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Perspectives and Reality of Young People in Slovakia in the Dimensions of Selected Subsystems of Social Policy¹

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Abstract

Young people are often exposed to various life situations that gradually come during their lives. The quality of life of young people in Slovakia is conditioned by several areas of social policy therefore, these issues are very important for research. The aim of the paper is to point out the analysis of selected factors (areas) that affect the life situations of young people in Slovakia. We pay attention to the areas of support and protection of the establishment of young families and preparation for parenthood, support of employment of young people and support of housing policy of young people. In this paper we work with the analysis of secondary data, which relate to selected monitored areas focused on young people in Slovakia. The data we use in the article are of a quantitative character. We will use the method of analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction to achieve the set goals. Another key method that we use in the paper is descriptive statistics (Rimarčík, 2007; Chajdiak, 2010; Marek, 2015). In Slovakia, the issue of young people often appears only as a political issue. In scientific discourses, the issue of young people is addressed in isolation, as evidenced by several contributions from the authors. The authors of this paper present the problems of selected factors (areas) influencing the perspectives and reality of young people in Slovakia in an integrated manner.

Keywords: *Young people, social policy, perspective, Slovakia, family policy, employment policy, housing policy.*

1. Perspectives and reality of young people

Young people are an important social capital of society, they form its present and future. Young people have long been at the center of policy interest at EU level and this interest is not slowing down today (Young People, 2021). “Youth represents a liquid age category. It is characterized by high internal variability, dynamics, but also a strong potential for change. It is an integral part of the life

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cycle of modern man, although from the perspective of the dominant adult society underestimated and associated with many negative labels” (Čavojská, 2019, p. 8) Young people are often exposed to various life situations with which during their lives gradually meet. The quality of life of young people in Slovakia is conditioned by several areas of social policy, so these issues are very important for research. The perspectives and reality of young people are accompanied by relationships between *society - the state - the young person*, which are limited by the *opportunity - expectation*. On the one hand, society offers a young person an opportunity, thus enabling him to mature into a full and self-sufficient individuality. On the other hand, society expects young people to take advantage of the opportunities and opportunities offered. It is in the interest of the state that young people have practical experience and are prepared and determined to participate in the development of society (Šípoš, 2005). This means that the young person accepts the offer and puts new experiences into society, thus ensuring social development. For the state, a young person is an important element for the job market and for securing the future. In this way, the government influences all elements in the mosaic of youth life through systemic changes. It creates conditions for every individual to have decent housing, opportunities for education, to find a suitable job, to be able to pursue their hobbies in their free time, to have the opportunity to make and maintain contacts, to start a family and to raise children (Šípoš, 2005). The role of state and non-state institutions is primarily to help the family in creating natural conditions for the development of the personality of children and young people.

The aim of the paper is to point out the analysis of selected areas that affect the life situations of young people in Slovakia.

In this article we pay attention to the following areas:

- support and protection of the establishment of young families and preparation for parenthood,
- support for the employment of young people,
- support for housing policy for young people.

These are indeed key areas that influence young people's behavior as well as the opportunities and prospects of their lives. At the same time, they enable young people to live in dignity in real life. Young people are significantly affected by social change, which causes a change in their way of life.

The picture of young people's lives has, among others, the following features:

- family - marriage, transformation of marriage into partnership,
- work - emphasis on individual self-realization at work, new links of work to further education, unemployment,
- housing - decent housing.

A survey conducted by the Slovak Youth Council (RMS, 2017) among young people illustrates that social security is sensitively perceived. These are, above all, employment, living standards and independence. The survey showed that only

less than a third of young people in Slovakia are convinced that in the horizon of 3 years they will be able to live independently, independently of their parents, will be able to manage to pay their bills, have a stable job or start a family if they want. However, an aspect that is linked to the future of young people abroad is very important. Young people see social security outside their own country. They also attribute this to rising prices and cost of living.

1.1. Demography

The territory of the Slovak Republic is divided into 79 districts and 8 regions according to the valid territorial-administrative division. As of December 31, 2020, the Slovak Republic had a population of 5,458,827, of which the youth representation is 1,855,349 under the age of 30 (0-30) (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020). Young people represent 33.98% of the total population in Slovakia.

2. Methodology

In this paper we work with the analysis of secondary data, which relate to selected monitored areas focused on young people in Slovakia. The data we use in the article are of a quantitative character. We are based on secondary data of national institutions and other relevant entities. We will use the method of analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction to achieve the set goals. Another key method we use in the paper is descriptive statistics (Chajdiak, 2010; Marek, 2015; Rimarčík, 2007).

3. Support and protection of the establishment of young families and preparation for parenthood

We can define the family as the most basic cell of society. The family can be understood as a family system, which is based on the social relationships of its individual members, each member of the family has its status and its roles, which it should fulfill (Laca, 2011). Family empowerment is closely linked to marriage and parenthood. Education for marriage and parenthood is a very important aspect for the development of young people, partners in life together (Šípoš, 2005). In this context, also with regard to the specifics of demographic development, it is necessary to strengthen sexual education and education for marriage and parenthood, especially for young families as future parents (Bodnárová, 2004). Several subjects are involved in the preparation for marriage and responsible parenthood, as well as in solving problems in marital and family relationships, and their task is to strengthen education in the field of education for marriage and parenthood. Entities include:

- a) family,
- b) school (educational curriculum in the school education system),
 - kindergartens,
 - elementary schools,

- high schools,
- c) institutions of counseling and psychological services,
- d) church,
- e) third sector.

Education for marriage and parenthood is provided through formal and non-formal education of various programs.

However, education in marriage and parenthood education with a specific focus in alternative education facilities and social services facilities is insufficiently covered. Lack of education also occurs in mentally handicapped children and young people. Education for young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Roma communities) is also insufficient. Experience shows that this is a community in which the births of juvenile girls are already common. In addition, it happens that the mother leaves the baby in the maternity ward, or gives birth to him at home and neglects his and her care, as a result of which the baby dies. Sexual education is also a problem with this group of young people (many children are born from incest among close relatives in young people as well). The constant need for education is more than necessary and should be addressed systematically (Šípoš, 2005).

Based on the perception of the need to develop and strengthen the family policy of young people and their parenting education, we present the following starting points and suggestions.

1. *The empowerment and support of young people should reflect*
 - a. demographic differences,
 - b. regional disparities,
 - c. family structure and upbringing.
2. *Strengthening the deteriorating conditions of young people, even in the context of a socially disadvantaged environment. Support in particular:*
 - a. parent - child dialogue,
 - b. conflict resolution,
 - c. responsibility in decision-making,
 - d. support for family relationships.
3. *Strengthening sexual education, education for marriage and parenthood.*
4. *Strengthening the functionality of families.*

3.1. Support for the employment of young people

The situation in the field of youth unemployment is influenced by various factors. The task of tackling youth unemployment is the responsibility of the national or regional government. It is unemployment that has an adverse effect on inclusion in the work process with psychological problems (Schraggeová, 2011). As we have indicated, it is this risky social group in relation to unemployment that is the most vulnerable, forming a large group of citizens. Data from the Statistical Office (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020) declare that the unemployment of young people under the age of 29 is still relevant. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic in the mentioned examined age category up to 29

years, this represents a figure of approximately 16%. The comparison of youth unemployment across Slovakia copies the total unemployment. This high number also causes young people to be forced to leave the regions, leading to the depopulation of certain municipalities.

In 2019, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15–39 in Slovakia was 7.6%, which is lower than the average in the European Union. The issue of youth unemployment is an EU-wide issue and assistance in training and education is key (European Survey, 2016; Quality of Life, 2016). Young people, as a group of registered unemployed at employment, social affairs and family offices, who are unable to find work, can take advantage of several assistance options.

In addition to the current schemes through national projects for young people under 29, coordinated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, there are also various initiatives for young people. There is also an Initiative to support the employment of young people in Slovakia. It is support for increasing the employment and employability of young people using innovative tools such as internships, internships and training. The initiative has a share of 8.81% of the total allocation of funds, which represents the amount of EUR 194,350,518.00 (Europska Unia, 2021).

The main goal is to increase young people's participation in the labor market. The means to achieve this goal are to implement a quality job offer, further education, vocational education and training, as well as to complete internships within four months of being registered as unemployed after losing their job or completing formal education (Minns, 2021)

Based on the perception of the need to develop and strengthen support for youth employment, we present the following starting points and suggestions.

1. Stimulating mentoring programs to help young people.
2. Taking into account various certificates, voluntary activities of young people in their job search and inclusion in the labor market.
3. Building programs for non-formal education for young people (for the development of project skills, soft skills such as communication competencies, critical thinking) (Support for youth employment in Slovakia, 2020).

Through the implementation of individual projects for young people under the age of 29, it is important to gain experience, experience and skills, new knowledge and to become an active part of working life. A young person can become a more competitive and suitable employee for a potential employer (Imrovič, 2020).

However, the impending economic recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) also affects the employment of young people across Europe.

3.2. Support for housing policy for young people

The biggest financial item for the life of a starting family is their own housing, or the purchase of an apartment or other form of separate housing, which is in Slovakia, not only in cities but also in the countryside relatively generally accepted as a

condition for future family stability. However, the lack of financial resources at the beginning of a young family's life together often forces young people to stay with their parents. In the countryside, there are more opportunities for this, as houses are adapted for multi-generational housing. When acquiring an apartment, intra-family solidarity is perhaps most evident. The idea of owning a home is currently a very desirable aspect. Housing is a predisposition for the family base and is one of the key attributes of today's young families. Independence in all areas and not excluding one's own housing is currently and in some cases problematic, especially for young people. Although, according to EU surveys, up to 90.5% of households own the property in which they live, which is the highest share in the euro area (Eurostat, 2018), up to 74% of young people aged 18 to 34 live in Slovakia with their parents, which is the highest share compared to other EU countries.

The main reason, according to the 2015 survey, is that up to 45.4% of young people postpone starting a family precisely because of the financial unavailability of their own housing (WebNews, 2015). We see that the problems with one's own housing affect the most young people who become independent or decide to start a family. In comparison, the city and the village are more significant in the cities. If we pause over this trend, we will find that housing problems can be considered as a key factor for which the birth rate is declining and the demographic potential of young people of working age is weakening. This status is also proved by the fact that Slovakia is aging the fastest compared to other EU member states.

The authors Suchalová & Staroňová (2010) identify the tools of housing policy. According to Imrovič (2020a) They define universal tools and selective tools that enable support for young people, such as mortgage, housing allowance.

In any case, young people often cannot do anything without the support of their parents. In addition, they do not have the funds or the real estate to be set up, so they are forced to continue to live under one roof. Three out of four young Slovaks consider their own housing to be a condition for a happy life. On average, young people start thinking about buying their own residential property at the age of 22. Young people strive for their own housing and take out an apartment or house for a mortgage as one of the main reasons for getting into debt. It is not surprising that people in marriage or long-term partners, and people with a higher monthly income, live in their own home.

What are the solutions to the shortage of housing for young starting families? These are mortgage loans, various types of building savings (with an ever-decreasing amount of the state premium) and contributions from the Housing Fund, mortgage loans.

The most desirable (although economically perhaps less efficient) solution is considered and politically promoted by the construction of rental housing. The Government of the Slovak Republic is responding to these facts and plans to build 25,000 rental apartments a year. Almost half of young Slovaks aged 18 to 30 live with their parents. Less than a third of young people live in their own house or flat and more than a sixth live in a sublet. According to the survey, more men than women have their own housing, most often young people aged 27 to 30 with a

university degree.

Based on the perception of the need to support the housing policy of young people, we present the following starting points and proposals.

- A) Building start-up / rental flats for young families.
- B) Improving the availability of mortgages for young people.
- C) Stimulation of young families e.g. housing allowance.

As a result of the non-implementation of systemic support for housing policy for young people, we see the following.

1. Worse availability of one's own housing without a mortgage, which is helped by the unfavorable state of real estate prices (not only due to COVID-19)
2. Worse availability of one hundred percent mortgage amount compared to the past.
3. The health and mental problems of young people are increasing due to the pressure exerted on them. In case of health problems or loss of employment, their solvency decreases.
4. Multi-generational houses are returning, which can be seen especially in the countryside.

4. Conclusion

The European political debate on young people still dominates. Young people face long-term exclusion from the labor market, and this has not only economic consequences, but in such a situation there is an increased risk of their social exclusion and a certain loss of confidence in society. (Eurofound, 2014). In Slovakia, the issue of young people often also appears only as a political issue. In scientific discourses, the issue of young people is addressed in isolation, as evidenced by several contributions from the authors. The authors of this paper present in an integrated way the problems of selected areas influencing the perspectives and reality of young people in Slovakia. Social and family policy should create favorable conditions in the process of socialization of young people in society.

The tool for measuring the quality of life of young people based on meeting their needs is the so-called YPI Youth Progress Index (Eurofound, 2021). We can analyze the index from a global and national perspective. The index focuses on several indicators: social rights, economic rights, political rights, employment, housing affordability, etc. The YPI consists of an assessment of three areas: basic human needs, well-being and opportunity. According to YPI, Slovakia is one of 102 countries and placed 25th, with a total score of 76.99. For comparison, we state that the highest ranking was reached by the northern countries of Norway, Denmark and Finland (Čavojská, 2019).

What are the perspectives and realities of young people in Slovakia? Based on knowledge and research in this area, we can state that the position of young people is often challenging. We would define difficulty as personal ideas and a standard about one's own life on the one hand and personal preconditions and development of experience on the other. However, it can be clearly stated that young people are the

future of society and it is very necessary to bring possibilities and opportunities from the state systematically. Investing in young people is essential in the long term. It is important to capture and exploit the potential and innovation that young people have. The third sector is a very good opportunity to present young people in various fields. In general, we can say that young people have opportunities for employment, but due to the lifestyle of young people, it often happens that they cannot become independent. The independence of young people, work responsibilities or parenthood are mainly influenced by the economic side. The problem is that young people do not have enough financial security and the only option, unless they are subsidized by their parents or family, is to take out a mortgage for at least 30 years. However, individual requirements vary, but young people who do not come from a complete family or come from a socially disadvantaged background and have worse access to opportunities should not be forgotten.

In conclusion, we can say that the perspectives and realities of young people in Slovakia are constantly improving. We see the share of young people in both public and private companies, more and more of them holding various important positions. Nevertheless, it is possible to see a high outflow of potentially capable, talented and skilled young people abroad for better opportunities, opportunities and experiences. At best, many of them return home, at worst not. Despite the above, it is important to note that it is still worth being young and staying in Slovakia. There are various social and economic benefits that help kick-start their own ambitions. However, it is natural that living standards are rising and young people want to live as they see them in various developed countries.

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