

YSPDB report about situation of young people in Bulgaria, youth NGOS and youth policy and relations with government

Situation of young people in Bulgaria

According to data from the National Statistic Institute for the year 2000, the Bulgarian population decreased substantially (population growth was – 5.1 per 1000). This fact draws concern and describes the demographic situation in the country. This situation is the result of many factors including a decrease in the birth-rate (9 per 1000), the slow but steady rise in the rate of mortality (14.1 per 1000), and the increase in the emigration wave comprising mostly of people in the 10-35 age group.

The age structure of the population in 1999 shows that the young people are:

6.9 % - from 15 to 19 years;

7.6 % - from 20 to 24 years.

The main problems related to the young people in Bulgaria are a result of the social-economical conditions in the country. Another factor is the general society's lack of interest in the problems of the young people. These problems are similar with those in the area of SEE.

Health problems

The health status of young people is dependent on various social and economic factors. One main problem is the lack of regular, physical activity, which leads to a sharp deterioration of their health status, which prevents a positive lifestyle.

The problems that can be observed among children and young people are connected with the following:

- Increase in alcohol abuse among young Bulgarians between 15 and 24 – in 2001 this percentage was 70%, whereas in 1996 it was 50%;
- Smoking – the number of smokers in the 15 to 24 years age group has increased to 41.3% in 2001, in comparison to 38.8 % in 1996;
- Increase in HIV/AIDS and STD cases; 2001 data shows 41% in the 20 to 29 year age group and 7 % in the 14 to 19 year age group. **The number of HIV** cases reported was 447 people as of August 2003.
- Increase in drug abuse – About 200 000 – 300 000 people are addicted to heroine, and about 150 000 have experimented with “light drugs” and amphetamines – other new drugs, including methamphetamines are known on the street by the name of “Piko” which replaces cannabis and heroine. These stimulants are faster and stronger than amphetamines. According to the most recent data, 20 000 people between the ages of 15 and 30 years have experimented with various stimulants; however, unofficial data

suggests the numbers to be about 100 000 people. Over 130 000 Bulgarians smoke marijuana, according to the Ministry of Health. Studies have shown that marijuana kills brain cells.

- High rate of teenage pregnancies; the birth and abortion rate within the 15 to 19 year age group is about 77 per 1000 people.
- Sexual contacts at an early age; young people age 17-18 already have an active sexual life; but only 35% use condoms;

Social and economic problems of the young people in Bulgaria

- **Bulgarians emigrating** – One of the main problems is that many Bulgarians leave the country and settle abroad despite the fact that they usually live in bad conditions. This is especially true for those from small towns and villages where social mobility is almost non-existent.
- **Youth employment** – A large percentage of young people between the ages of 15-18 are forced to work. The average age of the workers is 16. Unfortunately, they are exploited by their employers who pay them less than minimum wage. They are not provided with any health and social insurances. They are essentially working illegally. On the other hand their parents encourage them to continue working despite the fact that they are aware of all this.
- **Conflicts in the family are very prominent.** The main reason for this is the social conditions of the family. There are no family consultation offices available for families to seek help or advice. There are many single parents who must provide for their families on their own. Domestic violence is another huge problem that plagues the Bulgarian Family.
- **Increase in criminal behavior among young people:** children are raised in a family environment which is not conducive to their well being. Thus, criminal activity against their peers and parents has increased. The reason for such juvenile delinquency, according to specialists in pedagogy, is due to the lack of interest on the side of the state to initiate laws and work for the welfare of the young people. A large number of young girls are sold into prostitution, in Bulgaria and others, especially in the European Union such as Germany and Italy.
- **Educational problems** – The Bulgarian society places on a great deal of emphasis education. Despite the difficulties experienced in the last several years, its goal is to maintain a competitive education system. A relatively small number of Bulgarian children do not attend school, while some drop out at various stages. The decreasing percentage of children and young people enrolled in schools at different educational levels are due to the social and educational nature. The high poverty level, as well as the proximity of low-populated and poor areas to educational centers hinders school attendance for many. The educational aspects of the problem are related to the following factors: lack of diverse and interesting teaching methods, young people's lack of interest in attending classes, insufficient language skills among children from the different ethnic groups, as well as lack of motivation on the part of the parents.

Situation of youth NGOs in Bulgaria

Unfortunately, the non-governmental sector in the country has an exceptionally bad reputation. Usually NGOs are involved in illegal activity especially money laundering. Scandals among Bulgarian foundations have become sensational headline topics in the media. Youth NGOs are put under the same scrutiny as the other NGOs in Bulgaria. A large number of active youth NGOs are struggling financially since the only way to finance these NGOs is by applying for outside grants.

NGOs lack the ability to hire qualified staff. Volunteering is not very popular concept here.

Youth NGOs focus their efforts on political activity which essentially distracts them the real problems of the youth. These organizations usually work to attract voters to the polls. They work to implement a certain campaign platform that would put youth issues on the frontlines of political debates. However, their efforts deem questionable results.

Youth NGOs lack of resources for active and effective work. Many of the organizations do not have offices, computers, or quality Internet connection.

On the other hand there are many cases where it is evident that there is a strong rivalry among the NGOs which deters their activities away from the youth problems.

Situation in the field of youth policy and relations with the government

In 2003 the Ministry of Youth and Sport established the Strategy for National Youth Policy. This strategy includes different programs, activities, and methods for development of a real youth policy. This strategy was created for implementation for the period 2003-2007;

Unfortunately relations with the government are difficult. Bureaucracy, lack of communication among the NGOs and the government, and the constantly changing labor force in the institutions are barriers that must be broken to achieve success. The introduction of the network EURODESK in Bulgaria has improved methods of communication. There are 35 EURODESK info points in Bulgaria at the moment. Its main goal is to help NGOs find partners, funding, and projects presented by the EU.

The more prominent NGOs based in the capital city are forced to aid the smaller NGOs since the government is not willing to help them. The communication between NGOs and the government is more difficult for the organizations which are based out of Sofia. The local representatives are ineffective and unable to provide the needed information.

Many of the European programs are managed by corrupt governmental agencies. This causes NGOs to seek money from abroad and cooperate with strong European organizations. An example for that is our cooperation with European Bureau for Conscientious Objection.

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