



Youth Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries

Overview of youth policy in Eastern Partnership countries
and its European support mechanisms



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Foreword

The joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017 announced the establishment of a special Youth Package. Its consequence was the Youth and Education Package published in June 2018 by the European Commission as a mechanism facilitating support for investments in competencies and skills of young people, enhancing their civic engagement and employment, while fostering their entrepreneurial mindset. In response to this declaration and to further strengthen youth cooperation between Eastern Partnership and European Union countries, this publication presents the youth programmes and measures taken up by the European Union and Poland and concerning the Eastern Partnership countries, an overview of the youth policies of the Eastern Partnership countries, a description of the challenges faced by young people in this region and the proposed conclusions and recommendations to further enhance cooperation between the European Union countries, especially Poland, and the Eastern Partnership countries in the area of youth policy and youth work.

This is a particularly important matter from Poland's perspective. Our country is the most active one in the European Union in implementing educational projects with the participation of young people from the Eastern Partnership countries, as a part of the already completed Youth in Action programme of the European Commission and the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme. Thousands of young Poles have taken part in projects implemented in Eastern Partnership countries. At the same time, Poland is a very attractive country for hosting learning mobility projects, the most often chosen projects by young Ukrainians and Georgians. The joint projects of young people not only help to acquire knowledge, develop competencies and skills, but also build lasting bridges between nations.

I am confident that the Youth and Education Package will ensure a continuation of the already started good cooperation, will enhance building and strengthening of social capital, and in doing so will have a positive impact on the situation of young people in the Eastern Partnership countries.

Paweł Poszytek
Director General, Foundation for the Development
of the Education System

Eastern Partnership^{1,2}

The Eastern Partnership is a joint undertaking of European Union Member States, initiated by Poland and Sweden and implemented within the European Neighbourhood Policy since 2009. It is addressed to six partnership countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and its main goal, in accordance with the declaration adopted during the first Eastern Partnership summit in Prague (7 May 2009), is to create the necessary conditions for accelerating political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries.

The beginnings reach back to 1998, when Bronisław Geremek, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, used the term "Eastern Dimension" in reference to the policy of the European Union towards the states of Eastern Europe. Three years later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drew up the document "EU eastern policy in the context of EU Eastern and Central Europe enlargement – the Polish perspective" which postulated closer cooperation between the countries of the European Union with its eastern neighbours. In 2003 the European Commission adopted the document on EU cooperation with the neighbouring countries – the European Neighbourhood Policy¹. Its objective is to strengthen prosperity, security and stability, basing on democracy and the rule of law of government structures in the EU neighbouring countries. The European Neighbourhood Policy covers 16 states – six Eastern Partnership countries and ten southern neighbours (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Syria).

The Eastern Partnership is aimed at significantly strengthening the European Union policy towards allied countries by placing

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1. The sources of data of all chapters are given in the chapter Bibliography. A detailed list of references has been included in the chapter Footnotes.
 2. The chapter Eastern Partnership has been prepared entirely on the basis of material of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. The sources to documents have been given in the end footnotes.

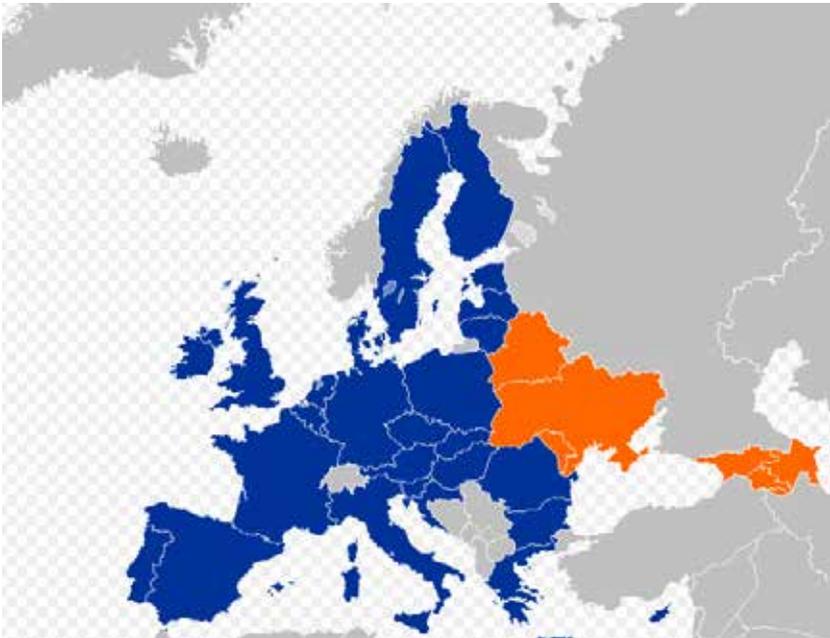
special emphasis on the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. To achieve the set objectives, the Eastern Partnership strives to support political and socioeconomic reforms in the six partnership countries in order to bring them closer to the European Union. The Eastern Partnership is also aimed at promoting stable relations and building trust between all the involved parties.

Cooperation within the Eastern Partnership may be bilateral, multilateral or nongovernmental. The bilateral dimension consists of relations of the European Union with the individual partner countries. Three of the six countries: Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have signed Association Agreements (AA), containing also provisions on the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA)ⁱⁱⁱ. On 1 September 2014, provisional application of the Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia was started. The political part of the agreement with Ukraine entered into force on 1 November 2014, while implementation of the free trade part of the agreement – on 1 January 2016. Armenia completed the AA/DCFTA negotiations in July 2013, but withdrew from signing the agreement in September 2013 due to accession to the Customs Union (encompassing also Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) in January 2015^{iv}. In December 2015, negotiations were started between the European Union and Armenia on the establishment of a new legal framework for further relations (the New Frame Agreement). Azerbaijan, which had not negotiated DCFTA, as it is not a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), expressed interest in signing a Strategic Agreement with the European Union. Belarus, also remaining outside the WTO, is not negotiating an Association Agreement but is interested in establishing a legal framework of relations with the European Union. The different objectives and expectations of the individual countries of the Eastern Partnership regarding the European Union are a part of the principle of differentiation currently developed in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Under this principle, consideration is given to different interests, ambitions and level of involvement of partner states in their relations with the European Union.

Developing multilateral cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries has been organised by the European Commission within four thematic platforms, devoted to:

- » democracy, good governance and stability, i.e. Platform 1 – improved functioning of the judiciary, public administration reform and the fight against corruption;
- » economic integration and convergence with EU policies, i.e. Platform 2 – regulatory harmonisation and environmental protection issues;
- » energy security, i.e. Platform 3 – development of infrastructure and diversification of energy supply, harmonisation of energy policies, promotion of energy savings and use of renewable energy sources;
- » contacts between people, i.e. Platform 4 – education, youth, culture, support for NGOs and a civil society, promoting student exchange as well as research and innovation.

Map 1. European Union (blue) and the Eastern Partnership (orange) countries.



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The platforms facilitate planning, implementing and coordinating common undertakings facilitating the development of multilateral cooperation⁴. Each platform has adopted a set of priorities as well as an action plan and monitors their progress on an ongoing basis. Pursuant to the Prague Declaration (2009) the meetings of each platform are held twice a year and gather high officials from Eastern Partnership and European Union countries responsible for implementing reforms in the given areas.

The work of the thematic platforms is backed by 14 expert panels. These review and analyse the situation in individual partner countries in terms of matters dealt with in the platforms and prepare recommendations and project proposals. Recently a new panel was set up to handle digital markets, in response to the interest voiced in this area. Multilateral cooperation is complemented by training programmes, seminars and workshops linked to the activities of the thematic platforms and expert panels.

In 2009 the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was established. Its goal is to enhance the contact and dialogue between civil society organisations and public authorities. The Annual Assembly of the Forum serves as a platform to discuss further strategies to support the development of the civil society in Eastern Partnership Countries. Within the Forum there are five working groups devoted to the following topics: democracy, human rights, good governance and stability, economic integration, and convergence with EU policy, environment, climate change and energy security, contacts between people and social and labour policies and social dialogue. The working groups meet once a year and each of them has two coordinators: one elected by the Assembly and one appointed in the Eastern Partnership Country. The matters related to education and youth are discussed in the contacts between people and social and labour policies and social dialogue working group. The Eastern Society Civil Society Forum is an important instrument of support of Eastern Partnership goals within the Platform 4.

The Eastern Partnership is financed primarily by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), with the 2014–2020 budget

totalling EUR 15 432 634 000, of which about EUR 4.1 bn has been apportioned for financing the Eastern Partnership³. To compare – in the EU financial perspective for 2007-2013, about EUR 2.4 bn was apportioned for this purpose.

3. According to 2014 prices.

Eastern Partnership summits⁴

Eastern Partnership summits are organised every two years and outline the political directions of development.

The first summit (Prague, 7 May 2009) led to the adoption of a joint declaration⁴⁾, which established the Eastern Partnership between the countries of the European Union and the partner countries of Eastern Europe. In accordance with the Prague Declaration, the participating countries undertook to establish a partnership based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to market economy, sustainable development and good governance. The Declaration also provided for strengthening the development of bilateral and multilateral relations, also outlining the structure of the thematic platforms.

The second Eastern Partnership summit was held in Warsaw, on 29–30 September 2011. It was one of the most important events of Poland's presidency of the European Union Council. The summit was attended by twenty seven delegations from EU states and five from the Partnership countries. The following came to the Warsaw summit: Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, France's Prime Minister Francois Fillon, Great Britain's Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and representatives of EU institutions: European Parliament Chairman Jerzy Buzek and the head of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy who chaired the summit deliberations. It is worth adding that representatives of Belarus did not take part in the summit.

The Warsaw summit ended with the adoption of a Joint Declaration⁴⁾, which confirms that the European Union is ready to help the Partnership countries in their European aspirations. The Declaration

4. The chapter Eastern Partnership Summits has been entirely prepared on the basis of material of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. The sources to the documents have been given in the final footnotes.

also contains an announcement on continuation of negotiations in the matter of concluding association agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The visa free movement for the citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries was also an important (however, still unresolved) point. It was also decided that financial assistance for the Partnership countries will be increased to EUR 2 bn for the next two years (2012-2013). Until that time, it totalled EUR 600 mn for the years 2010-2013.

The third Eastern Partnership summit was held in Vilnius (28- 29 November 2013). There, Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia were initialled as well as agreements on the deep and comprehensive free trade area. In Vilnius two agreements were also signed: with Azerbaijan on visa facilitation and with Georgia on participation in EU crisis missions. However, the authorities of Ukraine withdrew from signing the AA/DCFTA agreements and Armenia from initialling them due to its integration with the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The summit ended with the signing of a Joint Declaration^{viii}, which nevertheless did not bring any new elements to the Eastern Partnership initiative in relation to the 2011 summit in Warsaw.

The fourth Eastern Partnership summit was organised in Riga (21-22 May 2015). Its participants summed up the achievements made since the last summit in Vilnius in 2013 and set out a programme for the future. The programme assumed that the EU would become strongly engaged in contacts with all six partner countries, irrespective of their individual level of ambition in terms of relations with the EU^{ix}. Leaders also reaffirmed the importance of the reform programmes in the partner states and the need to establish strengthened and more transparent institutions, free from corruption. Discussions focused on multilateral cooperation projects aiming to strengthen four identified priority areas: institutions and good governance, enhancing mobility and contacts between people, developing market opportunities and ensuring energy security. An important topic was also conflict resolution in the region. All summit participants agreed to pursue all efforts aiming at de-escalation and a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine.

During the last Eastern Partnership summit (Brussels, 24 November 2017), leaders of European Union and Eastern

Partnership countries discussed how to strengthen cooperation and achieve a stronger economy, governance, connectivity and society. All leaders agreed on a joint declaration reconfirming their commitment and the high importance they attach to the Eastern Partnership. In the declaration, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to support the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners. The summit participants called for renewed efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of unresolved conflicts in the region on the basis of international law. They also acknowledged the European aspirations and European choice of partners who signed association agreements with the EU: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. They also reminded of the right for other partners to choose the level of ambition they aspire to in their relations with the EU. Leaders also adopted 20 deliverables for the year 2020. These outline how to improve the lives of citizens across the Eastern partners in the four priority areas of cooperation identified in Riga in 2015, e.g.: strong support of investments in competencies and skills of young people, increasing their civic engagement and employment, as well as support of entrepreneurial mindsets. The declaration^x announced the establishment of a special Youth Package, as a mechanism facilitating these objectives. The direct inspiration for preparing this package was the Third Youth Forum of the Eastern Partnership, organised in Warsaw in June 2017 (see the chapter Eastern Partnership Youth Forums).

Eastern Partnership Youth Forums

In 2011, during the Polish presidency in the European Council, Poland put forward the initiative of including the topic of cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries on the list of priorities and organising the EU Youth Event in Warsaw²⁰. For the first time, youth leaders from Eastern Partnership countries had an opportunity to discuss matters of importance to young people with their peers from other countries. The event became an inspiration for organising Eastern Partnership Youth Forums in subsequent years, within the Eastern Partnership Platform 4, the only one aimed at activities concerning and directly engaging citizens of EU and Eastern Partnership countries.

So far, three Eastern Partnership Youth Forums have been organised. The first Forum, in Kaunas, during the Lithuanian presidency in the European Union Council (22-25 October 2013) gathered about 200 participants: young people, researchers dealing with youth issues, young workers and decision-makers from European Union and Eastern Partnership countries. The Forum's objectives included enhancing and recognising youth work and non-formal learning, raising its quality, as well as highlighting the significance of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Youth Window²¹. The conclusions²² adopted during the Forum included the following:

- » the need for deeper and more effective cooperation between institutions of non-formal and formal education, to employ young people and incorporate them in activities of a civil society;
- » to ensure mechanisms of recognising competencies acquired during non-formal education and to create support systems for persons working with young people;
- » to make sure that public measures respond to the real needs of young people and are created with their active participation;
- » to make youth work and non-formal education enhance incorporation and activation of young people affected by social and economic exclusion.

The second Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised in Riga on 9-12 February 2015, within the framework of the Latvian presidency in the European Union Council. It was attended by more than 250 people from 30 countries (young people, youth workers, representatives of employers, teachers, lecturers, researchers and representatives of ministries, the European Commission and international organisations). The main objective of the Forum was to strengthen cooperation (including inter-sectoral cooperation in the field of youth) between countries of the Erasmus+ programme (EU programme for education, training youth and sport for 2014- 2020) and the Eastern Partnership countries, particularly within the educational programmes of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations, and also the exchange of good practices and development of youth policy. A number of recommendations^{xiv}, were elaborated, focusing on the following areas:

- » involvement and the coordination of actions of the public, private and nongovernmental sectors, trade unions, business representatives, employment services and international actors, to guarantee young people employment and to counteract unemployment;
- » creating synergy between non-formal and formal education;
- » supporting voluntary service and volunteer attitudes among young people;
- » creating mechanisms facilitating assessment and supporting recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education.

The third Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was held in Warsaw on 21 and 23 June 2017. It was organised by: the Ministry of National Education, the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission. The Warsaw Forum had as its main goal strengthening dialogue on participation of young people in social life and their engagement in education and entrepreneurship. The Forum was attended by more than 300 people: representatives of youth and nongovernmental organisations, educational institutions, persons with influence on youth policy as well as business and

science representatives from the Eastern Partnership countries and countries taking part in the Erasmus+ programme. The Forum ended with two groups of recommendations^{xv}. The following were for decision-makers:

- » to establish and develop evidence-based youth policy, based on principles of transparency and with active participation of youth organisations;
- » to create efficient and effective legal, financial and political instruments, thanks to which youth organisations can use their full potential;
- » to improve coordination between individual European Union programmes and measures dealing with youth issues;

The second group was for organisations working with young people:

- » to intensify measures of analysing the needs of young people and to monitor the spending of EU funds on youth-oriented projects;
- » to increase involvement in international projects, including volunteer projects;
- » to strengthen cooperation between non-formal and formal education systems.

The third Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was especially important in the context of further development of youth policy. It allowed for discussions and in result, for identification of common challenges in the field of youth in the European Union and Eastern Partnership Countries. The Forum also contributed to proposing specific actions as a response to the challenges identified. Its participants drafted a message to be discussed during the 5th Eastern Partnership summit (November 2017).

Youth Policy in Eastern Partnership countries⁵

According to the definition of the Council of Europe, youth policy consists of all activities of public authorities for young people. In most countries this is an inter-ministerial policy and calls for the coordinated activities of several ministries, dealing with e.g. education, science, culture, social matters, employment or health^{xvi}. The basic aim is to create for young people suitable conditions to operate in, ensuring the right to education or participation in political, cultural and social life on equal terms with other social groups. Thanks to an effective youth policy, young people have the opportunity to become citizens with full rights, who play an active role in society and in shaping the labour market.

The definitions of the notion of youth differ in the individual countries of both the European Union and the Eastern Partnership. The approach to youth policy implementation is also different. This chapter presents an outline of the youth policy in each of the Eastern Partnership countries, describes the main institutions and organisations responsible for its modelling, analysing also for its financing. At this point it is worth noting that all of the Eastern Partnership countries are members of the Community programme Erasmus+ and in a limited extent can be partners of international educational and youth projects, however they are not considered as programme countries as understood by the Regulation (EU) No1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing "Erasmus+" the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC. The Eastern Partnership countries also enjoy the options of the Visegrad Fund and are signatories (except for Azerbaijan) of the Memorandum on Cooperation in youth issues with the Visegrad Group.

5. Information on GDP, population, birth rate, active and passive voting right of Eastern Partnership countries are from the database of The World Factbook. Detailed sources of information for individual countries are in the chapter Bibliography.

The presented information has been updated as for June 2018. It should be remembered, however, that in the countries of the EP region there are frequent changes in the competencies of individual ministries and new documents on youth policy may appear.

THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA



In the Republic of Armenia, persons aged 16 to 30 are considered as youth^{xvii}. According to 2012 data of the National Statistics Office, there are 888 344 such persons, accounting for about 29 percent of the country's total population.

Per capita GDP: EUR 7689 (2017)

Population: 3 045 191 (2017)

Urbanisation index: 62.5 percent (2017)

Fertility rate: 1.64 (2017)

Youth population (16-30): 888 344 (2012)

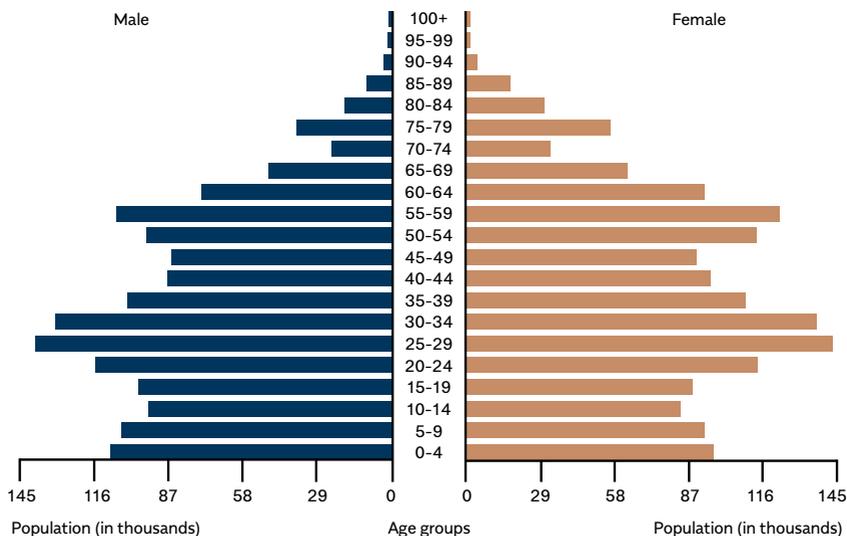
Active voting age: 18

Passive voting age: 18 (local government elections), 25 (national elections)

Systemic measures to benefit young people have been under way in Armenia since 1995. Since that time, two strategies have been developed, containing long-term objectives and directions of development of youth policy: for the years 1999–2001 and 2015–2025^{xviii}. The second strategy focuses on increasing the participation of young people in political, economic and cultural life. Priority tasks also include providing needed support for rural youth, to ensure equal access to education, culture and participation in the political life of the country^{xix}. These tasks are the responsibility of both the central and local authorities. Each year, the government presents a report on this topic to the General Assembly.

The main body responsible for the preparation and execution of the youth policy is the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Armenia. The Ministry prepares legal acts, supervises the implementation of legal acts and draws up recommendations related to improvement and amendment of the regulations in effect concerning young people. The Ministry works out and implements national programmes that focus on young people, takes part in preparing the country's budget and watches over the fulfilment of commitments resulting from international agreements or programmes, by the same supporting international youth exchange. The Armenian Ministry of Sports

Fig. 1. Republic of Armenia – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

and Youth is also vested with the responsibility of developing statistics, analyses and projections concerning young citizens and for carrying on a dialogue with youth organisations (within the established Public Council, operating by the minister of sports and youth). Other state administration bodies partly engaged in the implementation of Armenia’s youth policy include the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Diaspora, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and the Ministry of Culture. An evaluation of the state youth strategy has shown, however, that inter-ministerial cooperation is poor. It has also turned out that there are no mechanisms to facilitate coordination of the activities of ministries and social partners.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia has established a Standing Commission for Science, Education, Culture and Youth. The Commission consults on new legal acts and prepares opinions on legal acts for the National Assembly. In 2004 the Youth Parliament was established within the framework of the Standing Commission for Science, Education, Culture and Youth,

to become a nongovernmental organisation a year later. Its main responsibility is to support the participation of young people in the legislative process and to increase the engagement of young Armenians in the political life of the country.

Much earlier, in 1997, the National Youth Council of Armenia was created. Though officially still a full member of the European Youth Forum, it has not been active in any way and is not recognisable in the country.

In 2001, the government of Armenia established the Pan-Armenian International Youth Centre, which in 2010 was renamed the Youth Foundation of Armenia. The Foundation implements programmes dealing with education, science, enterprise support, or patriotic upbringing. Special attention is placed on pan-Armenian activities, supporting the dialogue between young Armenians around the world. This is particularly important in the case of Armenia – a country where fewer Armenians live than in the diaspora. The Foundation is also responsible for promoting Armenian cultural heritage, education and history at home and abroad.

In 2013, the Youth Events Holding Centre was created at the Ministry of Sports and Youth, as a government agency implementing the state youth policy. The Centre contains the Youth Studies Institute, which does research on such issues as: youth employment, development of the 3rd sector, or the labour market and education. From 2016, the Institute has been conducting research on youth work and youth workers. The results are to be used for the creation of the new government strategy for work with young people. One of the most important activities of the centre is providing support for Youth Capitals, selected each year to promote work with young people at the local level.

International cooperation is a priority of Armenia's youth strategy. Student exchange programmes promoting inter-cultural dialogue, history and culture of Armenia are promoted. The country has also signed agreements on bilateral cooperation in youth matters with: Belarus, India, Israel, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan. Youth organisations from Armenia, in turn, cooperate with partners from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the European Union, as well as with

the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Peace Corps or the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

It is estimated that in 2017, the government of Armenia appropriated EUR 1 452 341 for measures to support youth and youth policy, i.e. slightly more than in 2015-2016.



THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Per capita GDP: EUR 14 701 (2017)

Population: 9 961 396 (2017)

Urbanisation index: 55.2 percent (2017)

Fertility rate: 1.89 (2017)

Youth population (14-29): 2 900 000
(estimates, 2011)

Active voting age: 18

Passive voting age: 25

In Azerbaijan, the 2002 Law on Youth Policy defines youth as aged 14-29^{xx}. This age group accounts for about 29 percent of the total population of Azerbaijan.

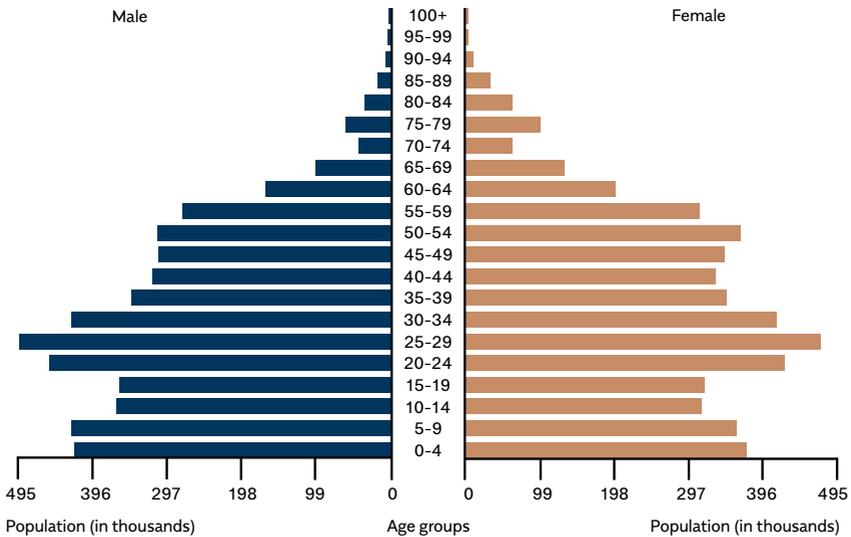
According to this law, the main objective of the youth policy of Azerbaijan is to provide support for young people in developing their competencies and skills, to

counteract social problems and guarantee protection of rights of young people^{xxi}. The law lists six key areas: spiritual, ethical and concerning cultural education, support for talented young people, health and physical education, the labour market, support for young families and support for youth organisations.

The main body responsible for implementing the youth policy in this country is the Ministry of Youth and Sports, established in 1994. Its main tasks include ensuring young people the right conditions for development (in accordance with the Law on Youth Policy) and also to promote national values and to supervise youth organisations. The Ministry is also responsible for implementation of the programme on Azerbaijani Youth in 2011-2015, which is the basic executory tool of the Law on Youth Policy^{xxiii}.

In 2004, the international platform of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation was established to develop

Fig. 2. The Republic of Azerbaijan – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

a joint youth policy of the countries associated in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In April 2018, the ministers of sports and youth of Islamic countries met in Baku for the fourth time. This is an important direction of international cooperation in youth matters in Azerbaijan. The country also actively cooperates with the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

An important role in shaping youth policy is played by the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation^{xxiii}, which supports measures benefiting young people in such areas as science, education or culture, by allocating grants for various projects, including international ones. According to reports of the Foundation, since its establishment in December 2011, it co-financed 3909 projects^{xxiv}. This is a unique example among the Eastern Partnership and other countries of such a large national fund supporting youth initiatives and projects.

Despite this, difficulties are observed with the transfer of funds by international programmes to beneficiaries in Azerbaijan. In 2014, the law on registration of foreign donor institutions was adopted

to regulate their activity in Azerbaijan. The system significantly hampers the transfer of funds by nongovernmental organisations from abroad.

The National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA)^{xxv} was established in 1995 by 11 organisations and currently associates 124. Its main responsibilities are: coordination of activities of affiliated organisations, fostering participation of young people in political life, representing youth organisations at the regional and national level and providing support for dialogue, cooperation and the exchange of good practices between affiliated organisations. NAYORA represents Azerbaijan at the international level, also as a full member of the European Youth Forum.

According to 2012 data, the budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sports totalled EUR 28 452 700, but there is no information on what part of it was apportioned for youth-oriented measures.



BELARUS

Per capita GDP: EUR 15 756 (2017)

Population: 9 498 700 (2016)

Urbanisation index: 77.4 percent (2017)

Fertility rate: 1.48 (2017)

Youth population (14-31): 1 992 512 (2017)

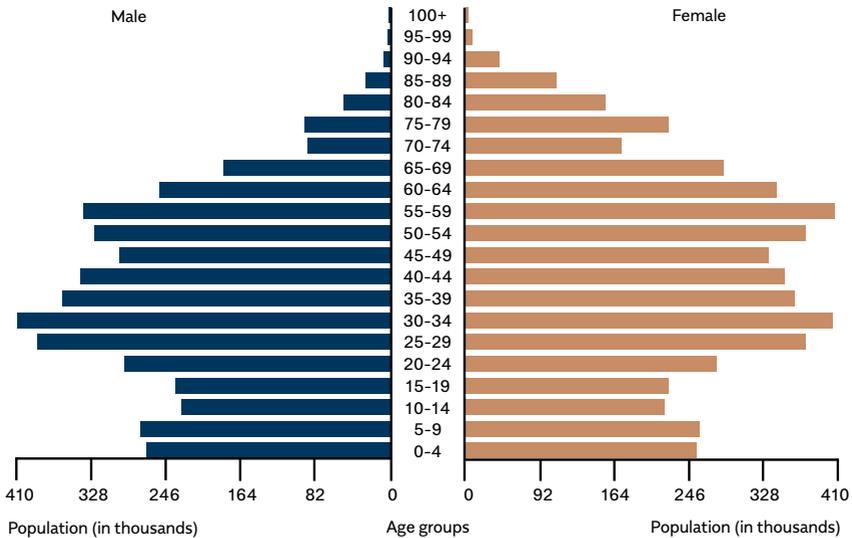
Active voting age: 18

Passive voting age: 21 (House of Representatives), 30 (Council of the Republic)

According to the Law on general principles of youth policy of 7 December 2009, being the foundation of the state youth strategy, youth is understood as persons aged 14 to 31 years^{xxvi}. These persons account for about 20 percent of the total population of Belarus.

The 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus stipulates that the main objectives of state activity for young people are: to support education, to support spiritual, ethical and physical development of young people, to create the right conditions for unfettered participation in political, social, economic and cultural life and to ensure social, financial and legal support for young people in carrying out their life goals^{xxvii}. Other legal acts impacting the youth policy of Belarus include:

Fig. 3. Belarus – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

- » the Law on general principles of youth policy^{xxviii} (of 7 December 2009, regulating the basic issues related to the development, economic and social support of young Belarusians as well as the directions of development of the state youth policy),
- » the Law on State Support for Belarusian Public Organisations Operating for Children and Young People (of 9 November 1999)^{xxix},
- » the Code of Education (of 13 January 2011)^{xxx}.

Important provisions concerning young people also appear in the Programme of the National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development for 2016–2020 (of 15 December 2016). One of the five priorities is the development of the potential of the younger generation, which should be engaged in the creation and development of a knowledge-based economy^{xxxi}. Another important government programme is the Youth Policy, functioning within the broader programme Education and Youth Policy for 2016–2020, adopted on 28 March 2016^{xxxii}. Its purpose is to support active

citizenship and patriotic attitudes among young people and to engage them in activities for the country.

The main body responsible for implementing the youth policy is the Ministry of Education, which supervises activities in the following areas: civic and patriotic education of young people, health, support for young families, young people attending school and very talented young people, employment promotion, protection of the right to freely associate and support for international cooperation. Under the programme, the youth policy is also shaped by: the Ministry of Architecture and Construction, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Communication and Information, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy.

In accordance with the Law on general principles of youth policy, youth policy is financed mainly by the state budget and local budgets. In 2016, support at the central level for the development of youth policy totalled EUR 613 636 017.

Belarus has signed bilateral agreements on cooperation in education, science, youth policy and sports, with such countries as: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia, Saudi Arabia, China, Moldova, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey. The directions of development of youth policy are also outlined by the Union of Russia and Belarus, the Commonwealth of Independent States and to a lesser extent by the Eastern Partnership.

In 1992, the Belarusian National Youth Council, or RADA, was established. Officially it was registered five years later and functioned as a platform representing the sector of youth organisations in the country and abroad. In 2006, by the decision of the Supreme Court, the RADA was officially dissolved and since then has not been recognised by the national authorities. In spite of this, it remains a full member of the European Youth Forum, associating more than 20 organisations and informal groups, continuing to represent Belarus at the international level. In 2014,

the RADA registered a technical office in Vilnius, to again acquire legal personality and greater transparency of operation.

The Belarusian Committee for Youth Organisations, established in 2003, is not recognised by the European Youth Forum. Though it does not carry on activities on a greater scale, the state authorities classify it as an official youth council.

Belarus has the largest national youth organisation in Europe – the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) with over half a million members and receiving 98 percent of the country's total budget apportioned for youth organisations. BRSM focuses on such directions of activity as: patriotic upbringing, volunteerism, organisation of leisure time, employment of young people or digital technologies. This is a flagship initiative of the Belarusian state, fully presenting a model of work with young people following the model of the Communist Youth Union from the days of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In Belarus youth policy is completely controlled by the authorities. As a result of this, NGOs have no chance of obtaining independent financing from the state. International organisations encounter serious difficulties in carrying out grant programmes in Belarus, given the existing requirement of obtaining consent from the national authorities for implementing activities financed with foreign funds.

GEORGIA



In Georgian legislation there is no explicit definition of youth. The National Youth Policy defines youth as persons aged 14-29^{xxxiii}, whereas the Georgian Statistical Office applies the categories 10-14, 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years^{xxxiv}. It is estimated that young people account for about 20 percent of the total population of Georgia.

Per capita GDP: USD 8 980 (2017)

Population: 3 718 200 (2017)

Urbanisation index: 54 percent (2017)

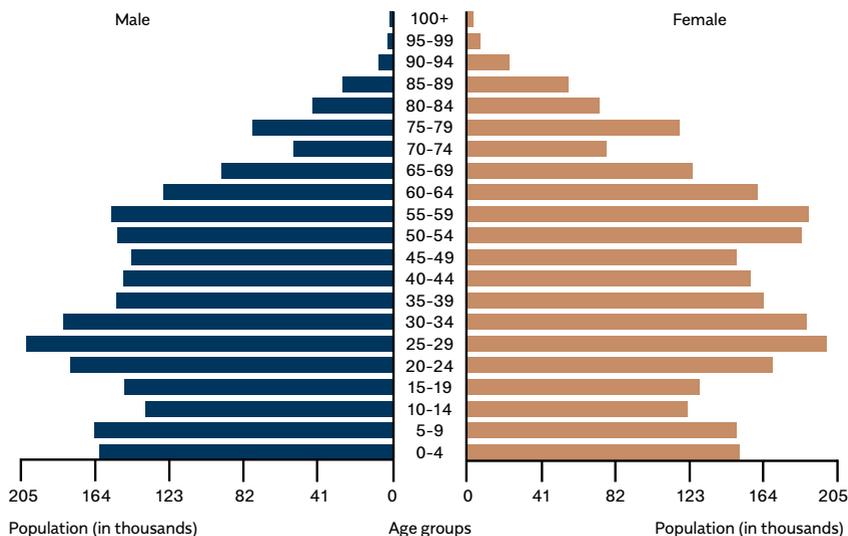
Fertility rate: 1.76 (2017)

Youth population (15-29)⁶: 746 100 (2016)

Active voting age: 18

Passive voting age: 25

Fig. 4. Georgia – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

The legal basis for the youth policy in Georgia is the Law on State Support to Children's and Youth Unions of 22 June 1999^{xxxv}, the Law on Protection of Minors of 28 September 2001^{xxxvi} and above all the National Youth Policy of 2 April 2014^{xxxvii}, which came into being in order to enable young people to fully use their potential and also to create mechanisms conducive to their engagement in all spheres of public life.

On 5 March 2015, the Georgian Youth Action Plan was adopted as a key document for implementing the policy for this group of citizens^{xxxviii}. The Plan outlines the most important actions of the government for young people, repeats the assumptions of already existing documents and proposes several new solutions: support for youth work, improving recognition of the results of work with young people and support for the participation of young people in international activities and programmes.

6. Data for the population aged 15-29, however young people in Georgia are considered to be 14-29

Coordination of the activities within the Georgian Youth Action Plan is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. Towards the end of 2017, following government restructuring, this ministry took over this responsibility from the eliminated Ministry of Sports and Youth. The Ministry contains the Youth Affairs Department, responsible for e.g.: helping young people enter the labour market, working out legislation concerning young people, supporting student self-government, supporting young people with special needs (ethnic minorities, displaced persons or young people with fewer opportunities) and fostering a civil society, participation in international programmes and promotion of non-formal education. Since 2007, the Children and Youth National Centre has been operating at the Ministry. The Centre implements programmes that support young people, through establishing educational centres and clubs, and other local government units that work with young people. Other responsibilities include regular monitoring of the situation of children and young people in Georgia.

The Children and Youth Development Foundation has been operating at the Ministry since 2000, as a government agency supporting the development and implementation of youth policy and ensuring active participation of young people in social life.

Georgia is also involved in international activities concerning young people. Bilateral agreements involving young people have been signed with: Lithuania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova and Iran. The Youth Organisations Forum is also organised regularly in Georgia, being an important element in supporting young people and developing regular dialogue.

The National Council of Youth Organisations gathers over 45 NGOs working for young people. It was established in 1995 and is a full member of the European Youth Forum.

The budget of the Ministry of Sports and Youth apportioned for youth-related activities was systematically reduced in 2011- 2017, from EUR 3 763 273 to 1 341 570, i.e. by as much as 64.5 percent. These cuts have led to a drastic reduction in the number of government programmes addressed to young people – from eleven to four.



THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Per capita GDP: USD 4 909 (2017)

Population: 3 474 121 (2017)

Urbanisation index: 45.2 percent (2017)

Fertility rate: 1.57 (2017)

Youth population (15-29): 740 000 (2017)

Active voting age: 18

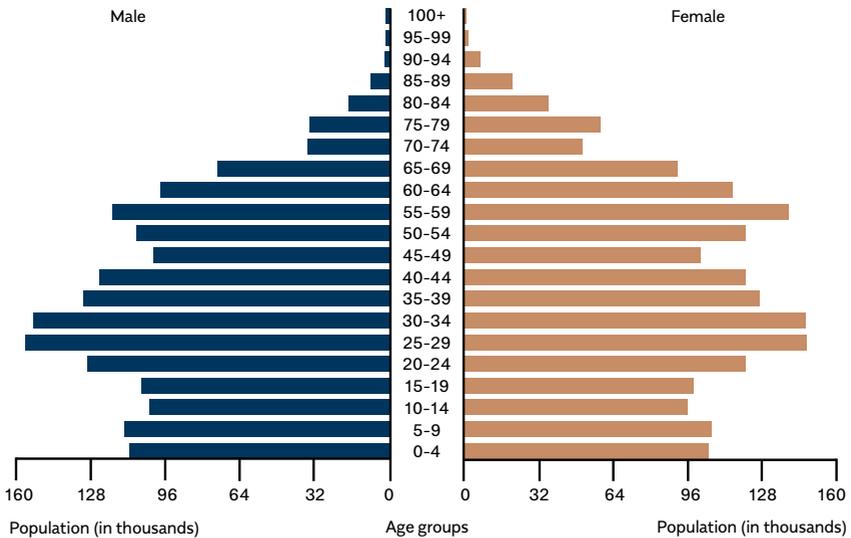
Passive voting age: 18

According to the Law on Youth of 11 February 1999^{xxxx}, youth is defined as persons aged 16 to 30 years. However, in national statistics this is the 15-29 age group^{xl}. According to 2017 estimates, there are about 740 000 persons in this group, accounting for about 21 percent of the country's population.

The main goal of Moldova's youth policy is to ensure favourable conditions for the development of young people and to ensure them access to social, political and economic participation in the life of the country^{xli}. This is carried out through the support of (self-) employment, increased access to education and health care, development of structures encouraging young people to take part in social, cultural and political life and by facilitating access to information on the broad perspectives available for young people. The basic legal act that regulates these matters is the Law on Youth of 11 February 1999 (amended on 23 September 2016)^{xlii}. It is also worth mentioning the National Youth Strategy for 2009-2014, later continued within the framework of the Moldova 2020 Strategy and in the Law on Volunteering of 24 September 2010.

In 2017, responsibilities related to shaping the youth policy were taken over from the closed-down Ministry of Youth and Sports by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. The Ministry is responsible for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national youth policy. Representatives of the Ministry are members of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) as well as of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP). Another body dealing with monitoring and evaluation of the national youth policy is the Parliamentary Commission for Culture, Science, Education, Youth, Sports and Media. Other ministries engaged in shaping youth policy are: the

Fig. 5. The Republic of Moldova – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Social Care and Family as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Moldovan youth organisations are represented by the National Youth Council, established in 1999^{XLIII}. Its basic responsibility is to care for the interests of the affiliated organisations and implement measures benefiting young people in projects dealing with formal and non-formal education. The Council gathers 58 organisations and is a full member of the European Youth Forum and the International Council of youth organisations of the Francophonie (CIJEF).

According to the 2008 data of the Moldovan Ministry of Finance, youth-related government spending can be estimated at about EUR 9 451 300^{XLIV}. This includes expenditures for the development of youth centres, to support young entrepreneurs as well as scholarships for students.



UKRAINE

Per capita GDP: EUR 7 370 (2017)

Population: 42 805 731 (2015)

Urbanisation index: 70.1 percent (2017)

Fertility rate: 1.54 (2017)

Youth population (14-35): 11 700 000 (2015)

Active voting age: 18

Passive voting age: 21

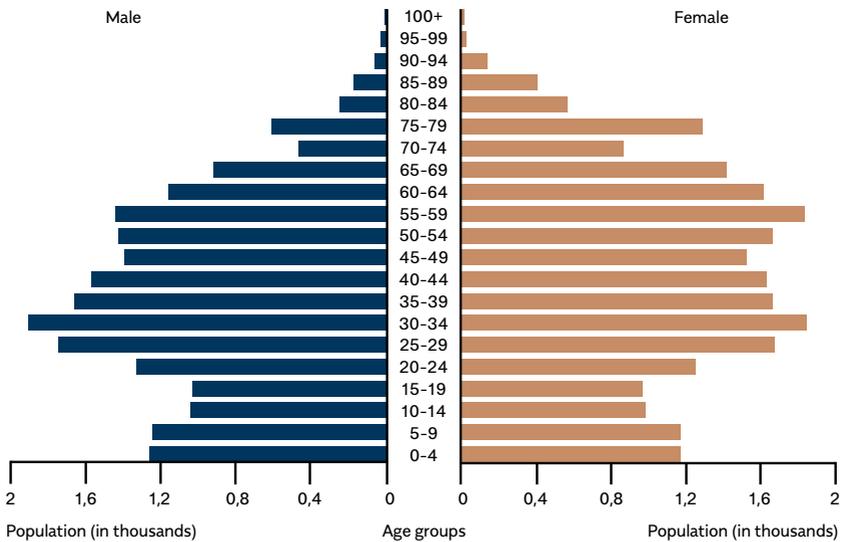
According to the Youth Development Law of 5 February 1993, young people are defined as between 14-35 years^{XLV}. According to 2015 data, there are 11 700 000 people in this age group in Ukraine, accounting for about 32 percent of the country's population^{XLVI}.

The basic legal act dealing with youth policy in Ukraine is the Youth Development Law of 5 February 1993 (successively amended until 2017)^{XLVII}. The Law lays down the assumptions of the Ukrainian policy for young people: respect for values, human rights, cultural heritage and history, active participation of young citizens in the development and implementation of youth policies and programmes and linking these needs with the economic opportunities of the country, access to social services and a sense of security for young people, responsibility of the country for the creation of conditions facilitating development and self-development of the young generation, as well as merging the efforts of individual ministries to benefit young people.

The above objectives are reflected in the programme Youth of Ukraine for 2016-2020^{XLVIII} and in the Patriotic Education Strategy for 2016-2020^{XLIX}. Important provisions in terms of work with young people and participation in non-formal education can be found in the National Youth Work Programme^L.

Even though Ukraine does not have a uniform youth strategy, the most important challenges have been included in the Youth Policy Development Strategy 2016-2020^{LI}. These concern development of a youth policy based on knowledge and research findings, the creation of more coordinated mechanisms of cooperation between individual ministries and a clear definition of the rights and obligations of young people. However, the document

Fig. 6. Ukraine – age pyramid, 2016.



Source: The World Factbook.

does not contain a plan or a schedule that would help in the implementation of the essential measures. In connection with the 2014 reforms in the country, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in cooperation with the Centre for Reforms, worked out the document called *On the Road to Reforms – the Youth Policy in Ukraine for 2016- 2020^{LII}*. The document outlines the main areas of reforms, the tools for carrying them out and proposes a set of indicators measuring the effectiveness of the undertaken actions. The proposed reform primarily aims to create a dynamic sector of work with young people and to increase the participation of young people in the social, political, cultural and economic life of the country. The document (by 2020) calls for a 50 percent increase of young people benefiting from youth programmes (13.8 percent in 2015), a 20 percent reduction in the number of juvenile offenders, creation of better conditions for the development of entrepreneurship among young people, establishment of a comprehensive system of non-formal education and an accompanying system for training youth workers, as well as an increase in the number of young volunteers.

The policy concerning young people of Ukraine is shaped by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and within its structure – the Youth Policy Department. At the legislative level, the Committee for Family, Youth Policy, Sports and Tourism operates within the Supreme Council of Ukraine. The Committee prepares legal acts concerning matters that include: the family, protection of homeless persons, the demographic policy, patriotic education and youth policy.

The institution representing the citizens in youth policy is the Public Council, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Its basic responsibilities include: promotion of the constitutional right of citizens to be engaged in government affairs, monitoring the activities of the ministry and the status of implementation of the youth policy. Members of the Council are representatives of NGOs and other institutions dealing with young people and sports.

The newly created National Youth Council of Ukraine (NYCU) operates at the national and international level. An important effect of these activities has been the establishment of the Eurodesk Centre⁷ Ukraine in 2018 – the first within the Eastern Partnership region. The NYCU has an observer status of the European Youth Forum.

The Ukrainian youth policy is financed with public funds (the central budget and budgets of local governments) as well as by international organisations (mainly by the United Nations under the agreement signed in 2015). The total budget of the programme Ukrainian Youth for 2016–2020 is EUR 16 134 348⁸.

Several agencies of the United Nations are involved in international cooperation with Ukraine: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These organisations operate in close cooperation with the government of Ukraine and

7. Eurodesk is a network operating in 34 European countries. It is made up of organisations and institutions that work with young people, dealing with European and/or youth information. In Eurodesk there are more than 1300 organisations, of which nearly 100 are in Eurodesk Poland.

the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Ukraine also cooperates with the Council of Europe within the Cooperation in Youth Policy Programme for 2016-2020. These activities are harmonised with the Youth of Ukraine programme. Ukrainian NGOs can also benefit from the support of the European Commission programme Erasmus+ (Ukraine is a partner country of the programme and can benefit from the programme in a limited capacity). There are also two bilateral cooperation programmes: the Polish-Ukrainian Council of Youth Exchange and the Ukrainian-Lithuanian Youth Exchange Programme.

Challenges for young people from the Eastern Partnership countries

Because of their great demographic, economic, ethnic, religious and geographic diversity, the Eastern Partnership countries are struggling with various challenges – in the system of exercising authority, in the economic and social sphere and in active or unresolved conflicts.

The societies of the Eastern Partnership countries are relatively young, compared to the European Union countries. However, one must remember there is a very low birth rate in all Eastern Partnership countries. The result is the problem of simple replacement of generations, with its negative impact on the system of education, pensions and the labour market. The number of students of higher-education institutions may decline, while employers may experience staff shortages.

Another challenge facing the Eastern Partnership countries is young people entering the labour market and working out a synergy between the system of education and the needs of the employers. In these countries there is a high unemployment rate among young people (e.g. 37.2 percent in Armenia, or 30.8 in Georgia)¹⁴, and a relatively low activeness in the labour market. As in the case of several Western Europe countries, the skills mismatch can also be observed in the Eastern Partnership region. Young graduates miss skills and competencies required on the labour market. Therefore it is difficult for young people to find a job that corresponds to their education, which may result in a job below their qualifications, migration from smaller towns to big cities, or even economic emigration of highly skilled persons to other countries. The last two trends, combined with the quickly ageing societies, may pose a big problem. At the same time, in some Eastern Partnership countries there is an inflow of economic migrants and refugees (e.g. Syrian refugees in Armenia). The situation of ethnic minorities and their integration with society pose great challenges (e.g. the Roma people in Ukraine).

The passive civic and social attitudes of young people in the Eastern Partnership countries need to be also mentioned. Young people

from rural areas and distant mountain regions are particularly vulnerable since they rarely take part in elections and do not become involved in social issues of their village, region or country.

A separate problem are the unresolved conflicts that take place in five countries of the Eastern Partnership. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria and part of Donbas as well as the annexation of Crimea, lead to the forced resettlement of more than 2.5 mn people. The unresolved conflicts have their impact on the social and economic situation of young people, especially on their educational and professional lives.

Efforts should be made to increase the participation of young people from Eastern Partnership countries in social affairs, particularly young people with fewer opportunities who are disadvantaged economically and geographically. Health protection of young people and promoting a healthy lifestyle with sports also pose many challenges (particular emphasis should be placed on fighting obesity), as does the fight against addiction and promotion of health education (e.g. concerning persons with HIV and the matter of their social acceptance). Many young people also have poor access to housing, resulting in postponed plans to get married and have children.

Many of the above challenges are shared by most countries in the world, particularly the demographic challenges which affect the system of education, the labour market and social welfare.

Civil society organisations operating for young people in Eastern Partnership countries⁸

Apart from the government authorities, which create legal acts, develop and finance government programmes for young people, a very important actor in shaping youth policy are the civil society organisations frequently created by young people and operating for their benefit. One can observe two trends in the approach of the authorities of the Eastern Partnership Countries to cooperation with such social partners⁹:

- » a permissive approach, with broad government incentives for youth organisations to take up initiatives and with numerous incentives for the sector of non-governmental organisations, without obstruction of activities financed with foreign funds (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine);
- » a fundamental approach, with control of the activity of youth organisations financed with foreign funds, with strong influence and at times limitation of their activity (Belarus and Azerbaijan).

Permissive approach

Relatively well-developed cooperation between central and local government authorities and youth organisations can be found in Georgia. The role of Georgian youth organisations is referred to in the National Youth Policy, while the development of their cooperation with the authorities is watched over by the Interministerial Coordination Council, established at the Ministry

8. In this chapter the authors refer to the reports of the US Freedom House organisation *Freedom in the World*, as well as to other sources (e.g. FRSE studies), to present an unbiased division.

9. The adopted division is dynamic, meaning that the approach of a given country may be liberal in one area and controlling in another.

of Sports and Youth. What is important is that the government activities for youth policy development, including cooperation with civil society organisations, can be monitored by every citizen at www.youth.gov.ge.

The US watchdog organisation Freedom House, which each year prepares the report Freedom in the World^{lv} about the state of democracy and freedom in all countries of the world, considers Georgia to be a partly free country (64 points out of 100 in 2018). The report describes the good condition of the NGO sector in Georgia. The number of such organisations is growing, but they are mostly gathered around the country's capital. Some of the NGOs are partners in the legislative process, but others are criticised by those in power as well as by the opposition. The Georgian NGOs readily accept foreign financial support, from e.g.: USAID, the European Union, the Open Society Foundations, the European Endowment for Democracy, the Black Sea Trust, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, or the World Bank.

Also Moldova is trying to create a relatively friendly environment for the development of youth organisations. An important step in this direction was the appointment in 1999-2001 of youth workers in every locality and in every administrative region (raion). Unfortunately, in 2001 the territorial reform was withdrawn and the hired youth workers were dismissed. However, the activities of Moldovan authorities for young people were continued and Moldova implemented youth strategies in 2003, 2009 and 2014. The last strategy (2014-2020) places great emphasis on the development of systems of support for young people, such as e.g. youth centres or health centres, and on strengthening the youth sector through consolidation and interministerial cooperation.

The Freedom House report considers Moldova to be a partly free country (61 points out of 100 in 2017). NGOs are not repressed (the situation in this respect has been systematically improving since 2009), there is freedom of association and expression of opinions. Civil society organisations have played a key role in the public debate on the 2015 banking scandal. The NGO sector in Moldova is largely dependent on external financing (with the exception of large organisations of international range, such as AISEC Moldova). Thus, most organisations are in 80-90 percent

financed by such organisations and institutions as: USAID, the US Embassy, the East-Europe Foundation, the Soros Foundation, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, or the European Union.

In Armenia, although non-governmental organisations encounter certain difficulties, particularly financial ones, one can observe a good climate for cooperation between the authorities and the third sector operating for young people. The right to associate in civil society organisations is enshrined in the Constitution of Armenia (art. 28), whereas the activities of NGOs are well regulated by law (the 2001 Law on Nongovernmental Organisations has helped in this as well).

Freedom House considers Armenia to be a partly free country (45 points out of 100 in 2018). The law guarantees freedom of association, but NGOs have a limited influence on political decisions and a great obstacle in the third sector-government relations is corruption. The main problem, faced not only by youth organisations but also the entire NGO sector, is the lack of financial stability. Therefore, Armenian civil society organisations resort to funds from foreign donors, such as: UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, the World Bank, the US Embassy, the British Council, Save the Children International, the European Union or OSCE.

According to the Freedom House Foundation Report, Ukraine is a partly free country, while NGOs still have a large influence on the implementation of reforms in the country. In recent years, Ukrainian law has been increasing opportunities for civic activeness through the implementation of the e-petition system and a participation budget. The National Strategy for the Development of Civil Society for 2016-2020 was adopted in 2015, also providing for the implementation of an effective mechanism of state financing of civil initiatives.

Fundamental approach

Belarus is a state where the authorities exercise strict control over the NGO sector. The Belarusian Committee for Youth Organisations is recognised by the authorities as the official youth council, yet does not carry on regular activity and is used by the authorities

for political purposes (e.g. during the 2015 presidential election it was responsible for preparing and publishing exit polls among students). The Belarusian National Youth Council (RADDA), in turn, is the first registered youth council after the fall of the Eastern Bloc. It affiliates over 20 organisations and informal groups and is a member of the European Youth Forum. However, it operates unofficially and secretly and does not work with the authorities. The biggest youth organisation is the Belarusian Republican Youth League (BRSM), with about 500 000 members. BRSM receives considerable state funding for its activity, thanks to which it is one of the most important partners of the authorities in the implementation of the youth policy in Belarus.

In the opinion of Freedom House, Belarus is not considered to be a free country (21 points out of 100 in 2018). The authorities exercise control there particularly over organisations they do not favour. There have been cases of closing down the most critical NGOs and prosecution of their activists^{LVI}. There are also serious limitations in obtaining foreign financing.

The greatest control over the NGO sector (and, by analogy, over youth organisations) among the Eastern Partnership countries is applied in Azerbaijan. In the years 2014–2015, a series of laws was introduced to reduce corruption and counteract money laundering by Azerbaijani NGOs receiving foreign support and to disable foreign financing of anti-government initiatives. The official reason for introducing these laws was the need to implement transparent rules for operation of the third sector. In practice, seeking any foreign funds whatsoever became impossible. There were also cases of freezing bank accounts of NGOs or persistent fiscal controls or persecution of activists. The result is significant restriction of activities, particularly of large organisations (smaller ones have remained, despite these difficulties, very active)^{LVII}. Fortunately, smaller organisations have remained very active. On the other hand, NGOs can obtain generous domestic funding, e.g. from the Council on State Support to Non-Governmental Organisations, the Azerbaijani Youth Foundation, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, or the State Labour and Social Support Fund.

Consequently, Azerbaijan is not recognised by Freedom House as a free country (12 points out of 100 in 2018). Freedom of

association is highly restricted and since 2016, association is prohibited in the case of individuals and entities that disturb public order and morale (where these two definitions are very extensive and in practice any organisation or individual that criticises the authorities loses the right to associate).

Selected foreign mechanisms of support for young people and youth policy in Eastern Partnership countries

THIS PART OF THE PUBLICATION CONTAINS THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMMES THAT ARE OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE YOUTH SECTOR IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES. FIRSTLY, THE TERMINATED EU PROGRAMME YOUTH IN ACTION (2007- 2013) WAS PRESENTED. IT CONSTITUTED THE FIRST WIDELY RECOGNISED TOOL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO SUPPORT THE COOPERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES.

SECONDLY, THE AUTHORS PRESENTED THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL YOUTH POLICY SUPPORT MECHANISMS, SUCH AS THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME (2014-2020), ETWINNING PLUS PROGRAMME, POLISH-UKRAINIAN YOUTH EXCHANGE COUNCIL, SUPPORT ADVANCED LEARNING AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES (SALTO) IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CAUCASUS RESOURCE CENTRE, AS WELL AS THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE SOLIDARITY FUND PL AND GERMAN-POLISH YOUTH OFFICE. FURTHERMORE, THE AUTHORS PRESENT REGIONAL COOPERATION WITHIN THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE IMPLEMENTED BY THE POLISH MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION. MOREOVER, THE AUTHORS DISCUSSED THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS WHICH IN 2018 BECAME A SEPARATE PROGRAMME AND REPLACED THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE (PART OF THE YOUTH IN ACTION AND ITS SUCCESSOR, ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME UNTIL 2018). FINALLY, THE MAIN GOALS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE EU4YOUTH PROGRAMME WERE DESCRIBED. THIS PROGRAMME WAS INITIATED IN 2017 AND WILL BECOME AN IMPORTANT SUPPORT MECHANISM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES.

IN THE CASE OF TWO MOST IMPORTANT PROGRAMMES, NAMELY THE YOUTH IN ACTION AND ERASMUS+, GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES WERE INCLUDED IN ORDER TO ILLUSTRATE THE PROJECT THEMES AND ACTIVITIES.

Programmes of the European Union

THE YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME (2007-2013)¹⁰

The Youth in Action Programme, (2007-2013) was the first mechanism of the European Union in the field of international youth cooperation and non-formal education allowing for implementation of projects with partners from Eastern Partnership Countries. For the first time in history of EU youth programmes a part of the budget was dedicated only for cooperation with countries from outside the Union – the Action 3.1 Cooperation with neighbouring partner countries. This fact constituted a significant support boosting and fostering the cooperation of young people from European Union and Eastern Partnership Countries.

It can therefore be stated that the Youth in Action Programme contributed to an important increase in the number of partnerships and projects implemented with participation of young people from Eastern Partnership countries and that its successor, the Erasmus+ Programme is, to a large extent, based on the human and organisational capital developed between 2007-2013 within the Youth in Action Programme. In Poland, the Foundation for the Development of the Education System – National Agency of Youth in Action and Erasmus+ was responsible for the implementation of both programmes.

The projects co-financed within the Youth in Action programme had to be associated with the priorities (permanent, national and annual) defined by the European Commission and the National Agency. Permanent priorities included: participation of young people, European citizenship, cultural diversity and inclusion of disadvantaged young people. The National Agency was empowered to define the national priorities which were aligned to the social situation of young people in the given country. In Poland, the national priorities in 2007-2013 included the cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

10. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (www.frse.org.pl and www.mwd.org.pl).

The Youth in Action programme was divided into five Actions:

- » Action 1. Youth for Europe (youth exchanges, youth initiatives, youth democracy projects)
- » Action 2. European Voluntary Service
- » Action 3. Youth in the World (youth exchanges, training and networking projects in the youth field)
- » Action 4. Youth Support Systems (trainings, seminars, job shadowing, feasibility visits, evaluation meetings, study visits, networking)
- » Action 5. Support for European cooperation in the youth field (projects supporting structured dialogue).

The Eastern Partnership countries were able to implement projects of long- and short-term foreign voluntary service (within Action 2.), as well as youth exchanges and training and networking projects (within Action 3.).

In 2011 the European Commission officially inaugurated new financial mechanisms, including the Eastern Partnership Youth Window of the Youth in Action Programme. The purpose of this was to create additional possibilities of international youth cooperation with the six countries included in the Eastern Partnership initiative. In practice, the Window offered additional financing for volunteering, youth exchange and youth workers' training projects .

The general budget of the Eastern Partnership Youth Window for 2012-2013 was at EUR 31.5 mn, of which EUR 12.5 mn was allocated to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency for financing projects put forward by Eastern Partnership countries, and EUR 19 mn was divided among the National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme for financing projects put forward by beneficiaries from the programme's countries.

For the first time in the history of cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership Countries such high amounts were allocated for the development of international youth cooperation. For the first time it also became possible to support applications directly submitted by organisations from the Eastern Partnership countries, in this way creating a historical opportunity

to develop the potential of young people and youth organisations of these countries and contributing to a bigger independence of civil society organisations in the region.

On the basis of youth work needs analysis in the Eastern Partnership countries carried out by the European Commission, additional Window priorities were identified. These were taken into consideration when evaluating applications, together with the other priorities of the Youth in Action programme. The following were given preference:

- » projects that support young people from rural areas or from disadvantaged urban areas;
- » projects that increase awareness concerning work with young people;
- » projects promoting and popularising the effects of good practices in work with young people.

Statistics of the Youth in Action programme

In the years 2007-2013, the Polish National Agency of Youth in Action Programme financed 807 youth exchanges and training projects with the participation of members and organisations from the Eastern Partnership countries. Furthermore, over 1000 volunteers took part in European Voluntary Service projects involving participants from Eastern Partnership Countries.

Table 1. Number of hosting and sending projects (Youth Exchanges and Training and Networking projects) with the Eastern Partnership countries financed by the Polish National Agency of Youth in Action Programme.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Ukraine	23	32	25	37	30	74	59	280
Georgia	14	15	26	21	22	43	37	178
Belarus	14	9	11	9	10	26	38	117
Armenia	8	13	15	13	11	25	25	110
Moldova	9	4	11	3	9	16	15	67
Azerbaijan	13	4	8	3	6	8	13	55

Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

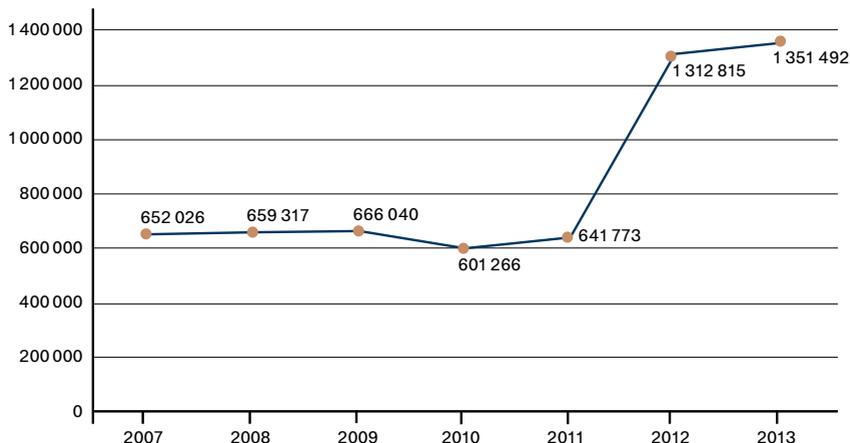
The most active country in the number of submitted projects and actions approved for financing was Ukraine. High activeness was also demonstrated by Georgia, Belarus and Armenia, while the lowest number of projects were carried out with organisations and participants from Moldova and Azerbaijan.

Table 2. Total number of foreign volunteers sent from Poland to Eastern Partnership countries and Volunteers from Eastern Partnership countries hosted in Poland.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Ukraine	19	39	39	59	76	69	81	382
Georgia	25	29	28	37	45	74	53	291
Belarus	11	7	8	26	22	7	51	132
Armenia	5	16	26	17	14	24	30	132
Moldova	2	2	11	5	9	2	15	46
Azerbaijan	0	4	6	6	9	9	14	38

Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

Fig. 7. Youth in Action programme – budget contracted in Poland in 2007-2013 (in EUR).

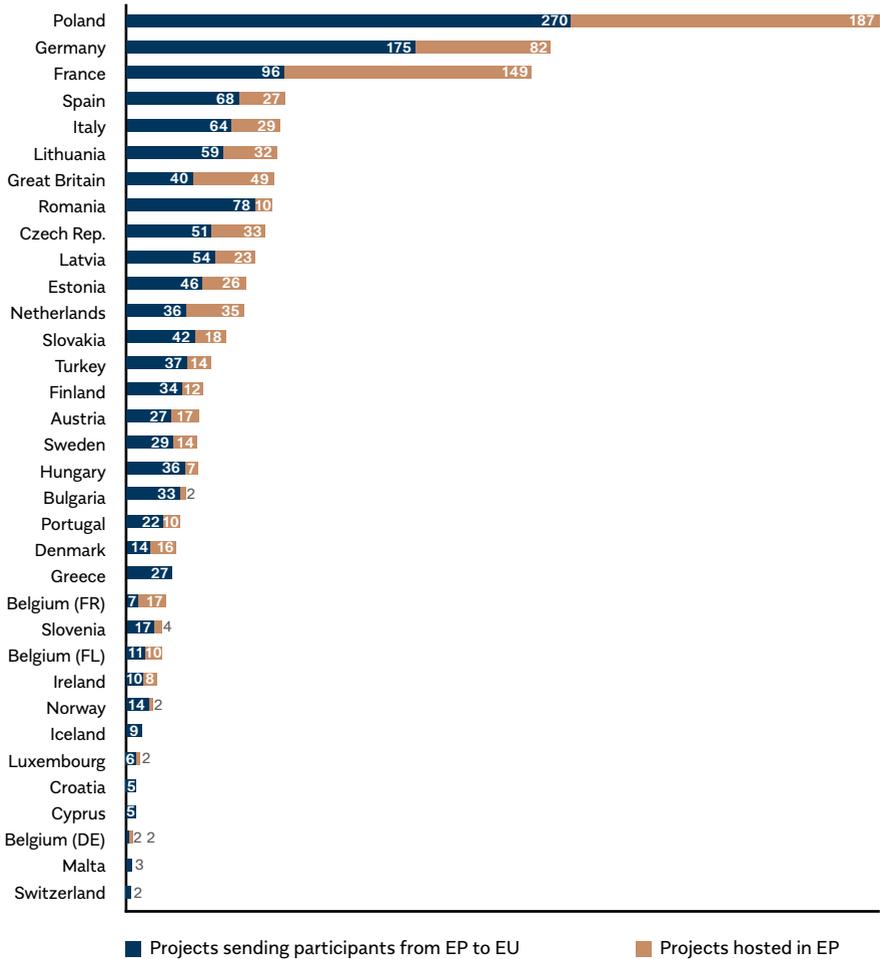


Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

The budget of the Polish National Agency of Youth in Action Programme for actions with partner countries (including Eastern Partnership countries) in 2007-2011 was within the range of about EUR 650 000 per year. In 2011, when the European Commission officially inaugurated the new financial mechanisms, including the Eastern Partnership Youth Window, a significant budget increase was observed when in 2012-2013 it exceeded EUR 1 300 000 per annum for Polish National Agency. This resulted in a greater number of applications and implemented projects in all Eastern Partnership countries, with the exception of Moldova and Azerbaijan, in which the number of projects remained at nearly the same level.

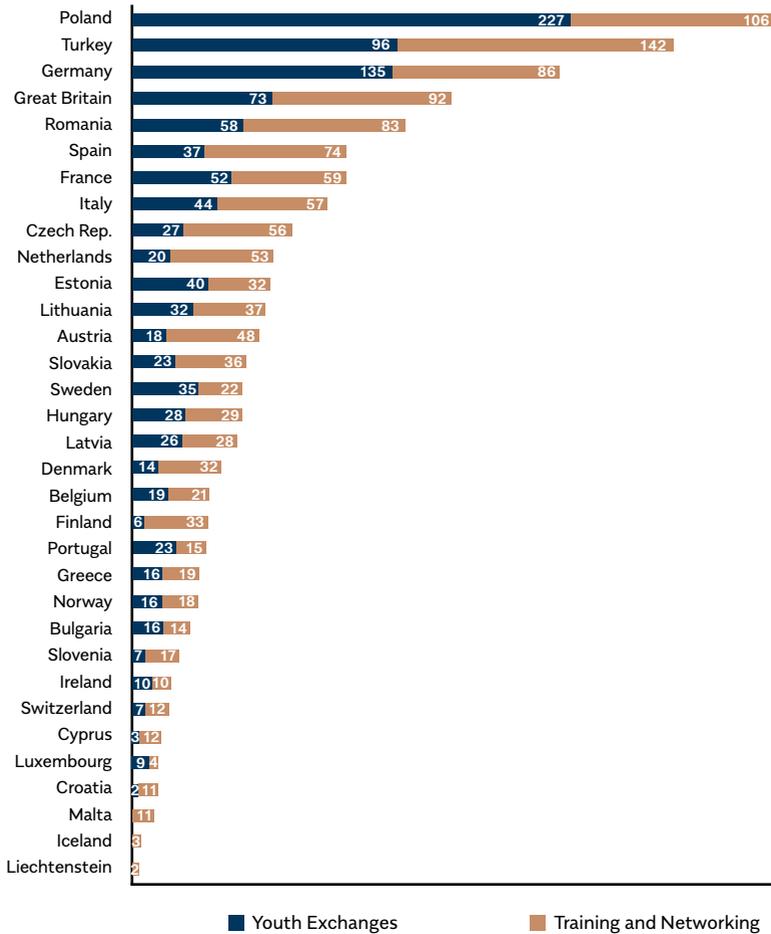
Between 2007-2013 the Polish National Agency of Youth in Action Programme financed the highest number of projects involving participants from the Eastern Partnership Countries. The EU countries with higher budgets (for example Germany, France and Italy) financed less projects than Poland. It also needs to be noted that Baltic countries were very active as far as the cooperation with Eastern Partnership region was concerned.

Fig. 8. Number of European Voluntary Service projects involving partners from eastern Partnership countries by National Agency. 2007-2013



Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

Fig. 9. Number of Action 3 projects involving participants from Eastern Partnership countries by National Agency, 2007–2013.



Source Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

Project examples

Make it visual

Project coordinator: Instytut Aktywizacji i Rozwoju Społecznego

Countries involved: Poland, Ukraine

Date and place: 1 August – 31 December 2012, Lublin (Poland)

Make it visual was a youth exchange of beginner journalists fascinated with new media. 20 people from the region of Lublin (Poland) and from Łucko (Ukraine) took part in 7 days filmmaking workshops. They had a chance to learn how to create and edit film materials, but also got to know the legal aspects related to filmmaking and publishing video content in Poland and in Ukraine. During the project a debate was organised, involving the representatives of local media (Dziennik Lubelski and Radio Lublin) who presented the practical aspects of journalism, based on their own experiences. Apart from workshops and the debate, the participants of the project had a chance to create their own content. They were divided into three groups and were given specific topics to prepare. The project ended with an exhibition presenting the results of their work.

The project allowed young people to see how it is to work as a journalist, listen to insights from the professional journalists and to create their own content. Another result of the project was the established and sustainable cooperation between the University of Maria Skłodowska-Curie and the Łuck University.

Green alternative for Caucasus

Project coordinator: Fundacja Inna Przestrzeń

Countries involved: Poland, Latvia, Georgia, Armenia

Date and place: 5 October – 12 October 2009, Varcixe (Georgia)

Green Alternative for Caucasus is a youth project focused on ecology and creativity. 25 young people from Europe and Caucasus countries gathered to discuss about ecology, get to know the experiences of other activists and to create a message – a short film

and a photography exhibition – which will make the local community reflect and take action to protect the natural environment. The project had three dimensions: local, regional and international and was organised by four organisations: Fundacja Inna Przestrzeń (Poland), Creative group MYST YLe art (Latvia), Georgian Youth for Europe (Georgia) and Bike+ (Armenia).

Project activities took place in Varcixe (Georgia) – a popular location for scout camps. Young people during one week organised a series of awareness-raising workshops which also included the local community. The project participants also had a chance to get to know their cultures and countries as well as to discuss the state of environmental protection both in the EU and Caucasus countries.

The project resulted in creating a photography exhibition presented in the educational centre of Rustavi. The participants also recorded and edited a short film which was later disseminated in the participants' countries of origin.

THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME (2014-2020)¹¹

Erasmus+ replaces and continues the Youth in Action and Lifelong Learning (and its sectoral programmes: Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig) Programmes. It is a European Union programme in the field of: education, training, youth and sports supporting both formal and non-formal education projects. Such programmes may significantly help in coping with the social and economic changes or the main challenges facing Europe until the end of this decade. These include: the fight against youth unemployment, greater integration of Europe's societies, the development of social capital of young people, the creation and development of efficiently functioning systems of education and training, as well as the social inclusion of persons from disadvantaged environments, including newly arrived migrants.

11. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (www.frse.org.pl and www.erasmusplus.org.pl).

Youth organisations can obtain funds from the Erasmus+ Youth component, within which financing can be obtained for projects in the following fields:

- » learning mobility (Key Action 1.), i.e. youth exchanges, mobility of youth workers, or volunteering projects;
- » cooperation for innovation and good practices (Key Action 2.), i.e. strategic partnerships and international youth initiatives;
- » support for reforms in education (Key Action 3.), i.e. youth policy development projects.

The following can take part in the programme:

- » countries of the programme (European Union countries and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Turkey);
- » EU's neighbouring partner countries (countries of the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the southern region of the Mediterranean Sea and the Russian Federation);
- » other partner countries.

The EU's neighbouring partner countries can participate in two sectors of the Erasmus+ programme (higher education and youth) as well as in eTwinning programme. The vast majority of projects implemented with young people and youth workers from Eastern Partnership countries is implemented within Erasmus+ Key Action 1. It is also the Action with the highest budget, however, according to the Erasmus+ programme guide, the limit of budget allocation for projects with neighbouring partner countries cannot exceed 25 percent, which results in limiting the number of projects financed.

Statistics of the Erasmus+ programme

Organisations from Eastern Partnership countries can implement three types of activities within the Key Action 1 Learning mobility:

youth exchanges, youth workers' mobility and volunteering projects. The most active countries in this respect are Ukraine and Georgia.

Table 3. Numbers of projects and participants of youth exchanges and mobility of youth workers from the EP countries hosted in Poland, within projects co-financed in 2014-2017.

Year	Armenia		Azerbaijan		Belarus		Georgia		Moldova		Ukraine	
	PRO*	PAR*	PRO	PAR	PRO	PAR	PRO	PAR	PRO	PAR	PRO	PAR
2014	15	61	5	15	6	29	9	48	2	28	30	331
2015	11	46	2	5	9	60	14	54	7	36	37	316
2016	6	28	3	13	4	24	11	71	5	25	28	330
2017	10	36	4	13	8	56	16	85	5	24	40	361
total	42	171	14	46	27	169	50	258	19	113	135	1338

*PRO = number of projects, PAR = number of participants

Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

The volunteering projects were an important component of the Erasmus+ programme. Since October 2018 they are implemented within a separate programme of the European Union – the European Solidarity Corps (see page 66).

Table 4. Number of volunteers from EP countries hosted in Poland within projects co-financed in 2014-2017.

Year	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
2014	12	1	6	14	3	52
2015	11	2	10	19	2	41
2016	12	1	10	29	1	46
2017	15	2	6	22	2	48
Total	50	6	32	84	8	187

Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

Table 5. Number of volunteers from Poland hosted in EP countries within projects co-financed in 2014–2017.

Year	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
2014	11	0	2	25	5	10
2015	4	0	2	4	0	2
2016	3	3	2	7	2	19
2017	2	4	1	25	1	5
Total	20	7	7	61	8	36

Source: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

Between 2014–2017 only a small number of projects involving participants from Eastern Partnership countries was implemented within the Key Actions 2 and 3. These projects do not provide equal partnership opportunities for programme and partner countries, therefore the number of applications involving partners from Eastern Partnership countries is considerably lower than in the case of Key Action 1.

Poland is one of the most active countries when it comes to implementing projects involving partners from Eastern Partnership Countries. The most active country is Germany, however, given the number of inhabitants, this country has a proportionally higher budget for implementing projects.

Table 6. Number of European Voluntary Service projects involving organisations from Eastern Partnership countries, 2014–2017.

	MK	ISL	LI	LU	MT	CY	GR	HR	UK	PT	DK	SI	FI	IE	NO	BE	BG	SK	NL	HU	EE	AT	SE	LV	RO	LT	CZ	TR	FR	IT	ES	PL	DE
2014	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	8	6	1	4	8	8	5	7	7	5	2	8	4	4	5	8	5	7	8	12	27	31	29	45	59
2015	3	1	0	8	5	13	0	8	0	11	16	12	13	17	23	19	20	22	31	15	23	21	32	18	27	29	32	43	36	66	55	72	155
2016	0	1	2	0	3	0	5	7	11	7	5	6	8	5	5	6	7	10	6	12	7	8	3	14	9	13	13	27	25	29	42	59	
2017	3	0	0	0	1	0	8	0	2	1	5	5	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	6	8	11	4	6	10	13	11	5	24	11	22	23	36

Table 7. Number of youth workers' mobility projects involving organisations from Eastern Partnership countries, 2014–2017.

	ISL	LI	MK	LU	MT	HR	SI	FI	CY	IE	PT	GR	LV	SK	NO	BE	HU	EE	BG	IT	DK	AT	SE	NL	RO	TR	UK	FR	CZ	ES	IT	PL	DE
2014	0	0	1	0	1	4	4	4	6	4	11	6	7	12	5	10	11	9	12	4	11	8	11	16	16	21	25	18	14	14	53	19	54
2015	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	2	5	2	2	0	2	1	8	3	3	5	1	3	9	6	13	14	8	7	10	6	11	6	8	23	41
2016	0	0	1	5	3	2	0	4	4	9	4	5	4	4	6	5	3	2	7	6	7	8	9	13	12	13	14	5	18	23	7	15	43
2017	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	2	0	3	1	8	6	3	4	5	6	8	4	13	5	11	4	2	10	5	2	24	11	22	11	23	36

Table 8. Number of youth exchange projects involving organisations from Eastern Partnership countries, 2014–2017.

	LI	ISL	MK	GR	MT	LU	CY	SI	HR	IE	PT	FI	DK	UK	HU	NO	SK	AT	BE	BG	NL	RO	LV	EE	SE	CZ	LT	FR	TR	ES	IT	PL	DE
2014	0	0	1	2	2	1	3	2	7	0	4	2	6	22	9	5	6	9	9	7	2	5	7	11	10	8	11	12	39	17	24	27	45
2015	0	1	3	0	5	8	13	12	8	17	11	13	16	0	15	23	22	21	19	20	31	27	18	23	32	32	29	36	43	55	66	72	155
2016	2	1	0	5	3	0	0	6	7	5	7	8	5	11	12	5	10	8	6	7	6	9	14	7	3	13	13	27	13	29	25	42	59
2017	0	1	0	3	0	3	3	2	0	3	4	6	6	0	2	6	2	5	6	7	7	7	9	10	8	4	11	13	3	19	15	30	34

In 2017 the European Commission once again established the Eastern Partnership Youth Window. The organisations from Eastern Partnership countries were given right to apply for financing of their projects to Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. This applies to two kinds of projects within the Key Action 2: Civil society Fellowships for Youth and Partnership for Entrepreneurship.

The aim of the Fellowships is to contribute to capacity building of youth organisations and youth workers through promoting and facilitating relations with partner organisations, public bodies or civil society organisations. The selected young leaders (Fellows) can increase their skills and competences in the field of policy making through educational mobility and work for EU institutions. Such activities need to be implemented within the educational mobility based on non-formal education principles.

The Partnership for Entrepreneurship projects aim at supporting youth entrepreneurship education as well as youth social entrepreneurship ventures. These projects need to be based on non-formal education principles and on a multilateral partnership of organisations active in the field of business.

The European Commission assigned a budget of 9 mn euro (60 percent for Civil society Fellowships for Youth and and 40 percent for Partnership for Entrepreneurship).

Project examples

„Together with neighbours“ – European Voluntary Service

Organisation: ANAWOJ Association of International and Intercultural Exchange, Michałowo, Podlaskie region (Poland)

Within the project Together with Neighbours, two volunteers from Belarus and Ukraine carried out their activities in Poland for nine months. The project lasted from mid-September 2014 until the end of June 2015, in two different institutions. The volunteer from Ukraine cooperated with the Białystok Esperanto Society, while the volunteer from Belarus – with the School Complex in Gródek. These actions were aimed at enabling volunteers and residents of

the region to meet and establish cooperation. Historical, political, cultural and social experiences could be shared.

“By inviting representatives of our eastern neighbours to the project, we wanted to give the volunteers and residents of our region a chance to meet and to encourage joint action. Gathering three neighbouring countries in Poland, in an area close to the border, opens the way for discussion about the past, the future, the common heritage, identity and European citizenship”, the organisers summed up.

Actions of the volunteers: supporting school students in their study, helping teachers prepare school events and local fairs, conducting language workshops, encouraging children and young people to communicate in a foreign language, helping in the school day-care centre, organising workshops, integration activities and games on the subject of interculturalism and Belarusian and Ukrainian culture in schools and kindergartens, organising visits and lectures in town and in the region.

„Let’s job-shadow youth work in CWM and Library in Gdynia”
– mobility of youth workers

Organisation: Centrum Wymiany Młodzi, Gdynia, Pomorskie region (Poland)

The aim of the project was the development of partner organisations and institutions working with young people, in particular the growth of professional competences and exchange of experience and good practice between workers from Ukraine, Belarus and Poland. In the project 6 youth workers (5 persons from Ukraine and one person from Belarus) took part in the job-shadowing at the Center for Youth Cooperation and the Public Library in Gdynia, Poland.

The project consisted of: a 2-week internship of 1 person from Ukraine in the Centre of Youth Cooperation, aiming at getting to know the specifics of working with local and foreign volunteers; a 1 month internship of 1 person from Belarus, aiming at gaining the knowledge about cycle of international youth project - preparation and implementation, including participation in it; and a 2-week internship 4 of public library workers from Kremenchug in Ukraine

in the Public Library in Gdynia. Participants learned the specific nature of work in Gdynia branch with particular emphasis on the EVS and activating the local youth.

The project resulted in personal and professional development of youth workers from Ukraine and Belarus and all partner organisations involved in the project. Skills, experience and knowledge gained in Poland will contribute to the development of the local youth in Kremenczuk and Grodno.

SALTO EECA RESOURCE CENTRE¹²

The SALTO Resource Centre (Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities in Eastern Europe and Caucasus), hereinafter: SALTO EECA, was established by the European Commission, with the support of the Ministry of National Education and Sports of Poland, at the close of 2003, within the Polish National Agency of the Erasmus+ programme. The SALTO EECA Centre is supervised by the European Commission and the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland.

SALTO EECA belongs to the network of six SALTO YOUTH resource centres located in various European Union countries. A common goal of this network is to raise the quality of youth projects and to support organisations working with young people and the National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, by providing information and through training activities.

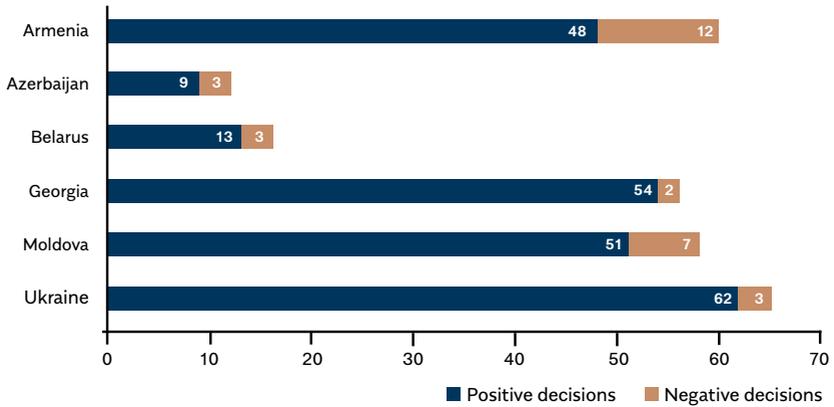
The SALTO EECA Resource Centre supports the development of non-formal education and raising skills to benefit from the Erasmus+ programme in the Youth sector, in the Eastern Partnership countries and in the Russian Federation. The main objectives of the Centre are as follows:

12. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System and the SALTO EECA Centre for Cooperation with Eastern Partnership Countries.

- » promotion of the Erasmus+ Youth programme and non-formal education in the Eastern partnership countries and in the Russian Federation,
- » raising the quality of learning mobility projects for young people and youth workers, through the organisation of trainings and seminars, and particularly supporting the quality of actions of volunteering projects (accreditation system, training for volunteers and coordinators, monitoring visits, information events),
- » supporting with information and expert assistance for national agencies of the Erasmus+ programme in the Youth sector, in the field of development of international cooperation between organisations from the European Union and organisations from the Eastern Partnership countries and the Russian Federation.

One of the principal objectives of SALTO EECA is providing support for international volunteer services. From 2010, SALTO EECA is responsible for accreditation of organisations ready to host and send volunteers within the European Voluntary Services (currently: European Solidarity Corps projects). During this time, the centre has carried out over 260 accreditations (Fig. 8), awarded for at least one year and at most until the end of 2020, i.e. until the end of the Erasmus+ programme. Taking into consideration the whole region, not even 2 percent of the accreditation procedures carried out by SALTO EECA end with a negative decision.

Fig. 10. Number of accreditations in Eastern Partnership countries in 2014-2017.

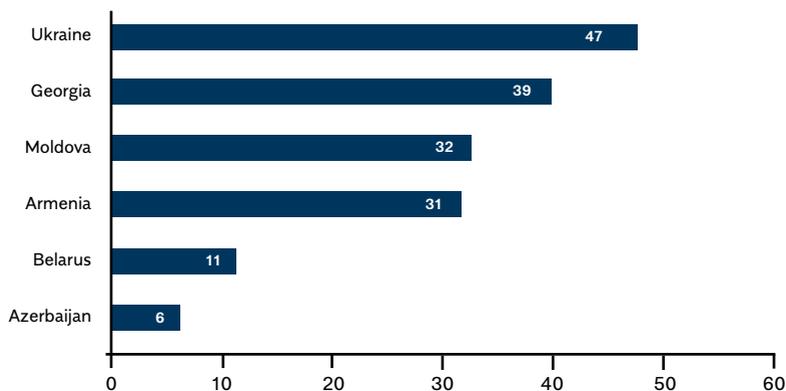


Source: SALTO EECA Centre for Cooperation.

Currently (as of 2018) there are 207 organisations with valid accreditations for hosting and sending volunteers. The highest number were given in Ukraine and Georgia, the lowest in Azerbaijan (Fig. 9). Organisations with a valid accreditation are also subject to monitoring, of which more than 40 were carried out in the EP region since the beginning of 2014

In the accreditation and monitoring processes, SALTO EECA is supported by a team of 20 experienced accreditors – nine from the Eastern Partnership countries, two from Russia and nine from the Erasmus+ programme countries, including four from Poland.

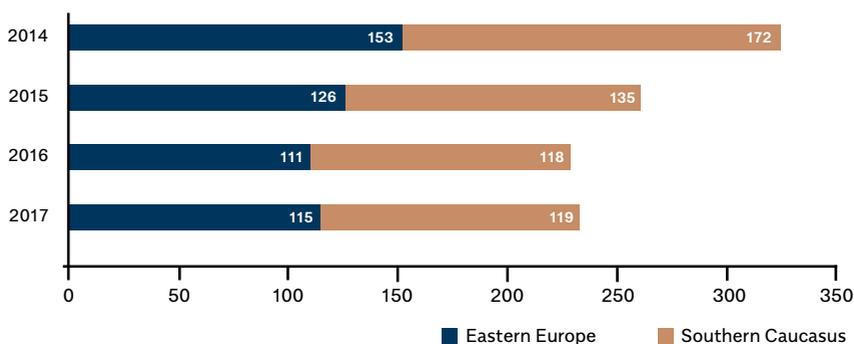
Fig. 11. Number of organisations from the Eastern Partnership countries with a valid accreditation, as at April 2018.



Source: SALTO EECA Resource Centre.

Next to accreditation, another kind of support for volunteer projects is harmonised training for volunteers hosted in Eastern Partnership countries, following arrival and mid-evaluation (for projects longer than six months). These are organised in the subregions of Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) and the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). In the years 2014–2017, more than 1350 young people participated (Fig. 10).

Fig. 12. Number of volunteers participating in EVS training in Eastern Partnership countries in 2014–2017.



Source: SALTO EECA Resource Centre

SALTO EECA is also responsible for the organisation of the annual meetings of former volunteers. Since 2014, nearly 240 persons took part in these meetings. Another element of support for volunteer services in the region is the organisation of national meetings of coordinators of volunteer projects. All training sessions and meetings are conducted by a team of 18 experienced trainers from the EP and Russia. The SALTO Centre also supports the development of workers of organisations engaged in the Voluntary Services of Erasmus+, e.g. by sending them for international training to raise their competencies.

From 2014 SALTO EECA has also been carrying out the strategy of supporting organisations and youth workers working with disadvantaged young people. The aim of the strategy is to reach organisations working with groups of young people disadvantaged for health, social, economic, geographical or cultural reasons, getting them acquainted with Erasmus+ international youth projects and developing their competencies in the field of inclusion, through participation in international training and seminars organised within Erasmus+. The project was initiated by SALTO EECA, the Polish, Austrian and Finnish NAs, which together carried out a study on the needs of youth workers from the EP and Russia and the challenges facing them. The study showed the need to increase access to training offered within Erasmus+ for youth workers from the EP through the introduction of training in Russian, as well as by ensuring appropriate infrastructure and support for persons with disabilities; the need to increase the quantity of training on inclusion topics and adjustment of training to the actual needs of youth workers (who in the EP differ from those of the Programme Countries) and, finally, through the organisation of local points that offer in national languages the essential information for organisations and young people who wish to learn more about the Erasmus+ Youth Programme.

Until now, five training sessions have been organised under the strategy, where two were in Russian. There were also two study visits: to Ukraine and to the Baltic countries. SALTO EECA has also translated into Russian the manual "Inclusion from A to Z" published by SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre.

The topic of social inclusion is closely tied with the strategy of counteracting radicalisation which leads to violence among young

people, through work with them by non-formal educational methods (Youth work in prevention of violent radicalisation). The project, initiated in 2016 by three regional SALTO Centres: EECA, EuroMed and South East Europe (SEE), gathers Erasmus+ National Agencies and four SALTO centres. It contained a study which included projects concerning counteracting radicalisation among young people in various countries of Europe, gathering good practices and identifying the general principles determining success (or failure) of a project. Inspiring practices included two projects conducted by Georgian organisations working with the Muslim ethnic minority of Kists in the Pankisi Gorge. The report from the study, presented at the conference in Malta in December 2017 and supplemented there following suggestions of the participants, will be published in 2018 by EU-CoE Youth Partnership, an institution also involved in the whole strategy. Other measures in the project include an inter-sectoral seminar for youth workers to exchange good practices and identify concrete educational needs of persons working in prevention of radicalisation, an international study visit and online training which is to be made available on the SALTO "HOP" platform.

In 2017, the Network of Information Centres of the Erasmus+ Youth Programme was created in the EP countries and Russia which won the recognition of the national authorities and youth organisations as a very important tool of support for the implementation of the programme in the region's countries.

The main effects of the Centres include so far:

- » 94 press conferences, information workshops and presentations, seminars for local multipliers, training for EVS mentors;
- » 736 personal, telephone, Skype, Messenger consultations;
- » 9010 persons following the Information Centres on Facebook;
- » 531 posts on Facebook, including 86 films and media accounts and 1206 photos.

Within the SALTO website there is a division devoted to Information Centres in the East, with a calendar of their work, a presentation in English and in national languages.

EU4YOUTH¹³

Following the recommendations of the 2nd Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga the European Commission launched the EU4Youth programme for the period 2017-2020. The programme focuses on cooperation between the Community and the Eastern Partnership region and has a budget of 22,75 mn euro. The aim is to strengthen active participation of young people in social and political life and to increase youth employment through the development of leadership and entrepreneurial competencies. The EU4Youth has three components:

- » EU4Y capacity building (estimate budget of 9 mn euro) – is a part of Action 2. of the Erasmus+ programme and finances projects for strengthening civil society and building networks. Its main target are youth workers, local leaders and civil society organisations. The projects can last from 9 to 24 months and the maximum grant amounts to 150 000 euro. The component is administered by the Executive Agency for Education, Culture and the Audio-visual Sector, and in 2017 co-financing was granted from it for 35 projects.
- » EU4Y grant scheme (estimate budget of 8,5 mn euro) – a separate budgetary line for financing actions to raise competencies of young people, supporting youth leaders and entrepreneurial attitudes among young people. A special stress is put on inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and youth organisations working with them.

13. Prepared on the basis of material of the European Commission available at: www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action/projects/eu4youth. Access on 10 June 2018.

- » EU4Y coordination and support (estimate budget of 2,5 mn euro) – mechanism to support the two components referred to above (through coordinating, promotional and popularising actions), scheduled to be launched in 2018. A special stress is put on promotional activities that contribute to increasing the visibility of EU4Youth projects and to creating synergies with other national and international initiatives in the field of youth.

The main target of EU4Youth are mostly civil society organisations working with and for young people in Eastern Partnership countries, young leaders, youth workers, young people socially or economically excluded as well as young women. Project partners can include local authorities and public or private companies.

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

The European Solidarity Corps is the new European Union initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe. Initially, the European Solidarity Corps was designed for European Union countries only, however after repeated signals stating that European solidarity cannot be limited by EU borders, the new initiative was also made available for EU neighboring partner countries, including the Eastern Partnership region.

The European Solidarity Corps is divided into three types of activities:

- » Volunteering activities
- » Jobs and traineeships
- » Solidarity projects

Individual volunteering activities are full-time unpaid solidarity activity for a duration from 2 to 12 months. In some cases, volunteering activities of 2 weeks to 2 months can be put in place for young people with fewer opportunities. This type of solidarity

activity will give young people the chance to take part in the daily work of organisations and perform tasks that can have a real impact. Volunteering teams are solidarity activities allowing teams of 10 to 40 European Solidarity Corps participants from at least two different countries to volunteer together for a period between 2 weeks and 2 months. Such solidarity activities could especially contribute to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the European Solidarity Corps.

Jobs are solidarity activities for young people, for a period from 3 to 12 months, paid by the participating organisation employing the European Solidarity Corps participant. The financial support to participating organisations offering jobs shall not exceed twelve months in cases when the duration of the employment contract exceeds twelve months. Such jobs shall include a learning and training component and be based on a written employment contract, which respects all the terms and conditions of employment as defined in national law or applicable collective agreements, or both, of the country in which the job is being carried out.

Traineeships are periods of full-time work practice of between 2 to 6 months renewable once for a maximum duration of 12 months within the same participating organisation. This type of solidarity activity should include a learning and training component, to help the participant gain relevant experience with a view to developing competences useful for the personal, educational, social, civic and professional development. It should be based on a written traineeship agreement concluded at the beginning of the traineeship in accordance with the applicable regulatory framework of the country where the traineeship takes place. Traineeships must not substitute jobs and should be remunerated by the host organisations.

Solidarity projects are set up and carried out by groups of at least five European Solidarity Corps participants, with a view to addressing key challenges within their communities while presenting a clear European added value. Projects can last from 2 to 12 months and must take place in the country of residence of project participants. A solidarity project should be directly linked to the local community young participants live in to respond to

the issues and challenges around them, although some of the projects can also tackle regional or even national issues. Together with addressing the local challenges, a solidarity project should also clearly demonstrate European added value by addressing priorities identified at European level. A solidarity project should reflect a common concern for issues within the European society, such as for example integrating third-country nationals, climate change or democratic participation.

The European Commission plans to assign 90 percent of the budget to volunteering activities. In the first year of the programme (2018) the budget of European Solidarity Corps will amount to 44,25 mn euro and until 2020 will reach 376,5 mn euro.

ETWINNING PLUS PROGRAMME¹⁴

eTwinning is a community of schools, pupils and teachers cooperating using online tools. It is composed of teachers of all subjects working with young people aged 3-19, including also librarians or school psychologists who jointly implement educational projects. The programme has been operating since 2005 and since then has gathered almost 400 000 teachers all over Europe.

Even though the eTwinning programme is mainly dedicated to schools, its projects very often use non-formal education methods. Moreover, in many cases the online cooperation is just a first step before establishing a real life cooperation, for example within the Erasmus+ programme, resulting in youth exchanges or volunteering activities for young people.

In 2013 eTwinning was expanded to include the pilot programme eTwinning Plus and opened for schools and teachers from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The initiative was created in compliance with the European Neighbourhood Policy. With the

14. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System and the National eTwinning Office in Poland.

development of eTwinning Plus, other countries were accepted: Tunisia and Jordan. eTwinning plus made it possible for schools from Eastern Partnership countries (except for Belarus) to use online technologies and become familiar with non-formal education methods.

The National eTwinning Office in Poland, operating within the framework of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, has been supporting eTwinning offices since the beginning, in the countries included in the eTwinning Plus Programme (PSA – Partner Support Agencies). In 2014 the pilot programme for eTwinning Plus countries ended and the principles of cooperation were established, thanks to which teachers from these countries are now full participants of the eTwinning Programme.

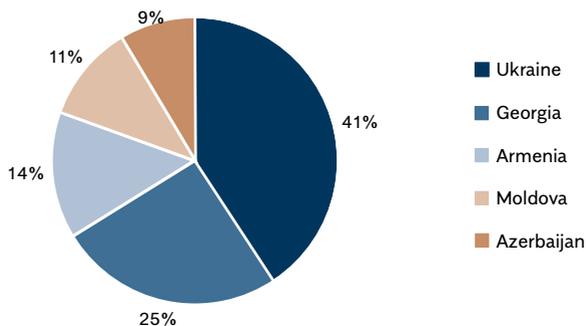
From the very beginning, a very important element has been the transfer of knowledge and know-how to the countries taking the first steps in the programme. For this end, the National eTwinning Office in Poland, in cooperation with the Central Support Service (CSS),organised special meetings (also online) with PSA representatives, along with training, study visits and international seminars.

The organisation of international contact seminars, training and workshops is one form of cooperation regularly offered by the National eTwinning Office in Poland. So far, there have been visits of teachers from Armenia and Georgia. The meetings help teachers from eTwinning Plus countries establish and maintain contacts, and the organisers to develop international eTwinning projects.

Another form of cooperation between the National Office and the PSA is international webinars between teachers from Poland and teachers from eTwinning Plus countries. The purpose of these internet meetings is to find a partner for cooperation in a project and to register the project on the eTwinning platform. This training form is addressed to teachers who are beginners in the programme. During a webinar, teachers become acquainted with the programme assumptions, the eTwinning platform and its tools. Examples of already implemented model projects are presented, contacts are made and ideas for projects are put forward. International project groups are created, where teachers plan and register projects.

Interest in cooperation with eTwinning partners is growing among Polish teachers with each year. Altogether, eTwinning projects implemented by Polish teachers in 2013-2017 with eTwinning Plus countries totalled 3 456.

Fig. 13. Percentage of projects implemented by Polish teachers in cooperation with individual eTwinning Plus countries in 2012-2018.



Source: National eTwinning Office Polska.

Teachers from Polish schools most frequently launch projects with Ukraine (1412). This is because Ukraine is the most populated country of all taking part in eTwinning Plus. Georgia is in second place (878 projects), then: Armenia (487 projects), Moldova (380 projects) and Azerbaijan (299 projects)¹⁵. The most frequently chosen topics in cooperation between schools are: foreign languages (2371 projects), art (1734 projects), ICT (1692 projects), interdisciplinary topics (1380 projects) and history (1379 projects). Somewhat less interest among schools is shown in topics in the field of: media literacy, European studies and social sciences/

15. The numbers of projects implemented within the individual countries do not add up to the total number of projects implemented by Polish teachers with the eTwinning Plus teachers, because more than one teacher can take part in one project.

sociology. The least often selected topics are: classical languages (Latin and Greek), vocational education, law, philosophy/logic and political studies.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES

POLISH-UKRAINIAN YOUTH EXCHANGE COUNCIL¹⁶

The Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Council (PUYEC) was established on 9 September 2015, by an agreement between the government of Poland and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The legal basis of the Council is an inter-governmental agreement that lays down the main tasks and aims. The managing body of the Council consists of its members – four representatives each from Poland and Ukraine. Administrative and organisational services are performed by national managing institutions (NMI). In Poland, these services have been entrusted to the Foundation for the Development of the Education System and in Ukraine – to the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The aim of the PUYEC is to support the cooperation of Polish and Ukrainian young people and build friendly relations between the people of the Republic of Poland and Ukraine. The Council, highlighting the special role played by the young generation in shaping international relations, inspires young people and youth workers to take up joint actions. Apart from this, it provides financial support (competition of projects) and technical support (training, consultations) for the implementation of ideas of young people aged 14–35.

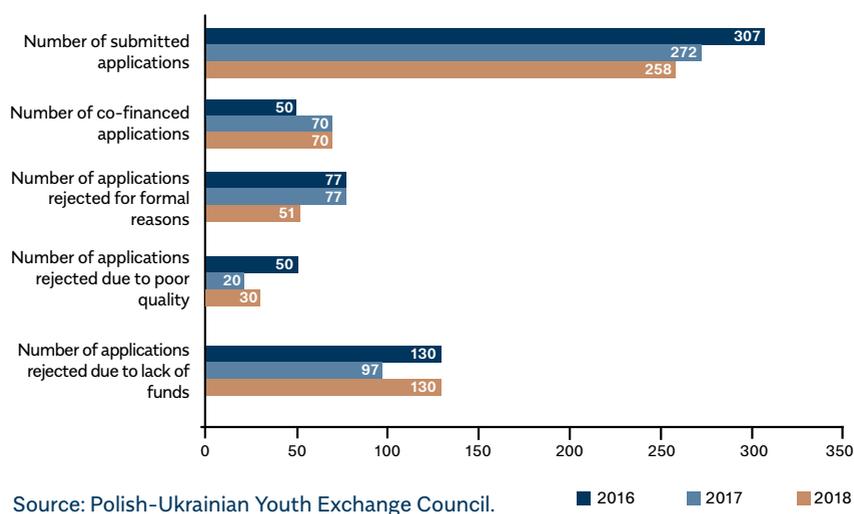
According to the Polish-Ukrainian agreement, the amount of funds for the programme and the costs of administering it are specified by the agreement signed each year by the Ministry

16. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System and the Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Council.

of National Education of Poland and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine.

The annual budget is PLN 4 mn PLN, of which PLN 3.8 mn PLN consists of funds for co-financing projects and the remaining PLN 200 000 is made up of funds for administrative servicing of the programme (e.g. personnel costs, costs of organising meetings of the Council, training and popularising activities). The average amount of project co-financing in 2016-2018 was about PLN 60 000.

Fig. 14 PUYEC decisions on co-financing projects, 2016-2018.



Applying organisations can use PUYEC funds in four available formats. The most popular one is youth exchanges. Their purpose is the exchange of thoughts, ideas and interests, implemented by way of various logical methods of non-formal education. A project can take place in one of the countries (Poland or Ukraine) and does not include return visits. The next most popular project type is youth meetings. As opposed to exchanges, meetings can be held in two countries (on the condition that they are planned at two different times). The anticipated outcome is

the organisation of the chosen event (festival, conference, workshops, concert etc.). The two remaining types of projects are clearly less popular, i.e. preparatory and contact seminars and information-promotion projects. The aim of the seminars is to become acquainted with a new partner organisation and joint preparation of ideas and objectives of successive youth projects. This type of project may be carried out in one of the countries and also does not provide for return visits. This condition makes seminars different from the last form – information and promotion projects, which do not require that project actions be limited to one country. This format provides for the preparation of promotion and information material on cooperation between Poland and Ukraine (e.g. a publication).

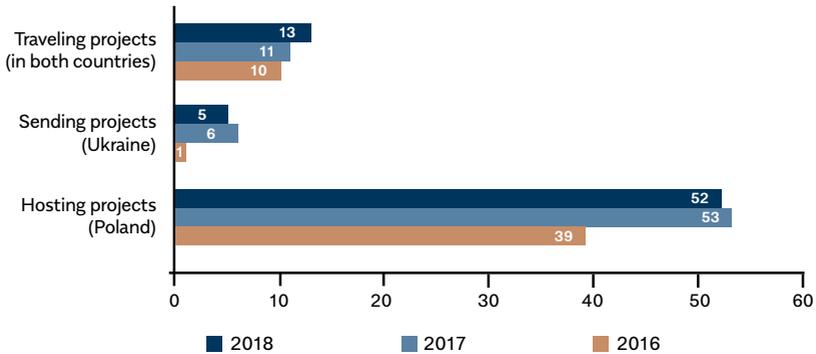
Applications for co-financing can be submitted by entities engaged in youth matters, i.e. NGOs, educational and public institutions. The condition for co-financing is the active participation of at least two eligible entities, one from each country. Commercial entities cannot be applicants or partner organisations. On the Polish side, applications for co-financing are submitted by the platform online. frse.org.pl, within time limits set by the NMI. Among applying organisations, NGOs constitute the greater majority – accounting for nearly 69 percent of all applicants.

Each application for co-financing has to be based on one of the five priorities set by the PUYEC:

- » strengthening intercultural dialogue by building attitudes of openness and understanding among young people;
- » acquiring competencies necessary for active participation in social and professional life;
- » strengthening cooperation and exchange of experiences in technical and sectoral education;
- » supporting active citizenship among young people, including promoting entrepreneurship and volunteer service;
- » discovering common roots, overcoming prejudices and stereotypes in perceiving the shared history and in today's reality.

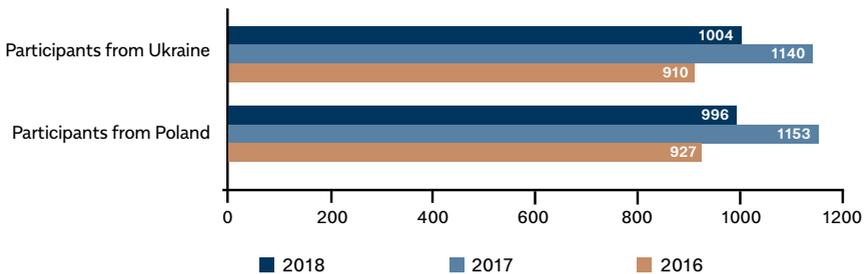
Although applicants are formally obliged to select one of these, it is worth observing that in practice, most projects implement more than one priority. Implementation of projects lasts from early June until the end of October.

Fig. 15. Number of co-financed projects, by place of implementation, 2016-2018.



Source: Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Council.

Fig. 16. Groups by nationality of participants, 2016-2018.



Source: Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Council.

POLISH-GERMAN YOUTH COOPERATION¹⁷

Polish-German Youth Cooperation (PGYC) is an international organisation created in 1991 by the governments of Poland and Germany, to support contacts and understanding between young people from the two countries. According to the Articles of incorporation, PGYC initiates, co-finances and provides expert support for youth projects: from workshops to camps and thematic projects. Moreover, PGYC provides partners' fair and thematic seminars, issues and disseminates publications for teaching and tourist purposes and also makes it easier to find a partner. Since the establishment of the Polish-German Youth Cooperation, financial support has been provided for projects with the involvement of more than 2.9 million young people from Poland and Germany.

The Articles of incorporation state that one of PGYC's tasks is to include young people from third countries to the bilateral cooperation. Since the beginning of its existence, the Eastern neighbours of Poland (Ukraine, Belarus and Russia – mostly Kaliningrad Oblast) have been important project partners within the trilateral exchange. From 2014, projects of trilateral youth exchange with the Eastern Partnership countries receive additional support through PGYC thanks to funds of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (within the programme "Cooperation with civil society in Eastern Partnership and Russia"). These allow for co-financing of expenditures of project partners (costs of travel and programme) in third countries, i.e. beyond the borders of Poland and Germany, which would not be possible from PGYC funds only. Since 2016, the programme of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also included projects with Russia.

The most popular trilateral exchange projects supported by PGYC are the ones with Polish, German and Ukrainian partners. The applicants include both organisations and institutions implementing exchange projects each year, as well as new trilateral partnerships. For participants of meetings, PGYC has also issued a Polish-German-Ukrainian phrasebook "Drei Друзи з боиска" ("Three friends

17. Prepared on the basis of material of Polish-German Youth Cooperation.

from the pitch"). A film was also made to promote youth exchanges: "To tylko gra / Alles nur ein Spiel / Це лише гра" ("It's just a game").

So far, a number of 1700 trilateral projects with Eastern Partnership countries and Russia have been implemented, including 1125 with Ukraine, 287 with Belarus, 285 with Russia and 3 with Georgia.

International Youth Exchange

The Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland for several years has been implementing the public administration service – International Youth Exchange. Its main goal is to support the exchanges of young people from Poland and selected Eastern Partnership Countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. The grant procedure is open for non-governmental organisations and local authorities. The final beneficiaries are young people from Polish primary and secondary schools and their peers from partner countries.

Each year the youth exchanges have to fulfil annual goals and priorities. For 2018 these include:

- » enhancing dialogue and building open and tolerant attitudes among young people, including common language barrier breaking;
- » promoting the image of Poland as an open country with rich cultural heritage;
- » underlying 100th anniversary of regaining independence by Poland.

Furthermore, the projects should contribute to fulfil at least one of the following goals:

- » involving young people in pro-social activities
- » continuing the cooperation after the end of the project
- » activating young people and stimulating their soft skills acquisition

The rules of the programme, project implementation and their financial settlement are published each year in an open call available on the website of the Ministry of National Education. The budget for 2018 is EUR 159 000.

SOLIDARITY FUND PL¹⁸

Solidarity Fund PL (until 2013 known as the Polish Foundation for International Development Cooperation "Know-How") supports democracy (including local democracy) in countries undergoing a system transformation. It helps in democracy-oriented changes in societies unable to take part in decisions concerning their own fate due to the political system and also by supporting observance of human rights in the world.

The Foundation was established towards the end of the 1990s, on the initiative of the president of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski. Its aim was to help countries during transformation in their market economy and private enterprise and to support their economic, social and political development. In the first phase of operation, the Foundation implemented projects e.g. for Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Georgia.

The Foundation does not directly support youth actions and projects, but its actions may indirectly concern young people from Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. Co-financed projects as well as the Foundation's own actions are focused on five areas:

- » support of local democracy, self-governance and empowerment of citizens;
- » support of independent media;
- » observation of elections;
- » help for the repressed and support of activity of organisations that defend human rights;
- » cooperation of public and civic institutions in implementing good practices of operation of public institutions.

18. Prepared on the basis of material of the Foundation for International Solidarity.

The work of the Foundation is financed with funds of Polish development cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, as well as with the support of USAID, the government of Canada, Switzerland, the European Union and other donors.

V4 REGIONAL COOPERATION

Cooperation between Visegrad Group (V4) and Eastern Partnership countries in the field of youth has been implemented within the official programmes of the respective V4 country taking the presidency of the Visegrad Group (it is a one year rotating presidency which starts on the 1st July and finishes on the 30th June of the subsequent year) since 2011. The cooperation was initiated by the Slovak Presidency (1 July 2010 – 3 June 2011) when a European Steering Committee for Youth of the Council of Europe member from Georgia was invited as an observer to an annual V4 meeting in Bratislava in May 2011. Afterwards, the Georgian minister of youth and sport invited the directors of V4 ministerial youth departments to Tbilisi in July 2011 to discuss the cooperation between V4 and EaP countries in the field of youth.

As a result, under the Czech V4 presidency (1 July 2011 – 30 June 2012) the representatives of Eastern Partnership countries were invited to join the annual V4 meeting in Prague in May 2012. During this meeting the participants agreed on developing cooperation between V4 and EaP countries in the field of youth on three levels: 1. ministries responsible for youth, 2. Youth in Action national agencies, and 3. national youth councils. One of the final products of such cooperation was a training seminar in Georgia organised by the Czech Youth in Action National Agency in 2013 aimed at creating partnerships between V4 and EaP countries which resulted into four successful projects granted through Eastern Partnership Window of the Youth in Action Programme.

On June 22 2015 in Bratislava a Memorandum on ministerial cooperation in the field of youth between countries of Eastern Partnership and the Visegrad Group was signed. Its main goal was to encourage both groups of countries to promote cooperation between youth organisations, including information exchange, organising joint conferences, seminars, trainings or study visits.

The Memorandum envisages also that both parties shall prepare an action plan regarding the implementation of joint initiatives and organise an annual meeting summing up the effects of this cooperation.

Continuing the tradition of meetings of representatives of Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership Countries in the field of youth within the Visegrad Group, established in 2012 and according to the programme of the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group (1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017), the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland in cooperation with the Foundation for the Development of the Education System organised on 22-23 February 2017 in Warsaw a working seminar “Young people for human rights” involving the representatives of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries. National delegations were represented by Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Among the participants there were representatives of ministries responsible for youth policy implementation, young activists, youth councils’ representatives, representatives of National Agencies of Erasmus+, national coordinators of No Hate Speech campaign of the Council of Europe, representatives of Council of Europe, the EU-CoE youth partnership, SALTO EECA Resource Centre, Solidarity Fund PL and the Visegrad Fund.

The participants concentrated on activities and projects implemented by young people in order to promote human rights, including the activities carried out by the Council of Europe against hate speech. The programme featured group work within three key areas: human rights in digital world, activation of young people to act for human rights in civil society and especially within youth organisations and the role of cross-sectoral cooperation in supporting young people in their actions for human rights.

A similar seminar involving the representatives of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries was organised within the Hungarian presidency in the V4 (Budapest, 28-31 May 2018). The Hungarian Human Resources Ministry organised an expert meeting aiming at discussing the following topics:

- » young people's opportunities in starting a family; housing and commencing adult life;
- » digitalisation;
- » sustainable development.

The Slovak presidency is planning to sustain this tradition of youth-related meetings for the representatives of Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership Countries and is scheduling its seminar for the first half of 2019.

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND YOUTH IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

Analysing the cooperation between Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union it can be stated that Poland is the key partner from the European community when it comes to cooperation in the youth field. Organisations from the Eastern Partnership countries took part in youth exchanges, volunteering projects and training and networking activities. The Youth in Action programme resulted in implementation of over 800 and the Erasmus+ until 2018 of over 400 such projects involving thousands of young people from Poland and the eastern Partnership region. These numbers make Poland one of the most active partners of the Eastern Partnership region in the EU, especially taking into consideration the fact that other states such as Germany, France or Italy have at their disposal higher budgets for implementing projects, proportionate to the number of their inhabitants.

Such a high number of projects implemented has contributed to visible changes in the functioning of non-governmental organisations working for and with young people in the Eastern Partnership region. Moreover, educational mobility has become a means for young people to gain valuable skills and competences and the profession of youth workers has become more professional and recognised. The study carried out by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System proves that European mobility programmes have a significant impact on youth organisations in the Eastern Partnership region¹⁹. Their employees develop language competences, interpersonal and social skills and

learn how to manage an international project – from conception and implementation to its financial settlement. Through implementation of international youth exchanges and volunteering projects youth organisations develop networks of contacts which often result in further joint activities, financed from sources other than EU funds, which may prove the development of the organisational potential of the youth NGO sphere in the region. The research carried out by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System also shows that that half of the surveyed organisations increased the number of employees between 2007 and 2012 as a direct result of implementing international activities, including the ones financed from EU funds. Moreover, 75 percent of the surveyed organisations declared that the number of international projects they implement rises every year. Some organisations claimed also that based on the experience in international project management they are carrying out also national activities, financed from regional or national funds. This is a very positive signal, especially given the fact that in the Eastern Partnership region there is a high risk of non-governmental organisations being dependent only on foreign donors.

The rising popularity of learning mobility among young people from Eastern Partnership countries is the direct consequence of the increased potential of youth non-governmental organisations. Learning mobility is more and more often perceived not only as a mean to visit foreign countries, but also as a source of acquiring valuable competencies necessary in professional and personal life.

The impact of international learning mobility is subject to a regular analysis and monitoring by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System. Since 2010 the Foundation is member of the RAY research consortium (Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action)²⁰ – a joint research project carried out by 32 National Agencies of Erasmus+ Programme, coordinated by the Institute of Educational Science of the University of Innsbruck²¹. Its main aim is to discover if and what project participants and

19. Biskup, B., Pavlovyh, A., Jeżowski, M., Pawłowska, M., Influence of the Youth in Action Programme on youth sector in EECA and Programme Countries, FRSE 2012.

20. Results available at: www.researchyouth.eu

21. Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, Universität Innsbruck

leaders learn through participation in international mobility projects financed by the Erasmus+ programme. The RAY research questions are the following:

- » what is the influence of Erasmus+ projects on young people, youth workers, youth organisations and local communities where these activities are implemented?
- » what are the learning contexts of Erasmus+ learning mobility projects and what is the profile of their participants and organisations implementing them?
- » how RAY research results can contribute to dissemination of good practice examples of Erasmus+ projects and how they can influence the shape of future EU youth programmes?

The last phase of the research (2015-2016) involved 190 participants from Eastern Partnership countries. 96,8 percent of them expressed satisfaction with participation in Erasmus+ mobility project and 93,1 percent declared to be willing to take part in a learning mobility in the future.

Moreover, 95,2 percent of the surveyed participants from Eastern Partnership countries claimed that Erasmus+ mobility project contributed to their personal development. The research also proved that mobility projects have a strong learning potential. 94,7 percent of surveyed participants from Eastern Partnership counties claimed to have improved foreign language skills through participating in Erasmus+ mobility project. 95,7 percent claimed to have learned to work in group and 82 percent to develop and implement their own ideas and projects. Also 82 percent of surveyed participants claimed to have become more self-confident after the Erasmus+ experience.

The international dimension of mobility projects also needs to be stressed. 95 percent of surveyed project participants from Eastern Partnership region, through participation in Erasmus+ project learned better to communicate with people representing other cultures or religions.

International mobility projects financed by Youth in Action and Erasmus+ programmes have contributed to a great extent to professionalisation of youth work in the Eastern Partnership region. Youth workers, through participation in international training activities, have a chance to compare and share their practices with other experienced colleagues from the European Union countries. The role of Polish experienced and widely recognised youth workers in training their colleagues from the Eastern Partnership region needs to be stressed. Since 2007, thanks to EU educational programmes, it has been possible to train a significant number of youth workers from the region, whose skills, competences and methods used in work with young people, young migrants and young internally displaced persons are valued not only in the European Union, but worldwide. The Foundation for the Development of the Education System together with SALTO EECA Resource Centre carries out training activities on a regular basis in order to share the knowledge, experience and good practice examples of youth workers from the region.

The importance of bilateral cooperation programmes needs also to be underlined. Apart from their clear international dimension, they also put a significant stress on building neighbourly relations, combatting prejudice and highlight the ties between local communities that often share common history. Through such projects young people are able to get to know better the history and tradition of their countries and regions and to discover shared interests the international cooperation can be built upon. Bilateral programmes allow also young people to appreciate more their peers from the neighbouring countries and thanks to non-formal education methods they have become a tool to develop foreign language skills, as well as interpersonal and social competences. Finally, they facilitate the cooperation between young leaders and initiate long-lasting sustainable partnerships.

Conclusions

Cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries in the field of youth policy is an important element of both the European neighbourhood policy, within Eastern Partnership Platform 4, and the Erasmus+ programme, which enables young people and youth workers to acquire and raise competencies. Poland is the most active country of the European Union in implementing educational programmes addressed to young people from the Eastern Partnership countries. Polish NGOs have a good reputation and persons who organise training for other countries have become valued experts in working with young people, also those who are disadvantaged.

In the light of the statement included in the joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017, concerning the establishment of a special Youth and Education Package as a mechanism facilitating support for investment in competencies and skills of young people, increasing their citizenship involvement, employment and supporting their entrepreneurial attitudes, and basing on an analysis of the youth policies of the Eastern Partnership countries presented herein, in order to further strengthen cooperation with Poland and other European Union countries in the field of youth policy, the following conclusions and recommendations are proposed:

Social inclusion should remain one of the priorities of learning mobility with the participation of young people from the EP countries. Particular attention should be devoted to young people outside of big cities, young people with disabilities and young people with socio-economic problems. In the case of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the group referred to should also include internally displaced young persons (IDP).

An important element of cooperation with EP countries is the transfer of experience in developing a civil society in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, where an effective legislative base has been formed to support civil institutions at the local and national level. In Poland, this is the Act on

public benefit and volunteer work, the practice of donating 1 percent of income tax to designated NGOs, a transparent mechanism of cooperation between local governments and the third sector.

Research analysis and monitoring of the effects of the Erasmus+ Youth programme shows that actions for this group have a great impact on the development of competencies and skills valued in the labour market. Particularly significant are the long-term projects of the International Volunteer Service, thanks to which young people can prove themselves by working for local organisations and communities. These long-term actions are not only a lesson in self-reliance, but for many young volunteers are also the first steps in entering the labour market and a chance to test their skills and competencies in practice. During times of economic slowdown, when young people are particularly affected by unemployment, this has also become an interesting alternative for the first professional experiences, providing an opportunity to acquire language, social and intercultural skills. Whereas money cannot be earned in this way, volunteer service can be a significant tool in the fight against idleness of unemployed young persons. Wishing to further strengthen the capacity of young people from the Eastern Partnership countries, financing of long-term volunteer projects should be continued, since for young people from these countries they are a unique experience that may significantly impact their life. International voluntary service, by strengthening the key competencies, makes it easier for young people to enter the labour market and build their position there.

Learning mobility is an introduction to professional mobility and is a response to the progressing employment instability, particularly among people under the age of 30. By taking part in international learning mobility projects, young people acquire competencies essential for active participation in social and professional life. Through non-formal education tools, they learn about openness, mutual understanding and cooperation in an international environment, while improving their language skills. International programmes increase the sense of responsibility for one's life (including career responsibility), help young people understand the sense of actions taken by them.

These facts should be the point of departure for working out the future framework of international cooperation of young people from the EU and the EP countries.

According to the European Training Strategy, non-formal education is the basic tool for supporting professionalisation of youth work and for building capacity of the sector of youth organisations. Apart from youth workers, professionalisation also benefits organisations with which they are tied and, directly, target groups for which they are working. Evaluation of the EU4Youth programme, launched in 2017, and deep reflection over the support structures in operation for many years, such as the SALTO Centres Network, should provide detailed answers to the questions on the directions of development of mechanisms of support for the EP countries by EU programmes.

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