in sports clubs (with the perspective/vision to become a professional). The alarming number of children wandering pointlessly through the streets with key changes round their necks isn't just due to lack of financial resources in the family or the cause of an excessive workload of parents' but sometimes it is due to the fact that parents do not consider the existing offer of organised leisure activities as suitable for their child from the point of view of their future professional orientation and therefore aren't willing to pay huge sums of money for these services of the specialised educational institutions.

- **Individualisation in leisure time use**

For an individual, the working hours represent a sphere of duty, which define limits for his/her living standard. At the same time it is the sphere of life where the external determinants reign over the activities of an individual, with a different level of organization and inferiority to labor standards. Past years' experience shows that youth prefers non-organised activities in their leisure time to organised activities and spends their leisure time rather individually than in organized groups. The formal organization as an attribute of a voluntarily-chosen duty, is being respected less and less among young people in their leisure time.

- **Social limitation of an individual at in choosing of time-and activities**

The choice of leisure activities is nowadays limited mainly by the social situation of a family. The existing social differentiation represents a problem, to which none of the existing educational and leisure-time systems are well adjusted. So far the institutions for children and youth's leisure time hardly consider the bad social situation of some families (mainly in the form of lower fees for parents) because the present legislative doesn't encourage it.



- **The development of leisure time industry and trade**

The predominant tendencies towards uniformity and non-critical acceptance of behavioural patterns lead towards the fact that young people only rarely search for the sources of their creativity in their own person, but they expect that their close or distant environment will entertain them. They often adopt the attitude that it is enough to accept what is being offered. At the same time the commercialization of the forms of spending leisure time leads to frustration among young people because of limited financial possibilities of many Slovak families that aren't able to fund the attractive offers of leisure activities.

Young people today are the first "post-revolution" generation who grew up in an atmosphere of widening opportunities for spending their leisure time. They could really choose, with the help of their parents, from the "offer" of various institutions, or they could create the conditions for their interests themselves. At the same time, they balanced between the relatively easy access to information, between the pressure of the commercialized leisure time industry and the traditional form of spending leisure time. As time passed, the whole offer became less and less accessible for those from low-income and socially-secluded families.

According to the survey indications (UIPS 2003) a majority of young people (77.6%) is content with the way they spend their leisure time, while every second young person reports being bored sometimes. These mainly include men, mostly young and single. Boredom is reported significantly more often by young people of younger age groups. An increase in reported active and meaningful leisure time spending is interconnected with the level of completed education. In general, content prevails in the context of feelings related to leisure time. The mentioned situation is similar in all regions of Slovakia, while the expressed content with the leisure time spending is the strongest in the case of young people from the regions of Trenčín and Nitra. Young people living in the capital city of Bratislava and the region of the second largest city Košice express their discontent in this regard most frequently (27.1% and 27.6%). This fact might be related to the large scale of opportunities available to young people, which are not being utilised by the young people, who are at the same time troubled by lack of free time due to a high workload.

The reasons for the discontent with the leisure time opportunities were monitored through the research conducted by UIPS (2003). The mentioned reasons for discontent are of personal as well as objective character. The objective reasons included inadequate opportunities and lacking financial resources necessary for the realisation of their interests and needs in this area, but also a dominant influence of parents on the leisure time of some students. Several young people searched for the reasons of their discontent within themselves. They acknowledged having problems with use of free time, reporting that they „often do nothing“, or „use their free time for useless things“, respectively „often get bored“. A further reason for discontent lies in the stereotypical use of leisure time, some young people lack the strong will that is necessary for breaking these stereotypes. We believe that the level of expressed content with the use of leisure time is an impulse for further thought by leisure time service providers and parents. On the basis of data gained through research conducted in the past few years, it is possible to divide the young people who express content with their leisure time spending into two basic groups. The first group is made up of young people, who use their leisure time actively, are involved in activities that provide an opportunity for self-realisation and thus generate positive feelings. The second group is made up of young people whose needs and interests are not highly differentiated and thus they are content with spending their leisure time as comfortably as possible. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that young people evaluate their leisure time according to their own criteria. Feelings of content or discontent are an individual reflection of a personal set of expectations and opinions related to leisure-time opportunities.

16.6 percent of individuals stated that they attended some interest groups even though they did not have any of the hobbies mentioned. Attendance of activities organised in interest-based groups decreased with the age of respondents. As shown in the following table, out of respondents with stable interest, up to 74.9 percent of 14-year-old students regularly or sometimes attended interest groups, as for older age groups the number of respondents was lowering and oscillating between 55.1 and 45.7 percent.

Table no. 23 :
Do you have a hobby - yes

		Attendance of interest groups					
		Yes, regularly		Yes, sometimes		No	
		abs. no.	%	abs. no.	%	abs. no.	%
Age	til 14	303	61,5%	66	13,4%	124	25,1%
	15 to 17	1314	36,4%	675	18,7%	1619	44,9%
	18 to 20	348	28,2%	220	17,8%	667	54,0%
	21 to 23	24	20,7%	29	25,0%	63	54,3%
	24 to 26	16	28,6%	15	26,8%	25	44,6%

The survey data confirmed the interest of secondary school students and university youth in organised forms of interest activities or study groups, ensembles and clubs. The presented results evoke a development in trends, which have been adapting to the changes in lifestyle and needs of youth at the beginning of the third millennium.

Nowadays a frequently used way of spending leisure time is going out with friends of similar age. 65% of respondents were completely satisfied with this way of relaxing and 19.2% were satisfied only partially. According to the survey, we can conclude that young people in general spend time in groups for other reasons than just not having any other opportunity to socialize with other young people. Only 3% out of all respondents claimed joining groups only as an “emergency” solution. Such informal meetings with friends do not exclude other organized forms of spending leisure time. 61.9% of all respondents were practicing their hobbies through organized opportunities and at the same time, informally meeting with their friends. Only 12.3% of respondents were not socializing within groups of young people. There were no significant distinctions between boys and girls. Slight differences were distinguished within particular age groups. The oldest respondents from the chosen reference group aged 24 – 26 did not tend to bond to informal groups as much as the younger ones did. The fact, that it is the age of finishing university or other forms of full-time studies, finding a job and taking on family commitments, might offer some kind of an explanation why it is harder to find leisure time to be spent with friends.

The motives for socializing varied within each age group. On the contrary to all respondents, the number of those who considered being part of some group as “a virtue of necessity” increased in the group of 14-years olds (4.9%). When looking for reasons for this, we have to consider the boys’ and girls’ behavior at this age in a complex manner. It is the period of changing from elementary schools to secondary schools, meaning not only change of place but also being faced by higher achievement related requirements. The future lifestyles of these young people are formed by other factors as well. Many of them leave their hometowns, already existing groups of friends and schoolmates slowly break up, and the conditions for leisure time and requirements for separate decisions both change. All this effects boys’ and girls’ view of reality, their visions and expectations of the future and also brings about certain corrections of their interests and preferences.



Table no. 24:

Do you have a group of friends you meet with? / Indicate frequency of meetings with them.

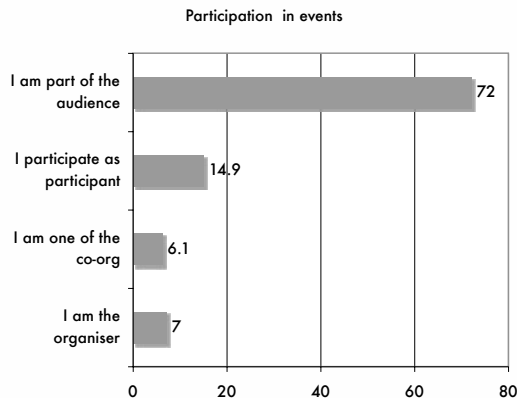
Frequency of meetings							Total
			Almost every day	Often	Rarely	Only sometime	
Do you have a group of friends you meet with?	Very good	Abs. Nr.	2537	1454	171	19	4181
		%	60,7%	34,8%	4,1%	,5%	100,0%
	Satisfactory	Abs. Nr.	367	670	180	12	1229
		%	29,9%	54,5%	14,6%	1,0%	100,0%
	Virtue of necessity	Abs. Nr.	26	75	73	16	190
		%	13,7%	39,5%	38,4%	8,4%	100,0%
	Don't have	Abs. Nr.	38	120	257	273	688
		%	5,5%	17,4%	37,4%	39,7%	100,0%
	Total	Abs. Nr.	2968	2319	681	320	6288
		%	47,2%	36,9%	10,8%	5,1%	100,0%

Source: Iuventa

Another form of leisure time activity takes the form of participating in the public events. Young people can be part of the programme as organizers, participants or audience. In general, they did not show much interest in public events. (Iuventa, 2002). Majority of the young people visited them rarely (59.1%), almost a quarter (24.6%) attended public events often and 16.3% did not attend them at all. Considering the age, young adults aged 21 to 23 had the biggest interest in public events while pupils finishing elementary school and secondary school graduates were almost not interested at all. From the gender point of view, girls attended events more frequently than boys. Košice and Prešov were regions with the highest number of young people attending public events, whereas Nitra, Trenčín, Trnava and Bratislava were the regions with the lowest attendance numbers. Young people, who socialized with their friends or were part of some activity club, were participating in events more often than those, who were not part of any of these. Interaction with other young people does not only lead to the stabilisation of youth's interests but also to participation and engagement in local cultural or developmental projects.

Which position did respondents take in public events?

Graph no. 13:



Being a member of the audience formed as much as 72.0% of the forms of event participation, 14.9% attended as performers and only 6.1% as co-organisers of events. A majority of them were satisfied with being part of an audience. Members of interest organisations have a high share in the active preparation or participation in public events. (See table)

Table no. 25:
Visiting interest-based organisations (IO)/ Participation in events

Going to IO	Participation in events					Total
			Co-organiser	Performer	Audience	
Regularly	Abs. Nr.	194	460	1295	1949	
	%	53,9%	52,8%	28,1%	33,4%	
Yes, sometimes	Abs. Nr.	68	185	807	1060	
	%	18,9%	21,2%	17,5%	18,2%	
No	Abs. Nr.	98	226	2505	2829	
	%	27,2%	25,9%	54,4%	48,5%	
Total	Abs. Nr.	360	871	4607	5838	
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

As many as 53.9% of co-organisers of public events and 52.8% of the performers of public events also regularly attended hobby groups or clubs.

The family is the primary environment where the child is exposed to stimuli and patterns of behavior which lead to acquiring values and norms of the society. The education system should be complementing the family by providing an environment for meaningful activities. This system is enhanced by civil associations, children's and youth organisations and as well as church based associations that provide youth services and free time activities. There is a wide spectrum of institutions and associations performing within an open education system operating in the context of after-school activities for children and youth.

The network of state educational institutions whose role it is to provide after school programmes is mainly spread within the bigger cities with the number of inhabitants exceeding 5,000 and more. It consists mainly of:

- 133 leisure time activity centres created by the local self-governments and one established by the church. A total of 67,276 children and youth aged 5 to 26 years visit the centres annually in Slovakia. 58,821 of them are children aged up to 15 years. The average number of children visiting the centre every week is app. 470.
- 18 school-based centres of leisure time activities, providing services to 2,742 children and secondary school students.
- 2,285 school clubs for children out of which 2,000 are based at elementary schools, 178 at special schools and four at secondary grammar schools. A total of 128,549 children and youth visit them. Out of this number 96% are children of 1st - 4th grade of elementary schools.
- 200 elementary art schools where 97,394 pupils are registered.
- 109 student youth hostels; 18 acting as independent institutions, 63 at SGS and STS, 11 at STI and 187 at medical STS. A total of 15,786 secondary school students are accommodated in youth houses.



- Art groups and interest clubs based at local cultural institutions with 54,320 children and youth members. It is 21.3% of the population of children and youth aged 6 to 26 years.
- 15 low-threshold centres providing a unique combination of interesting free time activities and social services, operating mainly in vulnerable communities and serving unorganised children and youth with specific needs.

All these institutions also organise occasional events for children and youth who do not attend them regularly.

A paradox can be seen the fact that young people visiting these institutions rarely have a chance to participate in the creation of the concepts or activities. The activities in many interest-based clubs have the character of after-school education – offering opportunities for personal development through practical repetition rather than participatory learning.

Trends characterising the education delivered in leisure time institutions for children and youth

The after-school education system is going through a phase of stagnation rather than development. It is underfinanced and has to struggle with unfavourable operating conditions.

A majority of youth (85%) spend their leisure time away from the educational influence of governmental institutions, municipalities and organisations and associations of the so-called (NGO) third sector. The majority of villages with the number of inhabitants under 2,000 do not have other after-school programmes apart from the school clubs for children. They often do not even have open public premises, which would be available for youngsters to meet with other young people. Children and youth have very limited opportunities in these communities. This deficit is partially saturated by the church, which often organises youth clubs and other activities targeting young people.

The programmes provided by institutions only partially reflect the preferences and interests of children and youth. The aforementioned institutions manage to answer the need of children and youth only partially, not only because of their limited capacity but also because of the stereotype in organizing their services and activities. On average only 10.8% of young people in Slovakia have a possibility to develop their interests in after-school programmes of institutions.

Roma children and youth visit institutions for children and youth very rarely. Only 4.3% out of the total number of children and youth visiting leisure time institutions are from Roma families. The highest participation of Roma children is reported by the Centers of free time. In other institutions (school centres for leisure time activities, school clubs, interest-oriented clubs in the student youth hostels), their number does not exceed 2.6%.

Pupils having to travel from surrounding villages visit leisure institutions in limited numbers. Slovakia is a country of small villages, majority of which have less than 2,000 inhabitants. Only a very limited number of leisure centres – mainly run by civic associations and non-governmental organisations – exist for children and youth. In the past, children of these villages used to take part in leisure time activities in the nearest bigger town. These days, more than half of the students from elementary schools and STI, and 40 % of students from STS and SGS in these towns are commuting from nearby villages. The number of participants in leisure time activities in institutions in towns is significantly lower. The commuting pupils represent 29.4% of all the members of the FTC, 25.9% of the number of pupils in SCC and 25.6% of participants of after-school activities are led by teachers at elementary and secondary schools. The civic associations for children and youth and school leisure centres in towns with over 5,000 inhabitants register the commuting

pupils of surrounding villages only sporadically. There are more causes for this situation – children have tasks to fulfil in their homes (taking care of siblings, helping parents with work at their farms, preparing for school), the bus and train transportation system is not adjusted to the activities of children and youth after finishing the teaching process, the low socio-economic status of inhabitants in small villages limits access to these activities due to financial problems, etc.

After-school activities are enjoyed mainly by high-achiever pupils. Out of all children and youth visiting leisure time institutions and establishments, 55.9% report excellent to good achievement in school. Considering the structure of members/programme participants in particular institutions, a majority of children and youth who achieve excellent and good results at school, visit those leisure time clubs led by teachers of elementary and secondary schools (74.4%), and by specialists in FTC (64.7%). The membership base of civic associations for children and youth is composed of 62.5% of high-achiever students. A considerable part of the members (38.1%) comes from family backgrounds where parents have university education. 43.1% of children (younger school age) with excellent achievements in the 1st to 4th grade are integrated in the FTC. At the same time 55.2% of all children visiting these institutions come from families with socially low background. According to these results, we can state that nowadays, majority of leisure time institutions for children and youth do not fulfil their social function to a satisfactory degree.

Young people positively view the atmosphere at leisure centers. These centers have great potential for the process of non-formal education. Although a majority of the educational institutions still follow the traditional forms of after-school education, changes are underway. The process of self-reflection is boosted through teaching methods based on experience and practical situations which contribute to the development of social competencies and life skills acquisition. A significant factor is the level of cooperation and participativeness, which is introduced through selected forms and methods in leisure time programs. In view of the fact that the educational process is often based on competitiveness, it's important for leisure time programs to put emphasis on cooperation. Young people need to acquire cooperation skills in order to be able to join the different social groups and fulfil their basic social needs. The after-school programs, leisure centers and the environment created by youth NGOs can provide support and space for this.

4.6. Young people and health

Nowadays, 65% of young people subjectively consider their health conditions as good and only 3% as not good, girls prevailing.

Following the height and weight trends of young adolescents, we can see the growing trend towards slimming of Slovak youth, especially of girls.

In the group of children and adolescents aged 0-18, there is an increase of chronic health disorders which require intensive preventive care. 28.5% of the population of children up to 14 years old have a chronic disorder. 11.7% of them suffer from bad posture, 15% suffer from eye disorder, and 1.8% from neuro-psychic disorders. Neuro-psychic disorders are more spread within 14-15 years olds in towns, where it reaches an average of 16.5% to 21%. On the contrary, within the same age group in the villages, disorders such as anxiety, depression, and neurosis occur but in lower numbers, maximum 1.1%.



When looking at health conditions of young adolescents aged 14-15, the numbers of acute diseases (tonsillitis, influenza, other respiratory disorders and injuries) reflect the actual epidemiological situation in Slovakia; respectively, they do not vary significantly.

When analysing data on chronic diseases, we can state:

- Due to bad conditions of environment, especially in towns and industrial regions, there is a growing trend in the occurrence of asthmatic diseases and various types of allergies.
- Growing occurrence of posture disorders of young people, which can be caused by inadequate school equipment (chairs, desks), bad sitting habits, and also by lack of physical activities, which would compensate for the static burden of learning process.
- From mental disorders we should mention higher number of students suffering from depressions, caused by time stress, stress related to school, or caused by bad social situation in their families.
- Students often suffer from headaches, especially students of SGS. These days, 7.3% of students of SGS, 5.4% of students of STS, and 6.3% of students of STI visit their doctors because having chronic headaches (in 1985 10% of students of SGS, 4-11% of STS students, and 7-11% of STI students admitted having a headache very often). On the contrary, problems with pain in the back occurred more among STS and STI students, which might be connected with manual work, and lack of proper technologies, proper working environment etc.
- Girls (24.3%) and boys (23.4%) aged 11 years belong to a high-risk group with increasing level of cholesterol. In comparison, in the population of 17 year olds the occurrence is lower, with girls (18.5%) and boys (8.7%). Differences in the levels of cholesterol are also reported between young people from towns and villages. Population living in villages has significantly higher levels of cholesterol (21%) than population living in towns. Children of the Roma phenotype have significantly lower levels than other children.
- Approximately 5% of children younger than 18 years of age suffer from obesity.
- The combination of three risk factors (increased blood pressure, increased level of fat in blood, obesity) occurs in the group of under 18 year olds in the case of girls (0.17%) and boys (0.15%).
- Every year, more than 200,000 young people from Slovakia aged 0-18 years suffer from injuries. 20,000 young people end up being hospitalised and 2,000 end up physically handicapped.
- Injuries are the cause of death in 40% of children aged up to 14 years. Most of the fatal injuries happen on the roads – responsible for approximately one third of the deaths of children. Drowning causes approximately one fifth of the deaths. Among the places with highest frequency of injuries are schools (25.6%) and homes (22.6%).
- There is an increase in the number of registered cases of venereal diseases. (See Hegyi, E-Hegyi, V. Danilla, T., 2001) Although it is connected mostly with group of people with risky behavior, undoubtedly it is a part of current evolution of our population.

The health status of young people is influenced by several factors. The factor of the quality of health care is preceded by negative effects of smoking, lack of physical activity, incorrect diet, bad socio-economical situation and poverty in combination with the negative factors of a polluted environment. Therefore in order to improve the health status of young people, we have to improve all the factors determining their health.

The basic strategy of state policy on youth health preservation includes:

- support and reinforcement of health of healthy individuals,
- health preservation of young people endangered by biological, chemical or physical environmental factors,

- rehabilitation of youth with weakened or damaged health.

System of health care for children and youth in the Slovak Republic

In the Slovak Republic the concept of healthcare for children and youth is included in the concept of paediatrics and adolescent medicine. According to these concepts the general practitioner for children and adolescents provides health care for people younger than 19 years of age within the range assigned by the National Council's Bill No. 98/1995 of the Collection of Laws about medical order as amended by its later decrees and the contract with insurance companies.

Healthcare in the Slovak Republic is oriented toward:

- primary preventive care (compulsory regular free vaccination of children, education on correct diet, hygiene and monitoring of the optimal psycho-somatic development);
- primary preventive healthcare for children in collective institutions, at elementary and secondary schools, foster homes, schools in nature and holiday camps.
- Secondary and tertiary care is ensured by specialists in clinics and hospitals, which are responsible for the immunization and screening of some diseases apart from the basic diagnosis, therapy and preventive function. These workstations also ensure the dispensary care for children and youth with chronic diseases. A dentist ensuring therapeutic and preventive care for buccal cavity and a gynecologist-obstetrician are also considered as doctors of first contact.

The Department for public health service of the Slovak Republic with its Regional Departments for public health deals with prevention, monitoring and epidemiology of infectious and serious non-infectious diseases. It initiates and takes parts in solving problems of various investigations oriented toward observations of serious diseases or various forms of behavior and attitudes, ensures the control of hygienic norms and takes part in creating bills and legislative regulations concerning health.

As of 1. January 2005 the Act No. 577/2004 Coll. on the scope of health care covered by public health insurance and on the reimbursement for services related to the provision of health care services based on Act No. 720/2004 Coll came into force, which terminated Act No. 98/1995 Coll. on the health care system as amended.

Prenatal care, care for mother and newborn during delivery time, postnatal care and breastfeeding

In the Slovak Republic, the medical care system for young people includes also the provision of optimal care for pregnant woman and newborns. It includes an effort to decrease maternal death rate and sickness and to improve the health status of newborns through the organization of an equal approach to medical services. Planned parenthood, prenatal care, and care during delivery and after it are included in this. In the Slovak Republic, rate of maternal death cases has remained on a low level since 1985. The most frequent reasons of maternal death in Slovakia include bleeding during delivery (15.8%), premature separation of placenta and relating complications (10.5%), embolism by amniotic fluid (7.9%) and pre-eclampsia (7.9%) (ÚVZ, 2004).



Table no. 26:
Development of maternal death rate in SR

Year	Maternal death rate
1989	9.99
1990	6.25
1991	14.00
1992	1.34
1993	12.29
1994	6.03
1995	8.14
1996	4.99
1997	3.38
1998	8.68
1999	10.67
2000	1.81
2001	15.64
2002	7.87

Source: ÚVZ 2004

According to statistical indexes, the number of pregnant women visiting antenatal clinics is appropriate on average. However, given numbers do not reflect situation in certain regions of Slovakia with higher concentration of Roma population. In the last period, less than half of all pregnant women visit their gynecologist during the first trimester. This case is obviously connected with insufficient medical awareness, absence of medical personnel motivation (gynecologists and midwives) on one hand and that of pregnant women on the other. A visit service is also lacking (SŠPR 2004, p. 10). Since the end of the 1980s, child, perinatal and early newborn death rates have been declining. For the last five years, however, they have been stagnating. The most common reason of perinatal death is newborn immaturity due to premature delivery (37.6%), followed by Q79 (5.9) and inborn developmental disturbance (4.7%). Another significant reason is respiratory insufficiency syndrome – again one of premature delivery consequences.

In summary, almost one half of perinatal death rate reasons lay in complications due to premature delivery and inborn developmental disturbances. The way to decrease of perinatal death rate is to prevent premature delivery and to perform quality ultrasound and biochemical screenings, which could help to detect inborn developmental disturbances, incompatible with life, in advance.

The system of health service in Slovakia underwent and is still undergoing many reforms, which led to various changes. But there are still limitations and gaps in the organization and ensuring of health service for children and youth. General practitioners for children and adolescents concentrate mostly on healing care and neglect the prevention, not only clinical but also hygienic, as well as prevention which leads to health education. The disestablishment of the majority of first-contact doctors brought, in some cases, the disruption of the healthcare service, which was formerly well organized. The preventive examinations and vaccinations at elementary schools moved into the paediatrician consulting rooms and the dentists are realising preventive checks only at some schools. Some parents do not react to appeals to ensure dental care for their children and it is a problem to make them come to a preventive examination or even attend the obligatory vaccination with their child. The statistics show that, during the preventive examinations,

21% of the children are diagnosed with some type of abnormality, out of which 12% are serious. Older adolescents also do not tend to use the opportunity for preventive checks provided by insurance companies. According to the indicators of the insurance companies, only a quarter of adult population of Slovakia undertakes the offered preventive examinations.

The upbringing of children and young people towards healthy lifestyle represents a significant role in the formation of life habits and lifestyle. The upbringing must not be limited only to spreading knowledge on health issues. Its main aim and goal should be the positive change of everyday habits in the children's behavior in favour of health preservation. The following survey results present the actual status quo in this field. (National Health Institute, 2003)

Elementary school pupils

- In the last period of time the percentage of children who do not eat breakfast has increased (with maximum of 27% in the 9th grades) and in the lower age groups, girls do not eat breakfast more often than boys.
- A higher number of pupils from towns indicate going to sleep at a late hour (i.e. after 11 p.m.) during free days. In the 9th Grade the number of pupils with short sleeping time is 8% (towns) and around 6% (village).
- 60 - 70% of pupils do not participate at all in organised sports activities. A significantly lower number of girls are involved in sports.
- Outdoor activities are a necessary part of the relaxing element of children's schedule. The daily values do not even reach 2 hours whereas 3-4 hours of being outside are recommended for the youngest pupils. During the free days around 80% of children spend outside more than 2 hours. Pupils of higher grades are longer outside than the younger pupils.
- The preparation for the learning process is time demanding. Pupils from towns are showing longer intervals of preparation for the learning process (91-120 min. and over 120 min.) than pupils in the countryside.
- The length of TV watching increases with the upward grades, exceeding more than 2 hours a day no matter which grade.
- Only 35% of pupils from towns and 27% from the country spend their breaks outside. Other children are mostly in the classrooms or alternately in the classrooms and in the hallways.
- The number of children in school clubs decreases, which is probably related to the fact that mothers are unemployed or on maternity leave or the parents can not afford them.

Secondary school pupils

- Observation of the hours when students of STS wake-up showed that 6 am to 6,30 am is the most frequent time, which can be considered as the adequate and physiological.
- Around 35% of secondary school students were involved in organised sports activities in the past. Presently around the same percent of STS and STI students do sports. The situation is relatively most favourable within the SGS students of which almost 45% do sports more than 2 hours a week. To compare it with the STS students it is three times less and with the STI students, it is half as much.
- The length of the time spent in non-organised recreational sport activities points to the fact that the numbers of students who do not do sports at all are relatively equal with the number of those who do sports more than two hours a day. Generally it can be said that the number of young people who do sports organised, non-organised or in a recreational way is relatively low.



- Significant differences between particular schools can be seen in the time spent for the homework. Up to 44% of SGS students learn more than 2 hours at home. It is half the number among the STS students and two thirds less among the STI students (in 1985 39-48% of students of all types of schools spent 2-3 and more hours a day preparing for the learning process)
- The length of time spent on watching TV or video in the leisure time instead of doing some other activities is excessively long among the secondary school students. 20 to 30% of the students spend 2-3 hours a day of their leisure time this way. As well there's a high percentage of those who watch TV or video for longer than 2 hours a day.
- 40 to 50% of students go to bed between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. during the week, which is the optimum time in terms of physiological needs. A higher number of students of the 3rd and 4th grades (30-60%) go to bed at later hours. The average sleep length among students of all school types is 7 - 8 hours (indicated by 40 - 50% of students). As well as in the past, even now the so-called "zero lessons", starting at 7 a.m. or before 7 a.m., are considered as undesirable because they are the cause of an early wake-up of students, disrupting their sleeping pattern.
- The frequency of eating is indicated by mainly girls of all types of schools as three times and less per day, particularly in the fourth grades (around a third of SGS and STI girl students and around three quarters of secondary training school girl students).
- Comparing the numbers from the survey of 1985, the number of students who do not eat breakfast has increased. These days, around 20-25% of students do not breakfast. We can find higher numbers among girls of any type of secondary school.
- Compared to the last observation the number of students who do not eat supper rose significantly. Up to 35 - 43% of students eat dinner irregularly (more girls than boys who have a higher energy consumption).
- The drinking mode is kept in an acceptable form by 40 -60% of students who drink around 1.5 liters of liquid in the form of water, mineral water or tea a day. In principle boys drink more liquids than girls.

The environment of elementary schools responds to the hygienic requirements, with the following research findings to be presented:

- The teaching subjects are integrated in the schedules without considering the physiological requirements of the central nervous system.
- 24% of classrooms have insufficient daylight, 19% have insufficient artificial light, 24.5% of classrooms were over-heated during summer and 15% of classrooms did not reach the minimal temperature during winter. 29% of town's and 19% of country's elementary schools indicate an increase of outside noise. In the past there were 36% of such schools with the outside noise over 60 dB 9%. Nowadays, the situation is more favourable - in towns almost 100% of the schools have satisfactory day and artificial light. In the country 6% of the schools have unsatisfactory daylight and 13% have unsatisfactory artificial light. 6% of country elementary schools claimed insufficient temperature during winter and 23% of town's elementary schools in summer.
- At the most-observed secondary schools, the integration of the teaching subjects into schedules does not respect the physiologic curve of efficiency throughout the day, nor even throughout the week.
- Pupils sit at the desks and on the chairs adequately only in about 50%. Considering the type and size of the school furniture, 42% of pupils sit inadequately at the desks and 49.9% of them sit inadequately in the chairs, due mainly to their wrong size.
- In 36.4% of the cases the left-handedness of children is not considered in seating arrangements, neither are the refractory defects in 26%, nor the hearing defects in 26%.

- Pupils spend a considerable part of the day by sitting outside of the classroom as well, mostly when working with the computer or watching TV and video and they do not compensate the sedentary work at school adequately with the dynamic elements after school.

The health status of young people in Slovakia has been generally improving in the past few years. But the differences between those with best and worst health are widening. The reason is the growing gap between the poor and the rich. This is influenced by unemployment, low educational profile of some groups and other causes leading to poverty and social exclusion.

Impetuses and recommendations

- Work to maintain the current high level of paediatric care and its preventive programmes (immunisation, preventive care, screening...).
- Introduce pro-population programmes promoting family stability and population growth. Incentives should not be of financial character (as financial incentives are often misused by certain groups of citizens) and should support families with more children
- To realise effective measures against media manipulation of youth and limit the negative impact of media on children and young people.
- Implement programs on elimination of negative impact of adults on children (campaigns against smoking, excessive drinking etc.).
- Develop the physical potential of the population through promotion of sports
- Promote healthy lifestyles, with emphasis on own responsibility for health, disseminating information related to health issues. To extend the current prevention programmes run by health staff to an effective education on issues related to family and parenthood (not only sexual education!).
- Support the establishment and further development of NGOs and civic associations providing services to children and young people
- Introduce complex prevention and education programmes in the area of personal safety (in traffic and elsewhere), introduction of legislation making the use of bike helmets mandatory.
- Enforcement of regulations related to the correct use of safety belts in cars.

4.7. Socio-pathological features

Use of drugs and drug dependency

A significant increase in the consumption of drugs and other psychotropic substances has been a problem reoccurring as of 1989 in all post-communist countries undergoing transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. The opportunity of free movement of citizens across borders resulted among other things in easier access to drugs. The society undergoing necessary economic, political and social reforms, which were an integral part of the transfer from a pre-planned economy to a developed free-market economy with a social and ecological focus, result in a significant increase in the number of dysfunctional families. This shows up in an increased number of children with high-risk behavior and behavioural problems, as well as in a dramatic rise in the number of unemployed – unemployment being a previously unknown social phenomenon. All of these factors lead in many cases to disillusionment in the context of personal problem solving and lead to the social exclusion of some individuals, who often became easy targets for drug dealers.



Alcohol is holding a prominent position among the substances influencing the human psyche and is considered the most frequently used drug in Slovakia. According to research results of the Institute for information and prognosis in Bratislava, there was a significant increase in 2004 in the number of young people consuming alcoholic drinks on a daily basis or twice to three times weekly and also the number of young people drinking alcohol irregularly increased. As of 1995 the number of young people never drinking decreases, together with the number of respondents who have never tasted alcohol. A deeper analysis of data shows, that as of 2000 there is a slight decrease in the number of respondents who consume alcoholic drinks more frequently. At the same time the number of respondents drinking alcohol on various occasions significantly increased, while the number of young people who do not drink alcohol, respectively never tasted it, decreased.

Table no. 27:

Alcohol	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Daily	0,2	0,9	2,7	2,1	2,5	2,7	2,0	1,9	1,8
2 - 3 x a week	7,7	5,8	10,8	10,7	12,3	12,1	11,0	11,4	10,6
Occasionally	62,3	58,9	53,6	59,9	59,7	62,4	63,9	66,3	62,3
Does not drink	25,8	30,9	29,2	24,4	24,0	20,0	19,6	18,2	22,6
Did not try	4,0	3,5	3,7	2,9	1,5	2,8	3,4	2,2	2,6

Source: National Health Institute

According to statements made by the respondents, the lowest age when alcohol was tried was at the age of 6. Boys 8 – 14 experiment with alcohol consumption more frequently. The age when young people start experimenting with alcohol consumption most frequently is between 14 and 17 (14 years 12.3 %, 15 years 22.2 %, 16 years 18.3 %, 17 years 13.3 %).

As of 1996 there was a decrease in the number of young people who have a preference for hard alcohol. The number of young people preferring wine, beer and liqueurs has grown. Most respondents who get drunk on alcohol are male, in the age of 15 to 17 years, reporting an excess in free time, living in combined or single-parent families, and families with non-satisfactory relationships. The lowest age reported by respondents for getting drunk was 9, but a majority of respondents lose control over alcohol consumption and get drunk for the first time at the age of 15 (20.3 %) and 16 (20.8 %). Men get drunk for the first time earlier than at 17 years of age, while women are confronted with this situation more often after reaching adulthood at the age of 18 (UIPS 2004, p. 47-50).

As of 1995 the results of research show a growing tendency in the number of young people experimenting with illegal drugs.

Tab. no. 28:

Respondents, with drug experiences										
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
%	18,0	15,4	17,5	15,5	19,6	17,8	17,3	20,7	16,1	20,2

Most frequent age when young people begin to experiment with drugs is between 15 and 18, however lowest age for experimenting with drugs is 10 years of age. According to UIPS data, of the respondents

between 10 and 14 years 10.4% tried drugs, in the age of 15 to 17 it was already 62.6% of respondents and less than one third tried them for the first time from 18 to 22 years of age. The drug most frequently used by young people in the course of experimenting is marihuana (87.4%), followed by volatile substances (4.2%), tablets with alcohol (2.6%), hashish (1.6%), pervitine and ecstasy (1.0%) and magic mushrooms (0.5%). Up to 42.5% of young people buy illegal drugs, while 41.5% get them for free, while these young people often state that they use drugs only if offered for free. Marihuana plants were grown cultivated by 6.4% of those people questioned, 4.8% of respondents get it through exchange and 3.8% decide based on the situation. Drugs are more frequently bought by males, students of professional schools, young people 15 to 17 years old and the oldest respondents, while women and respondents from the middle age category more often get them for free. The planting of illegal substances is spreading among the students of high schools and professional schools (UIPS, 2004, p. 56).

Among the most frequently-tried drugs are marihuana (51.1%), tablets with alcohol (10.6%), hashish (8.0%), volatile substances (7.2%), ecstasy (4.3%), pervitine (3.4%), tablets and magical herbs (2.9%). Other drugs such as LSD (2.1%), crack (1.8%), cocaine (1.4%) and heroin (0.7%) are only rarely tried by respondents. Respondents most frequently once used marihuana, tablets with alcohol, hashish and volatile substances. Repeated consumption (over 5 times) was reported with marihuana, hashish, volatile substances and tablets with alcohol. The environment with easiest access to drugs included discoteques, concerts and bars. In comparison to 2000, the public offer of drugs in parks and on the streets significantly decreased.

According to the data of the Institute for research of public opinion, in comparison with the 1990s there is a shift in the case of the most accessible drugs - marihuana/hashish and ecstasy. The availability of marihuana/hashish on the Slovak drug market significantly increases. While in 1996 the drug was not offered to 83% of citizens, currently its only 79%. The most significant decrease in this indicator was recorded in the group of young people 15 to 29, by 14 percentage points of the basis level of 65% in 1996 to the current level of 51%.

The share of citizens who were never offered ecstasy has been decreasing as of 1998, when ecstasy began to be monitored within the drugs offered on the market, with a most significant decrease among the - by 6 percentage points, from 87% in 1998 to 81% today. As far as youth of the capital city of Bratislava, such offers were down - by 10 percentage points, from 83% in 1998 to 73% in October 2002. Significant changes came in 2002 in comparison to 2000 especially in the preferences related to premises where drugs are available to young people of 15 to 29 year of age. The most significant decrease in the offer of drugs as noted in the public and might be due to an intensified monitoring and control of public premises by the Slovak police force and the fight against groups involved in drug dealing. This decrease is mostly visible in Bratislava, while a simultaneous increase in the offer of drug in the capital is reported from pubs, restaurants and clubs. This data point to the fact that the offer of drugs is moving from public into enclosed premises, where there is a lower chance of discovery of these illegal activities as well as an increased anonymity and related opportunities for experimenting with illegal substances.

While young people in Bratislava remain the main target of marihuana/hashish offers, the differences with other regions of Slovakia slowly disappears. In 1996 marihuana/hashish were offered in Bratislava to 49% of 15 to 29 year olds, while the national pool reported 35%. This represents a difference of 14 percentage points, while in 2002 the difference was 4 percent (49% of young people in the national pool compared with 53% of the youth of the capital city). The share of citizens who were offered marihuana/hashish in the national context in the monitored period between 1996 and 2002 represented about a half of the young citizens population of Slovakia.



Through comparison of the number of citizens who know someone dependent on drugs from their environment in the individual monitored groups – the national level, Slovak youth and the youth of the city – the following tendencies can be identified:

- The youth of the city of Bratislava from 15 to 29 years of age reports a significantly higher share of those who have a drug addict in their families,
- The youth of the city of Bratislava also most frequently know someone in their group of friends who is addicted to drugs, while this is less frequent at the national level of monitoring, least among the general national population of adults.

A significant factor limiting the direct exposure to drug use is religious affiliation. In general, people without a specific affiliation and atheists more often know someone who was or is dependent on drugs. Among the group of citizens (national level) without a specific religious affiliation 48 % knew someone who was or is dependent on drugs. Meanwhile there were 45 % among the group of atheists that knew such a person and among religious individuals it was less than one third of respondents (32 %).

As of 1998 the educational structure of citizens with a drug-related experience has gradually changed. In 1998 – 2000 the share of citizens with a drug-related experience among those with basic and high school education was significantly higher in all segments of the population, while currently the differences between social segments slowly disappears due to an increase in drug consumption among citizens with university degrees. Among the Slovak youth, the share of university students with a drug-related experience increased 16 % as of 2000 to 56 %, in the case of youth from Bratislava it was from 11 to 39 %, thus by 40, resp. 28 percentage points.

The socio-economic situation of citizens finds its reflection in their lifestyles to a certain degree, in this regard mainly in their inclination towards the use of psychotropic substances, but research shows that it is not the decisive factor in the context of experiments with drugs. The differences in drug use in different socio-economic strata of (as they placed themselves in the survey) are not significant. A slightly higher share of respondents with a drug-related experience was noted among those who placed themselves among the rich and poorest social groups. This implies that drugs are not only used by citizens living in poverty, who use them as “escape from reality” but also those that are rich. For them drugs represent a way out of boredom or a tool for placing themselves in a specific group of peers.

The level of subjective perception of threat related to drug addiction has not changed significantly in comparison with 2000. Currently this threat towards one’s self, children or family is perceived by almost one fourth of all adults in Slovakia, one sixth of all young Slovak respondents and one fifth of young people 15 to 29 years old from Bratislava. The lowest share in those not perceiving danger related to drug addiction – app. one fifth – is among the youth of Bratislava. The threat of drug addiction in term of self, one’s child or family is most often perceived by middle aged citizens, the youngest and oldest groups of respondents report a significantly lower level of related fear.

While as of 1994 up to 2000 the share of citizens who know a drug addict has been on the rise, but currently has begun to stagnate. A majority of respondents that declared knowing a drug addict came from the group of young people of the city of Bratislava – 71 %, in the national youth context it was 68 % and in the segment of adult population it was 38 %. Of all segments the respondents know a drug addict from the direct surroundings of their homes, less frequently from the circle of their friends, job and least often

from families, most frequently in the group of youth from Bratislava – 8 %. A significantly higher number of citizens know a drug addict among those who also have a personal experience with drugs.

From the point of view of education, the differences between groups divided based on achieved education gradually disappear, due to an increase in the drug consumption among the citizens with university degrees. Experimenting with drugs is often interconnected with the family-related situation of citizens. Citizens with a bad relationship with parents most often report experiences with drugs – 46 %. A significant relation between the use of drugs and the socio-economic situation of individuals has not been confirmed. The most frequently-used drugs included marihuana or hashish, but included medical drugs including sedatives, barbiturates and hypnotics. This category was reported as having the most increase in terms of drug use compared with 2000 – by 8 percentage points in the national context, with 12 % of adults having an experience with use of medical drugs. A majority of respondent used drugs between 15 to 20 years of age – up to 50 %. They received the drug mainly from peers for free. Up to 73 % of respondents did not regret the first encounter with drugs, which up 11 percentage points compared with 2000.

The drug considered least dangerous by respondents is marihuana or hashish, whose use once or twice is not considered dangerous by 13 % of respondents nationally, 20 % of Slovak youth and 25 % of the youth of the city of Bratislava. Regular marihuana smoking is seen as a form of higher risk related to possible physical or mental harm by respondents. The second least dangerous drug, according to Slovak respondents is ecstasy, with one fifth of respondents not assigning danger to an experiment with this drug. Regular use of ecstasy is already seen as medium or highly dangerous by over 91 % of respondents. The use and regular consumption of other monitored drugs – cocaine/crack and heroine – is considered by a majority of respondents as very dangerous. The public is much more benevolent to the use of legal drugs – very little or no danger is perceived in the connection to smoking one or more packages of cigarettes per day by 28 % of Slovak citizens and 20, resp. 21 % in the group of Slovak youth. Regular drinking of a larger amount of alcohol is not considered risky or only partially risky 17 % of respondents on national level, and 14 resp. 16 % of the Slovak youth and the youth of the city of Bratislava.

The main danger related to drug addiction perceived by respondents is the increase in the crime rate, reported by 69 % of young respondents of the city of Bratislava, 66 % citizens of the general population and 60 % of Slovak youth. Drug dependency is related by Slovak respondents to the spread of HIV/AIDS respectively type B hepatitis, the loss of personality, the threat of an overdose and financial losses for the entire society.

Drug addicts are considered by over two thirds of Slovak citizens (62 %) as ill, but their share has decreased in comparison to 2000 by 5 percentage points. As of 1994 the share of respondents who consider drug addicts eccentric and not content with the mainstream lifestyle increased, up to 59 %. Approximately two fifths of respondents consider drug addicts to be criminals. The views differentiate when it comes to attitudes to certain types of addiction. Most respondents despise those who try heroin – 62 %, while 53 % despise those who smoke marihuana/hashish, almost half – 49 % despise those who try ecstasy and 48 % those who regularly drink alcohol. Negative perceptions were also expressed towards those who smoke over ten cigarettes a day.

Gambling machines – gambling

According to the International disease classification pathological gambling is considered an addictive impulsive disorder. According to UIPS, as of 1996 the number of young people who have experiences with gambling gradually rises, together with the number of those who wanted to try the game only once. Fewest



experiences with gambling were reported by young people in 1996 (38,9%), and the worst situation was reported in 2002 (53,6%).

Tab. no. 29:

Playing the gambling machines %					
	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Plays often	0,5	0,8	0,4	0,6	0,5
Plays when having money	3,0	4,7	4,2	3,4	1,6
Plays rarely	11,7	10,0	13,6	10,1	12,0
Only tried the game	23,3	33,7	31,4	39,5	33,4
Did not play yet	61,1	50,8	50,4	46,4	52,5

Source: UIPS

Gambling attracts most young people at the age 15 (15,0%) and 17 (16,6%). Boys get experience with the gambling machines more often, mainly at the age of 10 to 17, girls to the largest extent at 18. According to UIPS centres in the years 1996, 1998 and 2002, the most significant motive was to win money, in the years 2000 and 2004 young people wanted to try gambling out of curiosity. Compared with 1986 the number of respondents who appointed the reason for gambling to fill up the leisure time slumped and significantly slumped among those indicating the reason for gambling as winning money.

Situation in youth criminality

The highest increase in criminality of young people in Slovakia was recorded between 1989 and 1993, when it culminated. After that the criminal activity started to decrease slightly up to 1997, when its frequency stabilised. Since then, development of criminal activity keeps a certain periodicity in particular fields by the fluctuation of increasing and decreasing share of underage and juveniles in committed crimes.

Long-term development of criminality in Slovakia from 1989 to 2000

While the number of perpetrators of crime among the juvenile group decreased from 976 to 884 from 1997-2000, the number from among children aged up to 14 years increased from 568 to 776. The age limit of criminality thus moves to the lower age groups. The most frequent crimes of violence from among the group of the underage were robberies and tortures. In 2002 a child aged less than 14 also committed a criminal act of murder.

The share of underage (15 - 17 years old) in criminal acts in the field of moral and property criminality has a falling tendency. On the contrary, more children aged up to 14 took part in criminal acts of rowdiness and drug criminality.

Extremist groups in the Slovak Republic

In the Slovak Republic we also encounter criminal activities of young people with extremist and racist motives. Paradoxically the first to „play“ with racism were punk music groups. A well known music group - Zone A - with their song „The Gypsy Problem“ allegedly inspired several attacks against the Roma minority mainly in the capital city. This song became well known in the right-wing skinhead scene, its cover version was recorded by the infamous group „Juden Mord“.

In the beginning of the 1990s a small group of neo-nazis became active in the city of Bratislava. They spent their time provoking fights at concerts of Czech music bands that publicly declared their affiliation with Judaism. Attacks against the Roma minority and foreign students became more frequent. As of 1990 extremist right-wing groups began to organize marches to the grave of the former president Jozef Tiso and celebrations of the establishment of the Slovak state during WWII in 1939. First skinzines began to be published and offered space for skinheads to exchange opinions and spread racist and neo-Nazi propaganda. These groups promoted the ideology of the pro-Nazi state in Slovakia during the WWII. An organization called the „Clan of Slovak Knights“ was established, which reflected the ideology of the racist Ku-Klux-Klan in US. The members of the CSK trained in martial arts and traded weapons. Currently they are not active. Another extremist group established in the mid 1990s – the Slovak National Front, based in the city of Trnava at first published stickers and leaflets attacking the Hungarian minority, later publishing its own agenda declaring affiliations to dangerous nationalism, lobbying for a law against homosexuality among other things. Its request for official registration was denounced by the Ministry of Interior. Later it split into a faction with purely political agenda and a civic association oriented mainly at cultural life. Another neo-Nazi movement „Slovenský úsvit“ has many similar characteristics with the skinheads movement, but it's less radical. It was established in 1995 in Banská Štiavnica and it issues a newspaper called „Na stráž“ („To guard!“). Several other organizations reflected on the ideas of the pro-Nazi Slovak state.

As of 1995 the Slovak extremist scene became dominated by branches of foreign neo-Nazi organizations like the Slovakia Hammerskins and the Blood&Honour Division Slovakia. Although a majority of the members of the skinhead's subculture in Slovakia sympathize with fascist, racist and neo-Nazi ideologies, there are also non-racist skinheads in Slovakia, some of whom actually promote anti-racism.

Until 2001 the structures of the neo-Nazi groups developed relatively without restrictions. Concerts, meetings, and demonstrations were held in different parts of the country sometimes several times a month. The number of victims attacked by them increased. Until June 2002 seven people were killed, while many suffered serious injuries with lasting consequences. In 2001 the attitudes of the police and the government towards these groups began to change. In reaction the extremist groups became more conspiratorial and devoted more attention to the transfer from illegal activities to specific political goals. The Ministry of Interior elaborated a strategy for the elimination of criminal acts with extremist background and established a commission for the coordination of the fight against extremism. This contributed to a decrease in the number of incidents with such motives.

Table no. 30:

development of racially motivated criminal acts in the Slovak Republic from 1997 – 2004

	Year							
Criminal acts	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
identified	19	21	15	35	40	109	119	79
Solved	8	15	11	25	23	76	77	57

Source: Police force of the Slovak Republic

The intervention brought new methodological management of the fight against extremism, new methods for the detection of racially-motivated crime and the establishment of a centre for the monitoring of extremism which gradually transformed from a methodological body to a specialized department for the fight against extremism. In 2004 the number of criminal acts with extremist background was visibly



lower than in the previous years. Of the 57 solved cases, nine of the crimes were committed by minors and youngster committed 13. Neo-Nazis were most active in the region of Bratislava (26 cases), and least active in Trnava region (3 cases). In 2004 there was no recorded attack of right-wing extremists resulting in murder or serious health damage.

According to the statistics, there are currently 4 077 extremists in Slovakia, most of them right-wing extremists. The police do not describe them as neo-Nazi, because our legal system does not recognize the term. The number of left-wing extremists is low – the police records 175.

4.8. Slovakia – an intercultural society

Slovakia belongs to the democratic countries those citizens tend to consider the idea of inter-culture as one of the basic principles of cohabitation. Considering its historical development, present as well as the future, it has a great potential for creating an intercultural society, due to the following three reasons (among else):

- People of different ethnic origins, social rank, religion and language, which blended and influenced each other, lived in Slovakia since its establishment. This is not expected to change in the future.
- In consequence of the presence of various cultures in Slovakia, the Slovak culture was formed under their influence and this process still continues;
- The ethnic diversity will increase with the development brought upon within the framework of Slovakia's functioning in the European Union. Each individual belonging to an ethnic or national minority or majority will become its part.

The current intercultural attitudes of Slovak citizens relate to the apposition of the cultural fund, which was built throughout all generations and on which the society's status and destiny depend in many ways. From the point of view of historical events, Slovakia is typical for:

1. its peripheral location (not in the centre or at the crossroad but at the border of reach and influence of super-powers, cultures, civilizations)
2. experience from integration into multinational states in which Slovakia usually took the subsidiary position,
3. Impositions on the development of Slovak society in the 19th and 20th centuries caused significant social disharmony and gave rise to radicalism in certain segments of the society. Featured in this is "Hungarianisation" and restrictive measures targeting the Slovak educated, middle-class society, followed later by centralisation and restriction of self-governments, discrimination and liquidation of ethnic, religious and social minorities and groups.
4. historical cultural and economic under-development and the "national feeling or complex of inferiority"

The process of Europe's unification and fulfilment of the vision of the community of European nationalities bring back the question of national identity of the Slovak people as well as the question of tolerance towards minorities and minority cultures. In the context of the changes, both of these issues (identity and tolerance) were put to the test. One area of tension is at the level where local patriotism is confronted with the globalization pressures (problems related to exposure to international issues, e.g.

economic or ecological issues as well as problems with the resolution of regional problems). The second area of tension in Slovakia can be seen at the level of the national identity and the political efforts of integration into multinational structures and systems.

In the last few years it was possible to notice changes in citizens' opinions. There is a notable increase in tolerance and negative attitudes against ethnic minorities (maybe with the exception of attitudes towards the Roma minority), the hostility towards foreigners as well as negative notions towards the surrounding and the ethnically different environments.

Ethnic minorities

The population of Slovakia is made up of a relatively high share of ethnic minorities, making it a diverse nation. Slovakia has 10 recognised ethnic minorities, which represent approximately 15% of the population. The most numerous ethnic minority in Slovakia is according to the census in 2001 the Hungarian minority (9.7% of population), followed by the Roma minority (1.7%) and the Czech minority (0.8%). The other minorities represent less than one percent of the population and include the Ruthenian minority (0.7%), as well as the Ukrainian (0.2%), German (0.1%), Polish, Bohemian, Croatian, Russian, Bulgarian and Jewish. Issues related to the ethnic minorities have been a constant part of the developing social life in Slovakia since the 19th century, influencing the domestic and foreign politics as well as the life of the society until today. While being in the shadow of the Slovak emancipation movement until 1993, which more or less reacted to the Hungarian or Czech dominancy within the Hungarian Empire or Czechoslovakia, it became a relatively independent phenomenon after the establishment of an independent country.

Numerous facts marked the cultural and political development of ethnic minorities in Slovakia in the 20th century:

- migration into cities, mostly big cities (Košice and Bratislava) and therefore decreasing the number of village inhabitants;
- natural assimilation in ethnically-mixed territory, that means in a certain centre the minority adjusts to majority. The bigger the (negative) differences in representation of particular ethnic minorities are, the more powerful their assimilation process has become;
- a process of awareness of ethnic identity is becoming visible after a long period of natural adjustment;
- population share of minorities in Slovakia decreases;
- individual ethnic minorities present differing ethnic awareness and cultural development indicators. For example the Roma minority rapidly increases in terms of the number of people, yet this development is not adequately reflected in the population census, because (for various reasons) they do not declare themselves to belong to this minority and tend to declare Slovak ethnic nationality.

In 1998 the **legislative presuppositions** were developed with the aim to deal with various issues related to ethnic minorities. The minority policy was based as of 1998 on the Global Agreement for Preservation of Ethnic Groups Rights and significant development was transformed in the alignment of the Slovak Republic to the European Charter of regional or ethnic languages in 2001. The Act about use of ethnic minorities' languages of July 1999 as well as other relevant Acts (e.g. the Act on changes of name and surnames, Act on village titles, juridical act, etc) also present a framework for the rights of minorities. The institutional method of dealing with ethnic minorities and inter-ethnic relations improved after 1998. The Committee for Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities worked at a higher level in the field of legislation in the Slovak Parliament and it




changed its name after the election in 2002 to the Committee for Human Rights, Nationalities and Women's Issues. A position of the vice-chairman of the Government for the human rights, minorities and regional development was created in the executive field. The Government Office of the Slovak Republic created a Committee for Ethnic Development of the Department for Human Rights, Nationalities and Regional Development. In 1999 the Slovak Parliament established through the decree No. 292/1999 the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for ethnic minorities and ethnic groups as the counselling, implementation and coordinating organ of the government in the field of relevant national policy. The matters of ethnic minorities are handled also by some ministries, which created individual organizational bodies. The round-tables for nationalities are organised by the office of the Slovak Republic's president, with the aim to allow monitoring of the problems of particular ethnic minorities. The establishment of the Institute for the public rights defender - the ombudsman was realized as an institutional reinforcement of the rights of ethnic minorities. The government supports the preservation of identity, mother tongue and culture of the ethnic minority groups at several levels: by creating an educational sub-system for children and youth; by organising cultural events; by publishing periodical and non-periodical press in the languages of minorities; and through activities of cultural institutions (theatres, museums, professional groups).

Hungarian minority in Slovakia

The Hungarian minority is the most numerous in Slovakia and also has a stable political representation in the Slovak Parliament. From the point of view of its genesis it is a population, that has lived in the area for a long time. Historically the community was probably most affected by the breakdown of the Hungarian Empire after World War I in 1918. More than 105,000 Hungarians were forced to leave Czechoslovakia while a colonisation by Slovaks and Czechs was taking place. The Hungarian ethnic group was separated from its maternal state in direct consequence of the demarcation of Czechoslovakia's national borders in 1918. The changes meant that the position of the governing majority was altered into the position of an ethnic minority. They had to get used to a new identity, new conditions and a different status, which was a difficult and painful process. Part of the population understood the fact that they had become a minority as an injustice and therefore asked for a re-evaluation of the borders. There were many conflicts with the government and the so-called "Trianon trauma" was passed on to next generations of the Hungarian population in Slovakia. Its influence can still be felt from time to time. After 1948 an Act about returning the citizenship to citizens of the Hungarian and German minority was passed which resulted in the re-opening of schools, establishment of a cultural organization (Csemadok) and newspapers in Hungarian language were published. In 1968 the constitutional framework of minority rights progressed due to the pressure of the representatives of the Hungarian minority. The years of so-called Normalisation caused the limitation of Csemadok competencies, prohibition of Hungarian Youth Union activity and closure of 200 Hungarian schools.

The Hungarians in Slovakia live on a relatively compact territory in the south of the country, even though they lived separately from their maternal state throughout most of the 20th century. Despite many problems, they were able to develop their culture, literature, theatres, cultural organisations and their language in close relation to their maternal nation. After 1989 the Hungarian minority gained political representation in a relatively unified movement where the ethnic nationality dominates over the political orientation and personal values. Particular mechanisms were developed at the level of higher and regional politics, which create conditions for an autonomous development in the field of education and culture. There is a network of political parties, cultural institutions, organisations, children and youth associations, rich cultural life at regional level, which is a reflection of a strong ethnic identity, the feelings of ethnic



fellowship and compactness of this minority. No significant conflicts between Slovaks and Hungarians are reported in southern Slovakia, as both ethnic groups coexist well.

Currently the Slovak Republic disposes of a stable network of kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools with Hungarian as the teaching language. The kindergartens (their classrooms) have also Slovak language preparatory classes or they use alternative teaching methods with two teachers taking turns in the classroom and changing the language of teaching activities every other day. The improvement of the language readiness in the Slovak language of elementary and secondary school is also ensured by a choice of terms from science subjects, which the students acquire also in Slovak. A concept of alternative teaching methods for some subjects in the Slovak language and drafted alternative textbooks in Slovak is in place. In 1997 the government disestablished the monolingual grammar schools for the Hungarian minority and instead of these the government established bilingual grammar schools. This allowed the parents to freely decide about the teaching language. In addition, the number of university students rose gradually. 619 students of Hungarian nationality studied at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in the academic year 1999/2000. The University of Janos Selye with three faculties – economic, pedagogic and reformed theology, was established in Komárno in 2004. Hungarian and Slovak are the main teaching languages at this school. 300 students studied there in the first year of establishment.

The Roma minority in Slovakia

The Roma communities were characterised by the way of living, which resulted from the different ethnic codex and resembled the Indian tribe system. This community differed from the typical European culture. Over centuries they lived on the periphery of the majority society and Roma formed individual communities in the suburbs of towns and villages.

The majority population always had considerable prejudices against the Roma. In the 1950s the ethnic development of the Roma minority was declared impossible and restrictions were imposed mainly on their cultural development. The state supported the assimilative approaches towards this ethnic group. The educational policy was adjusted to support assimilation, not respecting the specifics of the Roma students. The state continually acquired a whole scale of alternative steps in the social sphere in order to encourage Roma children to go to school (charge-free school catering, learning aids, penalties for parents whose children didn't attend school regularly). The directive steps brought an increase in the number of Roma with high school and university education but on the other hand the assimilation policy resulted in an increase in the number of semi-literate people, students were made to repeat school years just in order to keep them at schools. Large numbers of Roma students were transferred to special schools established for mentally handicapped children. The development in the second half of the 20th century showed a cultural and social retardation of this ethnic group, which eventually resulted in the current social and cultural degeneration of Roma communities.

According to the National committees' indications as of 1989, 253,943 Roma lived at that time in Slovakia (4.8% of all inhabitants of Slovakia). The census in 1991 enabled the citizens to register declaring Roma nationality based on their own free decision. 89,920 inhabitants were registered as having Roma nationality in 2001, which meant 1.7% of Slovakia's population. In reality the number of Roma is estimated to be up to 380,000.

Compared to other minorities the Roma population is very young. The quotient of children in the population represented in 1947 after the post-war registration 39.3%, but it increased rapidly according to the registration during the years 1966 –1968 when it represented 50 – 51% and then stabilized at the



level of around 43% in the 1980s. In the present day, the birth rate increases again, especially in the most underdeveloped Roma settlements with the highest concentration of socially and culturally under-educated population, particularly in eastern Slovakia.

The issues that the Roma minority is struggling with are complex. Apart from issues related to social exclusion these include economic, social and psychological problems which further complicate their status in the society. The most striking problems that the Roma community is confronted with are: the spread of illiteracy, poor school attendance, barriers that appear in attitudes towards education, insufficiencies in the field of health preservation and planned parenthood, gaps in ability to understand and use valid legislation and growing unemployment. Racism and violence against the Roma mainly committed by rightwing extremists is also prevalent. A very high ratio of unemployment among the Roma (in some settlements it is almost 100 %) is on one side related to the obvious discrimination on the labor market based on ethnicity and also due to insufficient qualification of the Roma. According to the Government Office's investigations, 278 Roma settlements were situated in Slovakia in 1989. In the following 15 years their number doubled. In 2000 there were 620 Roma settlements in the eastern part of Slovakia, where people have very limited access to governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations that provide help. The inhabitants of these settlements have very low or no income and they are dependent on social welfare. Up to 80% of their housing is built on somebody else's land without a building permit, there are no supplies of electricity, gas, water, sewage, and there are no roads built. The cabins house from 2.5 to 8 people per one room (in Slovakia the general average is 1 person per 1 room). Only 55% of them are supplied with drinking water. Latrines dominate in the settlements (86%). An extreme risk of infectious diseases is present in such conditions. Children represent the most-endangered group. Moreover, this population is less vaccinated than the average. The Roma of these settlements live in the state of complete apathy; they aren't able to do anything to improve their situation. They consider the majority population as unfriendly, they feel that the world around doesn't accept their community nor is willing to help them out of their desperate situation. They create their own value systems, sometimes incompatible with the values of majority population, that are automatically adopted by the children. This environment totally disadvantages the young Roma generation. Children reflect the mistrust towards the traditional education system. They do not have the basic means to prepare for classes, some of them don't go to school at all and spend their time on the streets instead. No impetus from the community motivates them to work or to learn. On the contrary, the apathy towards the struggle for a better life is transferred from the older generations. The low number of students of Roma origin at secondary schools is alarming. A high percentage of Roma children attend the special schools. Considering the area and social segregation, juridical instability and low social status, the inhabitants of Roma settlements don't have a real possibility to participate in activities that are standard for other inhabitants of the villages. Because of that, their situation continues to become worse. The social work of the state and self-government is mostly administrative, without much personal contact and therefore it can't solve this situation effectively.

In practical life there are still various segregation and discrimination practices occurring towards the Roma from the majority population. These practices include establishing Roma "ghettoes" in housing development, like Luník IX in Košice, problems related to acquisition of property ownership by Roma, because neighbours refuse to live in their proximity (Puliš, 2002, p. 428), problems connected with acquisition of permanent residence permits, unlawful publishing of ethnic origin in connection with crimes; courts imposing higher punishment on Roma than on non-Roma perpetrators for the same crimes, and Roma having no possibility of conditional punishment reduction unlike non-Roma perpetrators

(EU accession monitoring ...2000, p. 34), but also physical cruelty during police interrogation of Roma, restriction of Roma minority members access to public establishments and buildings, e.g., hotels, restaurants, etc.

The road to success is based on the realization of necessary legislative changes but also in the implementation of practical steps to eliminate direct and indirect Roma discrimination and to accelerate their social integration, mostly through positive discrimination in the field of education and labor rights. On the other side, it is evident that their social exclusion makes intervention very difficult: under qualification, unemployment, and criminality are factors that complicate it further. Various forms of racially motivated violence increase their feelings of injustice and exclusion. The process of the public administration's decentralisation brings new problems because the Roma have only symbolic representation in the local self-government bodies. As a result of their political disunion and significant disintegration of the Roma organisations, the citizens of the Roma nationality in fact don't have any generally-accepted representation that could interpret and enforce their interests. Other political parties don't help profiling the Roma political subjects and more or less only feign possible cooperation and sometimes they even misuse it to increase their vote at election time.

The application of the Slovak government policy towards the Roma brought a number of practical steps. For example, they established the Secondary Art School in Košice with Romanes as the teaching language and a Roma department at the Pedagogical Faculty of the University in Nitra; in 1993 a teaching curriculum was elaborated for elementary schools (classes) with Roma language as teaching language. The experiment was coordinated by the National Pedagogic Institute.

Czech minority in Slovakia

The third most numerous ethnic minority in the Slovak Republic are the citizens of Czech nationality, which was declared by 44,620 people, about 0.8% of Slovakia's population. They don't represent any ethnic, social or cultural problem; the majority of the population generally positively accepts them. Only their considerable diffuseness keeps them from a full exercising of minority rights.

Ukrainian and Ruthenian minority in Slovakia

The current problems of the Ukrainian and Ruthenian minority in eastern Slovakia substantively originate from the history of the region. The most eastern parts of the Slovak Republic used to be parts of five different states in the past. The inhabitants used different languages and dialects; they differed in their culture as well as their religion a long time before these dramatic changes in the last 100 years.

A violent process of de-catholization and Ukrainisation, which wasn't sufficiently politically, personally and materially prepared, intervened negatively in the development of Ruthenian/Ukrainian community in the 1950s. The number of members of this community decreased. The environment in Slovak towns, which offered job opportunities, supported the process of a natural assimilation as well. Also the following factors speeded up the assimilation processes:

- similarity between Slavic dialects which the Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Slovaks in Eastern Slovakia use;
- religious similarity, Greek Catholic religion is equally spread among Slovaks as well as Ruthenians and Ukrainians;
- mixed Ukrainian/Ruthenian marriages where Slovak becomes the language of communication in ethnically mixed households.



The fall of the centralistic communist regime made it possible for diversity to blossom again in the last decade of the 20th century. According to the census in 1991, 13,281 citizens claimed Ukrainian nationality (in 2001 – 10,814 people) and 17,197 citizens the Ruthenian nationality. Like the Hungarian minority, it was possible to establish significant national cultural institutions of these minorities.

The “Velvet” Revolution in 1989 brought also the revival of arguments about national identity of citizens living in north-eastern Slovakia. Ruthenian and Ukrainian minority relations with Slovakia become considerably complicated. The identification with the Ruthenian community and the denial of Ukrainian nationality by a part of the population of north-eastern parts of Slovakia has its own historical reasons. The main fact is that the Old-Russian population found itself behind the Carpathian mountains before the formation of Ukrainian national conscience and developed relatively isolated from the ethnically close settlement Halič and central Ukraine. This dispute was evident also in the constitution of civic organisations. The Ruthenian Revival as well as Ruthenian-Carpathian-Russian Association fights for influence and favour of the governmental structures. These institutions developed from the Ukrainian trend represented by the Association of Ruthenians – Ukrainians of the Slovak Republic in the 1990s. Both communities feel marginalized in comparison to the strongly publicly-exposed problems of the Hungarian or Roma minorities and underrated within the state support of minority cultures and nationality education. This minority isn't compact from the point of view of religion (the citizens claim to be Greek or Roman Catholics or even Orthodox), nor from the point of view of nationality (citizens register as Ruthenians, Ukrainians or Russians), which has its specific historical roots. Currently the tension between the Ruthenian and Ukrainian representation is the most expressive sign of the ethnic group. The Association of Ruthenians – Ukrainians in the Slovak Republic and organisations deny to acknowledge the ethnic identity of Ruthenians and their literary language. They blame the state organs for acknowledging the Ruthenian minority as an independent community and for supporting its activities. The representatives of the Ruthenian Revival in Slovakia basically accept the existence of the Ukrainian minority and its national rights but they don't consider the Ruthenians as part of the Ukrainian population. Especially they don't agree that the representatives of the Ukrainian minority speak also in the name of the Ruthenians. The efforts of public propaganda are considered to be frivolous and a poor effort to keep the existence of the Ukrainian minority through the Ruthenians.

The recession of the Ukrainian national education continued in the 1990s, which also reflected the complicated internal development of this nationality. The codification of the Ruthenian language and the experience with its application into the educational practice make it impossible to conclude positive results yet. The state ensures the education of children and youth of both minorities through a sub-system of elementary and secondary schools. The kindergartens or kindergarten classrooms with the Ukrainian as the teaching language apply the Slovak language also to some activities, therefore a specific preparation classes of the Slovak language are not necessary. The subject of Music Education contains Ukrainian music regalia. The elementary and secondary schools with the Ukrainian language as the teaching language teach all subjects apart from the mother tongue in the Slovak language, the special terminology can be taught in Ukrainian. The secondary schools started to teach according to the alternative teaching curriculum of the Ukrainian language since September 1st 1997.

It is important to note that the Ukrainian and Ruthenian national education system and the civic youth movement retrograde, for example in comparison to the Hungarian, because of the disinterest of the parents. Its revitalisation is very difficult without direct contacts with the greater Carpathian region. The same fact applies to the Slovak national education system and the civic movement on the other side of the Slovak – Ukrainian boarder.

The Ruthenian education system was established in 1997. A preparation of necessary school documents (e.g. the concept of education of the Ruthenian language, teaching plans, teaching curricula) preceded the establishment of schools with the Ruthenian language as the teaching language. The Ruthenian language and literature are taught according to the valid teaching plans either as an obligatory or an optional subject. This minority doesn't have any kindergartens to prepare the children for their entry to elementary schools with the Ruthenian language as the teaching language. The biggest problem the schools struggle with is, the identity of the Ruthenian national minority and the disinterest of parents in the children's education in Ruthenian language.

Jewish minority in Slovakia

The issue of Jewish life in Slovakia is also complicated. Their existence in the Central-Europe is documented approx. from the 14th century. They always formed an autonomous community and often lived in ghettos outside the towns. Their relation to the majority community was often been complicated. The Jews usually claimed the Hungarian and German nationality in the 19th and 20th century. During the period of the Slovak State in 1939 – 1945 around 40,000 – 70,000 Jews were deported to the concentration camps or they emigrated from Slovakia. In 2001 around 4,000 people were registered as belonging to this minority in the census.

Currently there is a trend visible in the re-establishment of Jewish cultural, religious and community life. There are two larger Jewish communities (Bratislava, Košice) and nine smaller communities (Galanta, Nové Zámky, Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Nitra, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, Michalovce) in Slovakia. The number of communities is steadily decreasing. The reason is mainly in negative demographic trend in the Jewish community as well as the non-natural age structure of the Jewish citizens in Slovakia. Individual communities carry out a number of activities (concerts, exhibitions, sporting events for Jewish youth but also issue books about various aspects of Jewish life including religion, food, local history etc.). From the religious point of view it is important to mention the presence of two foreign rabbis active in Bratislava (Baruch Myers) and Košice (Lazar Kleimann). The Rabbi of Bratislava is still active on his post today. From an economic point of view, it was important for the Jewish community that the Slovak Act on restitution of church property was adopted, enabling the central Jewish Association of religious communities to regain a part of the property which they owned before 1939. The Jewish youth has the opportunity to become organised in the Slovak Union of Jewish Youth, which is active mainly in the area of youth cultural, sports and exchange activities, organizing among other things common reconstructions of Jewish heritage sights. Also, an Institute of Judaism that educates university students was established in 1996. Also, after 1989, a Museum of Jewish Culture, Senior Home „Ohel David“ for 40 seniors and a Jewish kindergarten and educational centre were established.

German minority in Slovakia

The German minority played a considerable part in the history of Slovakia. The Germans started to come to the Central-European region after the Tatar invasions in the 13th century. They established many medieval towns and mining settlements. In the Middle Ages, they had an equal position as the Slovaks in the town councils in some regions of Slovakia. During World War II, the period of the Slovak State, Germans partly inclined toward befriending Slovakia with Germany. They were especially afflicted by the displacement from Slovakia after the war based on the “Benes Decrees”. Currently, the German minority of 5,405 lives, like the Polish minority (2,602), in various locations. There is only one village with more than 20% inhabitants representing the German minority in Slovakia.



The kindergartens or kindergarten classrooms with German language as the language of instruction are specific with regard to mother tongue knowledge. Basically all of them are bilingual. The first elementary school classrooms with the German language as the teaching language were found in 1993, after the development and approbation of the concept of educating the German nationality citizens in the Slovak Republic in the same year. The German language is taught according to the teaching plans of the German language from 1997, according to the concept and content of foreign language teaching or according to the teaching plans taken from Germany. From the point of view of didactics, the serious problem is the pupils' low knowledge of literary German language or only that of its dialects.

Sexual minorities

The sexual minorities (gays, lesbians and bi-sexual) have a particular position in the society. Unlike the other minority members, they rarely find the support against the homophobia of the majority population in their own family. There are no laws in Slovakia that would create a legislative basis against sexual minorities' discrimination.

Physically disabled and handicapped persons

Young people with a certain level of physical or mental handicap form a significantly big group of people with fewer opportunities. The process of their integration into the everyday community life is tedious and difficult. This is not only because of the financial problems (lack of disabled facilities, specially-trained pedagogues, means of integrating pupils in the classrooms and other groups) but also because of the more or less prevailing reserved attitude of the majority population. There are deep prejudices and stereotyping towards the mentioned minority. According to available sources, 11% of handicapped children and young people aged between 3 and 21 years live in Slovakia. Both genders are represented approximately equally. As much as 90% are in the zone of middle handicap. The most of the handicapped suffer from:

- learning difficulties (42%);
- speech, language and communication problems (24%);
- mental retardation (14%);
- behavior disorder (6-8% of the school population);
- physical and multiple handicaps (3-5%);

The number of children and youth with behavior disorders and learning difficulties has significantly increased since 1993. The number of individuals with speech problems, mental retardation and other handicaps has fallen.

The comprehensive care of this minority is executed within the framework of a sub-system of the special education system. It reached a relatively good level in Slovakia in the second half of the 20th century. It's a carefully designed system of tutoring and education, whose aim is to achieve a maximum social integration of an individual with a health handicap. A further endeavour for improvement and efficiency of the care of children and youth with health handicaps according to the results of the research and practical knowledge concluded that the segregated education system is in many cases a barrier in achieving the main goal – integration of persons with health handicaps into the career and social life. The most severe problem was the impact of the segregated education on the development of the social relations where the majority population learned to view people with a health handicap as “different”, “exceptional“ or to tend to obtain negative attitudes based on prejudice. On the other side, the individuals with health handicap often have difficulties after completing their education in the special schools because the segregated system detaches them in the important period of personal development and is a big obstacle in the spontaneous adaptation to natural

social conditions. As a result of this we conclude that a further differentiation of special schools and the improvement of special educational programmes are not sufficient for achieving better integration results. It is necessary to change the overall educational concept of children and youth with health handicap and to create a sub-system of effective school integration in regular schools in the form of:

- a/ individual integration (i.e. together in a classroom with peers)
- b/ integration in special classrooms based at regular schools

Currently the majority of Slovak schools are neither personally nor materially equipped to cover the special educational needs of children with various sorts of physical, sensual or mental disability. It is necessary to devote more attention to the special preparation of teachers and also to establish an institute of therapeutic pedagogy and also have a school psychologist available in all schools. Another important issue to be considered is the fact that handicapped children are often placed in classrooms from which a majority of children with excellent achievements left for special classrooms or schools and therefore have a high number of children with average and under-average achievement. In this kind of environment the children lose the positive examples of good pupils and the disabled children become the target of antipathy of teachers. The efficiency of the special pedagogical care and integrated education of pupils with health disabilities is underpinned in Slovakia by the counselling system, which contains 32 special-pedagogical advisory centres and six children integration centres. Until now the special-pedagogical advisory centres have originated as an integral part of special schools mainly because of financial reasons, in consequence that they mostly concentrate on one type of disability. Experience shows that it is important to create suitable conditions for establishment of counselling institutions independent from schools and school institutions, with an own legal subjectivity and budget.

Equality of men's and women's opportunities

The principle of equality of men's and women's opportunities is one of the prior tasks within the frame of building a democratic state and at the same time one of the possibilities for the maximum utilization of human potential in the process of economic restoration. The issue of gender equality is of a multi-disciplinary character and therefore the close cooperation between state bodies, social partners, autonomies, research institutions and non-governmental organisations is very important in its implementation.

The basic human rights are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and by anti-discrimination legislation. The Government of the Slovak Republic declares in its commitment to ensure the equality of sexes in the legislative process. It is obliged, too by the various international documents oriented against gender discrimination. Slovakia is a signatory to the General Declaration of Human Rights, Agreements of the International Work Organization, European Social Charter, the Peking Declaration and the Action Platform, the Agreement about Elimination of all forms of women's discrimination.

In recent years, there were some decrees incorporated in the legislation of the Slovak Republic, mainly in connection with the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. This legislation empowers the policy of equal treatment of women and men. The amendment of the Act about employment, amendment of the Labor Code, amendment of the Act on children's allowance are some of the most notable. Simultaneously some decrees were removed from the legislation which were not in accordance with the principle of equality of opportunities (e.g. the abolishment of night-work prohibition, mother's preference in applying for children allowance in situations where the parents cannot agree).



Roots of inequality of opportunities

In reality, the position of women in the Slovak society isn't quite as idealistic as it is declared in the mentioned norms. The reasons are the lingering stereotypes of the men's and women's roles in the traditionally patriarchal Slovak family, strengthened by the deformation of the official communistic ideology in the perception of the woman's position in the society. The enforcement of collective ideals caused that the women refuse to think of themselves and of their position in a different context than they were traditionally used to. In many cases they state that they aren't interested in arousing public notice or to come out of an anonymous collectivity. Although official women's organisations existed in the time of the communism regime, it was not possible to find women's associations or groups which would be established from the *bottom* as the demonstration of common interests or needs and which wouldn't be created by the political pressure from the *top*.


On the other side the communist regime significantly changed the position of women in the society, mostly in the approach towards education and enforcement of female emancipation, which resulted in a rising employment rate. The traditional family model was transformed but the ideology of equality of rights and emancipation didn't touch the private sphere: the asymmetry in the performance of housework didn't change. Because the man's earnings weren't enough for the family, the women's salaries filled up the family budget while the women worked in "two shifts" – in their job and in the household. The roots for the high representation of women working in low-pay sectors can also be traced back to this period. During the communism women's income represented only two thirds of men's income in the former Czechoslovakia.

The quotas system, which ensured the participation of women in the politics at all degrees in the past regime, is considered today after its abolition as one of the obstacles of women's interests to enter the active politics.

Multiculturalism and inter-cultural education in Slovakia

The concept of multiculturalism and inter-cultural education in Slovakia is only at its beginning. It unwinds from the programme declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic from 1998 and 2002, which is specified in the National Programme of Education. The Government of the Slovak Republic considers the national and ethnic variety as historical and enriching elements and the Government will get involved in the creation of a system of international norms in the field of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Within the part of "Education" of the programme declaration, the Government guarantees to increase the educational level of citizens belonging to national minorities up to the nation-wide average and will handle educating the pedagogues for schools with the minority language as the teaching language. The Government determined its goal in the field of culture to maintain and support the variety of culture as well as to create conditions for an equal cultural development of the national minorities and ethnic groups.

The National Programme of Education is the proposal of specific conceptional changes, which should be implemented within the education system in the following twenty years. The document is based on internationally accepted and increasingly widely asserted basic functions of the education system, which includes "education towards openness and cooperation" leading to acceptance and respect for the differences between peoples, nations and cultures without prejudices that give rise to conflict. The principle of a European dimension in education is considered to be one of the basic principles according to the National Programme. This principle states that "we should prepare responsible citizens of the integrated Europe, to



develop the mutual understanding, apprehension of differences and identities in the European culture, the knowledge and respect of historical and contemporary socio-economic, cultural and political processes in Europe, to support the common values, mutual tolerance, to develop the international collaboration”.

In the area of the national educational system the document emphasizes the need for the exertion of the “principle of equal chances” in every citizen’s education. This is geared towards the co-existence of different ethnics, nationalities, cultures on the principles of overall-human values, co-habitation of countries within the EU, based on the principles accepted by the EU in education of members of the national and ethnic minorities. The document encourages implementation of modern programmes in favour of children from less developed social environment, mainly with respect to Roma children, which would help with their integration.

Both mentioned documents declare the need for tolerance, prohibition and exclusion of all forms of discrimination from society, respect and regard to the others. All these elements are part of the ideology of the multiculturalism and inter-cultural education but these terms don’t explicitly appear in these documents.

The multicultural education isn’t so far objectively included in the educational process in Slovakia. The curriculum for elementary schools includes references to the topic within the frame of some teaching subjects but it is up to the choice of the teacher if he/she presents these topics in a “multicultural sense” or just as the facts without explanation of their actual meaning. The situation at secondary schools is similar. Within the frame of the taught subject “Slovak language” reference is made to the importance of understanding the cultures of different regions, nations and ethnic groups. There is no university programme that would target multicultural education, although this topic taught at several humanity-orientated universities, separately or as a part of other subjects.

Some state institutions and non-governmental organisations carry out valuable projects in the field of multicultural education since the year 2000. Within the frame of various grant schemes, series of local and foreign publications on issues related to multiculturalism were published; the research institutes and universities took part in the preparation and evaluation of several pilot programmes.



5. Youth Policy Instruments in the Slovak Republic

5.1. Participation

Civic participation is a term, that started to be used in Slovakia more frequently in the early 1990s. The concept of civic participation was quickly adopted mainly by non-governmental organisations, because it was changing the perception of the role of the citizens from passive recipients to active initiators of change.

Participation is often associated with a broad social, political and civic dimension. It is often understood in our country as the engagement in associations, membership in civic associations or participation on elections and political life, while others envisage its realisation through the organisation of petitions or participation of young people on decision-making processes or public discussions. There also exists a broader view of civic participation, viewing it as being broader than participation in decision-making, but more generally as the process of the creation of an active citizen with an active role in the formation of the social environment at local, national and European level.

The analyses of participatory efforts of Slovak young people has to be conducted with consideration to the relevant time horizon. The change in social environment at the beginning of the nineties is mainly attributed to the disintegration of the communist regime and of the „east bloc“, ending the period of „cold war“, which is considered as the turning point between two periods of youth participation development: the period of communism and the post-communist era.

Before 1990, in the era of one political party, youth participation in the area of education, labour and leisure activities was guaranteed by the governing communist party. The social contract between the young people and the state was expressed by the slogan: „The party takes care of the young, while the young are faithful to the party.“ (Kovačeva, 2001). For the generally widespread feeling of social security in the area of basic needs, and the availability of education and work, provided through a system of intertwined paternalistic mechanisms of state care and parental support, the young people paid with lack of autonomy in decision-making about their own lives. This contradiction naturally lead to a conflict, which begun to express itself through an increasingly political youth protest in the course of the 1980s. Young people experimented with various forms of political participation (demonstrations, campaigns during elections, hunger-strikes, road blocs). The revolutions taking place in 1989 in the region of central and eastern Europe utilised the experiences gained through the youth protests (Wallace, C. – Kovačeva 1994).

The stredent political changes taking place in November 1989 brought the introduction of a democratic system with favourable conditions for the formation and development of the civic society, which found its reflection in the development of the youth movement. The conditions for youth participation radically changed. According to new legislation (Act No. 83/1990 Coll.), the creation of an association was not subject to an approval process anymore, which was replaced by the act of registration under the precondition of adherence to the conditions defined by valid legislation. Youth was freed from a paternalistic state control, which was imposed during the communist regime, but simultaneously lost the broad state support which was available in the past. This resulted in a broadening of opportunities and in a greater freedom of choice,

while the accessibility of counselling, support services and other forms of assistance decreased. The post-communist liberalisation led to a rather incisive restructuring of the transfer from youth to adulthood and an accumulation of risks and insecurity with regard to the access of young people to education, employment, leisure time activities and politics (Kovačeva, 2001). This period of transformation brought difficulties for young people in the process of cultural self-expression and also in the area of securing of financial resources. Net income of the young people decreased, family household budgets became poorer and the property of youth organisations meant to provide for the leisure activities of young people which was further developed during communism (for example youth clubs, recreational establishments etc.), either ceased to exist or was nontransparently privatised. Research from this period points to a growing inclination of youth towards a consumption-oriented lifestyle.

Participatory youth activities in the nineties were aimed at differing goals, ranging from the influencing of a policy in the parliamentary elections to the creation of structures for youth participation at local level, from the encouragement of creativity in science and art to environmental activities. Many youth structures suddenly erupted. They quickly formed and spontaneously dissolved after the finalisation of one or several projects. Thus the governmental institutions recommended the formation of more stable structures with a long-term strategy. This was not to be conducted through the denial of the role of non-formal groups in the phase of initial involvement of young people into specific activities.

Participatory efforts of young people encountered several barriers, which are to some extent remain present today. One of the main obstacles was the decreasing interest in representative democracy, which originated from the negative experiences related to the centralised political and social life typical for communist regimes. A further obstacle for youth participation in Slovakia was the lack of availability of information on youth initiatives in regions. Another significant barrier was the relatively limited scope of activities realised by the existing youth associations, determining the low level of interest in membership by young people. To overcome this handicap of the youth scene, projects aimed at disadvantaged young people or at the cooperation of different groups of young people have been supported. But the development of the youth participation in the Slovak society followed a different direction. There is a tendency visible in hints, showing an effort to bring issues to public attention and search for perspective solutions of relevant social problems.

Levels of civic participation / youth participation

Youth participation can be analysed on the basis of a model¹, which differentiates a variable level of involvement (commiseration) of the public and a differing level of ability to influence decisionmaking². Following levels of participation are being considered:

1. Access to information (passive provision of information)
2. Adequate provision of information (active informing)
3. Serious consideration of comments (consulting)

¹ While several sociological and political models of participation exist currently, we will use this model because it systemizes participation into its various levels and enables the examination of possible barriers and stimuli to the participation development and the necessary identification of specific strategies to achieve it.

² These levels of civic participation are partially based on the concept of the **ladder of civic participation** (Sherry Arnstein, 1969), but also reflect the pillars of the Aarhus Convention and other participation models (Civic participation, Karolína Miková and Zora Pauliniová, PDCS 2001)



4. Sharing the decision-making right (co-decision-making)
5. Control over decision-making
6. Realisation of decisions

When looking at whether the society and its representatives allow young people to participate, it's necessary to also look at the use of the opportunities by young people themselves – to analyse whether they are able to propose and realise activities which help them achieve their rights or accept and carry joint responsibility in more complex and long-term projects based on principles of cooperation.

General situation in Slovakia

The active participation of young people on public life and decision-making in Slovakia is visible in many areas and specific examples, from national to local level, and is based on legislative tools (the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the Act on municipal establishment, the Legal Code, the Act on free access to information, Act on state governance of the educational system and educational self-governing, etc...).

The involvement of young people into decision-making is still not part of the political culture in our country. The ones who should act as partners to young people in the process of acquiring decision-making skills and roles (including for example representatives of the public administration) often do not understand the concept of participation and view it as a threat, declaring that the engagement of “non-professionals” and mainly of the young is contra-productive and brings a loss of power.

Currently we can mention several dozens examples from Slovakia that can be considered important from the point of view of youth participation and deserve more thorough analyses. These include activities and projects, where young people and youth representatives (for example the Youth Council) get involved in the process of formation of legislative acts relevant to youth. This is the arena here young people fight for their rights, or where cooperation between young people and self-governments is being developed (student parliaments of cities and municipalities; participatory processes led by young people etc.) Many activities are based on the principle of confrontation (mainly when the rights of young people are violated or neglected. As an example we can mention the strike of high-school students related to the repeated A level exams in April 2005 or the strike of university students in May 2005 against the introduction of fees for university level education), while others are based on the principle of cooperation.

1. Access to information

The first level of civic participation is access to information (passive information provision) which ensures transparency in decision-making. In the Slovak republic, there is an Act on free access to information (Act No. 211/2000 Coll. – further as the “Info Act”). This Act was prepared in cooperation with citizens and non-governmental organizations (including youth organizations). The Info Act brought about a significant change in the provision of information and in the perception of rights and requests by citizens in relation to the representatives of public administration. There is no research that would uncover the level of contentment related to access to information perceived by young people nor the frequency of implementation of this right by young people themselves.

2. Active dissemination of information

In the Slovak Republic the level of active public dissemination of information is relatively poor. Thus important information often does not reach the young people whom they are relevant to and the information from the young people and about them do not reach those making decisions.

A number of methods and approaches support the mutual information flow in the course of realization of activities and long-term processes. These include discussion forums, round tables, hearings (public hearings) and other methods. Although some of these methods overlap with other levels of participatory involvement, it's necessary consider the power relationship . If someone holds power (and thus one can assume that the communication will not be equal) and wishes to include young people as partners in communication, it's their responsibility to actively engage them. Following are several examples of active information flow, initiated by young people and non-profit organizations and self-government in some cases.

- The first ever public hearing realized in Slovakia (Svit, 1994) was devoted to young people – several hundred young people had the opportunity to express their opinions and wishes related to leisure time opportunities available in cities and the way they perceived the possibilities provided by their home town. Later a similar hearing organized by the self-government was held in the city of Pezinok.
- Hundreds of discussion forums and meetings held before the elections of 1998, 2002 enabled young people to gain information about elections, politicians and their aims and increased their participation on elections. These meetings have often been organized by young people, active at local level.
- The Slovak Youth Foundation used the opportunity to gain input from young people and their representatives for its activities and present its mission and aims through round tables, taking place in the autumn of 2003 in all regions of Slovakia.
- Children and teenagers got involved into the creation of a study on the park in Rusovce in 2003 / 2005 thanks to the effort of the organizers who identified specific tools for their involvement (organizing a concert for the park, a competition for the most beautiful book on the park, a children's day).
- The civic association Slatinka prepared with the help of young people the so-called „civic map“, containing the opinions and perceptions of people about the city of Zvolen.
- One of the the new possibilities, which was allowed on a base of the act No. 596/2003 about state and self governace in schools is the creation of students / pupils parliament. This, especially concerns those that are created “from below” and taken into consideration by the self-government at other than just the informative level.
- The city of Senec offer on its web page a Discussion forum which includes the question of „What does the city of Senec do for young people?“, which prompted 25 contributions.
- In 2004 several active discussions were held in the university campus Mlynska dolina (for example on the government proposal of the university education reform) with representatives of the Comenius University, with several hundred students participating on each of them.
- The Slovak Youth Council organized between 2000 – 2002 the event called „Youth parliament“ – which was a meeting of representatives of youth organizations, the Slovak National Council and government where the national youth policy was discussed. This event created a space where young people could point to the non-existence of a homogenous national youth policy and problems related to the process of creation of the Act on youth.
- Every year a parliamentary youth day is organized in the Slovak Parliament. It's viewed as a tool of direct contact of selected representatives of the young people with members of the parliament where its possible to „publicly articulate“ the interests and needs of young people. Parliemaneary Youth Day



also informs young voters about the mission and system of functioning of the highest legislative body of the country.

In general it's possible to conclude that:

- The representatives of the public sector use only a few opportunities at local, regional and national level to actively inform young people,
- Representatives of the government structures or self-governments only rarely use innovative methods (internet discussions, hearings, competitions), which contribute to the quality of communication. The „campaign visits“ of politicians to students whose main aim is promotion before elections are not a solution.
- The network of established contacts and organizations which are well informed often does not pass on interesting information to other initiatives, non-formal groups or other target groups which would potentially have something to say about the topic. A similar situation is being repeated at local or regional level, where the self-governments have a tendency to communicate with one representative partner and omit the others.

3. Serious consideration of comments (consulting)

Serious consideration of comments (sometimes referred to as consulting) is based on a principle that young people participating in decision-making processes have the right for their comments (to concepts, strategies or legal acts) to be taken into serious consideration and their inclusion. In which Acts or documents did the Slovak young people have the chance to participate in the creation of?

- The most important subject taking on this role is the Slovak Youth Council (the official partner of the Ministry of Education and member organization of the Government Council for children and youth and the Council for non-profit organizations), representing several childrens and youth organizations. The Slovak Youth Council monitors and comments legislative initiatives relevant to youth. These include the Act on Youth, the Family Act, the Act on socio-legal protection of children and young people, legislation in the area of education. Concepts and programmes at the national and international level (the Programme Youth and Youth in Action, the national concept of the youth policy, the white paper on youth, regulations of the Ministry of Education regarding the financial support of youth work etc.) are also involved.
- Several organizations get involved in the initiation and formation of the legislative and governmental policies and self-government policies, including mainly the so-called advocacy groups and organisations (including Greenpeace, Sloboda zvierat, Oddyseus...). The organization Sloboda zvierat (Freedom for Animals), whose members are mainly young people, was behind the prohibition of experiments on living animals adopted in the 1990s or behind the initiatives aimed at the establishment of animal shelters. The organization Obcianske Oko together with Amnesty International got involved in the legislative proposal on the shortening of the civic service. The organization Oddyseus was engaged in the creation of acts on social services or the creation of concepts for youth work in the city of Senec. These organizations often have a broad volunteer basis, young but professional employees and international contacts and they are able to clearly and skilfully for arguments and opinions and work on their advocacy.

- A significant group of those who influence the creation of documents are young people who find themselves in situations where they get a chance to comment on proposals. They include young mothers from mother-care centers in the case of the creation of relevant legislation, young athletes in the process of preparation of the city budget etc.).

In connection to the opportunities of young people to get involved in the process of creation of significant documents (such as Acts, strategies, concepts, programs) it can be said that:

- At national level (Slovak Ministry of Education) there are basic tools for youth participation in the process of commenting documents. But other ministries, even if they are preparing laws that are relevant to young people (e.g. social services or other relevant areas), do not involve young people in the process of the public debate about the proposals.
- The process of public debate about these documents is usually limited to a very short period of time, while at other times the space for commenting is provided post festum (as in the case of objections of highschool students to new A level exams in 2005)
- If the public (the young people) failed to be adequately informed, even the process of commenting is doomed to failure.
- The process, based on the analyses of comments (accepting or rejecting them) and run by individual ministries, is often not transparent, with unknown criteria for the evaluation of comments.
- Although government and self-government employees already had the chance to experience, that final products which have been commented are of higher quality, there are still many institutions where this is not the case. Management of these institutions not thinking of the possibility to involve young people in the process of preparation of conceptual or methodological materials (including some leisure centres, schools and other institutions).

4. Sharing the decision-making right (co-decision-making)

Sharing the decision-making right means the delegation of power to other people in order to reach their empowerment. It also means that the effect of youth participation will not only be the development of specific areas which will be open to young people according to interest, but also the development and personal growth of individual young people who get involved. There have been several cases in Slovakia where young people could not only comment but also form programs, plans or concepts.

One of the less spread approaches to the creation of space for participation is the creation of youth or students parliaments³. If they are created, sadly this often happens from above (Pezinok, Košice, Prievidza, Banská Bystrica etc.). The functioning of these „youth representative bodies“ within municipalities and cities should naturally lead to the definition of areas where young people can share decision-making. More often they tend to become information channels for the self-governments instead, channelling info from them and generating support for their aims. (An interesting document is the Mandatory contract as of 14 December 2004 on the direct realisation of policy in the area of youth participation on the life of the city of Prievidza until 2007. On one hand its the first document in Slovakia, that emphasizes the value of participation of young people at local level and clearly defines the areas where young people can participate

³ Its necessary to differentiate between student councils or parliaments, which exist at almost every highschool (act on educational self-governance) and between youth parliaments, established in cities and municipalities, often at the impuls of self-governments.



in the life of the city (as members of the Youth Parliament). They are in fact rather put into the role of the disseminators of information generated by the municipality and organisers of event for children and young people, rather than partners in decision-making. The youth parliament of Košice also has a tradition, allowing the young people to elect a student mayor. He is accepted by the city mayor as a partner in the process of solving the problems of young people and according to the statements by the students is always heard by the self-government employees when necessary. The establishment and work of youth parliaments were subject to several project proposals and gained financial support from the Ministry of Education and the Slovak Youth Foundation (cities and municipalities of Ružomberok, Sobrance, Humenné, Spišská Belá, Kežmarok).

Student councils represent another form of providing opportunities for young people to gain practical experiences in participatory citizenship at the local level. In accordance with the Act no. 596/2003 Coll. there is an opportunity for the student councils to express themselves on important, questions, proposals and procedures implemented by the school in the area of education. This entails the opportunity to participate in the creation and implementation of the school rules of order and to represent student in relation to the school director and management, electing its representatives into the school council.

School student councils followed with its structure and aims the traditions of school self-governments from the era before the WWII that was terminated and replaced by the unified youth organisation at primary and secondary schools as well as universities during the communist era between 1950 and 1989. After 1990 the trend of establishing student self-governments in Slovakia was renewed.

According to research results (UIPS, 2004) of the total number of highschoools in the Slovak republic, 32.8 % currently have an established self-governing student body. Most of the student school boards were established on the basis of the school management initiative, approximately half of the rest were established from the initiative of students and only several were established based on a joint initiative of management and students.

The institute of a student school council is still not well established in the perception of students in the role of a representative body towards the management of the school or the public. This function is used by only 16.7 % of students. Student school councils currently initiate and organise the following events: traditional school events (proms, celebrations...) (33.7 %) and participate on the creation or organisation of after school interest-based activities (12.5 %), cooperate on the elaboration of the school rules (11.5 %), organise student events and sport competitions, participate on the improvement of communication and informedness between students, teachers and school management (9.7 %), participate on the resolution of problems of school students (9.4 %), mediate proposals by students into the planning process of school life and the educational plan (7.6 %).

At the university level there is more scope for joint decision-making. The academic senate has a student representation ratio of 1:2. The statements can also be submitted by student councils and university parliaments.

The following conclusions can be made based on the above mentioned facts:

- **Young people have (at least a declared) opportunity to participate on decision-making but their role in the interaction with self-governments respectively school managements is not always clearly defined and their voices are more often considered as a recommendation rather than a statement to be seriously considered. Such an approach reflects the formal implementation of legislative requirements rather than a real respect being paid to opinions and experiences of young people.**

- The youth representative bodies (for example student parliaments or student councils at schools) are created mainly from as initiatives of the institutional management rather than young people themselves. This seriously infringes the partnership and actual utilization of opportunities for decision-sharing on youth issues in the context of the school or regions.
- Although its not frequent, young people can sometimes influence and change processes, which result in the formation of important documents and decisions.

5. Control over decision-making

As an example of this type of activity we can mention the activities of 10 Slovak community foundations (established in the cities of Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín, etc.), which activate the public in the process of redistribution of funds from foundation and self-government sources. The open grant programme Young philanthropists, which was launched in the year 2005 and where volunteers in the age of 16 – 25 years themselves manage the redistribution of grants for projects by young people is such an example.

In general it can be concluded that

- In Slovakia it is still rather rare to see cases of young people having the chance of control and share decision-making powers of governmental and self-government bodies. This is largely due to the current political culture in Slovakia, which does not include the public control over decision-making powers of governing institutions by citizens.
- Pilot projects and model situations in this area are largely attributed to the positive influence from abroad.

The role of young people in participation

Non-formal as well as formal associations and organisations representing the interests of young people are capable of acting on the principle of cooperation but also that of confrontation (if their rights and interests are threatened). At a time, when Slovakia is undergoing significant social and economic changes, youth participation and its character mainly depends on the representatives of governing institutions.

Currently we differentiate between several approaches of young people to participation:

- Through membership in civic associations;
- Through involvement into protests or non-conventional politics;
- Civic participation on the development of cities and municipalities;

Thanks to a change in legislative conditions after 1990, a number of youth organizations were established in Slovakia (in 1992 there were 140 and their number grew threefold by 2004). Today, civic associations have a diverse orientation and differ in regional placement and membership. In many cases there is an overlap in their programs, differences between the declared mission and actual activities. Several organizations dissolved soon after their establishment into several smaller organizations. At the same time the political weight of youth organizations is relatively small, none of the political parties or coalitions considered their demands enough important to advocate for their implementation actively. The diverse spectrum of children's and youth associations in the Slovak Republic currently include:


1. association established between 1989 from the unified youth organization and continued in their activities in new circumstances (for example Strom života – Tree of life, Slovenský vysokoškolský spoloek – Slovak university students association,)



2. associations which followed upon traditions before 1948 (for example Scouting, YMCA or the Association of Hungarian Scouts)
3. associations which were born from a split of larger organizations (for ex. Fenix, Tatranský orol – the Eagles of Tatra Mountains, the Students network etc.)
4. newly-established associations (joined to political parties and movements, interest-based associations etc.)

In spite of the diversity, currently the membership of youth organizations represents less than 12% of the population under the age of 26 years. The low interest in the activities of youth organizations has several reasons ranging from a persistent aversion towards mass organizations remaining from the totalitarian era to a lack of information about the activities of youth organizations and civic associations. Also the activities of the youth organizations fail to reflect interests and needs young people. There is inadequate promotion of their activities and inadequate equipment, lack of premises and difficult financial conditions for youth organisations to contend with too. It is necessary to add the view from the other side. Most young people do not actively seek out civic associations they could join in order to follow their interests, but expects to be provided with offers. They often behave towards the civic associations as consumers do towards service providers – they make decisions about their membership based on the fact whether they find the offer attractive enough, respectively whether they are offered any benefits arising from the membership. The situation is different in the case of membership of political civic associations. These are usually joined by teenagers without experience and with minimum knowledge of the issues related to political decision-making. The most frequent motive for joining is the effort to spread the values of freedom and democracy (Diovčošová-Sedláková, 2003). Their entry into youth politics is motivated by the wish to learn and understand the mechanism of politics. But often the effort to become a politician overshadows the need to become an expert at the same time. Young people often cannot explain the content of the terms they are trying to implement in practice through their organizations or define them according to the verbally assigned attributes assigned to them by the public. According to research results (Diovčošová – Sedláková, 2003), the environment in these organizations is defined by three motives for membership. The first motive is the opportunity to express an opinion on various topics through the organization. The second is the opportunity to assume a role of leadership. The less frequent third motive is the so called “career-argument”. These are related to the easier progress due to party membership, respectively inclusion in prominent networks.

As of the beginning of the 1990s the Slovak Youth Council was playing an important role as a representative body of youth organisations. It achieved international recognition and a strong position in European youth structures. The youth services sector in Slovakia experienced political pluralisation, which became visible when the second organization called Snem mládeže Slovenska (the Diet of Slovak Youth established in 1994) emerged, followed by the another organisation called RADAM (The Council of children’s and youth organisations) established after 1998. The Slovak Youth Council had to face efforts to eliminate it from the youth scene. These trends characteristic with internal differentiation and pluralisation, which can be considered a normal process, strengthened the institutional capacity of the Slovak Youth Council especially in the area of dealing with priorities of the national youth policy. As of February 2000 the Slovak Youth Council became a partner organization of the Slovak Ministry of Education, thus ending a period of unclear and changing relations between the representatives of the state on one hand and the children’s and youth organizations on the other. The Slovak Youth Council is currently a member of several important platforms and institutes (the Government Council for children and youth, culture and media, the Government Council for non-governmental nonprofit organizations, the National convention on European Union, the Students Loan Fund, the Managing committee for the EU Youth programme, the Association of Slovak cities and



municipalities the Association of information and counselling centers for youth). At international level its actively involved in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, the Czech Committee for children and youth, the Bavarian youth circle, the German youth circle or the French Youth (CNAJEP). The status of an official partner enables it to fully participate on the planning and realization of the national youth policy. The Slovak Youth Councils membership currently includes 36 children's and youth organizations and civic associations (28 regular members, eight with the status of an observer), which represent about 80,000 children and youths. Its member organizations reflect the Youth councils neutral standpoint to their ideological and political background. The members of the Slovak Youth Councils' include 4 political organisations, 13 Christian organisations (mainly catholic), 4 organisations active in the area of environmental protection, 3 cultural organizations, 2 organisations targeting international cooperation, 1 organisation aimed at science and technology, 2 minority rights advocacy organizations, 1 organisation for handicapped children and youth, 2 children's civic associations, 1 association aimed at provision of support to children in institutional foster care. The Slovak Youth Council provides its members with a whole range of services in the area of advocacy, conceptual and support services and provision of information. It gets actively involved into the preparation and commenting of programme documents and concepts created by other subjects, organizes national conferences and seminars, educational programmes for volunteers and youth workers, provides information on educational activities organized by European youth institutions, operates an informational internet portal www.mladez.sk (www.slovak-youth.sk) and provides free of charge internet access to youth organizations. The Youth Council activities include a regular info service, publishing activities etc. In cooperation with the organization *Iuventa*, it assists with the preparation of a national newspaper on youth policy called ZOOM-M. It publishes methodological materials and informational brochures about its activities and the activities of its member organizations, organizes meetings of youth organization representatives with specialists, as well as campaigns and research. Through involvement in international projects, participation on international forums, seminars and conferences and joint realization of projects with foreign partners it strengthens the international dimension of youth work in Slovakia.

In spite of the fact that the membership base of the Youth Council does not even reach a half of all members of youth organizations in Slovakia, the Council manages to promote their interests and improve the financial resources available to support the work of Slovak youth organizations. This sometimes causes tension among in the youth services sector. The Slovak Youth Council could utilize its contacts and institutional role for the benefit of other organizations, associations and initiatives strengthening its role as a mediator.

Another partner of the Ministry of Education is the Council of Slovak Universities (representing university teachers) and the Students Council of Slovak Universities (member of academic senates). Only university student can become its member¹. The Students Council of Slovak Universities is made up of one representative elected by the academic senate of each university and other representatives of the university students, one elected for every 2,000 university students. The significance of the Students Council of Slovak Universities became apparent at the beginning of 2004 in relation to the proposal for the introduction of fees for university education and the proposal of a new system of social stipendiary. It was submitted, unsuccessfully, on behalf of the Slovak Government by the Ministry of Education in 2004 and 2005. The Students Council of Slovak Universities played an active role in the declaration of strike parol of students as an expression of protest when its comments were not accepted. It was joined by the Students strike committee which is an independent students' initiative established in March 2004 in Bratislava about 6,000 students took part in the public protests.



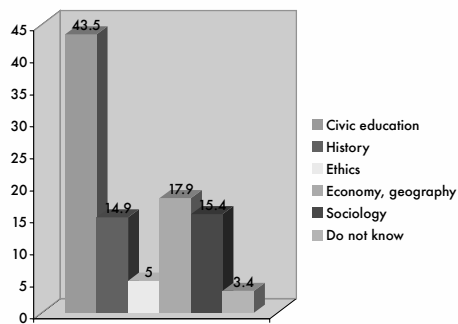
Apart from comments of proposed acts (incl. the Act on student loans) they also pointed to the missing public discussion about these legislative proposals.

School subjects as a form of participation education

The issues of civic education and participation in school curriculum of high schools are relevant and concentrated into several subjects – civic education, social sciences, geography, history, ethics and economics. Within the framework of these, the students receive information on democratic processes in the civil society but also on other processes and areas of sociology, economy, politology, psychology etc. The curriculum of these subjects includes fewer opportunities for participatory learning, earning criticism from the public. According to students of Slovak high schools most information on democracy, civic participation, the European Union, legislation and legislative bodies in the subjects of civic education (43.5%), economics and geography (17.9%), sociology (15.4%), history (14.9%), and ethics (5%). 3.4% of students could not remember any of these.

Graph no. 14:

School subjects related to citizenship education



Source: UIPS

All of the above mentioned subjects are not equally represented in the curriculum of individual types of high schools. Civic education is most frequently mentioned as the primary source of information at high schools without school leaving exams (76.8%), high schools with A level exams (68.4%), associated high schools (52.2%) and vocational schools (51.6%). At gymnasiums the most often mentioned subject was sociology (42.1%) and history (18.4%). Economics and geography were the subjects mentioned by students of vocational schools (22.4%) followed by gymnasium students (17.1%). The students of the first and second year mention most frequently civic education (40.2% and 51.7%), economics and geography (21.7% and 18%) and history (17.5% and 16.9%). Third and fourth year students mention civic education (58.4% and 53.6%) and sociology (25.7% and 25.6%).

The gained information point to at least two interesting issues of strategic importance for the conceptual work on the education of young people concerning European democratic citizenship, including civil rights and duties.

The first notable characteristic of Slovakia is that there is a relatively low frequency of discussions with politics or other public figures, campaigns and charitable events. Fears from political misuse often limit the scope for youth policy politics development at schools.

The second characteristic is the notable disharmony between the information provided within the school subjects and the actual opportunity to actively participate on the formation of school rules and function in student self-governments. Slovak students have sound knowledge on historical facts, democratic institutions but have weaker skills in the interpretation of these facts and their concrete use.

Civic participation of young people in the development of cities and villages

Cities and municipalities should become partners of organisations working with children and young people. In reality, the relations and cooperation between local self-governments and young people in cities and villages is hampered by several barriers.

1. Inadequate level of informedness by youth on issues related to the public life of their home community

Lack of information flow on regional development initiatives is one of the most serious barriers to participation at local level. Research (Iuventa, 2002) has shown a growing inclination to search for individual solutions and mutual (young people – local self-government) lack of trust in cooperation.

Only one fifth of all young people were content with the amount of information on public life in their communities. At the same time a majority of all mayors was convinced that the self-government provides enough information to young people. General informedness of young people was worst in the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. In the course of dissemination of information to young people, the self-government institutions most often used „traditional tools“ (boards, leaflets and personal contact). In the case of municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants the most frequent communication tool was personal contact, while in bigger cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants information was most frequently provided through information boards. The utilization of local media for information dissemination in the context of youth work was most frequent in large cities and least frequent in municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants.

2. Differences in the perception of local social problems remain between mayors and young people still prevail.

Both young people and self-governments in the east and south of Slovakia mentioned unemployment as the greatest social problem. In the west of Slovakia the impact of the problem was less eminent among the recipients. Young people and self-governments both considered an important problem the use of leisure time by young people and bad housing situation. Much less attention was paid to the problem of housing, criminality, environmental destruction and issues related to minorities by mayors than the young people. Young people in general are more tolerant with respect to issues related to drug and alcohol misuse.

3. Opportunities for young people to realise and implement their values and visions through real participation on public life at local level are still not used to their full potential. Young people often to the state government with their problems or passively wait until the local self-government notices their problems and starts resolving them. This status quo has its origins in inadequate knowledge of the principles of active citizenship by both young people and self-governments.

4. A paternalistic approach towards youth is still prevalent

An analysis of the forms of youth participation on public life at local level revealed a more reactive than proactive approach of young people towards problems in their home community. Young people tend to react to calls, get involved in projects prepared by others, rarely initiating projects on their own. Participation at local level thus fails to result in a partnership of generations, between the young, other citizens and self-governments. Civic control in the area of youth work almost does not exist.



5. The factor of professionalisation negatively influences the intensity and frequency of interest by individuals in regional public affairs. The interaction with self-governments reflects the attitudes of young people and their priorities.

Barriers and factors stimulating participation

On the basis of the described facts, we have tried to identify barriers to participation. The most significant barriers include:

Barriers of participation

- A traditional perception of authority and roles of representatives of the government and self-government and an inadequate knowledge of civic rights which represent a barrier to the formation of a partnership as the basic precondition of youth.
- A strong belief in the power of experts and looking down upon young people, underestimating their experience and abilities to express an opinion
- The relations between the public, private and non-profit sector perceived as tense, due to recent (political) history
- Lack of knowledge or understanding of principles and the meaning of participation, lack of knowledge and skills necessary for its implementation,
- Inadequate information about the current status quo and limited promotion of „best practices“ – positive examples of implemented participation
- Preference given to centralised systems (an effort to communicate with one strong partner, who would represent all young people at national, regional or local level); failure to involve unorganized young people, initiatives, non-formal associations and organizations with a differing interest or aim in the dialogue.
- Financing available from mainly one strong source (Ministry of Education), which strengthens dependency
- Lacking mutual informedness on roles and competencies of stakeholders.
- Efforts to resolve issues with decisions from above rather than creating space for grassroots initiatives

Participation stimulating factors:

- Networking, exchange of information and experiences from local to international level
- Education, mainly non-formal based on learning by doing; knowledge of ones rights and competencies
- Media and active cooperation with them on participation related issues
- The personalities of young people, their ability to take over responsibility, clearly formulate demands and fight for their rights.
- Enlightened politicians at all levels of politics, creating space for participation without being directive
- Independent resources for financing
- Social changes in areas related to youth rights (educational reform etc.)
- Changes in the perception of traditional roles and rights.

Participation development strategies in Slovakia:

In order to increase active participation of citizens in Slovakia and strengthen this social development tool, we propose the implementation of the following strategies:

Strategy	Explanation
Youth empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building capacity through education (together with the representatives of public administration), acquisition of procedures and skills which foster cooperation between young people and adults; positive confrontation with general trends from other countries • Education not only at the level of knowledge, but also in the area of attitudes and skills, to be provided through direct experience (learning through practice). • Collection and dissemination of best practices
Strengthening independence and securing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If young people and NGOs are to actively pursue their interests its necessary to re-evaluate the role of the Department for children and youth respectively the Ministry of Education itself. The Ministry is a source of financing on one hand, while its also a possible opponent in legislative processes, thus complicating the situation with regard to independence of partner organizations. This is also true when it comes to the issue of the creation of dependency (on self-governments, government institutions...) • to concentrate attention on the simultaneous launching of strategic pilot activities, which would bring a synergic effect. An excellent example of effective new tools is the grant programme "Civic participation", the programme Young Philanthropists financed from private resources (SPP Foundation), the Programme "Participation" (SYF and Ministry of Education) or the programme Priestory - Spaces (Ekopolis and ČSOB)
Increase effectiveness of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating opportunities for communication between young people and representatives of public administration • supporting the creation of networks as a precondition for an exchange of experience, information and impetutes • using new forms of passive and active information provision (internet discussions, discussion forums) • supporting access of young people to media
Leadership through providing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activating young people with the aim to support them in activities helping themselves and other young people (organizing specific activities, advocacy, peer programmes, problem solving and creation of concepts) • allowing young people to actively participate in the public life of a city of village through the use of innovative methods for involvement (pupils and students parliament, youth parliaments and councils, youth mayors) • supporting the involvement of youth into the creation of a vision / development plan for the region, concepts for youth work and management of own projects, programmes and clubs

Youth participation in Slovakia has development potential. If the environment fails to support it or even tries to prevent, if representatives of institutions fail to perceive the need of the young people and allow them to participate on decisions and share responsibility, participation of youth will move towards confrontation and fights for the rights. If the environment stimulates participation and creates space for it, it will result in cooperation.



5.2. Volunteering

Volunteering, in the broadest context as individual philanthropy or in the forms of providing help and support, is a hidden social phenomenon, which expresses itself outwards. Its a hidden social phenomenon because its relatively difficult to monitor and report in a way sensitive to the volunteers, often raising questions about their motives and benefits.

Volunteering and involvement in volunteering activities became the topics of public discussions only after the year 1989. 13% of citizens got involved in volunteer actions in Slovakia in 1995 in comparison to 1998, while it was around 19% of citizens and 13% in 1999. These figures are considerably lower than in other countries where citizens voluntarily contribute to their own country's development e.g. in the USA, the Great Britain and other countries with a "culture of volunteering".

A significant problem is the fact that there is not enough public support to voluntary activities and civic youth activities. The interest in others' problems and the will to actively help others, unselfishly develop activity in favour of other members of society who need it, is not sufficiently morally evaluated by the society. Young people do not have enough information about the possibilities of taking part in volunteer activities or in voluntary service. Mostly young people who were informed about opportunities for volunteering through their friends, civic associations in which there are organised, youth workers and leaders or schools, dedicate their time to volunteering. The potential for voluntary activities in Slovakia is much higher than its actual demonstration.

Voluntary work is still not as recognised in our country as abroad where a considerably larger number of people participates in voluntary activities (e.g. in the USA it is around 49%). In addition, volunteering in our country is still mistaken for or overlaps with organization membership. Women and people of the middle generation most frequently get involved in volunteering according to the countrywide survey.

However, the concept of voluntary work appeals to the young generation, which shows higher understanding of the usefulness and benefit of non-profit activities. A higher number of young volunteers are active in work oriented towards children and youth. Volunteering is more positively accepted by individuals with higher education.

Legislation

The term volunteering is not mentioned in the Slovak legislation. Some legal norms contain the term „volunteer“ but in a very specific context. .

The current Slovak legislation does not regulate the issue of volunteering, respectively it regulates only one of its specific forms – volunteer activities carried out by the unemployed in the context of activation programs (Act no. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services). The Act defines volunteer activities as the realisation of publicly beneficial activities by a physical or legal entity including non-governmental organisations active in the area of social services, health care, education and culture. The Act on military service No. 320/2002 Coll. mentions volunteers in relation to military service and volunteer military service. Act No. 42/1994 on civic protection of citizens mentions volunteers in relation to the organisation of civil guards units.

It is not used in other legislation acts. The Slovak legislation does not interpret the terms „voluntary activity“ nor “volunteer”, failing to defy the status, rights and responsibilities of volunteers. Presently mainly the Civil Code is used to formalise the relationship between an organization and a volunteer. The Civil Code defines certain types of civic agreements, such as the mandate and innominate contract, used to formalize the co-operation with volunteers. The law allows at the same time that e.g. a civic association, which concludes an agreement with a volunteer can conclude an insurance agreement with an insurance

company concerning the responsibility for damages or a personal insurance in case of an accident. The law contains no further requirements that would bind a volunteer to perform the assigned duty in a certain way and the definition of the criteria is fully in the competency of the voluntary programme manager or project administrator in the context of a non-governmental organization. Some programmes and projects require the volunteer to present a medical confirmation about his/her competence to exercise the given kind of work (e.g. if they work with children), some organisations ask for a declaration of civil virtue.

The proposal for the legislative regulation of volunteering is encompassed in the legislative proposal of the Non-profit legal Code, which was prepared and introduced to the public at the end of 2003 by the First Slovak Non-profit Service Centre. The proposal has been reviewed by the National Council for non-governmental non-profit organisations. The proposal prompted critique from some non-governmental organisations. The basic problem of the proposed legal framework was that it focuses only on one of the possible forms of volunteering and it is rather binding instead of supporting. Volunteers can and are willing to provide their services without needing to formalise their status and relation with the recipient organisation or a contract.

Motivation

Young people declare their motivation for volunteering to be based on: interest on opportunity for learning something new, to know new people, pleasure, fun, use actively leisure time, to avoid boredom, help others, to be useful, to gain e.g. professional experience, experience for future employment, sympathy with others, religion/moral conviction, to feel needed, to gain an appraisal, prestige, respect, to get to know a certain territory, a certain problem and to learn to solve these problems, other advantages – e.g. the possibility to travel, language courses, gaining of computer skills.

Young people mentioned the following barriers for not getting involved in the voluntary activity as: no one addressed them yet, they don't have access to the information source, they don't have the possibility for transport to the organization, lack of time because of work or studies. Also, some don't feel the need to dispose of the abilities qualifications they could offer because the offered type of activity does not suit them, or they have had a bad experience with volunteering.

Community and management type of volunteering are the most prevalent in Slovakia. In the first type the volunteers meet spontaneously based on a common interests, friendship. Later, some of the groups become voluntary centres, specialized in some social or age groups or in another kind of activity. Such centres keep their community character and the activities are carried out on the basis of friendships.

The second model is considerably younger. Activities are carried out on the basis of professional managers searching for altruistic people who they motivate for the voluntary activity. The coordinator – manager chooses the volunteers, prepares them for their work, and her/his task is also the supervision and evaluation of projects and volunteers. An employee as well as a volunteer can co-ordinate the voluntary activities.

Volunteers are active mostly in civic associations and specific religious institutions. The municipalities do not usually collaborate with volunteers systematically because the voluntary activity is generally considered as an institute for social help less than a tool in education process although it also has this effect.

Barriers

- Lack of information about the opportunities of participation in voluntary activities and about the positive influence of such work on personal development



- Lack of methodical materials about means and forms of volunteers' participation in the activities of educational institutions
- Generally widespread opinion that there's no interest in volunteering
- Organisations' passivity in the search for volunteers
- Insufficient legislation

The majority of citizens think that volunteering is only a substitute for the failing state care and that volunteers would not be needed if the state fulfils its duties.

Organisations not willing to co-operate with volunteers use following arguments:

- E.g. the fact that co-ordination and supervision of volunteers requires a lot of time from the organisation's employees,
- It is necessary to pay a lot of attention to volunteers, they require individual approach
- They need space and equipment, which the organization does not dispose with
- They can not always rely on the volunteers because they fluctuate very often
- Legislation is a serious problem

Cooperation

Organisations in the Slovak Republic co-operate with volunteers mostly in these ways:

- Occasional co-operation,
- Systematic and regular use of the help of volunteers,
- Organization is based on voluntary work,
- Provide service related to voluntary work (e.g. voluntary centres, service or community centres)

The volunteers' potential in the society is very wide. Young volunteers in Slovakia most frequently work in the following spheres of life:

- Environmental protection (fauna and flora preservation in preserved natural areas, restoration and maintenance of cultural monuments, improvement of environment in towns and villages, help with unrestrained catastrophes and wars, ecological and environmental programmes),
- Human rights (adaptation of immigrants to life conditions in the Slovak Republic, increase of legal awareness of young people, monitoring of implementation of the Declaration of children's rights, help with establishing and organization of children's help lines, etc.)
- Social and health sphere (integration of handicapped children and youth, universal prevention of addictions, work with children and youth in orphanages, work with children and youth hospitalised in hospitals or other health institutions for short or long term, e.g. medical and specialised establishments),
- Cultural sphere (alternative cultural projects, promotion and organization of cultural events, providing conditions for activities of folkloric and artistic ensembles of children and youth),
- Sport activity (competitions, promotion and organization of occasional events, hiking, events for non-organised sportsmen...),
- Organization of voluntary service on the national level (NGOs providing connections to various institutions, offering possibilities for voluntary work with children and youth, possibilities to get experience for unemployed university students with pedagogical, social and other specialisation...)
- Foreign voluntary service (international mobility, voluntary work of young people abroad, language courses).

5.3. Information access

At the turn of the centuries the transformation of civilisation is evoked by the existence of modern informational technologies, and changes that lead to a different understanding of the priorities and values. Modern informational technologies underwent an accelerating development in the last two decades of the 20th century and became the determining factor of further development of world civilisation as well as of individual countries. New forms of organization of economic and social life begin to have clearer contours in the rising information society. A new economic model started to rise with the progressing development of the Internet, which is called the new economy. This is based on an exchange of information and increasing value of knowledge in the economy and in the society, which becomes the main source for the economic development.

This trend shows the progressing process of capitalisation of the non-capitalised fields – science, education, training, adaptability, organization, and technologies. Investments into these new forms of capitalisation bring multiplied and higher profits in the more developed countries than the investments into the industry or financial capital in the less developed countries. The re-orientation towards understanding information and knowledge as the main resource of economic and social development is one of the keys to economical prosperity and the future modern society orientation. The transition to information and knowledge as the main source of development brings a necessity to acknowledge that the information and knowledge become the main source of economic and social development. It has become a major source of investment, a new manufacturing sector together with the land, work and capital as well as the impetus for change in the value orientation of individuals and society. Their transmission is ensured by informational technologies as the precondition of economic and social development.

Slovakia as well as the other post-communist countries missed out on the opportunity at the end of the 20th century for the development of an information-based society, internet, digital economy as well as electronic trade which begun to show its effects in the form of decreasing economic efficiency as well as the competitiveness of these countries. Our society's development demonstrated however the need to accept the progressing civilisation trends and to create strategies of adaptation to the changes. It is also the reason why the Slovak society promotes the topic of information and informatisation as a specific part of the national youth policy. In connection with this it supports programmes in the field of education and development of the education system. The informatisation process brings an increase in the requirements on educational and intellectual growth on one side but also the increasing demand for qualified manpower. The unbalance at the labor market rises, determined also by the spreading new information technologies. Structural unemployment is difficult to tackle without the existence of educational programmes oriented on informatisation and without a flexible education system and massive financial investment in its development. All national and international programmes of economic informatisation include a component based on the development of supporting education systems. The support for development of information flow and information technologies can be transformed in Slovakia within the context the following aims:

- Support of educational programmes in the field of informatisation
- Supports of informatisation in education systems
- Creation of a flexible education system which is able to react to the progressing qualification requirements in the field of intellectually demanding technologies (Klinec, 2003)

Project Infovek fulfils the mentioned goals in the field of the Slovak education system. The basic aim of the project is to change the traditional school into a modern global school of the third millennium through information and communication technologies. The Internet works as the instrument and engine of this



transformation, with emphasis put on its effective utilization at schools. The requirements include a modern school management, constant flexible teaching innovation, and should lead to systematic preparation of students for life and work in the information society. The idea is to offer schools an opportunity to allow all students access to Internet and opportunities for getting the necessary skills, equally in big cities as well as from the most forgotten villages and not only for children of rich parents at private schools but first of all for children from poor families who would never have the opportunity to get in touch with a computer and the Internet at home. It is important that all young people get the same chance to apply their skills in the modern information society.

The Project Infovek is implemented within three basic lines, named as the three pillars of the project: hardware – teachers – content, in order to address “informatisation” of schools in a complex manner. In practice this means that together with the establishment of hardware infrastructure at schools, the teachers’ lesson planning must change simultaneously, supported at the same time by a modern educational curriculum. The content should include information on traditional media (teaching and methodical teacher notes) but also electronic forms of communication (practically integrated into specific subjects), in the form of educational CD-ROMs or through creating school web-portals. Currently the development of all pillars of the programme is progressing successfully.

The text of the Project Infovek adopted by the Ministry of Education also contains calculations and an exact detail description of the following 7 principles, which are the basis for its implementation:

- A hardware infrastructure is created in the whole Slovakia, equally in all schools, including those in marginal regions and regional centres, schools with minority language teaching, schools with handicapped children, state, church and private schools;
- Technical school equipment must be modern, schools mustn’t become the wastebin of outdated and rejected technology;
- It isn’t enough to only connect the school to the Internet but it is necessary to build an internet-multimedia classroom equipped on a sufficient technological level;
- A so called threshold value (minimum level of equipment) of the schools involved in the project must be achieved as soon as possible;
- The project management must be professional and institutionalised;
- It is necessary to combine governmental and non-governmental funding, domestic and foreign;
- Teachers’ preparation must be systematic and must lead to gaining of skills with emphasis on how to integrate the modern IT technologies into the educational process of their subjects.
- At the end of 2001 and beginning of 2002 almost 500 schools were engaged in the Project Infovek of which each school had one Internet-multimedia classroom. That de facto represented 500 Internet centres spread along the whole area of Slovakia. Two years later this number doubled. In the meantime more than one thousand teachers are trained in the field of work with Internet. Such matchless net of Internet classrooms represents with its range as well as personnel assurance a huge potential and creates unique conditions for a wider use of the Internet in the society. The aim is to open these Internet classrooms at schools to the local community and provide the Internet access in the time when the classrooms aren’t being used for the educational process, in the evening and night hours, at weekends and during holidays.

The **Youth Information Centres (ICM)** represent a particular establishment for youth. Youth Information Centres are civic associations respectively non-profit organisations, whose mission it is to provide complex and up-to-date information on different areas of youth life, on the basis of needs and

requirements of young people. Youth Information Centres in the Slovak Republic operate in accordance with the European Charter of Information, as well as the Common classification of information and the Concept of ICM development.

They function as information channels, currently operating at 18 sights in Slovakia. The ICM employ at average three internal employees, 6-10 external co-workers and from 1 to 100 volunteers. They mainly provide information and related services (including counselling services) for young people in the field of education, leisure time, youth exchanges and mobility, youth activities, employment and international cooperation, activities of civic associations and social security. The ICM provide information also in other areas, namely grant programmes, information about the European Union, the third sector, information from the field of human and civil rights, about the choice of employment and choice of jobs, information about the region, they organise student parliaments at secondary schools in the region, they publish their own magazine. Other services include mediated counselling services by psychologists and of the specialists. The ICM cooperate with bodies of the state administration and local self-governments, with schools and other school institutions, with other ICM as well as various civic associations.

The ICM get financial means for their activities from the grant program of the Ministry of Education but lately also from self-governments. They begin to get involved the financing of informational services for youth, mostly from voluntary donations, gifts from their sponsors, some of them from their own activities, government and foundation grants. The local self-government finances one of the ICM. The Youth Information Centres are grouped in an own association called ZIPCEM, which is a member of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA).

5.4. Mass media education

The mass media in Slovakia offer a diversity of programmes for children and youth. In 2001 the broadcasts for children represented 14.2% of all broadcasts transmitted by the statutory television (STV1 and STV2). These programmes were watched mainly by children aged 5-8 years (14.9%), followed by the 9 - 11 year olds (8.8%) and then by the 12 - 14 year olds (4.6%) (Report of the Department for media research and information of Slovak Television, 2001).

Broadcasts dedicated to the young generation shouldn't in the first place endanger their psychological development. On the other side they should create the most possible suggestive contents, which would favourably and in a suitable way influence the individual's development. The specialists are most worried by the significant increase of violence and commercial elements in these programmes. The problem wouldn't be in the showing of aggressive elements, but in how they are presented. It is mainly the purposeless violence, violence as the way how positive heroes behave or violence where the child cannot see and realize its consequences.

Despite the fact that radio is considered as the most-spread and most-accessible media, children and youth don't use it as frequently as the television. The most popular are programmes that broadcast pop music, entertainment programmes and contest programmes (these are often accompanied by music too).

Listening to the radio is significantly influenced by the continuous broadcast of music television channels and the accessibility of other audio players. E.g. the Radio Slovensko broadcasted in 2001



a programme for youth every day except Tuesday. Out of the broadcast targeting children and youth, only the Sunday fairytale was dedicated to children.

Apart from television and radio the printed press plays an important media, offering products specifically dedicated for children and youth. The present situation at the market with children press disposes in the distribution net of more than twenty titles of children's magazines without a specific theme and outlook orientation and of five titles of magazines with religious content. These magazines are designated for children of the youngest age group (including those not reading themselves yet) up to the age of 12 - 14, when the interest differentiation of children is very diverse. Together with the age of readers and expansion of genres of the publicist character up to more commercial elements of the press include contests, broadcast or hidden advertisements. The weak point of the press for children and youth are the journalistic genres. Periodic press for children has a more literary character in comparison to the journalistic genre of the other press. The journalistic genres are replaced by relax genres, contests and games in the press for children.

The use of the Internet in Slovakia is only in its beginnings. It is used regularly by 5% of the adult population. More men than women belong to the regular users and young people aged 18 to 34 dominate. A majority of them has a secondary education with GCE and university education. According to these statistics there are around 113 million of Internet users, of which about 0.17% are from Slovakia.

The access to the Internet for young people is limited (it is estimated that around 5% of young people have access to Internet). According to the research of the National Centre of Media Communication from 1999 students who have it at home use the Internet the most. While the boys use the Internet twice more often than girls. The Internet represents a medium, which can be regulated only with great difficulties. A wide range of genres and products is offered to young people on the web pages. It is practically impossible to follow and regulate their contents. Therefore it is necessary to guide the attention of young people to the information sources that are suitable and safe for them. The Internet also offers a large space for communication with other people without any time-spatial restrictions. This type of contact enables the youth to improve their foreign language skills, get to know the peculiarities of other cultures and countries and to widen their range of friends. The computer also makes it possible to listen to the music, radio programmes or watching various audio-visual records (movies, series, contests, amateur videos) and read the press. As it contains elements of products of other media, the accessibility of Internet can have an influence on the utilization of other media.

Watching of media programmes by the children and youth population

Media, especially the television, is the most frequent companion of children and youth in their leisure time. The latest researches of the statutory television noted an increase in the following of programmes dedicated to children compared to 2000 by 2.6%. Among the most-watched programmes were animated films (Pokémon) and contests (Maxihra and Ponorka na Dunaji). These programmes were watched mainly by children between 5 to 8 years old.

The National centre of media communication launched a project in 1999, observing young people (secondary school pupils) and their consumption of certain media products. The results showed that 70.4% of secondary school students involved in the study watched various TV-channels daily, while only 0.3% of them didn't watch any at all. This research showed a much higher frequency of watching commercial

channels' TV-products than of the statutory TV-channel (the number of those who stated they watched the private channels Markíza were 78.6%, VIVA 29.9% and Nova 26%, while STV1 was getting the attention of 8.1% and STV2 4.3% of the respondents). Considering the programme structure, the secondary school youth stated that they watched mainly comedies (51.2%), followed by pop music (50.8%), series (41.5%) and entertainment programmes (33.6%). It is interesting that as much as 22.3% of the questioned respondents stated that they watched the news regularly and 15.8% the advertisements (these programmes don't have a recommended age limit for children and youth).

The listening rate of radio programmes for children (according to the research department of Radio Slovensko) was at around 4% of respondents apart from the Sunday morning fairytale which reached as much as 16.8%.

The research of the National centre of medial communication showed that young people prefer commercial radio stations (33.1% listened regularly to Radio Koliba, 24.7% to FUN Radio, 16.6% to ROCK FM Radio, while Radio Slovensko1 stated only 5% of listeners). Pop music was regularly listened to by 68.1%, humoristic-entertainment programmes by 28%, contest programmes by 17.8%, news by 13.5% of the respondents.

As we have already mentioned above the preference of press starts to develop from the age of 12 according to the individual's interests. Only 24% of questioned secondary school students read the daily press (National centre of media communication, 1999). The respondents read most frequently the daily *Nový Čas* (23.4%), *Sport* (12.3%) and *SME* (9.7%). The readability of magazines is significantly influenced by the age and wide range of opportunities directly relative to the size of the town. Regularly 22% of the respondents read the weekly *PLUS 7 DNÍ*, 20.5% read *EUROTELEVÍZIA* and 13.6% *ŽIVOT*. 3.9% of respondents stated that they read erotic magazines regularly and as much as 21.5% irregularly. Also the readability of magazines such as *Bravo*, *Level* and *Score* (targeting the young) significantly fell in direct correlation with the age (18.4% of respondents aged 15 stated they read *Bravo* regularly but only 6.3% of 18-year olds). Secondary school students showed a great interest in areas concerning pop music, entertainment, life stories, spare-time and lifestyle.

The secondary school youth used the Internet the most, often for surfing the www-pages (25.5%), for information search (18.9%), electronic mail (12.7%), software downloads (4.5%), participation in inquiries and discussion groups (3.7%), education (2.4%) and for the use of dictionaries and encyclopaedias (3%) (National centre for media communication, 1999). Even though boys used the Internet services more often, girls used various possibilities it offers (they used the electronic mail more often, they participated more often in inquiries and discussions and many of them used the educational possibilities of the Internet). Also the search of information and use for educational purposes increases with the age of users.

Media education

Media education is the way to media literacy. According to the position of the media in the life of an individual as well as the society, it should be an integral part of the general education. Media literacy is generally understood as the ability of an individual to receive, analyse and evaluate the media statements of press (news), art (movies, stories), educational (naturalist movies, educational programmes) or of entertaining character (contests, series, movies, etc.) in a wider social context.



Media education helps to develop critical understanding of the mass-media fundamentals. Its goal is to deepen the understanding of how media work, how they are organised, how the statements are made, how the reality is constructed within them. Also the non-formal education has the goal to “intensify the viewer’s education so he is able to fully use the maximum motives from the watched programmes for his own individual growth” (*Conception of State Policy Towards Children and Youth in the Slovak Republic until the Year 2007, pg.114*)

The content of media education depends on the context in which it’s offered, if we think about media education as a school subject (formal education) or about media education as an opportunity to cultivate the offer for recipients adjusted to their needs, interests, values (non-formal education).

Generally the content of non-formal education should be designed to allow recipient to achieve ascertain level of media literacy, which means:

1. To develop the ability to decode and understand the statements’ intentions,
2. To identify the typical way of using media,
3. To understand how the nature of media influences the key aspects of communication on the micro- as well as macro-level or the individual and society level.

Media education becomes a part of curriculum at all levels of schools in the developed countries, from elementary schools to universities.

The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic in its statement to the proposal for the introduction of the subject “media education” into the schools curriculum encouraged the elaboration of a list of topics related to media to be integrated into curriculum of compulsory the subjects “civic education” at elementary schools, “civic education” at secondary schools and “ethics” at both types of school. Media education as part of the educational process is only in the discussion phase. There are real tools for media education, which are available and can be included within the non-formal education.

The most serious problems of media education:

- The action of media education in the process of non-formal education does not have a clear concept;
- The media creators prefer some age groups of consumers while others remain unnoticed. Where the media aren’t able to impress the young preceptor, his interest moves to concepts which are very often unsuitable in relation to the level of his/her development;
- The insufficient attractiveness of programmes dedicated for children and youth invokes the move of these age groups to media products for higher age groups;
- Programmes that are getting less space in the media include (e.g. talk shows, discussion forums) that are targeting problems of young people (especially aged 12 – 15) and would potentially create the space for expressing their own opinions and attitudes to problems that bother them;
- There is a significant deficit in the field of non-formal education and its place in the media. Many institutions do not possess a single computer or they have older models. The same applies for other technological equipment.
- The researches in the field of mass communication are more oriented towards finding proof for the existence or the lack of negative media influence and less on the viewers, the way they perceive, process and implement information received through the media;
- An insufficient preparation of youth workers in the field of media education disables them to use their potential to influence their target groups positively in their “media related skills”;

- An insufficient interest of the society caused by lack of knowledge about this area influences significantly also the financial support of activities in the field of media education.

5.5. International cooperation in Youth Work

International Youth Work in the new Social and Political Context

International youth work has undergone significant changes since 1993 when the independent Slovak Republic was established. This is connected to integration of the Slovak Republic to the European Union, which influenced state policy towards youth and children as well as the functioning of various children and youth organizations in Slovakia. The new concept of international youth work includes several significant features that became its inseparable part. Therefore they have to be reflected in state youth policy. These new features are defined as intercultural learning, active participation of youth on public life, accessibility of information and youth mobility. New aspects of international youth activities in the work of youth organizations as well as in the state youth policy came into practice especially the involvement of the Slovak Republic into the programme Youth for Europe (since the year 2000 the YOUTH programme).

International cooperation plays an important role in the field of youth education and creates its new dimension with several aspects:

- Provides possibilities for an exchange of experiences and information and makes access to information easier;
- Supports creativity and activity as well as the transfer of knowledge, methods and methodologies;
- Leads young people to independence and acceptance of responsibility for own activity in the new environment without the support of the close surroundings and to developing new skills and competencies connected to real life;
- Leads to the development of tolerance and understanding, combating prejudices, xenophobia and racism through experiences gained in an intercultural environment;
- Gives young people a global view of the world and makes it real;
- Supports awareness of own culture and nation,
- Makes the creation of new contacts and friendships easier;
- Contributes to the active utilization of foreign language skills and motivates for further language learning;
- Supports utilization of new information and communication technologies and gaining new skills through using them;
- Supports active work with information;
- Contributes to the development of formal and non-formal education;
- Gives impulses for active work in own environment;
- Gives opportunity to many young people to get to know countries that they otherwise could not visit.

Policy of the Slovak Republic in the area of International Youth Work

Slovak youth policy has several levels within which it tries to reflect on social and political changes (joining EU, NATO), national needs and the fulfilment of new responsibilities (European Commission White Paper on Youth, Lisbon Strategy). The Ministry of Education of Slovak Republic implements tasks in this field through the Department of Children and Youth of the Ministry of Education and IUVENTA – non-



profit organization established by the Ministry of Education. In order to support the integration of Slovak youth into the European Union, the Ministry of Education uses the existing experiences from international cooperation. It takes into account the importance of international cooperation of civic associations and nongovernmental youth organizations and takes responsibility for the improvements in the preparation of youth workers for international activities and cooperation.

Bilateral cooperation in the area of youth is implemented mainly on the basis of bilateral agreements. Among them the most important are mainly those with France and Germany. Support of international youth activities on this base was implemented through specific grant programmes.

The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic established a grant programme for the support of international youth activities in 2003. This programme was focused on various youth projects including youth exchanges, international camps, voluntary service and training and informational activities for youth workers implemented by civic associations as well as state and non-governmental organizations. Projects partners were from France, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Germany – countries with which the Ministry of Education signed an agreement on the support and development of youth work. All together 15 projects were supported within this grant scheme.

In the field of multilateral cooperation, the most important partners in the field of the youth policy include the Council of Europe (Directorate of Youth and Sports) and the European Commission.

The Ministry has its representative within the structure of the Council of Europe in the CDEJ – European Steering Committee for Youth, working together with a representative of the Youth Council of Slovakia

Cooperation with the European Commission is focused mainly at the implementation of the YOUTH programme and activities connected to it. In the process of providing support and initiating and supporting the development of international youth activities especially towards the European Union an important role is played by IUVENTA, an organization established by the Ministry of Education. It takes part in the implementation of the national policy towards the youth and children and is the administrator of the YOUTH programme. This programme supports youth mobility, voluntarism, and local activities and contributes to the quality improvement of the international youth work. IUVENTA is a member of EAICY – European Association for Leisure Time Institutions of Children and Youth. It is an international association of organisations and actors involved in the field of leisure time activities for children, youth and youth workers.

The YOUTH programme

The YOUTH programme (2000 – 2006) is implemented in more than 30 programme countries in Europe. The programme primarily addresses young people between 15 and 25 years and youth workers. Financially it supports mainly international youth activities, which implement non-formal education (out of school), intercultural learning, tolerance, development of communication skills among youth, development of communities and fight against negative social phenomena (stereotypes, racism, xenophobia). Priority of the programme is the integration of young people with limited opportunities (disadvantaged youth). The aim of the YOUTH programme is preparation of young people for the life in multicultural society. This is expressed in the motto of the programme “Youth programme for all”. Priority is given to the mediation of opportunities for Slovak young people to meet other young Europeans. Giving them a chance to have this kind of experience, learn from it and implement new knowledge in their life, prepares them for upcoming enlargement of the European Union. This is especially important for the people with limited opportunities who do not have own resources for gaining such an experience.

The YOUTH programme in the Slovak Republic is being administrated by the National Agency for Youth Mobility (NAFYM) since 2000, in joint cooperation with a network on regional coordinators. According to

the requirements of the European Commission the National Programme Committee was established in June 2000. The committee includes representatives of the Ministry of Education, Iuventa, the National Council of Youth and Slovak Parliament. Committee evaluates the state of fulfilling the aims of the programme and presents a platform where the problems connected to the implementation of the programme are discussed. The National Agency of the YOUTH programme is a part of National Agency for Youth Mobility.

Thanks to the successful implementation of the YOUTH programme (8 000 involved applicants in 2 and a half years, almost 500 supported projects in the years 2000 – 2002) the question of youth mobility became a part of Concept of the Children's and Youth National Policy designed until the Year 2007. The popularity of the programme points to the significance of the international youth work, its results and widening of activities to cover the more remote regions of Slovakia. The YOUTH programme significantly influenced the national children's and youth policy in following areas:

1. Elimination of prejudices connected to living with people of different cultures, nations, ethnics, races or social groups;
2. Support of local youth work;
3. Promotion of terms voluntarism and voluntary service
4. Support of activities of non-formal groups

EURODESK

Project EURODESK, implemented by IUVENTA, provides a possibility to find information about grant programmes of European Union and possibilities of studying and working abroad. EURODESK, working in 31 countries, has created a communication and information network within which it is possible to exchange information in the field of youth mobility and mutual support. It provides the information in the region about possibilities for international cooperation as well as information of other offices of EURODESK about local and regional projects.

Participation of Slovak youth organizations in international organizations and associations

Among the most important nongovernmental organizations that cover and coordinate youth organizations in Slovakia there are the Youth Council of Slovakia (RMS) and *The Association of the Informative and counselling centres for young people in the Slovak Republic (ZIPCeM)*. They also try to cooperate with the government on determination of principles of youth policy. Their common characteristic is the involvement in international activities and international youth structures.

Youth Council of Slovakia

The Youth Council of Slovakia actively cooperates with partner organizations abroad. It is a member of several international organizations and networks: European Youth Forum (EYF), European Union Affairs Commission (EUACOM), Council of Europe Commission (CoECOM), Task Force for analyses and strategies for sustaining the development of youth work in Europe, World Assembly of Youth (WAY)

ZIPCeM and Youth Information Centres

Youth Information Centres (ICM) are specialized youth organizations that provide information and consultancy to young people. Their umbrella organization is *The Association of the Informative and counselling centres of young people in the Slovak Republic (ZIPCeM)*. Its aim is cooperation with ICMs, their methodological guidance, information and counselling. ZIPCeM is a member of *ERYICA European Youth Information and Counselling Agency*. ERYICA is international non-profit organization, which coordinates activities of members and strives for improvement of level of



cooperation among organizations, which work in the field of information and counselling services for young people in Europe. In November 2004 on the 15th regular meeting of the ERYICA in Bratislava, the new wording of the European Charter on Information for Youth was adopted by 40 representatives of individual umbrella organisations and unions for informational centres from all over Europe.

Lack of satisfactory access to information about possibilities of international cooperation and youth mobility prevail as the biggest problems. There is lack of information about the core of mobility, its benefits for youth and youth organizations, about possibilities of its implementation and possibilities for funding it.

After the process of decentralisation of some competencies from state services to municipalities certain demerits in the youth work on the level of municipalities became visible. This involves several areas as lack of information, misunderstanding of significance of mobility as such, but also in the lack of professionals for the field of children and youth policy. Another remaining problem is lack of communication about activities between youth organizations and municipalities.

The biggest financial source supporting international projects in Slovakia is still the European Union's YOUTH programme. The lack of information, experiences, language barrier, small motivation or fear of organizing financially and technically more demanding events are the reasons that prevent a more effective utilization of this tool. However this programme is only for young people from 15 to 25 years of age and conditions for the provision of support to a project include participation of at least one other EU member state. Majority of organizations working in the field of youth work considers the limits imposed on the support for younger age groups (13 - 14 year olds) of young people as disadvantaging and contra productive.

Large civic associations and youth organizations

The national organizations and organizations with big number of members have an advantage when applying for funding for international activities. The system of state support enables them to develop their organizations from organizational as well as material point of view. Many of them employ professional employees; have own facilities, systems of dissemination of information and other important internal resources. Strategies of their further development bear professional features as well. Some organizations even have special workers dealing exclusively with international relationships. These employees can train members of organizations or associations and motivate them for the preparation of own international mobility activities. Large organizations during their history collected a large number of own contacts and became members of various international networks. Within the networks they can exchange not only information, but also various offers for cooperation and partners for new activities.

Small civic associations and non-organized youth

Small or new organizations face completely different problems when preparing international activities. They do not have experienced professional workers, educated in this field, who could pass the information to the other members or train other workers in the organization. Their activities are based only on volunteers, particularly young people, who divide their time among work, school and often even family. Many organizations have problems with the passing on experience and know-how to the new generation of volunteers and youth workers. Non-organized youth is completely excluded from this field. There is no complex system of youth work with non-organized youth in Slovakia. Open clubs and professional youth

workers to work there are not present in the Slovak youth work reality. Leisure activity centres, which have the biggest potential for preparation of international activities for non-organized youth pay just minimum attention to this.

Development of youth mobility

Excessive orientation towards countries of Western Europe is one of the biggest challenges that need to be overcome in Slovakia. Very few projects are implemented with countries of former Soviet Union and Balkan countries. Also there is lack of systematic support from state for the implementation of this type of projects in future.

The biggest obstacles of organizations and civic associations influencing the quality of mobility activities are non-systematic work; lack of motivation to start new projects and also mistrust that Slovakia can be an attractive partner for foreign organisations. Just few organisations think of creating activities that target the development of participants' personality and do not have an overall strategy of development in this area. Participation of young people in the project from the moment of its conception is very rare in Slovakia.

Another challenge in the field of mobility development is the ineffective utilization of grants and existence of almost "professional" applicants who know the principles of successful application and thus are more likely to succeed even with projects of less value in terms of their contribution to target groups.

There is small number of experienced professional youth workers, who are trained and educated in the preparation and implementation of international activities.

International activities are demanding on resources. Organisations and associations, not even speaking of non-formal groups, face many problems when trying to borrow money from banks for transition periods until donors send the money for the project. In this situation they have to pay high credits and this places a great burden on them.

It is very difficult to receive long-term grants that would cover several international projects. The possibility of involvement of young people only from 15 years of age upwards is also a disadvantage. Grant programmes often seem complicated, usually discouraging young people.

Ways of improving the situation

In order to increase awareness of the potential benefits of mobility in Slovakia, it has to be sufficiently advertised and promoted. It is necessary to inform and realise training activities focused on a wide range of target groups: organised groups, local government, schools etc. It is also necessary to raise the professionalism of organised youth and find ways how to involve non-organized youth into mobility related activities.

Involving the active young people as participants of international activities contributes to their motivation to find their own similar activities and create projects.

Another possibility would be to consider possibilities of supporting series of international activities through systems of grants from the state. Also it could be productive to advertise the use of other forms of mobility such as writing, visits, jobshadowing, short-term voluntary service. After joining the EU, it is very important to support intensively the cooperating among countries of V4.

International cooperation represents an important element when working with children and youth, it has significant educational value and can contribute to the personal growth of young people. Participation of young people on international events and exchanges gives them a chance to meet new people, get to know their culture and actively participate in creating an Europe for every one.



6. Summary – development tendency

The aim of youth policy is to create conditions that ensure young people an environment where they can develop their knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for their active involvement in the democratic public life and their inclusion into the society as active citizens.

A focal point in the implementation of youth policy in all areas of life is the need to perceive youth not as a social issue but as a social resource. The youth policy should be aimed at the creation of opportunities, open a positive strategy aimed at the utilization of initiative, energy and knowledge of young people and thus help the youth scene to create a positive vision of the future personal lives for all young people, including disadvantaged groups. Emphasis should be put, similarly to the Scandinavian countries, should enable young people to „stay young“ instead of focusing on how to resolve their problems in order to help them become „adults“. The youth policy should lead to the preservation of identity and autonomy of the youth subculture, prevent the marginalisation of some groups of young people through its universal profile, strengthen and support positive perspectives for all young people and support them in their active citizenship. In this regard, it's necessary to emphasize a more proactive than reactive character of the youth policy, give young people an opportunity to be the creators of social development, and not only to react to the given status and existing problems.

In regard to the creation of the youth policy and practical steps related to its implementation, it's necessary to solve the interconnection of the children's and youth policy and the related administrative structures for children and youth in the Slovak republic. The professional evaluation of the interconnection of ontogenetic development and its significant the „smooth transfer“ from the period of childhood into adulthood seem to represent an important precondition for the creation of youth policy. As well a simultaneous effort to ensure the development of identity and specific aspects of children's and youth work in all phases of development are noteworthy.

The main players in the youth policy sphere in the Slovak Republic is the public administration and youth scene. The public administration covers the political representatives, government officials, and representatives of self-governments. The realisation of youth policy requires personal and conceptual support of the department responsible for the youth policy at the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and the institution Iuventa, whose mission is to implement the youth policy. Individual ministries and self-government bodies should have officials appointed to deal with and carry the responsibility for youth issues. They should cooperate with the youth scene, churches, non-governmental organisations and volunteers. One of the main tasks of the youth sector is to support and activate civic youth organisations.

The realisation of the national youth policy in Slovakia is happening at several levels, and consists of a complicated system of re-allocation of competencies in the area of government support in the area of support and protection of youth, as well as of a process of constant search for a relation of the state, self-governments and civic society based on partnership.

The National youth policy is developed at the level of:

1. state,
2. local and regional self-governments,
3. local communities.

At the state level the process covers:

the creation of the legislative preconditions for the realisation of youth policy, through:

- Preparing the adoption of the Act on Youth in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which should aim towards the strengthening of the national youth policy status at the central, regional and local level and should be consistent with the reality and the existing legal system. This requires the definition of the status of youth in the society, the resolution of terminological questions, put emphasis on the inter-sectoral approach to youth issues at various level of public administration.
- Preparing the adoption of the Act on Volunteering in the National Council of the Slovak Republic as an act of support to participation of young people on the public life. The contentual basis of the legal definition of volunteering and related issues should consists of an institutional framework for volunteering, with a defined attitude of the state towards volunteering in terms of its support and creation of conditions for its development. The legal Code should reflect basic principles of volunteering. They include the principle of solidarity, support and remuneration-free delivery of service, which contradicts the application of the traditional labor law tools and similar institutes, but also a principle of proactive support reflecting the evaluation of its social value and supporting its pluralism and autonomy. An important basis for the legal tools for volunteering will be the definition of basic terminology and principles of volunteer service delivery based on a volunteer agreement and the definition of forms of support to volunteering provided by the state as well as the creation of a grant system for its support.
- Preparation of the adoption of the concept of non-formal education of children and youth. Non-formal education of children and youth is interconnected with personal development, active citizenship, management skills development and also the development of skills necessary for social and labor market integration of the young people. It includes a whole scale of social and ethnic values such as human rights, tolerance, promotion of peaceful resolution of conflict, solidarity and social justice, inter-generational dialogue and gender equality, democratic citizenship and intercultural development. Non-formal education of children and youth uses specific methods (the method of cooperation, education based on acquisition of skills, autonomy, responsibility etc.), which are not generally used in the formal education system. Its goal is to evaluate and develop practical skills of young people, leading towards acquisition of social skills and proactive attitudes of individuals towards reality, as the preconditions of their effective integration into their future professional world. The concept of non-formal education should lead towards achieving balance between formal and non-formal education strengthening their status equality as subsystems of the education system of the Slovak republic.
- Unification of sectoral policies and fostering inter-sectoral cooperation (labor and social issues, education, health care, internal affairs, justice etc.) on issues related to young people and the creation of inter-sectoral bodies and projects of cooperation and coordination targeting problems of young people in the area of education, employment and labor market, health, housing, life style, social protection of youth and family and the penal code. The creation of an actual youth policy coordination body at the level of the Ministry of Education or at the level of government (government commissioner for youth),
- Youth research plays an important support role in the youth policy. It helps the creators of youth policy and youth workers to comprehend the youth phenomenon, trends and living conditions of young people. Research also helps in the process of identification of indicators, provision of statistics and elaboration of evaluation studies, thus promoting the policy of factual work in youth policy development. In this regard it's necessary to support the elaboration of analyses necessary for reflection and further strategy development in the Slovak Republic.
- Preparation of youth workers. It's a necessary precondition of youth policy implementation. The Slovak Republic (with regard to its long-term traditions in the area of preparation of professionals for organised



activities provided at leisure time of children and youth) needs to concentrate more on the curriculum of the preparation process of youth workers in the course of university and post-graduate education, but also in the course of the continual education taking place out side of the formal education system and include competencies not only leading towards influencing the educational aspects of leisure time utilization by young people, but also on the promotion of youth, support in the process of social inclusion (especially in the case of ethnic and cultural minorities), support of cultural diversity, and the support of activities taking place in non-formal groups of young people etc.

- From the point of view of national youth policy implementation the state at the regional and local level should:
 - a) Formulate political targets;
 - b) Create conditions and frameworks for regional and local action through legislation, budgeting, research and other tools;
 - c) Establish a central and regional administration network for youth policy and define relevant priorities, implement goals, ensure and manage resources, evaluate results and ensure continuity in youth policy development;
 - d) Create a system of involvement of regional self-governments, local authorities and individuals on planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

At regional and local level

- As the regional and local policy in the Slovak republic has not been formed by tradition from „below“, but was created in a relatively short period of time due to legislative intervention of the state, its necessary to overcome a certain lack of informedness of self-government representatives in the area of youth policy (as well as other sectoral policies) in the context of the process of defining regional priorities and overcome a certain mistrust of citizens (including young people) towards professional competencies of self-government representatives;
- In this regard it would be beneficiary to involve self-government representatives into the process of definition of national youth policy goals. The dialogue between the state and self-governments should increase the motivation and involvement of self-governments;
- Self-governments should have a support system for youth civic organisations, but also a youth information service, ensure the preparation of youth workers, establish structures for youth participation, regional and local youth bodies etc.
- From the point of view of regional conditions, self-governments should have the competence to prefer or emphasize certain issues within the framework of the regional youth policy (for example minority policy, prevention of addiction and crime, youth employment improvement, housing issues, elimination of domestic violence or bullying at schools). These questions should be formulated as specific measurable goals and thus create possibilities of further development of youth policy.
- Self-governments should support research at local and regional level, through provision of feedback in the form of data on methods of youth participation, measures ensuring continuity and interconnection of youth policy programmes, information on the management of youth policy at local level etc.
- Self-governments could elaborate (on the basis of the Finnish example) a minimum package of opportunities, which they would like to provide at regional and local level – for example, a list of basic services for local youth including:
 - Financial support to youth organisations and non-organised youth groups
 - Premises for young people
 - A local self-government youth worker (financed by the local self-government)

- Mediation of workshops for young people
- Youth information and counselling centres
- Leisure time activities available to young people
- Programmes for disadvantaged young people
- Free access to internet
- Interest-based activities
- Summer camps
- Opportunities for intercultural learning (support of mobility, youth exchange programmes, volunteer involvement abroad)
- Support of own cultural production of young people

In this regard it's necessary to intensify the cooperation of representatives of public administration with the youth scene. This should lead towards:

- Support of civic society, and mainly of conjugation of young people,
- Partnership of generation, overcoming the fears of older generations in terms authority loss,
- A change in the accent from „listening to young people“ to real participation, i.e. delegation of responsibility for certain activities towards young people,
- Involvement of young people into decision-making bodies and processes, related to development of schools, communities etc.
- A change in the role of young people from „passive consumers“ to „active partners“,
- Expansion of youth participation into sectoral policies relevant to young people (such s education, health, leisure time opportunities, family policy, social issues, housing, employment etc.),
- Involvement of disadvantaged and passive young people into civic life.



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